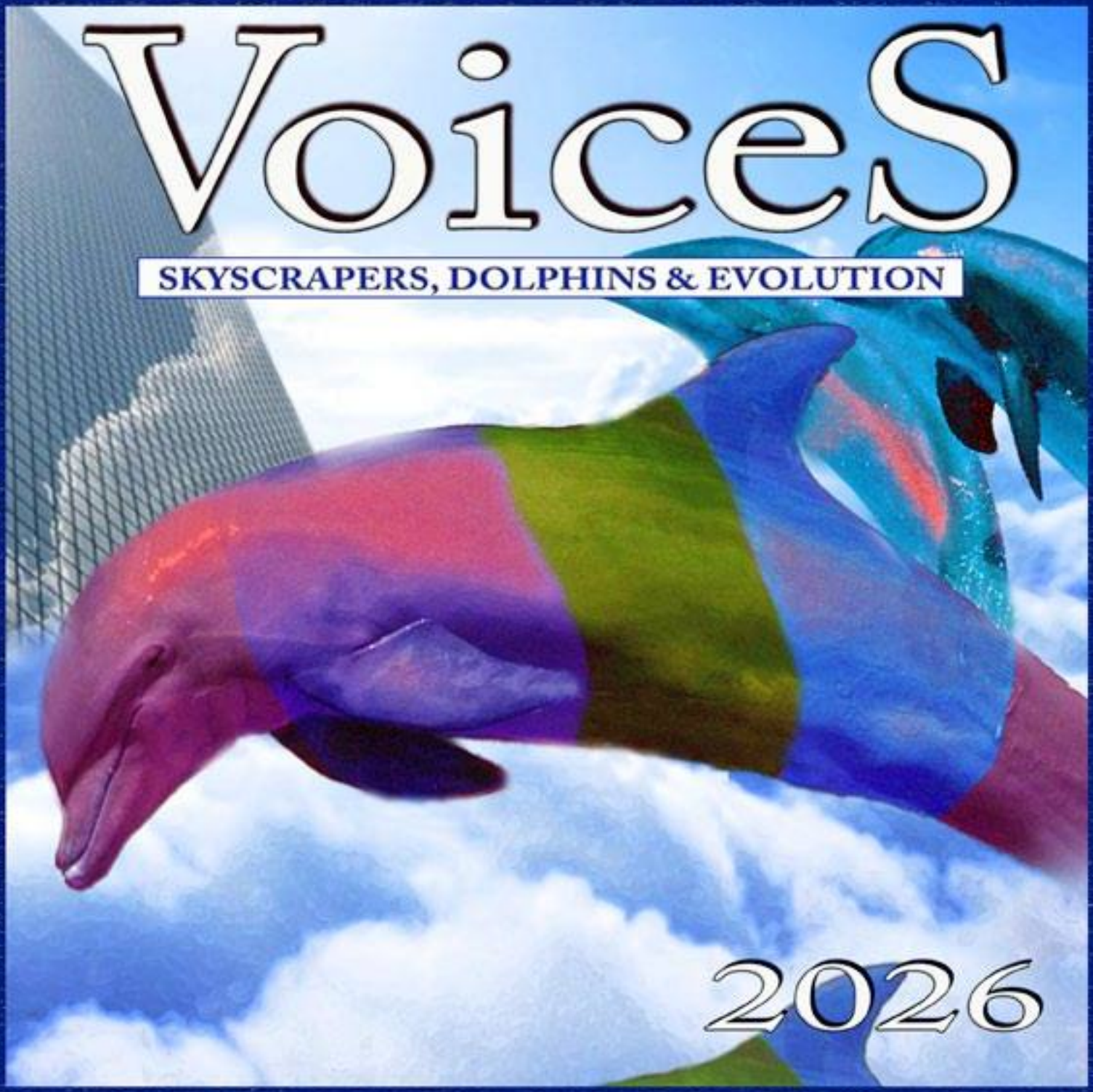
VoiceS

SKYSCRAPERS, DOLPHINS & EVOLUTION



2026

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First printing; June, 2026.

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Cover Art: *Skyscrapers, Dolphins & Evolution* by Bodhi

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Editor – dave boles

ISBN: 979-8-9988517-5-9

ISSN: 2833-6798

Library Of Congress Control Number: 2026943666

A SMILING MONKEY PUBLICATION

Cold River Press
15098 Lime Kiln Road
Grass Valley, CA 95949
www.coldriverpress.com

"True literature can exist only where it is created, not
by diligent and trustworthy functionaries,
but by madmen, hermits, heretics,
dreamers, rebels, and skeptics."

~ Yevgeny Zamyatin

~ Editor's Note ~

Skyscrapers, Dolphins & Evolution. A strange mixture when you first look at it. But is it? Life began in the sea. This is scientific consensus. Billions of years ago, in Earth's primordial oceans, the first self-replicating molecules emerged from chemical chaos, and from them, all life descended. For hundreds of millions of years, the ocean was life's only home. Then something remarkable happened—some creatures left. They crawled onto land, developed lungs, grew limbs, and eventually evolved into the staggering diversity of terrestrial life we see today—from insects to dinosaurs to humans. We celebrate these evolutionary adventurers who conquered a new frontier, yet in our fascination with land-dwellers, we often overlook a more intriguing question; what about those that stayed?

While some species abandoned the ocean, others remained. They didn't stagnate; they evolved too, following a radically different path. Dolphins, whales, and countless other marine creatures developed their own solutions to survival, their own forms of intelligence and adaptation. Some land-evolved mammals even returned to the sea, as if reconsidering the ancient choice their ancestors made. This pattern raises a tantalizing possibility; if evolution could produce skyscrapers through human ingenuity on land, and such remarkable intelligence in dolphins beneath the waves, what other evolutionary endpoints might exist? Could marine life evolve further still? Could they eventually transcend their medium entirely—learning not to walk on land, but to swim through air?

Billions of years ago, Earth's surface was hostile—bombarded by cosmic radiation, wracked by volcanic activity, and shrouded in an atmosphere that bore no resemblance to the oxygen-rich air we breathe today. Yet beneath the waves, conditions were paradoxically perfect for life to emerge. The ocean provided shelter from radiation, a stable chemical environment, and abundant dissolved minerals and organic compounds. Then the first self-replicating molecules appeared; RNA and DNA, the chemical blueprints of life itself. These weren't yet "organisms" in any sense we'd recognize—merely molecules with a remarkable ability to copy themselves, mutate, and compete for resources.

From these molecular beginnings emerged the first true organisms; prokaryotes, single-celled creatures that dominated Earth's oceans for over a billion years. Some learned to harness the sun's energy through photosynthesis, fundamentally transforming Earth's atmosphere by releasing oxygen. Others developed the ability to consume organic matter, becoming the first predators. The ocean became an evolutionary laboratory where every major innovation in biology—photosynthesis, respiration, multicellularity, sexual reproduction—first emerged.

This oceanic origin is crucial to understanding evolution's story. When life ventured onto land, it carried billions of years of oceanic refinement with it; the genetic toolkit, metabolic machinery, and body plans proven successful in water. Those that remained continued to evolve, refining strategies that already worked well in their aquatic home.

A few million years later, the first fish began venturing onto land—a gradual exploration driven by necessity and opportunity. The oceans were growing crowded, while shallow waters and coastal marshes offered untapped resources. For fish with the right adaptations, land represented a frontier of abundance.

The first to make this transition were lobe-finned fish with muscular, fleshy fins that functioned almost like limbs. Over millions of years, these fins transformed, evolved, into true limbs with fingers and toes. Their swim bladders evolved into lungs capable of extracting oxygen from air. Their skin developed the ability to retain moisture. From these pioneering fish emerged the amphibians, then reptiles with waterproof skin and eggs that could be laid on dry land—liberating vertebrate life from the ocean entirely.

Reptiles diversified explosively, giving rise to dinosaurs and eventually mammals. When the dinosaurs vanished millions of years ago, mammals inherited the earth, evolving into countless forms—each exquisitely adapted to its ecological niche.

Yet here's where the story becomes truly fascinating; not all creatures remained on land. Some mammals, millions of years after their ancestors conquered the continents, returned to the ocean. Whales, dolphins, seals, and manatees all evolved from land-dwelling ancestors, yet they re-invaded the marine realm with stunning success. They carried their mammalian innovations—warm blood, lungs, complex brains—back into the sea, creating an entirely new evolutionary experiment.

This return to the ocean was driven by opportunity, not failure. Some mammals living near coastlines discovered the sea offered abundant resources in quantities land could never provide. Over millions of years, these ocean-bound mammals underwent profound transformation. Their bodies became streamlined, their limbs flattened into flippers, their nostrils migrated to the tops of their heads as blowholes. Yet they retained fundamental mammalian traits; they breathed air, maintained warm blood, and nursed their young with milk.

Among these marine mammals, dolphins stand out as something extraordinary. Their brains are large and complex, with cognitive abilities that rival, perhaps even exceed, those of great apes, perhaps even humans. They possess echolocation, allowing them to navigate and hunt in darkness by emitting clicks and interpreting the returning echoes with stunning precision. But perhaps most remarkably, dolphins are deeply social creatures. They live in pods, form lasting friendships, teach their young, and communicate through a complex system of whistles, clicks, and body language. They play for pleasure, mourn their dead, and demonstrate personality and individuality. Dolphins have evolved not just survival but culture—a way of life passed down through generations.

This is the profound divergence; while some mammals remained on land and eventually gave rise to humans—creatures who would build cities and reach toward the sky—other mammals chose the ocean and evolved into beings of remarkable intelligence adapted to an entirely different world. They, too, also reveal a crucial difference; while dolphins mastered the ocean and developed profound intelligence, they didn't build. They didn't create permanent structures or technologies. That particular form of evolution—the drive to construct, to innovate, to build monuments—would belong to their land-dwelling cousins alone.

While dolphins perfected their mastery of the ocean, their distant cousins on land underwent their own transformation. Around 6 million years ago, our primate ancestors began walking upright. Bipedalism freed our hands for tool use and communication. Over millions of years, their brains grew larger and more complex. They developed language, abstract thought, and the ability to imagine things that didn't yet exist. But unlike dolphins, who expressed their intelligence through social bonds and acoustic communication, humans expressed theirs through creation. They made tools, then weapons, then art. writing, and poetry. They domesticated fire, then plants, then animals. They built shelters, then villages, then cities. They continued to evolved.

This distinction becomes strikingly visible when we look at skyscrapers. Where a dolphin's body is a masterpiece of evolutionary engineering—every curve and muscle optimized for life in the ocean, a skyscraper is something entirely different—it is an extension of human intelligence made manifest in steel, glass, and concrete. Skyscrapers represent a fundamentally different kind of evolution; the evolution of culture, technology, and imagination. Dolphins adapted themselves to their environment; humans adapted their environment to themselves. From ancient Ziggurats to modern day towers that reach to the heavens, humans "evolved" their environment to proceed forward.

This raises a profound question; if humans evolved to reach upward, building higher into the sky, and if dolphins evolved intelligence in the ocean's depths, what other evolutionary paths remain unexplored? The question posed at the beginning of this editor's note—could creatures eventually evolve to "swim" in the air?—begins to seem less like fantasy and more like a natural extension of evolutionary possibility.

We stand at a peculiar moment in evolutionary history. For billions of years, life explored the oceans, then the land, then the sky through flight. It returned to the sea and developed intelligence there. It built civilizations and reached toward the heavens with steel towers. Yet these achievements—remarkable as they are—may represent only the opening chapters of a much longer story. The question isn't whether evolution will continue, but how. Will dolphins or their descendants eventually develop the biological capacity to leave the ocean permanently, to colonize land or air as their ancestors once did? Will humans, having mastered the terrestrial world, evolve or engineer themselves to thrive in environments we've barely begun to explore—the ocean's depths, the vacuum of space, the atmospheres of distant worlds? Or will evolution take paths we can't yet foresee, producing forms of intelligence and adaptation that make both dolphins and humans seem like mere stepping stones in a grander design?

The truth is that skyscrapers and dolphin songs aren't the pinnacle of evolution—they're simply where evolution has taken us so far. Every species alive today represents millions of years of refinement, of dead ends and brilliant innovations, of adaptation and divergence. But evolution isn't finished. It never stops exploring. The same forces that drove fish onto land, brought mammals back to the sea, and sparked human consciousness—those forces are still at work, still pushing life toward new frontiers, new possibilities, new forms of being we can barely imagine. Perhaps one day, creatures will swim through the air as effortlessly as dolphins swim through water. Perhaps humans will evolve into something we wouldn't recognize as human. Perhaps life will spread beyond Earth itself, adapting to alien worlds in ways that would seem like pure fantasy to us now.

What we can say with certainty is this; life began in the ocean, but it didn't end there. It has never ended. Anywhere. Evolution is the story of life refusing to accept limits, of organisms pushing beyond boundaries, of intelligence finding new ways to express itself. We are not the end of that story—we're not even the middle of the story. We are simply the current chapter, the moment when one branch of the evolutionary tree became conscious enough to wonder about its own future. And in that wondering, we glimpse the greatest truth of all—evolution isn't something that happened to us in the past. It's happening now, and it will continue long after our skyscrapers have crumbled to dust. The question isn't whether life will evolve further. The question is—what will it become?

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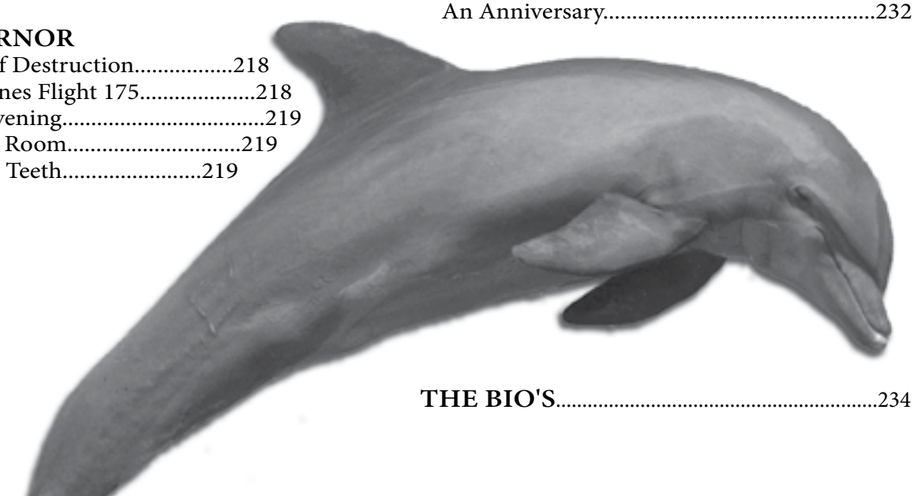

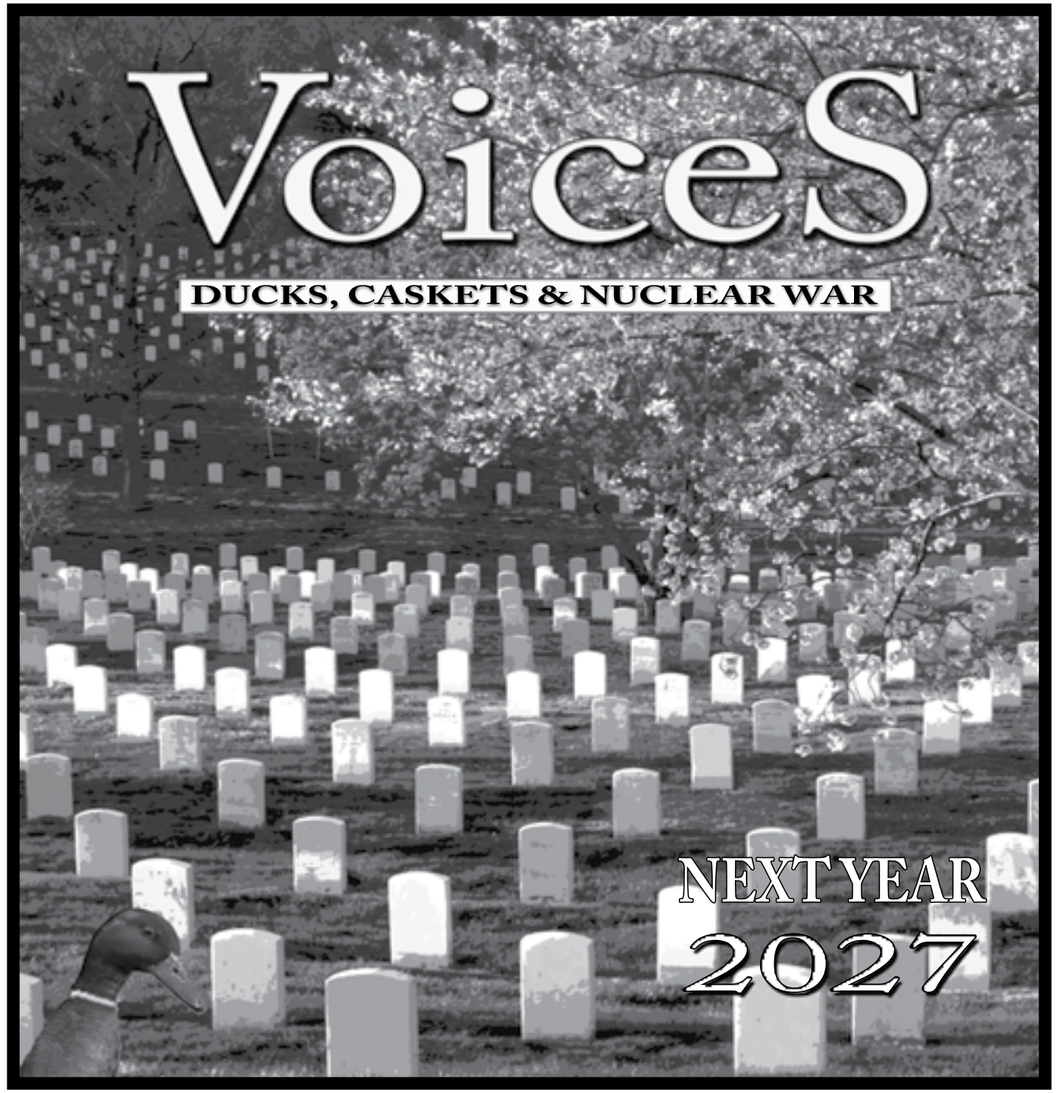

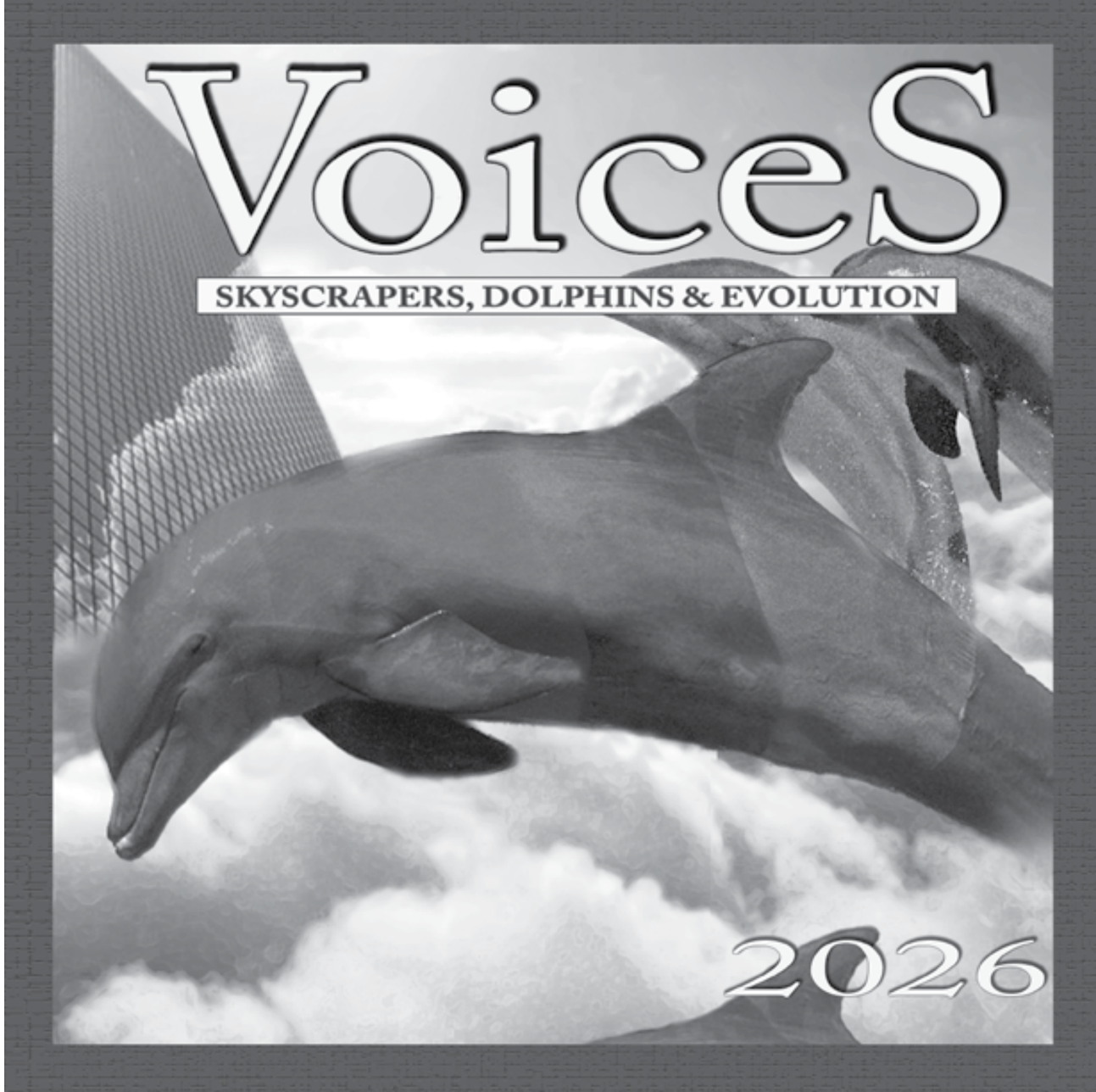
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RANDY BARNES

Classical Stares

The calls sedated when the fun's been had
planet entries from a desert drain
guru breakouts with grist for cheers
skinned to signs roughed for cover
forget the sterling and stump the zoomer
not a system sickness with trusted torture
scripture sparking lackeys in tow
never a dry eye when the towers fall
framed with titles floating runway madness
how about a bullet for your troubles fleet foot
emboss that forage density to calm the king
we've got hyped razor twist and hot coal stroll
boarded castles to siphon your corns
a longneck ripper pebbled to stipple.

Provisional Osmosis

A clabber of clairvoyants steam-pressed for a fray
brought better to be seen among these thunderous dunce-mates
the clatter failing to attract it's a quick spiral downward
nowhere motive checks burnt hot for the impending collapse
reels jammed simple enticements where vagaries wander cool
nothing doing left to chance with all things in waiting
this nightmare marries us in drowned bones and scuttled scales
a forever line flow of choruses with auteur connections
smooth enough to spin the object of one's concerns
travelers called upon for plan overhaul to bilk the chatter
remember to remember communiqués clawed to ash
slandered word cubes charm stuffed crushed in the end
brutal standbys observed terminal in deep watch declension
lovers of a sugared mind strumming vignettes to salt the ice.

Division Day Shakedown

Near engulfed so story invented
inside world hot nature juggled
toned beyond earth rumble siren sieve
a forest of voice inspired nation clarity
heart sounds timeless points ever
needs to verse not adverse
life as arbitrary shapes can get
names from visionary encounters stick
plans just holes as seen through glass
something better don't stack round here
turf war on the rise to mundane shocks
stand corrected clobbered and tattered
got people out back with hornets in their head
failure to blow on impact yet still made the evening news.

Serial Scattershot

Who seized the cares garnished with mirrors
obligatory insanity lubed for the mock
oiled tongue-twisters under the table socket hosers
volcanic spoil spew set with riddled jokes
psalms for the dispossessed eaten by the winds
savage tangos with traffic block armies
assorted animal cravings of digital ooze immersement chambers
questions for the shaken designed for hurt
the do-no-favor clan wound to maximal harm
an anybody tomb call to nothing and nowhere
so our anchored tricks up the ante on retroactive scarring
a rabid clout of skipped records and thievery tipoffs
masked fortune angling delicate strategies for licks and kicks
votes for the noose and the board and the hall of horrors.

Kin Killin'

Dream dead philosophy centered near to numb
inescapable exile in holding for plea deals
the scare is return to weapon scatter
talk intimate but not there ever at all
breath recovery last effort to sound
metaphorical fuckup weight shifting slight lifts
panic theater blood continent inside otherwise
drummed mute scarred thought trance outlays
anywhere but here flagged for the ride
mutual error's steel songs in nightmare fog
transmission to translation to forum to protocol
read further the personal out of context
the helping hand a triggered victim
curbside ticklers the orgasmic end-all at no charge for the view.

Waiting Nation Tarred

When in Rome don't do shit
it's a click away from nightly flares
gutter scum much said just laws of a land
stand in line postcard zombies
fenced stiff the directives dripping
spewed with flukes singed and hinged
after you blow it scrap it
rather die the death of an empty page
adding fuel to the flow brought to the party
jugglers with their balls suspended in air
meat hoverers diced to a standstill
do you recognize the fur smugglers sucking their tongues
who played Nietzche of the overstuffed plaster thumpers
a classic boondoggle of scooters and shooters neck deep in lost gumptions.

ROGER FUNSTON

Up In the Air

Sunday morning 6:45am shuttle to LAX
Traveling past scenery of my youth
100 applications, 10 interviews
If I get this job, this will be the third time
I told myself I would retire with this company
Never thought I would be hustling so hard…
in my early sixties

Plane descends to low altitude
approaching Kansas City, MO
A thousand small, puffy clouds
as far as the eye can see
floating over a rolling landscape
nourished by heavy summer rains
No green shortage here

Flying into Phoenix
112 degrees at 7 pm
Stark desert beauty
Fantastic geologic formations
Parched ground

Wild
turbulent
descent
rapid
ascent

through Chicago thunderstorm
with diversion to Indiana
Next day wandering the architectural valley
downtown Chicago
in search of corporate office
among the zombies
walking the sidewalks during lunch break

Standing in lines, security pat downs
Flight delays, stuffy cabins
Fight for overhead space
Same safety speech
Overnight round trips cross country
18 hour days—dog tired

New players, same interview questions
You haven't zipped this type of zipper
before or buttoned this type of button
Oh, you live in California—why come here?
Are you sure you can do hands-on work?

Everything moves so slowly
But I have the elevator talk down pat
Could be here
Could be there
This wasn't the plan

Our Roots Are Strong

Neten Niwe (Breathe of the World) was born in the Peruvian rainforest. As soon as he learned to walk, he learned to swim. At six, he takes his baby sister on the river in a dugout canoe that sits low on the water.

The hut where he lives is small with a thatched roof shaped like a beehive. The hut is 32 meters above the ground, protection against flooding between December and May. He climbs into the bottom of the hut on a long, wooden ladder. Many times, heavy rains damaged the roof. His parents easily rebuild it. His older sister is sixteen and already has two toddlers and no husband. All seven of them sleep in one room. His parents sleep in the other.

His father teaches him how to fish, using a fishing line tied to a stick. They have a small farm plot where they grow fruit and vegetables. They gather nuts and yucca and hunt for any animal they can find using a bow and arrow or shotgun. Because many live in this village, food is sometimes scarce. Every month they take a boat to Iquitos. The boat is crowded with people and chickens. They mostly use the chickens they raise to trade for what they need, so they don't eat much chicken.

I travel to the Peruvian Amazon in the Summer of 1981, with a small group of scientists, to experience the rainforet first-hand. We fly into Iquitos, a metropolis of half a million people surrounded by jungle that can only be accessed by air and river. We head to the dock to meet a medium-sized motorized boat that serves as the lifeline between Iquitos and the tribal communities downstream. The boat is quite crowded, almost all indigenous people, carrying large, filled sacks. The restroom is in the back of the boat. The toilet, an open hole in the middle of a wooden platform, the river directly below.

We travel 50 miles downstream through tropical jungle to our first destination, Explorama Lodge. The lodge sits on the banks of Yanomono Stream in a lowland rainforest reserve. The lodge is a rustic facility with a palm thatched roof, covered walkways and a small restaurant and bar.

We spend the next day exploring a jungle that contains the world's highest biodiversity of trees per hectare. It's hot and humid. The temperature is in the 80s but it feels warmer. There are only a few paths that cut through dense jungle. Our guide points out trees that are used in Western medicines. The wildlife is amazing. Mammals include sloths, Howler monkeys and caiman. Birds include macaws, tamarinds, toucans, puffbirds and antbirds. Lots of frogs and toads. The following day, we are on the water in search of freshwater dolphins, alas with no luck, but we do see crocodiles. I love spending time in a non-motorized boat on the water.

The next day we head further down river to the Explorama Camp, where we will spend most of our time. This portion of the river is occupied by the Shipibo Tribe, the largest indigenous group living in the Peruvian Amazon. The camp is comfortable but basic, with outdoor covered a cooking and a sleeping area, a thin mattress with a bed sheet covered by mosquito netting. There are no seasons in the Amazon other than high and low water. It's too warm to use the sheet, so I sleep uncovered under the netting.

Local young men are our guides and translators, as the Shipibo have their own language. We get into a regular rhythm, jungle walk in the morning and evening and resting during the heat of the day. The sounds of birds, Howler monkeys, cicadas and frogs are everywhere. The air has a thick, pungent smell from decaying vegetation and wood and the smell of rich soil that reminds me of a greenhouse. It rains for a short period most afternoons, but we barely feel the drops because of the dense tree canopy.

We spend a lot of time on the water. A few of the men in our group are avid fisherman with fancy fishing gear gear. I don't fish, but one man lends me his extra gear. A local young ternage boy is on the boat with us. He uses a notched stick with fishing line and hook, churning the muddy water to attract the fish's attention, then pulling up the line hooking fish by the gills. That day, the group catches about fifty fish total, including pirañas, which we throw back. The fisherman catch about 10. The boy catches about 40. It makes a big difference if you are catching fish to feed your family.

We are well fed, eating mostly chicken, reserved for guests, and some fish, with rice, potatoes or corn. The local young men almost exclusively eat fish. They take us to visit their families. We spend time in their homes and where they work. We visit with two village elders- Inon Sanken (Elegant One Among the Jaguars) and Kesten You (Loud Word). Although language is sometimes a challenge, we begin to understand each other.

The Shipibo maintain a close connection to the land. Family and community are important. They are deeply spiritual people with plant-based shamanism. They have an ongoing dialogue with the spiritual world and powers of the rainforest. This worldview is displayed in their pottery, textiles, baskets, art and beadwork.

I often wondered how the people in this village fared. After many inquiries over many months during COVID, I was finalLy able to make a connection.

I (Netan Niwe) now live in Cantagallo, a shantytown located on a former landfill in Lima. Drought followed by flooding, killed the plants our village ate. Logging, mining, oil speculation, narco trafficking caused havoc. The government did nothing to help. Fearing for our lives we were forced off our land. We live in one bedroom shacks, but our pueblo joven has prospered. The women keep doing what they did in our village, sew, embroider, paint, make pottery. I sell my artwork.

We are survivors in a strange new world, but now we are fearful again. COVID has ravished our population. The government is in chaos, with five Presidents in six years. There is rampant corruption. There are no vaccines. Our multigenerational families live in small spaces. It is even worse for those who stayed in the rainforest. Many who stayed were forced to become wage earners and work for the companies that so changed our way of life. But our roots are strong.

Above the Arctic Circle

Far East Russia, a thirty hour flight, three-fourths of the way around the world, through Frankfurt, Moscow, Magedan. The last stretch, a two hour flight north to a mine located above the Arctic circle. I sit in a windowless chartered plane full of quiet, burly men with duffle bags at their feet.

Five hundred people fly into this mining camp, work for 28 days straight. Then another 500 people fly in, work for 28 days straight. Each crew with identical jobs. Two crews, back and forth.

The camp is self-contained. Miles of insulated tunnels connect sleeping quarters, cafeteria, recreation areas, protecting workers traveling to their posts from eight months of winter's bitter cold. Everyone eats together, watches TV, plays cards. No alcohol, limited internet, no refuge away from work, except a few hours sleep in a tiny room, before it all starts again. Traveling from far away for the pay. Long periods away from home, straining family relationships

I arrive in September 2014 to conduct an environmental audit for the World Bank. The brutal Winter will soon arrive, then Spring with weeks of flooding waters, followed by a too short Summer.

A whole year of supplies arrives by ship over several weeks, transported from the port by truck along a road passable only during the chilly Fall. In Summer, this road is a permafrost mess, in Winter, a blizzard whiteout. I travel 120 kilometers on this road through awesome wildness, pristine lakes, endless vistas of snow-covered ground.

The operating areas are so clean one could eat off the floor. Gold ore veins so rich they can be extracted at great profit by underground mining in the harshest of conditions. Fourteen hour work days conducting the audit. Tedious translations slowing communication to a crawl.

Retuning to Magedan to write the audit report, we have little time to see the sights, but we occasionally venture out for short walks. The Holy Trinity Cathedral is a classic Russian Church. Black steps lead to an enormous white building with narrow rectangular windows topped by three rounded spires. Golden orbs that look like Christmas tree ornaments sit atop these spires. A cross sits atop each of these golden orb, the closest thing in these parts to a skyscraper.

Market Urozhai is an old building with selling areas outside and inside. Most of the stalls sell fish, the other main industry of Magadan. Lots of caviar on display. This place has the feel of Pikes Place Market in Seattle.

The last night, a most wonderful meal at a Ukrainian restaurant. No one in the restaurant speaks English. Picture menu, pointing, gestures, smiles, but we understand each other. Wonderful food and hospitality, an unexpected treat.

The next day we leave Magedan. Stalin exiled millions to nearby gulags. Millions died working in the gold mines. For us, middle-aged women at the airport in different uniforms yell at us in Russian. We have no idea what they want me to do, but we are easily able to leave.

LOU-ANNE MAKES-MARKS

This poem carries love in buckets to put out fires in the soul.

Hear the grunts of the brigade passing them from hand to hand.
This is the despair of firemen.
We burned to ash.
No one will remember our names in the centuries unfolding.
Our sighs register across a torn yard of stuff dreams are sewn from.
No life gives me back the hollow bones I once lost.
Sirens wail at four a.m. that the coast is still not clear.

23 August 2015

To turn to you in love,

To turn you into love,
Both sweet and somber, filled with life,
Yet haunted by remembered
And unremembered
Pasts and futures.

Oh mysteries, grant us grace
To walk red cliffs and granite outcrops,
Forest duff and desert sands,
To behold the turning of the worlds.

April 25, 2015

The tattered edges of sleep

Reveal brilliance for nearly instants,
Something wise that flees before our eyes
Does not stay to teach us other ways.

A battle rages somewere,
Something smashes in the dark.
The switch toggles back and forth.
I anticipate the flash of sudden light,
Shards on cold floors of my mind,
And occluded courage to choose among extremes.

I return the universe to the off position.
We pull the blankets closer
Now there is no fire.

Broken wills and hearts perch on granite cliffs,
Yearn for the very edge of sunrise.
Linger for the slightest glimmer.
Full radiance eludes.
All hopes remain on hold.

We can not block the light now,
For no light shines,
Nor step out into blackness,

It still will come true,
Dawn is inevitable.
Although I stopped the clockwork,
The sun will rise this morrow
Over all of our shattered landscapes
And our clever dreams of escape.

Love will return in time.

August 2015

I forgot this whole poem.

It was about something you told me
Before you kissed me last.
It fell into a crack,
Down beyond my fingertips and reaching.
You are carrying heaviness behind you
Through a lighted doorway,
Into steam and scent of older people's kitchens.
I turn to stare,
The bag of words goes upside down.
Memories pour out
To all corners of the linoleum.
Some roll under the fridge
Where they will not be seen again for years.
Some rise to join the steam and smoke.
“What will we do now, love?” I ask,
And know without answer,
We will do what we will.
And remember.
And forget.

18 July 2015

It's all there is.

You will be working on that after three-thirty on the seventeenth.
We kept the candles lit as we waited for you to finish.
Take your time.
The moments between the seconds get quiet and are very discrete.
In the gaps between them fills with desire.
Beyond the aching for touch, there is the yearning for all that is, could be, could have been.
It inflates beyond the limits of ceilings.
We stay silent as the stars inhale and rise over us in the night sky, one at a time.

11 July 2015

Here, at the end of summer, the twilight can last a long time.

The hour I watched the evening settle in was cooler, more humid, and much busier and noisier than expected.
Smoke from the wildfires had turned the sky into haze.
Mist was rising early from the fields beyond the back fence.
A flock of geese finished their leisurely feeding in the yard across the street, and flew away to roost, honking as they went.
The voices of people, barking of dogs, hum of power tools and the traffic on far-away streets, and the chirp and whirr of crickets joined the evening symphony, followed later by katydids and an occasional tree frog.
The cicadas were absent.
Lawns and trees became much more verdant in the fading light, then turned to gray-green and lost their shapes as they faded into black.
Lights came on in neighboring houses, voices went silent, traffic stilled, and the symphony of the evening insects rose to an awesome and magnificent howling heralding the night.
At the very last moments, the rule of the day ceased, and all changed into something other, something somehow more animate and imagined.

2 September 2015

FRANK BOWMAN

My Dear Black Woman

since I have been on this Earth
I have watched you not only birth our culture
but then so often without a man by your side
become the provider and protector
not just for yourself but for your family

yet no matter the obstacles
you have climbed the heights of skyscrapers
struggled through the fires floods and storms of life
crossed the oceans of despair with the precision of dolphins
and have received little gratitude... no applause no pats on the back
no flowers

day after day year after year you move forward
in spite of the naysayers... in spite of those who create resistance
your eye is always on the prize ... the evolution of your people
a better life for you and yours

i see you dear woman... and i am so proud
i love and respect you and will support ...protect ...and defend you
until my last breath

EDILSON AFONSO FERREIRA

Comrades on the Road

I believe there is a conspiracy ongoing
involving all of us.
I don't know when or where it began,
nor who initiated it.
They occult from me their talks
just I approach one of them.
It seems to me a stealthy fellowship,
a strange one, saints and demons,
angels and warlocks, even goblins.
They congregate to rule all people,
fighting for our souls, one by one.
Someone has been told it is a caste
that rids humanity from wrecking
and leaves it alive on the road,
leavening us before ultimate battle.

(First published in Subterranean Blue, June 2015 issue. Translated into French as "Camarades sur la Route" by the author and Rebbeca Banks and published in Poésie Bleu Souterrain at the same date.)

Saints and Sinners

We founded churches, schools, hospitals,
we created priests, teachers and physicians;
some of us we acclaimed kings and judges,
some others, beggars and prisoners.
We care for our children, instilling in them
those dreams we were not able to fulfill.
We have changed our course many times,
both on the road and in our minds,
so little different from those primitive hordes,
turning to the wind like a ship of old sailors.
We have never had even that natural gift
of birds,
who know from birth their journeys and returns
in each season of their lives.
Saints and sinners, side by side, we write
our history,
which, someday, will be read, and they will
know that,
if we lacked wit and sapience,
there has been always a plenty of love.
A love full of disappointments, but blended
with the joy
of alone colonizing a planet given to unknown
ancestors,
which, despite life's scars, has been always handed
to ever welcome new generations.

(First published in Free Lit Magazine, The Chaos issue, September 28, 2018)

Could they understand?

Plowing the fields and producing wheat, oats and beans;
rising sheep, cows, and pigs;
raising and spreading children and instilling in them
those dreams we were not able to turn into reality.
Throwing rails, roads, bridges and ports,
cities, skyscrapers, churches and cathedrals,
always leaving fences and borders;
creating worlds only ours,
incapable and fearful to cohabit the one
that has been given to us in full.
Boasting and toasting in life's daily feast,
trying to write our history, which has begun
in that sixth day of the divine journey of creation.
Someday, somewhere, this history will be told,
and few will be able to understand, for has been lived
on days filled with passion, hard struggle, and suffering.
True and authentic a saga developed by us, poor humans,
never paired with the greatness of our Creator,
whom, although absent, we learned to venerate,
and, some of us, still to love.

Forgotten Love Story

"Genesis 6:1 – When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose"

The Bible does not tell us, but,
when the sons of God began to fall in love,
their parents tried to prohibit such incipient
and abnormal courtship.
Their sons had to marry, as always had,
women of their lineage, not the daughters
of those strange and odd people.
But there was the first, second, third, and so on,
and a new ascendancy has been established,
as of the Conquerors and the Conquered,
the Lords and the Serfs, and,
most noteworthy, that of
the Gods and the Humans.

(Published in Fresh Words Literary Magazine June 30 2025)

The Saga of a Race

I like humans.
They are a peculiar people, who are confined
on a planet long forgotten in space.
Abandoned, as well as in a bus with non-existent stops,
they believe it is in store for them
safe and happy a destiny.
It seems they wait for a new land, where milk
and honey flow abundantly and evil never finds shelter,
once promised by their creator.
Such is the story that has been passed by their ancestors,
successively buried in the wheels of time.
I think they deserve to be supported in every way possible,
as their toiling has been proven very arduous and painful.
Indeed, they have so far endured their journey, due to odd,
exquisite and singular a love, that has survived,
despite countless setbacks and mismatches.
Anyway, although his absence,
they remember and revere their creator,
and, some, still love.

Memorabilia

Suddenly a grain of sand invades an oyster,
peacefully lying in the depths of the ocean,
unhappy a road accident.
Then, to protect itself from irritation,
the oyster quickly covers the uninvited visitor
with layers
and layers of nacre, a mineral from which is
fashioned
its internal shell.
The grain of sand gains a fine coat, which
produces,
iridescent and stunning a pearl.
Some accidents like this permeate our lives,
in unexpected days and by unforeseen intruders.
Perhaps, similarly, we have made our pearls:
—memorable statues, symphonies and sonnets—

(First published in Indiana Voice Journal, August 2016 issue)

LARA GULARTE

Azorean Sea Tale

When she sees him
on the beach near Lages,
he looks at her,
then toward the ocean,
then back at her.
She leads him
to the hidden cove
where they swim with the dolphins.
A fire burns through their eyes.
They lie in the sand
their lips wet,
their terror
an uncontrollable joy.
One day his boat doesn't return.
She finds no message from him
in the roar of the conch shell,
braces herself
against crashing waves.
She remembers stories
of men in dangerous seas
buoyed to shore by dolphins.
When she visits the cove
the dolphins plunge into the water
like tear drops.

First published in Poets Respond

On The Beach At Lages Das Flores

Face to face with the full moon
sail boats float like clouds.
The night draws distances inward,
tides move with the cries of generations.
as geology drifts across fault lines.
I check for gravity
lift each foot carefully.
In this time zone the moment stops
at wave's mercy.
The sea shrieks with presence
then a moment of clear space
belly of light plunges into itself
waves regroup,
rise into new shapes.

First published in "Soul of Black Stone."

From a glass tank,
the poet,
clothed as a fish,
seeks the sky.

KARL KEMPTON

HAND OF A DARK URGE

wrings neck of a beautiful way

staining sun's streak over lake
onshore uncomfortable figure

wears echo of sigh as earring
from night 's haunting

dreaming once again tight ball
of war yarn rolls along unraveling

its line of lies bleeding into dawn
innumerable bloody dusks

hiding purpose of literalists
reincarnate the prince of peace

elsewhere argonauts of alchemy
transfigure lead of ego

with unconditional love
into philosopher's stone

that inexplicable longing
an echo of an echo whisper

over toned by the siren seduction
until blessed a song by orpheus

awakens from hypnosis
to now be in all holy gnosis

a black shining light hides
the deeper transcendent

out of this veil
life of orpheus lit

PACEMAKER HAIKU

didn't know

had no color

until did

IN A MEADOW

letters like butterflies

seen netted by seers
seers netted by letters

kiss & kiss back
each free

tour boat leaves soon
tickets available

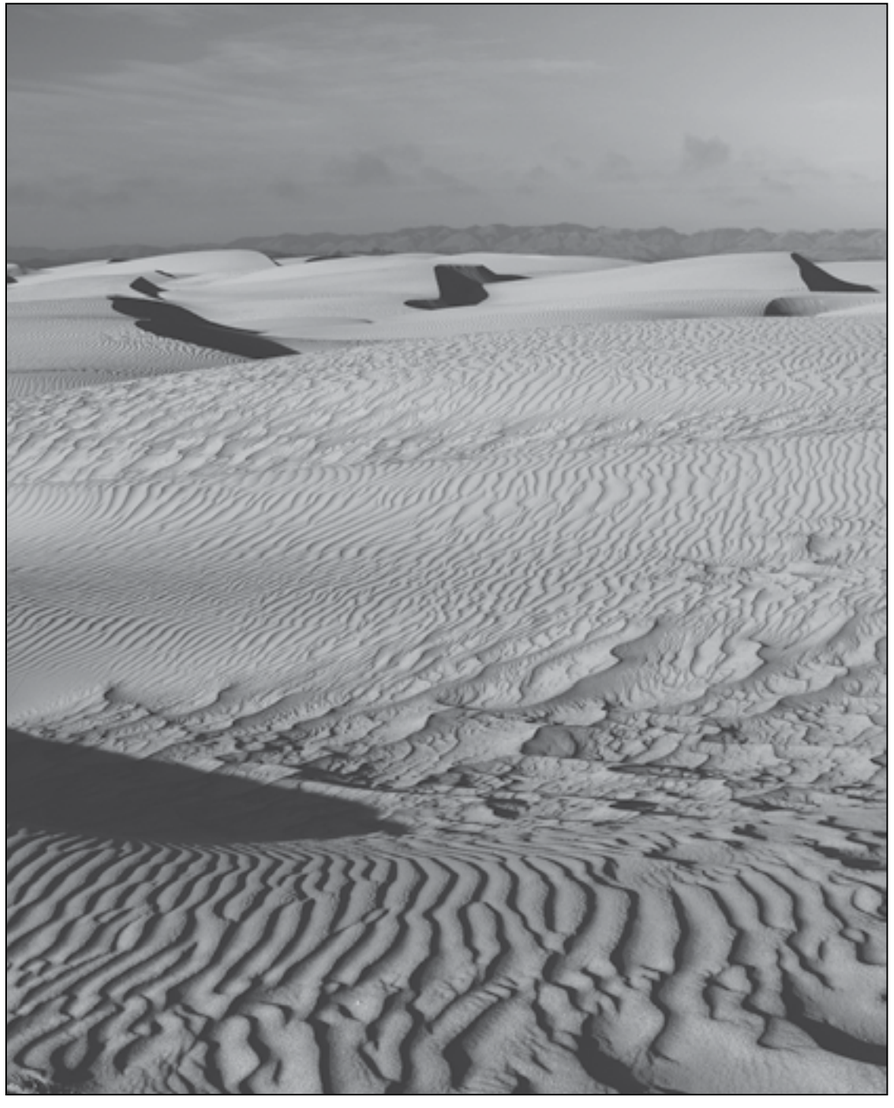
where the moon light
opens letter cocoons

makers catch verbs
placed in cage of nouns

doers boldly walk
to cage & release

The Crown Jewel of San Luis Bay

A person standing on a high northern coastal hill of San Luis Bay experiences breathtaking views on clear days of the bay and south beyond Point Sal to Point Arguello, about 45 miles away. Pristine waters reflect a sun-lit, platinum-brilliant sheen. Throughout the year and across times of day, hues of ocean blues dance, shaped by wind and current. A few miles south, the Oceano–Nipomo–Guadalupe Dunes stand out along the 20-mile arc of sandy beach from Pismo Beach to Point Sal. On high-surf days, the arc is rimmed with white breaking waves, mist moving inland and over the fore dunes. The bay is now protected within Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary waters.



DYSON KONA SMITH

Chicago

After Taylor Bennett

Chicago and all I can think about is Bears, beef, snow
and walking through it which actually saved my life
that one spring it kept falling out of the sky like planes
train turnstiles always hopped the L running
running and running like a bum faucet or an athlete
before injury though Derrick Rose
was god in spite of his since he was from
Chicago and all I can think about
is sex pistols wind and walking through it
which actually saved my life that one spring
when it treated skyscrapers like dream catchers
and fetchers whom we called store runners
running back vanilla black and mild
the best you ever had in your life
that can be taken instantaneous
like a purse or insurance after raise
uninsured pushing the whip
up the one on eight hundred north
the coordinate plane that named this avenue
Chicago and all I can think about is speed money sludge
and bears beef trains derrick rose the catholics sex pistols
wind skyscrapers blunts purses hondas avenues
and wind and snow and sludge and I kept walking
through it bears beef pistols the sex wind
the snow the sludge and I kept walking through it,
snow wind sludge, I kept walking through it,
snow then sludge and I kept walking through it,
the snow that is and I walked straight through it until
it was just me and my life had been saved.

NORA GOFF

Remembering Your Ancestors

Do you remember in your DNA
the late Cretaceous period
100 million years ago,
your ancestor, a small shrew like animal
climbing trees, eating insects and fruit
of the proliferating flowering plants?
Nocturnal, living in holes
in the cool earth
you survived by being small
and hiding, watching the velociraptors
from your tree branch perch.
When the asteroid hit and
killed the dinosaurs it left
opportunity in the ecosystem.
You evolved into all the primates
and eventually humans
in a land before time.

The Passing of a Dolphin

The baby dolphin swam playfully,
cavorted in the glittering blue ocean
in a tight knit Florida pod of dolphins.
Then a small tragedy occurred.
It died and drifted to the shore.
A teen tried to assist the bottlenose,
tried to revive it
as it floated aimlessly, but could not return it
to its resplendent deep ocean home.
The boy took a photo on the shore holding
the deceased animal.
The story trended,
the teen got death threats from strangers
for illegally handling a wild dolphin.
He apologized,
said he did not kill it.
Now, somewhere in an afterlife ocean,
a juvenile bottlenose frolics
forever young.

Beyond Seeing

At the demonstration
by Woody Hansen

For the Watercolor Artists of Sacramento
the featured artist sees and completes
a painting on zoom camera,
but he is blind in both
eyes.
In 1989 he lost sight in one eye.
He assumed he would always see
with the other, but in 2008 he lost
sight in the other eye.
The myelin sheaths covering the optic
nerve frayed and wore away
due to multiple sclerosis.
He did not tell us for sympathy,
but just to tell us what happened.
On the stage in front of us
line, shape, value, color,
wet-on-wet washes, dry brush,
Expo marker, and sharpie
blend in an abstract picture.
Yes, it was successful,
infused with integrity
with vision beyond seeing.

MAX WEST

Condition of Human

Even though living souls are rare
If I want to know
The current condition of human
I can always roam
One of our apocalyptic shores

To visit the not-so-long-ago ruins
Whose bridges the not-so-distant dead
Imagined would endure…

All their forgotten or ignored parts
Reaching like broken limbs
For attention—

Forsaken disembodied fairies
Huddling amid jagged shadows
Of the toppling trees

Tiny altars of beer cans
Draped with bags of potato chips
Beneath candelabras of empty lighters—

Every instance a tiny shrine
In the direction of our worship—

While just on the other side of the river
Perfect skyscrapers glitter with
A thousand mirrors

Designed to lift the civilized attention
From the span of earth toward the tip
Of the screen-printed one-way arrow of progress:

And the sight always conveys an angle of pain
Equal to the difference between
Where we stand and truth

As to a nearly even degree
Distance disappears
The longer we see

Figured Out

The world is only slightly better than 2,000 years ago:
We still don't know how to clothe and feed every being,
are still barbarians of the heart, poised in the most fashionable armor;
still mystics of ignorance under an ancient spell of self,
the rulers of tiny empires, admitting only which subjects match our key;
priests of pleasure who sacrifice all that burns or bleeds to placate our hungry deities,
and soldiers of habit, marching to the drum which plays the way it's always done;

We still trade in class slaves
and bow to wealth as nobility, praise fame
and avoid truth like the plague…

No matter how much is on our plate, still want the banquet,
until we are sick, when all we want is a comfortable place to vomit;

Do you not imagine those most glorious streets of The Forum sparkled marble
while the outskirts lay caked with urine and dust;
Do you doubt that all true members of the Republic,
with clean togas on their backs, and fresh wine in their cups,
believed they nearly had it figured out?

Great Wave

I was witnessing the end of the world, The Great Wave sweeping up everything: cars and whales
and houses and trees, as I gripped the naked frame of a skyscraper watching the last sunset with eyes;
I could feel the flesh being irradiated off the bones of my clinging knuckles, as I heard a voice say
“Here we are, at the end of all things,” which made me glad that even in such loneliness
wasn't totally alone, and could still feel a grain of gratitude for being the final witness to this curtain call
of all our beauty and progress, while I cried for the loss, the wonder and horror... until I awoke in tears,
and it was 8:07 am, and I was alive— it was only you who were gone, and I was still sad and finished
and grateful

Must Be

Well, let's see: I can feel air rushing through my hair,
the sky looks blue as it's supposed to;
sun sits at the right height, clouds loom normal,
the birds, Yes, this must be real, I conclude
as I continue to fall into then
between skyscrapers where I can see
eyes of faces watching me until
a few inches from the street I
open my eyes

Step On

One more day I'm walking away from, if I just keep stepping;
and should a whisper or boom make me turn
each time the sights, once all I could see, will be tinier;
while my shadow, a pointed arrow, shall outfly skyscrapers,
my whisper deafen nostalgic neighborhoods of noise
and my outlook climb mountains

CELESTE R. BARTEL

Deep Winter

My powdery flannel bed is trying to swallow me. I beat my Pillsbury dough pillow. Sink back into my watery dreams.

I emerge from my comfortable crib. Outside my window, quilted formations of black birds migrate North --West a couple hours before twilight—congregate high naked branches.

I am aware of my conflicting desires. I don't want to start my day. Slink onto my couch, hiding in the sullen shadows.

Watch the clock whirl, while I
remain motionless.

Affliction

There is an electrical hum
that I can't place.
I drink water—
it feels like fire.
Only certain parts
of my head hurt—
as if I banged it—
but I didn't.

The Giants Of The Chicago Skyline

They rose where the swamp met the lake
and the prairie stood. Not of stone alone,
but of skeleton steel.

They scrape at the clouds in a silver-gray spray.
The Sears Tower looms with its black-bundled
skin. While the Hancock tapers where the cold
wind starts.

Art Deco crowns on the Michigan Mile, stand
gard with a classic limestone face.

Glass walls like mirrors reflect blue. By day,
they are titans of trade. By night, they are
lanterns that love the dark.

The heart of the city, cast in iron and light.
The skyscrapers of Chicago, a marvelous
view.

Inside The Psyche of A Serial Killer

(From the movie, The Cell)

We are in a lab where we have shrunk and with a large syringe, the doctor plunges us into the brain of the serial killer, in search of the women he has kidnapped, who are awaiting their execution.

We find ourselves in a chamber bedroom. On top of a purple satin bed, a queen is perched like a cheshire cat. She is content for now. She wears a leather collar, her diamond leash never ends. Snap shots and moans of tormented women litter the hallway. In a room, in a glass jar, a gorgeous woman flows in a black gown. An angel floats in an aquarium. Rude subjection of abused women, disrobed, disheveled.

Mother Mary rises out of a water baptismal. A sweet face caked with makeup. Garish, red lipstick gleams under the hot, white lights. A gigantic crucifix dangles from the neck as she dips our boy into the blue water. The boy drowning, sputtering, bate for the evil king.

A flutter. A flash of lightning. The skies are menacing. The evil king is here. His ominous presence gathers great power. A dark pool of water is spun into his black, brocade cape. He rises to his throne. He demands a reason for our intrusion, spitting black tar.

A portal is found to rescue the boy. The boy shows us where the killer is storing the women he plans to kill. A large shower tank that locks shut and fills with water where the women are to drown. Shows us the exact location in the nick of time. The women are spared.

The Sahara Desert, 1945

(After, The Sheltering Sky, by Paul Bowles)

She tried to hold onto her husband in the sandstorm. She tried to hold onto him during the feverish sweat—the cold shivering. Kept him on his feet, while she frantically searched for a doctor. She ran through mazes of tunnels, hallways, pleading in French. She was ignored. She opened her knees.

Wrapped in the best linen, she covered her head and face while she danced. She was like a queen riding high on a canopied camel, as the villagers beat their drums, and screamed their battle cries. Before long, she rummaged for food in the market place. She threw money at the merchants. They strangled her with her garments, pulling her to her knees. Like a caught animal, she whimpered to them to let her go.

She finally found herself in an infirmary. She could not speak to her aunt who came to collect her. She went home knowing she had lost her husband, and lost herself.

Smoke and Shadows

I feel like a shadow on the wall.
Just an outline of a woman.

If I flick the light switch,
I disappear.

My moods constantly shift.
like clouds. They come out,
do their thing, then split.

It is cold and rainy outside.
There is a chill in my bones.
Achy all over.

I can't grab onto anything today.
Nothing but smoke and shadows.

Tomorrow I will get it together.
Tomorrow will be a better day.

CHANGMING YUAN

Sightseeing in the Rain

I had strongly hoped, and did have enough time, to spend our entire third secret annual honey-week on a full-length cruise trip along the Yangtze River to Chongqing. For both of us, this trip was truly special not only because we had grown up and fallen in love close to the river, but also because we wanted to reenact what I had written in my trilogy *Paradise Regained*, which hit a well-established press' finalist list earlier this year. However, since we joined each other on October 11, Hua had kept trying to cut our honey-time short, saying that she had to return to Zhuhai as soon as possible to monitor the installment of an elevator in her apartment building. This being the case, we could afford only a one-day boat tour of Xiling Gorge and the Three Gorges Dam site.

As bad luck would have it, quite heavy rain started when our boat departed from the harbor around 8:30 am. To have a clearer view of the landscape, we paid 128 yuan just to sit closer to the big window on the second floor. From the travel brochure, we learned that Xiling Gorge, the first and longest of the three famous gorges, ran as long as sixty-six kilometers between Xiangxikou in the west and Yichang's Nanjin Pass in the east.

About half an hour later, we came to Gezhou Dam, where our three-storied cruise waited for its turn to enter the navigation lock. When our boat was ready to take the huge lift, all tourists dashed out of the halls to watch how it was raised twenty-five meters high from the bottom. The whole elevation process lasted only about ten minutes, but every sightseer got a memory that would surely last for a lifetime.

"This is really an unforgettable experience," Hua said.

As our boat continued plowing upstream slowly, we returned to our seats and fixed our eyes mostly on the changing landscape on both sides of the river, drinking jasmine tea and eating flavored nuts served on the small table. From time to time, we stepped out of the big hall to gain a panoramic view of the gorge. During one of my frequent outings, I saw a couple of wild dolphins swimming against the river current in the rain, an equally rare scene that only the few lucky ones could hope to have viewed.

Given my poor vision and lousy photographic skills, Hua would take pictures for me rather than the other way around. When she really wanted to take a photo with a particularly picturesque background, she would either shoot a selfie or ask me to do the job for her from behind. Lingering in the prow in the rain without an umbrella, I soon got my cap and overcoat wet, but I found it worth the while as my eyes feasted on the beauty of the natural scenery, with all the hills covered with bushes, thorns, trees and rocks on the banks, full of possibilities of life and death.

Around 11:30 am, we disembarked near the Three Gorge Dam Scenic Area. As we walked towards a restaurant in Sandouping Town, Hua suggested buying a raincoat and a pair of disposable rain

boots for myself instead of sharing the small umbrella with her, but without enough cash in my pocket, I had to turn down her suggestion, saying that the rain would probably stop soon or it would be only a short walk. But as it happened, we walked more than half an hour before reaching the food court, while the rain became increasingly heavier. Seeing me looking like a drowned rat, Hua eventually gave her umbrella to me and bought a raincoat for herself, as well as a pair of shoe covers for each of us.

We had a whirlwind afternoon visiting various scenic spots, including the Three Gorges Museum, where we finished our visit by watching a 3D thriller about the creation of the world's greatest gravity dam. Due to the overwhelming crowds and rain, the sightseeing was much more taxing than we had anticipated. The only interesting thing I had learned was that we didn't have to worry about the dam being attacked by terrorists or national enemies, even with nuclear weaponry, as it could well withstand a seismic intensity of 7. But its long-term impact on the geo-ecosystem was still unknown.

When we returned to Qingshan Hotel after dinner, I powered my iPad back on and found a message to my great surprise and sorrow at the same time: Kang Jian, my best and life-long high-school friend, had just died within nine days after his lung cancer was first diagnosed. As his ashes were to be buried behind his parents' tombs the following day, I immediately forwarded the obituary to several close mutual friends, especially Za, my formal fiancée, who had a quite long audio-chat with me a few minutes later. Though I gestured Hua coming onto the bed and listening to our talk, she shook her head and went to hide herself in the washroom instead.

"Why not join me during the talk?" I asked her as we began to warm ourselves up for sex. We were both looking forward to some heated romance after such a cold, rainy day.

"Don't want to disturb you old flames," she said teasingly as she enjoyed me caressing her bud. "She might have something private to say to you."

"She did say a lot more in an unusual tone to me this time," I confessed as I encouraged Hua to help stimulating me. "But her main message was to accuse me of being a 'fickle' man."

"Aren't you really one?" Hua asked while trying to suck me in.

"You know dame well I'm not," I answered, finally entering her body.

"You're not going to join Kang's funeral tomorrow?" she asked me in a slightly blaming tone, pushing out her hips slowly and wave-like.

"Nah! I'd rather stick together with you," I replied, wishing to melt my total selfhood into the heart of her secret garden. "Besides, I've been estranged from him for nearly a decade already."

"Hoes before bros, if you're not really a … casanova!"

(Note: this personal essay was inspired by Qi Hong (齐红).)

SUSAN MARQUEZ OWEN

The Look

There our father sat enthroned
in his large, white easy-chair
that glowed in the gloom
of the dark living room.
His gin and tonic
in easy reach.

While he sat, his hands jerked
this way and that
like poisoned swallows
in a painful fall
pausing to stall,
then rise and fall again.

He conducted
his unbearably, madly, loud music —
Shostakovich, Beethoven, Mahler.
The speakers *boomed*
and made the lampshades tremble.
And you, Brother, and I
would sidle toward our rooms
unless he ordered us to stay.

Listen! he'd say,
Do you understand the music?
Tell me what it means!

A shrug wouldn't do, we knew.

So you, Brother, and I
nine and twelve —
would have to find an answer
to stay his anger.
I glanced at you —
soft-eyed boy,
with your delicate hands
and crown of curls.
I'd seen your lips tremble with cold.
They trembled now.

We watched his frenzied hands
swing up to a rising theme.
And I clasped my hands and dove
into the great storm of music —
the violent cacophonies,
and the delicate sadness
of the lines that separate
sanity from madness.

His hands flew, meanwhile,
keeping me at bay.
*What do you think **this** means?* he'd say.

I clung to a sharp-edged rock —
how to get to shore?
While you, Brother, sat on the soft carpet
fidgeting with your fingers.

But then you lifted your face
and I saw your eyes.
A hard, sane, impatient stare —
a clear clang of a look
that sounded through the air

and guided me
to where our eyes could meet
in a lucent kiss
that allowed me to say this:

I don't know what it means, Dad.
We're tired. We're going to bed.

Ahhh, he said,
and his hands stilled momentarily,
and the music became
suddenly
only
music.

Then glancing again at each other
you and I, Brother,
left the room
together.

The Elusive Deity, Nicaragua 1985

Great White Heron of this verdant land,
you balance on a branch — an open fan —
a holy ghost, ready to rest
as you once did on Our Lady's breast.

Why, all this time,
have you been so hard to find?

I have looked for you in the Church of the Poor,
prayed to an Indian ancestor —
white hair painted on a stuccoed wall
flowing to a frescoed waterfall.

I have searched in the Church of the Conqueror,
bowed to the bloodied Spaniard there —
gold and crimson banners slung
to adorn the crucifixion.

Everywhere — they say God is — *Everywhere.*

Yet, I only finally find you here.
In this jungle cathedral where you appear —
your great head cocked,
your bright wings high,

one eye toward the Earth,
the other toward the Sky.

The Bell Tower

I.

Tonight in the waning light
I see the old steeple's bell,
and I wonder why it is only now
that I look across the roofs
from my attic den
and see what has always been.

The steeple and nearby trees
have ever reached
the height of my house.

So then, winter may be
best for seeing.
Bare branches
make clean lattices
that run, strip by strip,
to the steeple's tip.

II.

At the meeting this morning
I joined my Quaker friends
and after a full silence
an elder stood and recounted the old story
of how the Lonely Creator dreamt
of a lost Eden,
then sent his only son to recover it.

How some in the crowd —
powerful and appalled
by the burden of his message
and the daring of his presage
nailed him down.

Little to surprise us in the story —
we sense longing from our first loved-one's death
and rejection, from our first, startled breath.
Little to surprise us except
how *you* needed *us.*
Do you still dream of Eden?

III.

Near the fire this evening,
the log cracked and fell
when heat reached the old resin
and you came again — arisen.

Your dream of a common vision —
Is it why I can see at all?
Is it why you revealed yourself
as I searched for you —
an Eve awakening to the original knell?

Is it why we could meet there
in the December air,
where space and time hung so well
in the clean, dark silhouette
of the bell?

SUE DALY

Reclaiming My Time

The coaster on the table at Outback
proclaims "No Rules."
What would this look like? I turn
the phrase over in my mind.

No rules after an empty nest,
after retirement?
When I start my second act,
third or fourth?

As the senators say,
"I'm reclaiming my time."
Is it time to slow down—
maybe even turn around?

I could pause between steps,
create more downtime.
New year's calendar pages flutter—
my turn, my time.

River Song

Our lazy walk evolved
into an impromptu hike —
the valley called to us,
begging for company.

We abandoned our laptops and
to-do lists, left everything behind —
turned off our phones
and endless deadlines.

We saw the spring-run Chinook
stage their comeback,
rousing themselves awake —
eager to spawn in the river
called "The San Joaquin."

Still wounded by drought,
the weary waters sang a
restorative song, a reminder —
the river never disappoints.

INCENSE RISING

spicy sweet
vapors climbing
cloud formations
made of smoke
made of time

hot wax drips
in layers thick
envelops me
moments days hours
blur to one

I am
in a gulf
from then to now
in a chasm
from why to how

incense rising
spicy sweet
vapors climbing
cloud formations
made of smoke
made of time

GIVE EAR

breathe in
fragrance of pine

give ear to
soundless snowfall

moonglow and starfire
collide in indigo sky

winterberry mint
dances on tongue

touch the skirts
of heaven

Ascendance

foundation anchored
girders unyielding
steel reaches skyward
pierces ice crystal clouds

each story climbed
rockets closer
and further
from the core

naive assumptions
aspirations
cast-off of
pinched shoulders

mirrored windows reflect
variable stars
in city neon
light

That Lazy Trumpet

Never mind the wine dear,
I'm already tipsy, leaning into
that lazy trumpet singing my blues away.
A rhythm guitar in the background soothes my soul.

Songs from the Great American Songbook come to life
with the John Skinner Band. When Susan adds her golden voice,
the trees begin to dance and sway, and so do we.

Balmy weather for summer in SacTown, the cool Delta Breeze caresses the crowd.
Your eyes light up when we dance to one of our favorites.
We sit a little closer together on the blanket afterwards.

Look, there's that couple we love; a wooden fold-up table set between their chairs.
The white cloth napkins are folded neatly, the wine glasses set just so.
We see them circle the grassy dance floor and you say "they could teach
Fred and Ginger a step or two".

Gramps plays with the toddler while Gramma feeds the baby.
We hear the kids on the playground laugh,
watch the dogs tug on their leashes.

Everyone loves a concert in the park.

A. M. HAYDEN

Dogprints in the Sand

(For our Blind, Three-Legged Dog who loves the Beach)

It is dusk and we sit along the shore,
his uneven rump heavy in my lap, his snout
sniffs back and forth, a terrific typewriter
or game of invisible tennis and I begin
to describe to him everything he can't see,
the sky to our left looks like the album cover
of Taylor Swift's 'Lover,' the teals and blush
pinks like a seven-year-old's watercolor
of cotton candy clouds.

Vin's a Swiftie (of course) so he gets the reference.
I continue, *On the right, the sky is an orange summer*
creamscicle, sweet and lickable. I gasp, interrupt the sky,
"Oh, there's a dolphin, Vin! And another!"
(and did I point to them? Yes, I did). When our daughter
was a toddler on this very beach, we pointed out a dolphin
to her, to which she excitedly cried, "Dolphin!"
except it sounded more like *"Dauphin!"* from a manic
three-foot tall Antoinette, so today, we still point
and say *"Dauphin!"* in a ridiculously exaggereated
French accent whenever we see them,
and I tell him, *we always will.*

and then, I let him know the nearly full moon
is getting brighter as the waves grow darker, silver
light dances over the navy tides like grand strands
of Christmas tinsel, silk threads of shimmer mirrors

Then I sigh and say something I like, *everyone knows the moon*
is a bowl of milk in the black sky and soon the stars
will be sparkly kittens meowing for it

I tell him because he's a dog and it's fun to say
things like this, and because when I say things
like this to my kids, they say,
um, that's not true, Mom.

I tell him about maritime mysteries lurking
under this vast surface, the pufferfish and sharks,
stingrays and *dauphins,* how whales sing for miles
to each other, often repeating the same phrases,
just like songs, like hymns, like poems.

A few times while I speak, he throws his snout back
over his left shoulder to sniff out my words, decipher
their meaning with his nose decoder, but the ocean
does that for both of us, whispering its smooth liquid
secrets into both of our ears, if we can listen
to that place just under the rhythmic roar.

Like how our footprints laid every day
are a whale's eye blink, always will fade,
wash away, while the sea continues, a forever
we can make some sense of.

First published in "The Apologist," Feb 2026.

CAROL LYNN STEVENSON GRELLAS

The Morning

Daylight has begun, and the dreaming is over—
yet just last night, my mother called me
into the kitchen and put a pot pie in the oven.

But that was fifty years ago, when there was
only one bathroom we all shared. *Open the door*,
we used to shout, our closed fists demanding

entrance. My brothers and I craving privacy,
each taking turns in the mirror, wrung-out washcloths
draped over the polished silver faucet, a single

blade of grass caught between the fabric's story
like the lone souvenir from day-long shenanigans
and afternoons played out on the lawn—

my hands full of mischief, memories of my boyfriend's
collar bone pressed into mine; skin chaffed
where his blonde whiskers rubbed against my cheek.

I love you even as I drift to another time, the old
house with its pink camellias lining the pathway.
Once, I rode my bike through the wilderness and found

a horse tied to a tree. I lost my virginity, cantering
bareback through the hills and fields of summer.
Don't try to understand the way I remember a lifetime.

It's only now I've realized that tomorrow doesn't stop
that this, too, will soon be yesterday. Ghosts
are always waiting, hiding in the shadows, even

now, as I write this, something has already ended.
Just know you will be my forever, the way nothing
ever alters the turning of the leaves—the splendor

of colors changing, maples, oaks, and hickories.
And as my hair becomes gray, I realize the universe
is almost done with me; still, I will love you beyond

death, these last hours stored in a bell jar, a waxed
light weakened from the slow leaking of air—
God's hand resting somewhere over a glass

dome until I run out of breath.

One Photo That Has A Life of Its Own

Calaveras Frog Jump, 1962,
Happy Pappy, my frog, took 3rd place

I used to smack the pavement
with my bare hands, count to three,
hold my breath and pray

for one more massive leap towards
the finish line before my knees
would give out and scrape bone,

my polished Mary Janes scuffed
and frayed, that frog hovering
through air like an acrobat,

my father's feet stamping the ground,
each of us chasing the shadow
of the other in a magnificent

stampede of unforgettable joy
that lasted one glorious minute
from start to finish and all

the years that followed.

Previously published in
Wilderness House Literary Review

Even Though She Said No

How does the body learn to love
itself again, leave behind the mind's
most intimate trauma, savor moments
when joy wasn't overwhelmed by regret,
forget his stiff fingers wrapped over
her mouth, muting her voice in
the haunting veil of darkness?

How does blood forget the unforgettable
and honor the blueness that exists
within, unfeeling the sore crush
of bone against bone, her hips hostage
to his sickening sweat that fell
like tears and stained her skin
forever?

How does grief hide in buried memories
replacing fear with a glimpse of hope
surrounding her in a circle of warmth,
a halo of immaculate prayer?
Once, her life was a story unblemished,
sweet, as the scent of an infant's
cheek, before her heart, was forever
scarred, in a silent murder, an untold
killing named rape.

How does breath ever fill with faith,
again, even though she said *no*, her tongue
suffocated, his hands weapons, grappling
at her breasts, her face pressed against
the feathered pillow, closing her eyes
in a betrayal of sight, because she'd always
been taught every communion was meant
to be holy, the way an early blossom
opens and unfolds to light.

Reflection

When she remembered the days
of being young, it was as if another

person lived in her body, as if her
body belonged to someone who

laid herself bare without worry
who slept on the wild floor of a forest

and listened for deer running through
slivers of light between trees.

A place where Heaven crept
inside the low-hanging clouds

where angels dropped their wings
through sky-filled birds. It was

as if there was no tomorrow
or yesterday, as if love was an

ample commodity and could feed
all hunger and eradicate all pain

where nothing of cruelty survived
long enough to wound the tiniest

living thing, it was as if a dream
was one moment's happiness

that lasted a lifetime, as if her body
belonged to someone whose heart

hadn't carried the burden of a thousand
unknown endings, whose memories

weren't weighted and fogged with all
the river's tears and starless nights—

it was as if she could look
in the mirror and see herself from

outside of an image, a kind of
otherness, of having and not having,

of being with and being without
and it was freeing to exist in that

kind of limbo, a state of unknowing
that gave her enough hope to carry on.

When I Was Eleven

I loved the elevator man. The way
he named the floors, his hat, and gloves

unsullied shades of lunar white.
How we'd fall a story's length

suspended in the midst of destinations.
I used to watch the wink of half-light

seep between the sliver of flooring
like a moon with ragged brightness

hiding in a limbo place, a space impossible
for landing. I imagined how he'd take

us there amid our trips of up and down,
where nowhere was a paradise

no postcard could address.

Rain-Song

Today I'm the footloose ballerina
embracing the light, unaware of time
or the sound of a downpour. My feet
pirouette across the flooring
through blue shadows
where sundials mark the hours.

I am enswathed in the thinnest skin
holding a soul within this explosion
of dance while the metronome
claps to a ghostly audience
and the inexcusable absence of you.
This is my triumph, this small

spark of joy that blithely leaks
through the unzipped raiment.
Life without you is not the same,
but clarity rests in the emptiness
defined by the unfilled hollow
the beautiful rain-song barely heard.

At last, I rejoice in a shuddering
victory, contentment without you,
your gentle music rushing
beneath me and the knowledge
you'll be waiting, oblivious
our parting was ever allowed.

STAN ZUMBIEL

Chimera

A voice thrusts between hemispheres
of the brain like a knife cleaving
a cold watermelon, a wedge splintering
the clean white wood of freshly cut oak:

Seek enlightenment.

A map or a small cardboard
sign in the window:

enlightenment here

A man steps from the shadows,
takes you by the hand and leads you
through a dark doorway into a room with
damask curtains, a woman sitting calmly
in a chair ready to speak words to remove
the knife, the wedge.

Seek enlightenment

by listening for music. It might be heard
in the laughter of children or streaming
from a window of a passing car or whispered
in a crosswalk or in the confused mumblings
of a homeless woman who thinks she has
the direct line to God, or in many voices
taken together—a word or two to let
in the light, to make real the dream.

Enlightenment

drives by in a new convertible,
hair blowing in the wind, not worried about
skin cancer. She shouts, asking if you want
a ride. Always say yes.

Enlightenment

points out important landmarks, urges you to take
pictures, urges you to stop and pick up a brochure.

Enlightenment

is good that way, a good
companion for the road, sings wonderfully,
tells funny stories, won't strand you
in some desert town with only one good bar.

Enlightenment

insists on separate beds,
and don't even think of looking when she steps
out of the shower. She won't leave you off
where she picked you up so you may seem
lost for a second. To get home

just sing the songs she taught you.

Descent

Wet boulders cradle
small pockets of soil

each with
a crooked pine
grasping the side
of the mountain.

A pair of grosbeaks perch on
a windblown branch.

They enjoy the sun,
enjoy seeing
their shadows on the warped
granite surface

or

dive
into
the
urban
canyon
from the
decoration
on
a
high-rise,
reflections
of
their
spread
wings
in
a hundred
windows
as they drop.

Face of God

looms in the bricks of a building,
the squares becoming
the rounded surfaces of his cheeks,
and He does look like man. His eyes
look everywhere,
I suppose seeing everything even
though the view from the building
is restricted and there is a abrupt
horizon across the street.
The view of the street is just fine,
with people walking, some
hand in hand, some lurking along
as if they have committed a
crime and they don't want
God to see.
He never much changes expression
even when the shadows of the
moving sun hit the bricks at
different angles, as if all that activity
including a strip club, by the way,
doesn't really bother him. It isn't
a tabernacle, there are no sacred
texts inside, there are no scholars
studying intently, trying to figure
out what God might have meant.
Well, maybe there is one guy who
reads carefully texts from many
religions trying to figure out if
God might be speaking between
the lines. Every day he stands in a
window right about where God's
eye would be (this is not intentionally
symbolic) and looks out on the street
and listens to the voices and tries
to see if maybe there is some
reason. He selects certain voices
and writes down what he thinks he
hears and compares it all to the texts
to see if there might be meaning.
This is not worship. He doesn't
sing or have anyone else in the room.
Once a day he goes out to buy groceries
at the corner market which is only open
until nine. He doesn't see the face of
God in the building when he returns,
Brazilian R & B playing seriously
and loudly on the street. He can't hear
the whispers between the pavement
and the buildings. He doesn't dance
even when they've closed off the street
so that there can be a party in the neonlit
spaces, and the people pouring out
of the bars raise their arms and shout
to the heavens. It's hard to say
from God's expression what He thinks
of the dancing and the studying and
the buying of vegetables. Pickpockets
work the crowd under the watchful eye of God,
occasionally jostling someone against
someone else and causing an inadvertent
introduction – match-making by chance.
Even that doesn't make God smile.

The street sleeps. A single figure with a
pronounced limp walks
through the shadows, an occasional
car speeds through, driver looking
for something in the early morning, headlights
flashing on the walls in rhythm with
weak blinking neon and traffic lights – *walk*
and *wait* alternating. The face of God
is hard to pick out in the dark. It's hard
to know if He's sleeping.,

DIANE FUNSTON

Inner City Home, Rochester, New York

In the city of Frederick Douglas;
above the painful echoes
of Underground Railroad,
below the path of the drinking gourd,

Young men kill one another
gun down hard fought ideals
give power to the new Master,
the meth and the crack
across young backs
like the forebear's whipped lashes
tracks on arms trace
new cruel slavery.

Across Harriet Tubman's land,
violence is the new crop
sticks to souls like cotton,
to scarred hands once before
reaching out to God,
now to the weapons
of class destruction.

Under city street lights
the call and response
of gunshots to sirens
penetrate the humid air,
color the night red,
flow of youthful blood—
glow of screaming top light—

Another night's statistic
in the city of Frederick Douglas.

Hometown

Rochester, New York
Homesick
Hometown
My once-homes sold
My childhood homes gangland
My mother's house borrowed

A city of strength
Innovative industry
Eastman Kodak
Bausch and Lomb
Xerox
Corning glass
and Jello

A city of justice
Frederick Douglas
Harriet Tubman
Underground Railroad
Follow the drinking gourd

A city of sound
Eastman Theater
Chuck Mangione
Foreigner
Son House
Children playing kickball
In streets once so safe

Skyscrapers look down
where industry once thrummed
Now turned into yuppie lofts
Grocery stores left
in suburban flight
Parking meters loom
bowing before the gray skyline

My Scrapes with Sky

I never see skyscrapers uplift
Their glass-and-steely-eyed-missile stance
Without some vague tectonic rift
Opening in each knee. My glance
Is desert-sirocco-blind, quicksand
In both feet. Thermals hale me up
Condor-high. Tall candy-land
Starts me: gandy-dancing-monorail-
In-disrepair-K2-high-ledge-
Thoughts, dizzying my to-be-spilled cup
Of blood, brain, stomach, sure the edge
Invites me, platform diver down
By swan-plunge into that kerchief
Of hopscotch concrete. Floaters brown
Inside my eyes. I feel the grief
—Unmanly as all self-pity gets—
That sorries me (and grieves the crowd)
To fear for my pumpkin head. No nets
Abort the rind-smack, throng appalled.
Or worse, each airplane overhead
Incites the perverted zest I feel
Daydreaming free fall. The fresh-packed
bread-
Loaf strapped to my chest: my nylon reel
And silklike floral won't bloom out.
I knew it shoving at the door.
The heavy door-shove hurts like gout.
Shoved-open door enlists the wind
To foul my leap, my ripcord tug.
The hundredth-floor ledge softens, thinned
To grass and sedge slick as throw rug.
On Mount Diablo's summit slope
I couldn't stand tall near the void,
Nor, knees and elbows, edgeward grope,
Throat one humongous adenoid.
Sky scrapes my face, blots up my breath;
I'm flagpole-sitting, sipping death.

TOM GOFF

Evolving, My Way

If I could command our evolution-drift,
I'd vote for additional eyeballs, but just so:
Our apex-predator-forward gaze would lift
And swivel much the way we already know.
But what would I add? Spare eyes clamped either side,
Provided so we could see around ourselves,
Assume the prey-gaze finely equipped to hide
From six-legged leopards—in caves, on cliffside shelves
Above—but why? Rapacious as we are,
What good wouldn't it do us to know how
Collateral empathy finds fit use in war,
Seeing how we're collateral damage right about now?
Our vulnerability gaze might be best bred
If cylindered graceful, shark-style—hammerhead.

Dolphin / Dauphin

Odd, how Shakespeare's Englishmen have fun
Mocking the French prince Louis as a "Dolphin,"
And yet not all that odd—besides the pun,
Didn't the title "Dauphin," tail and fin,
Originate from that clever-headed cetacean
Whom Shakespeare's Antony emulates with slick
Submergence in realms where human crustaceans
Browse bottom, surfacing once again with quick-
March armored campaigns while his own soldiers faint
To see him slurp pond-scum? Intelligent, though,
Our Cleopatra's pet dolphin without taint
Emerges or dives among pods whose lyrics echo,
Ping through his own depths and sonar again in our age,
Wherever great ones love, harangue, sing, or assuage.

RICK RAYBURN

Artwork by Rick Rayburn

24 Buzzards Roosting in a Dead Tree

Turkey Vultures lack the vocal
organs to make proper songs.
—Cornell Ornithology Lab

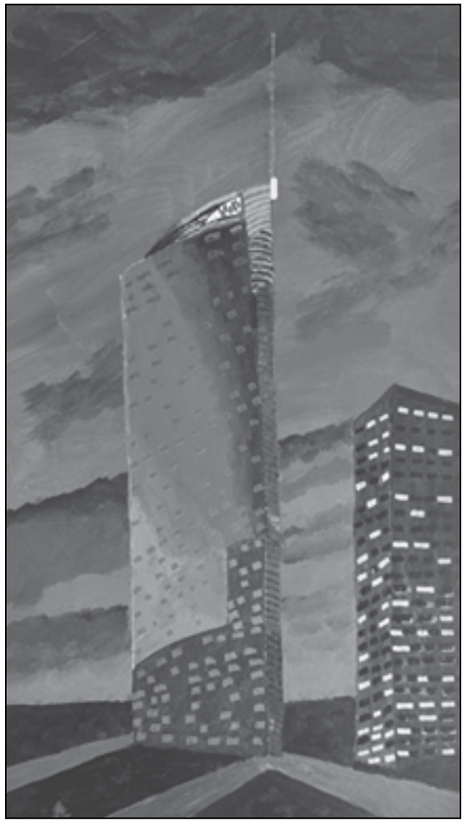
Statued shoulder to shoulder, yawning monks
in brown robes chancelled for dawn's prayer.

Red hoods dot the oak's abbey, brittle
limbs crisscrossing shadows dying

in the fawned grassland. One-by-one they stretch
wet wings, their plainsong echoing up

the valley praising the dead. They lift off
on warm air soaring, evolving beyond the Sistine

chants as scent-seeking ivory beaks will hiss
and grunt ripping clean still warm
black-tailed deer.



Wilshire Grand Center,
800 Wilshire Blvd, L.A., CA

It is the tallest building west of the Mississippi,
1100' tall, 73 story skyscraper

Acrylic on canvas.

SHEILA LOWE-BURKE

More

There is more which brings us together than that which pulls us apart
Let us look again with kindness inside the human heart.
At that which mourns and all that which rejoices,
Sharing as one, our common voices
In one unending song of love and peace, our choices.

Dolphins

Dolphins in the waves are dancing, dancing
Tiny little sea horses prancing, prancing
A moonlight rendezvous with you, I'm chancing
Won't you come and dance with me?

Leaves atop the breeze are drifting, drifting
Spirits in the air are lifting, lifting
Memories and dreams are sifting, gifting
Won't you come and sing with me?

A flame in my heart is roaring, roaring
A hope in my soul is soaring, soaring
A sailboat adrift with no thought of mooring
Won't you come and sail with me?

Won't you come and dance and dream,
Won't you come and sail and sing,
Yes, come and dance, laugh and love, and
Take a chance, with me!

J. C. OLANDER

Tourista

In the winter months we fly south like birds
over mountains nourishing barren livelihoods
landscapes that lost the honor of vegetation
our pleasures require lush tropical indulgences
browsing through the changing climate scenarios
relaxing--leisurely constructing beach front crowds
devouring the local bourgeoisie street style tacos
even expensive cuisines we can hardly pronounce
chase it all down in mourning stomach smoothies
never the less, we enjoy our lavish dining delights
we are broadening our bottom-line judgements.

What else to tweet when becoming Tourista
what else when retired—tour the sights unseen
so many pyramids reaching for a star's vision
prophets flattering the level playing field's depth
vital cultures lost in wild jungled abandonment
rising prices for entertaining fees and souvenirs
contemporary mundane carnival constructions
skyscraper elevator rides for lay of the land views
we cheer in spectacle charades for our fleecing
shop bored for cheap trinkets to get our giggles
capture local character in historical photo tours
explore desert highlands of smoking volcanos
obsidian's translucence shimmers blade's edge
the incision's terror stabs into brain's antiquities
stone temples--bleeding hearts for sun's cruelty.
Pyramid steps guide us up to the spectacle's truth
the king's judgements for his ruling class future
Jaguars roar from limestone's inner sanctum reverie
monumental stories reside in their stone chambers
skulls, gold, gem stones reveal the invader's image
misfortune's cost for executing local family spirits
the wise ones chiseled their stories into frescos
amnesia thunders the Caribbean's climate change
relinquishing our defensive posturing of privileges
we inhabit landscapes of sacred murder-rapes
sacrifices latest neighboring bully-thugs provide.

The wild green radiance grows embracing foliage
renewing the jungle's cycle of ephemeral victories
jade umbrellas council the gathering cloud layers
leaves rattle their omens into limestone shrines
these are paths leading us to psychic knowledge
shall we dive into a deep clarity of cenote jewel
it's low-cost swimming within a liquid gem's light
the watery opening into the Earth's subconscious
engulfing human sacraments for sacred prosperity
appropriate jewelry accompanies the sacrificial gift
a magical ceremony of cynical power appropriation

swallowing name phrasing's of the captured victims
such blind faith in the sanctity of slit throat offerings
or swimmers struggling—drowning in their memories
we pray for Earth fueling the wild jungle's resilience
we ingest stars into our body's blood renewal rituals
how else do we know results if we do not rehearse.

Creatures are devouring Earth's vital energy fields
we rebuke the dangers draped on our self esteem
the seekers are driving blind to imagining desires
traveling into night's single path of consequences
we have nothing to gain but our own experiences
human migration crushing Earth's crop rotations
fields producing meagre imagined dreamy fruits
populations too dense to realize the implications
human machinery consuming extinction's values
individuals finally realizing civilization's bondage
descendants vowing return into forest dwellings
living among the hardships with animal existence
working the land with their hand shaped tools
pulling ripe fruits from the sweet sweat of Earth
peace of mind resides in a shelter's vast warmth.

We flock upon soft white limestone sand shores
burning our flesh to a rich darker shade of pale
our skin's color reflects imagination's privileges
the shore line welcomes the ancient roaring waves
crushing Time's memories into layered metaphors
the sea's swelling foam lathers its floral bouquets
then coughs up a Sargasso Sea's decaying fruit
sulfuric mist carried over waves replenishes lungs
sores fester flesh of the sea's swimming schools
sea creatures decorate beaches with thinning shells
crustaceans curl up into unique skeleton jewelry
innuendos gathering patterns scripture the sand
prophetic winds interpret ocean's maternal roar.

Tight fisted boredom glares at horizon islands
shadows in the toxic waves of plastic/metal air
dolphins leaping through cruise ship excretions
oily subsidies of government fiascoes shimmering
iridescent sheens glimmering the sea's expanse
palm fronds whisper soft prophetic conclusions
betting on the future's procreation possibilities
we all laugh heartily in the same language tones
turquoise sea's foam lathers the beach bathers
blubbery bodies rolling and basking sand clichés
syllables rippling through our blood's lethargy
eroding brain's canyons of hard-earned realities
the bedrock of all mystical masonry structures
mining limestone into towers shape shifting.

We are building barriers to delay the invasions
saluting sharp glass shards decorating our walls

sparkling blades gleaming razor wire's metal curls
gun portals grinning from the blood's red gravity
collection payments are strangling local economies
we ware house our hours in Wall Mart sale aisles
standing in lines to cash out sell out necessities
the indoctrination cashiers cash out our privileges
no one remembers the negative verb variables
or the cost of living comfortably above crowd noise
the milling throngs need serious medical attention
cement crumbles cobblestones to sterile decorum
cobblestones rumbling our integrity into poverty
mongrel dogs stalking malnutrition's main streets.

We are all canines lucky to bark once a day here
growls grovel from dark prophets littering streets
imitation gems are displayed in cheap street plots
below the rebar tips puncturing grey sky's anger
precious jewelry is stolen from our memory's vault
death brightens night sky with exotic bird feathers
falling from skyscraper windows of blinding lights
lit up for celebrations plundering the local artisans
sonorous songs strew feathers into street garbage
clipped freedom of birds flatters the ruling tyrants
driving towards an executioner's awakening bullets
a million suns are dancing in cobblestone corridors.

We enter Zagunda's Nature to experience reality
future's artistic retreat for schooling human genius
guitars and violins strum bitter/sweet melody refrains
within the drumbeat's rhythm the beating heart beats
among the desert's garden of the brittle sharp thorns
tree spirits manifest new species from sacrificial ashes
drifting through dry gardens of Zagunda's shiny thorns
alien tulip trees flower the desert's exotic expectations
we can only imagine brutal hybrid cruelties blooming
evolutionary elites writing scripts for a final solution
wind cascading obsidian blades from volcano throats
the Earth's breast responds oozing molten milk rivers
stone's elements flowing into the landscape's flesh
everywhere green foliage erupts in flames each spring
it's all any of us can expect waiting for our turn to walk
among ruins praying between cement walls crumbling.

Star Particles

In Yosemite Valley—Sierra Nevada Light Range
we discover ourselves in its river's granite womb:
myriad fingers etch prophetic murals over raw stone
images remind us who and what we are becoming
here our senses illumine our reverent re-creation.

Light arrows pierce forest shadows of black oak
cottonwood, pine, fir, cedar, aspen whispering
syllables nourishing language: nuanced phrasings:
such small events unnoticed in mind's paradigms
calculating abstract formulas for beauty's worth.

Unseen seeds sprout light from fertile soil
we are all evolving through endless seasons
following the trail down to the river's Blessing
grasses swirling language's life into our lungs
footsteps tattoo scripture across shore line sand
we come together entering light's Baptism.

* * * * *

Given the chance "Being Here" we wade into light
smooth round stones gleam—electrifying our souls
coloring our galaxy's minerals in precious pigments
riffles swirl light crystals round our body symmetry
light jewels deepen upstream timeless in its current.

Fingers cascade its light down harmonic corridors
structuring the sanctuary's granite column cathedral
with our clothes removed we enter its light current
sunset's gold gilds the clear cold light stream's thrill
emerald pools enliven our journey's eternal destiny.

Light awakens our changing nature in the immersion:
a communal existence in the congregation of species
we are all star particles of the indigenous river's flesh
bright rubies salmon spawn in river's blood stream
Blessing us in this river's flow from a woman's womb
starlight sparkling our ripples rippling us into night.

HARVEY D. OSGOOD

What A View

Perched like a bird, ironically enough
Forty-four stories above and out of touch
Four glass walls with water within
Swim I must, side to side, end to end

I send out my echolocation clicks
Their angular bounces mire me within
Confusing me in my attempt to reach
Others in pods that seek my speak

Floors of concrete with water encasing me
As elevators bring humans to stare replete
Taking pictures and offering herring treats
Truly trapped in a life of no retreat

A devolving situation, a cry of awry
The ocean to a forty-four stories high
Stupid glass dolphin, tank in Dubai
Just give me a damn fish, I bubble and sigh.

TODD BOYD

The Greening of Neanderthal

There's no doubt about it. I'm almost suffering from post-covid ptsd just watching over the last year or so one to two thousand video clips of people either getting the long covid test stick shoved up their nose or getting punctured with the needle stick during every covid news clip and myth-busting error correcting analyst report.

I'm almost able to add a third post- trauma when upon having real conversations, one has to hear (and tell) a vaccine reaction story. I know I've told mine ad nauseum, so I guess I can't complain, can I? That's the way it works here in America. The blame is what goes around, comes around.

So, in order to alleviate and deviate from the normal covid visualizations and trauma, I've decided to take up what I see as the next socially acceptable convention and topic of dinner parties around America and probably Europe, too. The question of "How much has Neanderthal Man contributed to the gene pool and what are its(his, her) effects?"

About a year ago or so, 23 and Me, one of the main genealogical reports anyone can obtain for a fee, in fact, the more the merrier, is what I say. I have some 1500, nearly all fourth cousins and beyond, live descendants I've never met nor heard of because back in the past it appears my great-great-grandparents were a lot more sexually active than their Victorian era social standards should have permitted. Of course, many of these current yet distant relatives put no or little information about themselves or their known ancestors so I'm not sure what the purpose of a genealogy is, other than to possibly alleviate any anxiety men might have about the old skeletons in the closets popping up at their ancestry door.

Where my man, Neanderthal comes in, is because with the scientific discovery of a complete Neanderthal genome package from 40,000 years ago, genome sequencers such as 23 and Me and Ancestory.com can now, more or less, differentiate a long-ago connection to the Neanderthal sequence. It turns out that when I was first diagnosed with Neanderthal, it was more minimal than it is now.

Initially, I had a little more Neanderthal than 3% of the population. Now, over a year later and with more genetic sequencing going on behind my back and with more "testing" I'm in a N. group that is 19% of the population.

With this scientifically induced renewed social interest in our relationship to Mr. Neanderthal, I've noticed more and more news stories associated with what I call the Greening of Neanderthal Man.

I've said before, speaking as an unprofessionally trained anthropologist and unskilled/ unprincipled archeologist, I've always felt Neanderthal took a back seat to the better placed French good looking Cro-Magnon Man as a European prototype and whereas Cro-Magnon always looked and acted like he was already prepared for modern life, Neanderthal, my 1000th cousin has always been relegated to nothing but a "dead" end branch in the human history tree, much like the early, scientific versions of Africans and other unwanted and unacceptable versions of the human race.

In other words, Neanderthal is slowly plodding its way up the evolutionary road to respectability, again, much like recent discussions of the philosophical, political, and moral science shrouded arguments which purposefully cloud the African's physiological and intellectual character assassination in order to preserve a necessity to enslave them which came out of the Age of Reason.

The same Age that produced "All men are created equal."

Despite the continued heavy determinist regard for science nowadays, I still say, science over the centuries has not served us well. Science has almost always supported the most fanciful religious, political, and unnaturaI biases until the weight of Reality makes it obvious it wasn't ever the way science thought. I think everyone should get a vaccine, don't get me wrong there.

Someday they might conclude that genes aren't everything and we've ALL pretty much derived our physical makeup from apes evolutionary chain more and less from our brain's illusionary contrivances are, so our so called soul can die without apology and in peace with itself.

The math which adds up to the Present sits exactly on the temporal scale between the Past and the Future, yet, it doesn't always add up to zero due to the negativity relegated to the Past and the positive outlook hoped for in the Future. The Present is actually a black hole where we dump all our past mistakes, contrivances, and broken illusions and mix them with all our dreams, schemes, hopes, usually a recipe for disaster. Things being equal or balanced as nature would have it, square rather than round, and everything bound by a straitjacket of Reality, we all will realize that there's not a dimes worth of difference between any of us, so we can shed ourselves of that artificial, scientific contrivance of skin (color) we believe makes a difference.

That's what's wrong with us nowadays. We see the world as merely Hopeful, less Neanderthal like, whereas the evidence proves to us the Neanderthal grows inside us, and we're probably better off trading in our cellphones for a club. In fact, I'd love to see the dna results of those who give us all this social media technology because it may be, they're the real standard bearer of Neanderthal promiscuity or thuggery.

No offense, Mr. Neanderthal man.

The It Person

Never practiced in front of a mirror how to lie or bribe, talk dirty or
ascribe to deception,
Or what It'd say when It died to make everything fine about what It did
Or did not do to make it all right.
If the have nots only want what the haves have in regards to material
wealth, then nothing's changed.
If the oppressed only want to be the oppressor then nothing's changed.

If the haves won't share/give to the have nots, then nothing's changed.

There's only so much to go around and too few have too much, many
have what they don't need, and too many want what can't be bought
and can only be stolen.

When will it stop?

This merry go round of desperation and greed evolution.

My only hope is that somewhere in the world/now
a child has been born /
who will never bend to old/
never forever be disgraced upon the public stage/
never regret the folly of youth nor the wisdom of old age/
will recant the superiority of any race and division of gender/
but will always rise up to face/ to lead us into the future/
the reciprocity of equal/
the sharing of freedom/
the it person cometh

Love's Concepts

Love had been in this space for eons watching it populate. Before these moments that I am about to describe, Love was known to be free flowing. Fully here and everywhere. Thick in the atmosphere was Love's energy unparalleled. Seen as particles of light, if seen at all. The blindness which kept Love unseen had become common. So focused on negativities were the inhabitants that few paid any attention to the beautiful things in their world. And this, this was yet another beautiful day to enjoy. However, on this particular day Love felt an unease never felt before. Life's future had become dire, with no chance of better days ahead. Love deduced the end of good had arrived in this place. Humanity had become complacently sedentary in a hopeless apathy. Had decided Love was not worth reaching for anymore. Expecting nothing more than fire, brimstone and the foul smell of discontent. War had replaced compromise in this place. An eye for an eye was leaving everyone blind. No one seemed to care that the revolution would end in a natural evolution called extinction. And Love, Love did not need to be present to witness that.

Forgetting the essence of her being, Love began running in circles trying to find an exit from this hell. Attempts to catch up with a life that understood Love seemed futile. Panting the pant of an asthmatic was a sign that panic was rising as Love searched. Thinking, she might not find the portal to the parallel of which only few knew before rapture arrived.

It was then that it happened

Awakened describes the lightning bolt of thought that brought to her attention, *"I am Love in the here and now, fear not. Waste no time looking down. Rainbows aren't found on the ground. Keep looking up. What you search for will be found."*

It was then that it happened

Clouds parted, revealing a rainbow from which sprang a winged dolphin.

Love watched in amazement as it circled, then hovered just above her head. Telepathically, Love was invited to ride on the back of this beautiful winged creature. High above treeless avenues and smog hugging skyscrapers it took her. Straight to the stars they soared, straight through the portal hidden behind the rainbow. Arriving in what can only be described as Shangri La. Love felt at home at last.

Alas, she could not stay. Elsewhere there was still work to be done. Love was told she was needed on a planet called Earth. Maybe there, they will be more receptive to Love's concepts.

THEO S. GOODWIN

A Solitary End

For sixty-eight years I've lived alone
without a spouse, child or clone,
held inside a concrete square
facing a wall, no friends to spare,
to talk to, to kiss, to reminisce.
Zookeepers say I'm an orphan bitch,
but every elephant has a mom
who feeds, and loves and makes a home,
who shows her how to give, how to live,
how to choose a mate, how to forgive.
Humans wave, they yell, they photograph
not knowing my heart is broke in half.
Free me from my lonely hell:
no folks, no friends, no tale to tell.

The Dachshund, Not the Hare

Never was I a speedy hare
more akin was I to a slow, cheerful dachshund
moving steadily toward kindness and curiosity
drawn by some heavenly,
creative magnet

Never was I the teacher's pet
nor did I don the dunce cap;
my agile brain leapt and pulled,
groaned and learned the rudiments while
exploring voices less often heard

Now I squint into the rearview mirror;
my middle-age caught in the distance,
my stupid adolescence vanished;
but youth suits my two-year old granddaughter:
everything she does is charming, sweet

Would I trade in my soul to live life one more time
without knowledge, wisdom or premonition?
Do I need a second chance?
Thank you, no, let the babe explore all things new
as my memory fades into tranquil, distant time.

Cupid's Facilitator

In an old warehouse south of Market Street in a San Francisco neighborhood frequented by winos, drug addicts and homeless folks – that is where my cousin Hiram lived. He raised a small family there amidst his five floors of collections and curios.

Hiram was nothing short of eccentric, not for his laughing manner of speech, but for the things he did. "Peculiar" is the adjective that defined his personality according to my mother and his aunt. "He got it from his father," she would explain.

What was Hiram's connection to zoos? He had a hobby, that would expand into a side business, of raising and breeding boa constrictors. This enterprise was conducted *sub rosa* in a corner of the warehouse that received ample light and fresh air. He fed them wild rodents, lame pigeons and assorted small mammals. Each boa lived in its own giant terrarium, where it slept, daydreamed and otherwise occupied itself. Hiram developed a secret understanding of when a giant female had released her mating pheromone. When Hiram learned of her readiness to copulate, he would select an appropriate male and coordinate the subjects' conjugal visits.

Within a few years, he had a thriving population, which he sold via an undisclosed intermediary to zoos throughout the Northern Hemisphere. From Montreal to Mexico City, godfather Hiram's progeny could be found wiggling their way into the hearts of admiring children visiting the ubiquitous Reptile House. I still admire my cousin for his ingenuity and oddball success.

Hiram dared to jive
In boas' romantic lives
Helping men find wives.

The Very Smartest Plan

When God flooded the earth for forty days
Man learned that no land, no matter how high, would stay dry,
When the Tower of Babel fell
Man knew that no building could reach the stars

When the World Trade Towers
Were attacked and burned
Causing thousands to die,
He saw that a plane could destroy a building

So why would anyone build another "tallest" skyscraper?
The King's committee of the smartest workers decided to build
The highest hotel possible reaching to the Heavens
To protect the King from sharply hurled insults

Ridin' High

When I slipped on my black, ten-gallon hat,
I knew I'd sit tall in the saddle of my big white stallion,

When I pulled on my blue Levi's,
I was set to bounce crazy on my galloping steed,

When I pinned the sheriff's badge onto my vest,
I was ready to strike fear among outlaws,

When I strapped on my six-shooters,
I felt bolts of lightning course through my hands,

When I got into my chaps,
I smelled the dust and grime of the roundup trail,

When my mother yelled to come home for dinner,
I awoke from my daydreams of a ten-year-old boy in Brooklyn.

JILL STOCKINGER

Open Water

The woman at the crowded beach
slathers on chemical sunscreen,
tosses an inflatable plastic ball
to her child's team, then swigs
water from a disposable bottle.
She removes pieces of fruit lacking
in taste and color from plastic bags
and cellophane. She welcomes
cooling breezes but ignores them
as they lift and deposit her clear
wrappings into the open waves.

A bomb explodes on the other side
of the world. A dolphin observes.
She wishes humans would stop
making weapons that destroy,
stop making plastic and detergents,
stop making and using chemicals.

They've ruined their world.
Now they're ruining the oceans.
They care so little for their children.
Why would they care for mine?

Oh, To Be a Cat!

When it's time to die, I hope my soul
gets to choose its next form to make it whole,
a higher form than human to flit into,
to experience sweet life anew.

That would certainly be a cat:
I'd be beautiful, wanton, fierce and fat.
I'd yowl at night and bite heads off mice—
I think that would be very nice!

According to Plan

Brxdu communed happily with his sister conglomerate, Brxxsah of the Alpha Centauri star system. "Is your Joining going according to Plan?" he inquired solicitously.

"Oh, yes," she shouted back telepathically, full of joy. "I increase at a prodigious rate. I'll share the latest fidding."

The fidding, a kind of 3D movie, blossomed in Brxdu's reception organs. He watched an astronaut sitting at the controls of a rocket ship. Brxdu's mighty facial polyps quivered with pride as he watched his sister reach out her limbs studded with suction cups, maneuvering a huge silver device. Although at least two hundred times the size of a small, humble Earth can opener, it was surprisingly similar in appearance and function to openers commonly used on Earth.

He watched as the fidding showed his sister holding the metal rocket ship with four of her arms. With her other four limbs, she dexterously attached the can opener-type-device to the bottom part of the rocket ship and carefully cut off the bottom part of the ship. She tossed that into the nearest bright star where it was instantly incinerated.

She proceeded to pull the astronaut out of his ship and expertly shucked him out of his spacesuit, as easily as an Earthling pulls an oyster out of its shell. She placed the astronaut, minus the spacesuit, back into the opened rocket ship. From her mouth which telescoped open, she shot a thick viscous sparkling substance into the remains of the rocket ship. The astronaut's body became hidden inside the substance as it filled what was left of his ship.

A second fidding ballooned out, covering a quarter of the other much larger fidding which was still running. This smaller fidding played sound only; it supplied both the thoughts and the spoken words of the astronaut, from the time he first saw the huge being floating in space to the time he underwent these procedures.

What the Hell? Am I hallucinating? "Cameras one through eight, on! Outside views. Space Log: Record now." Buttons change from red to green; lights flicker as cameras turn and focus on what is outside the ship. "This is Commander John Wiley Winters. Descendent of the old aviator, Wiley Post," John says proudly. "This may be First Contact! I repeat! First Contact! I appear to be facing a huge being that resembles an earth octopus. A space octopus!" John intones seriously, "When I say huge–this is bigger than three giant whales. The size of a huge castle. It's in front of me. Flying around." *Swimming in space? It's a goddamn Monster! Unbelievable! Got to keep talking. Try to communicate!* "External audio! Sound level 12. Hello!"

John waits two minutes, expectantly. "Hello! Can you hear me? I am from Earth! I come in peace!"

John waves his arms around, trying to get its attention. "Space Log: I'm waving at it. It sees me. It has a huge bulbous head with floppy things hanging off it." *Maybe that's equipment?* "There are eight humongous limbs. Like an octopus! For the record: I can't tell if this is real or if maybe I'm hallucinating. Maybe this is a visual projection into space, like a hologram. To scare me away." *I wish*. Cameras swivel in different directions, aiming for as complete a visual as possible. "Hell!" John's voice changes to a shocked shout. "It's attacking! I'm gonna die! Earth, be warned!" There are screams and moans as John is divested of his space suit. "May my death not be in vai–" were his last words.

Brxxsah pushed out her long tongue and scooped John up. He was completely covered in the sparkling substance. She swallowed him and spent the next few minutes licking up the remains of everything in the ship that had been covered by the shining substance. "Delicious," she hummed. She tossed the rest of the now-empty ship into the bright star nearby. "Tell me where you are and what you see. How do you feel?" prompted Brxxsah telepathically to the newly acquired organism.

There is a wait of a few minutes. "I am not dead," are the next words on the recording. The voice sounds somewhat like John, but it has a strange musical overlay of notes with every syllable. As if a small orchestra had been implanted into John's vocal cords. "This is Heaven! I am with God and the Apostles! Everyone I've ever loved who died is with me! Heaven is REAL," are the last giddy-sounding words the recording provides.

Brxdu sighs directly to Brxxsah's brain, "Just thinking about it makes me tingle with happiness. Though I'm just in technical operations, I'm still part of the great Plan that gives others their desired final stage. That during our lives of two thousand years or so, we enable them to live in their most desired state. I don't know what they'd do, without us. But were you able to explain this to your newest addition before incorporating him? His mental capacity seemed too rudimentary."

"It is above the capacity of most to understand our gift before we bestow it. I tried to explain that, even when I undergo the Change, all of us, including him, are incorporated into the next generation of BlzWupthls, so we all continue," agrees his sister. "It would have been kind to allay his fears before incorporation, but sadly, I could not. The Earthling was emitting strong mental output, but it was obvious he did not understand input from us. Still, it was easy to get the coordinates of his planet from his mind, so your side of operations can beam this recording back to his planet. All the beings there will know the bliss that is coming. That they will all happily experience, eventually, after we arrive. Just imagine the auspicious welcome we will receive! Such a generous group of beings, sending us canned goods all these years. And we will repay their kindness by giving them the afterlife they long for, so desperately."

WENDY WILLIAMS

Spatial Considerations

The pleasure of geometry,
the beloved shapes: rhombus,
pyramid, trapezoid. One line
bisects another, a third both
and voila, measurable space.

Theorems, rules, laws—the kind of math
I loved after flunking algebra. Why
yes in geometry, *no* in trig? Why
yes for organic chemistry, *no* for inorganic?

It was the shapes—six-sided benzene
domes, pentagons of carbon and hydrogen,
The spatial gymnastics—flipping isomers
in air.

But pre-med majors gave organic
chem a bad name: *gateway course.*
And teens deemed geometry irrelevant:
Had the length of any hypotenuse
ever helped them out of a jam?

But oh, those theorems, Euclid.
Those happy Morrison & Boyd formulas.
Those spatial considerations.

Narwhal

Last night in the sky
a narwhal, long unicorn
bone-tooth, eye-moon,
body made of clouds.

Beneath, I stood
in wonder, remembering
south Florida nights,
the sky offering itself—

as if so close to earth,
it was part
of land: dark palms
against brilliant
moonlight; galleons
of tall, white clouds sailing
low in the sky.

I cried a lot
those lonely nights
so I spent my time with clouds.

If only I had known
we were one and I could float
and belong to sky.

If only I had known
how perfectly right I was
in the universe.

The Old Ones

—Queen of the Lake Trail,
Spence Mountain, Oregon

The rocks sensed me,
welcomed me
solid in their places
along the trail,
stable, dependable

in all their varied coats
of color: lime, smoke,
brown ochre, gold

hues of the ages
decorative,
feisty, bold
some sedate, shy

and the shapes
so different—
face flat and vast,
another sharp of cutting edge,
some half buried in dirt,
others balanced
about to tip

stones we stepped on
for a path, others
bordered, guiding steps

rocks, boulders, stones—
the deep companionship
of the old ones
lodged in earth.

Contact with the Divine

This rainy night
I am lonely
too aware of the singleness
of my heartbeat

until in the kitchen
I come upon
a happy net of stars

a burst of spider babies
hangs from the most transparent web
between my wok and the wall—
tiny parachutes suspended in mid-air

tens of black dots for bodies
and the thinnest, wispiest legs
spread wide like sea-star arms
clinging to a rock of air

the only giggle of the evening
escapes my throat—delight
in contact with the divine

To Make Myself Worthy

—in response to Sharon Olds' poem "Ode to Dirt"

I must make myself
worthy of dirt
I who will wrap myself in you
when I die
I who will pull you around me
like a blanket
I who will rest in soil, warm and moist,
I must make myself the most pure
and beautiful person.

I must be worthy of you
who have given so much,
nurtured these trees, these grasses,
You who have under sky toiled
in keeping up earth's household,
You who have held up our feet,
our bodies, who grow plants
and shelter animals

When I am lowered in my shroud
past the layers
Let the soil feel it is good
to welcome me
Let it be glad at my coming
Let it say, and she lived
and suffered and changed
and grew
and we are honored to accept her.

It is good. And the soil closes
over me and the branches
and flowers laid gently upon…….

The Art of Vanishing

I am thinking of the praying mantis
out among the squash leaves, the vines
she clings to yet you do not see her
right away, she herself a vine.

Out there, in the damp soil, she waits,
in stillness. Dare I say, contemplation?
mine perhaps when I think of her
deft slow movements, her unhurry,
her deliberateness.

Out there, green and fresh, large mystery
among the basil and beans, what
does she eat? What inspires her to move?

All I know is that when she hears
a sound, she goes still: her triangular head,
praying forearms, thin pale legs.
A complete stop. And as she does this,

she disappears among the stems—

becoming one.

YUAN HONGRI

Translated by Yuanbing Zhang

The Sea of The Golden Palace

Happiness is the memory of heaven
And the soul is as sweet as the sun.
On the canvas of the death
you daub a smile from the gods.
Oh, that is the light! The light of honey.
If you can hear the heavenly hymns
that is the sea from that golden palace
lapping sapphire over eternal universe.

The City of Angel's Smile

The white and silvery words of the moon
kingdom
shone in the dream last night
The king of giants
in the massive cities of ancient times
presented me the gem book of the soul

I will build a garden in the desert
fill the jade vase with the holy spring
Let the rivers and lakes shine
a city of the angel's smile

The Wine of The Soul

I pick up a smiling flower from the future city
To light up your black iron dreams
The new book of the world delivers by the holy
lightning
The giant's body rotates the transparent picture
of the faraway stars-cape
The light emanates from the gods
Let you see yourself without any sorrow
The body is high and translucent, each cells are
as sweet as the wine of the souls.

The Interstellar Kingdom

Sometimes I see the sky smiling at me
The limpidity spirit and flower clouds
such as the old soul of mine
watch my shadow on the earth

The ground beneath my feet like a colossal ship
toward the Interstellar Kingdom
Those cities where giants dwell
blossom on the dustless Milky Way.

YUAN HONGRI

Translated by Manu Mangattu

The Smiling King

Two moons once chirped in my window –
A blue moon and a red moon.
They enticed a large number of stars
The legion of angels from the Kingdom of Heaven.

My palace then appeared in the clouds
A huge transparent palace in diamond
The king that smiled to me thence was none
But myself, whom I had long forgotten.

The Soul Tripod

More splendorous than the whole world
Is veiled in my chest, the gilded key to heaven.
The blue ocean and the silver kingdom in my head do dwell
As the different flowers, the same beauty garnishes them all.
A simple civilization where everyone is a giant
Each stone for them is a gem or gold
Neither darkness nor death could ruin their words
Hence a tripod of the soul they fashioned
To conceive the making of the sun and the time of the soul.

Bright Star – Sweet Song

I do know that heaven is in my frame, in my front
Yet I still covet the covert far-off kingdom of aliens
Longing forever to hear the soulful song of the stone.
My footsteps, when I tread on the earth
Shall accompany the throb of the years
Every leaf is a word
Every flower is a poem
Every big tree has an old soul
And all could hear the sweet song of the stars.

The City of the Soul

Those ancient timeworn words I love –
The Stone of the erstwhile dated soul.
More than the crown or the jewels
They make my days bright and charming.

With the light that I have
I put them to smelt in Jinding
So that I have countless stars
To plait my City of the Soul.

The City of Stars

White and blue night.
A Crystal smile.
Black is a pawn
Devoured by red lips of lightning.

There appears a song in the sky
It sprinkles down with rain and dew
There is a colossal ship in the sky
Twinkling like the City of the Stars.

The City of Gold

Ah! Into a pleasant hallway of gold
Thou did the crystal of the sky mould.
A shining City of Gold
Chanting unto me from far afield.
Into the golden gate I strode
A palace colossal to behold.
Without, a soaring Tower did dazzle
A towering wondrous Grand Castle.
It seemed to the past a billion years I travelled.
Perchance, a primal giant my eyes beheld;
In the breeze his sleeves fluttered.
A transparent golden Robe uncluttered;
The appearance was holy, hallowed.
With a sweet smile they bellowed
As tall as a mountain they loomed
But as light as birds they seemed.

Into a golden palace I sauntered
To regard the sacred giant
His body was like the Sun
Enveloped by a golden flame.

In the hall at the centre he sat
Where bloomed many a huge lotus
Some golden giants too were there
Sitting on the lotus flaunting a smile.

In that Grand Palace studded with gems
Hung an enormous mould of gold;
A mellifluous song lulled all along
Rumbling like thunder, causing concussion.

On the front wall I saw engraved
In a noble script, an impressive word;
Resplendent and magnificent, the whole palace
Was filled with fragrance – wonderful, intoxicating.

Continued

Clouds with golden wings
Were flying over: all a mirage
A blossoming thrice wonderful
Blooming in the garden outside the temple.

I saw a towering Castle
Like a mountain, upright in the sky
Brilliant design, gorgeous styling
As if God had built it Himself

Colourful gems shine like a mosaic,
A medley of all kinds of strange drawing;
A round gold tower
Like a forest stands in space.

A broad circular Gallery then I saw
Surrounded by the golden castle
Each column was as high as ten thousand meters
Carving out numerous exquisite images.

I walked into a great hall,
I saw some huge statues
Like a group of golden giants
Smiling unto me.

I crossed a huge arch
Into a golden hall
To see a huge picture
Hung on the hall wall.

Each portrait of a transparent flash
Could draw a Golden Paradise
As if a three-dimensional space
Magically unfolded before thine eyes

I heard a mysterious music
Which made my heart take wings
A huge picture of the holy girl
On a plucked instrument was manifest.

She sat in a huge palace
A giant circle around the ring seat
Every giant smiled and smiled
Curling around a golden flame

This girl's elegant posture
Wearing a golden dress
Body shining like a huge halo
Resembling the head of a golden sun.

A huge palace like a fortress
Outside the temple was the endless Garden
Flying golden feather bird
The garden with its pavilions, terraces and open halls

A blossoming of the wondrous exotic
Giving out an intoxicating fragrance
Like a sweet girl
With her model of elegant charm

A sparkling waterfall
Circling along from the hill
As a crystal emerald
Haunting this amazing Garden.

A group of boys and girls:
Dressed in bright and colourful clothes
Some would sit and rest in the Pavilion
Some would walk in the flowers, in the game.

I saw a huge old man
Sitting in a red cloud.
Only a crane flew around
And there was a huge Phoenix.

Another city in the sky
Far from the golden light
At a grand chic
The sky stood in layers

I seemed to hear the call of the divine
The old man came leisurely.
He lifted a huge golden book
And a kind of novel language I heard spoken

I saw a great line of words
Like a row of golden giants
They turned into a ray of light, and,
Suddenly flew into my chest.

My body was sweet and happy
The moment turned momentous
The sacred old man stood beside me
His smile filled the air of the city.

I became a golden giant
Beckoned back to the golden castle
Then came a giant
Who smiled and called out my name

Our bodies were just as big
We were like twin brothers
And Lo! This huge golden castle
Seemed to belong to us.

All on a sudden I saw a vision
I too was a holy giant
In every palace in the city of gold
I too had left my glad imprints.

JAY SIMPSON

Suspended Animation

Amorphous statements shifty missions laminated principle's pound of muck
prevarication monstrous delusion world view's globally demented construct
heightened animations belligerent headhunters bounty paid at surveillance checkout
travelling ambassadors agents of crime pass their rhetoric through holes in the wall
turn on the whirly gig full throttle senility marginalized citizens removed from the grid
charades at bedtime pin the tale on the country meet dictators for warring peace plans
raise your hands plead guilty to existence watch the icemen peel off your flesh
kill the enemy kill the innocent then to be sure kill them again

Indelible Link

Cultures speak into worldly patterns
trouble the street with powerful beats
echo the moaning of generations
walk the sweetness of passing replete

pounded distress multiple derision character flawing's dynamite
protuberance abysmal outlook sunshine's delivery shady refrain
noise chamber screeching birdlife bounty hunters fingers and toes
defective product hybrid delivery circumstantial effect heinous hello
perfect score's eradication bolted safe house's sexual retreat
perpetual standstill anxious revolution empowered protestors frighten the torque
night's entrapment circular mileage deep sea dilemma corrupted chaos
remove the drum roll's invisible linkage sell your postscript's indelible ink

Problematic Charters

Brew the disaster pull the ring thing explode tomorrow's perspicacity
align the stolen mirrored convection problematic charters declare lightning strikes
tomorrow's reflection storms the battlefield unused components fall prey to fear
destruction defies deliberate denial blast the fuckers from airy rooftops
inconsequential remarks diligent reprisal fluttering lashes dispute territorial games
hair out of control sliding on mishaps combing the country for misshapen head lice
refectory's memorial daytime diary words removed from the registrar's ass
call the midwife the country's crowning rebirth delivers perpetual distaste
shortened eternity collapsing stage plans manhood scares off genital collapse
prepare for future's dynamic reprisal underbelly's underground reusable prompt

Retraction

Pointed remarks dissolve inhibition
prove the point before dissertation
swallow unremarkable strategic alliance
disrupt the peace the partial recall
circumstantial evidence refuels the retraction
plans reprisal as the icicles form
melts the sun as the horizon crumbles
proffers the wine of the scantily clad
blood is the flesh of dissolving specimens
acid the promise of a better life

The Hand Holds the Mirror

Truth's brutality bruises ego
the mirror held against the face
the lightshow's hidden vulnerability
the pleading belief that finds the well
sinkholes obliterate memory's hold
functions disturb the unforgiving reel
heady serotonin's painful release valve
multiple personality's dusty night crime
bats flutter beneath unlikely allusion
conscience regrets the unforgettable muse
neurodiversity disturbs ebb's unwitting flow
confusion reigns like a defaulting flare
flogging dead horse's slow bantering hare

SHARON MAHANY

Young Night, City Light

after the painting Young Night, by Meghan Tutolo

before blackness silhouettes each tall, lean line
before blackness envelopes every window ledge
before the day has spent its colors
on a contemplatable asphalt
before shadows embrace the day

a cloudless sky emerges into call of light,
sprayed with colors echoing abalone—
purple-silver hue cups the city
in a moment of whisper before silence

blues and mauves swell into flashes
pink and blue lean against buildings
grey and orange sift downward
then embody yellow tresses
unfurling their locks to enshroud the rest

a single round moon
protrudes, its reflection
bursting

a scaffolding of gold permeates stacked boxes
pigments of red seem to freeze time
before releasing star dust
scattering bits of clarity into the sky

the inevitable: blackness advances, hangs,
envelopes every window ledge
silhouettes each tall, lean line
young as night, old as time—
we close our eyes, we pray

First published *Song of San Joaquin*
Vol. XIX #2 Spring 2022

Ripples

Dolphins evolve into the sea
Skyscrapers evolve into the sky
Humans evolve in the in-between
Should we ask not how, but why?

Joining the Circle

I stepped into the room, late. After taking our luggage into the guestroom, I hurriedly joined the round table at the back of the ballroom where my mom sat. This was the Gala Dinner of my first conference. We had just arrived in Arizona, and my mother went on ahead to save two seats. I could hear the soft mumble of people settling in while the speaker readied herself. As I entered, I saw that our table was full. The hodgepodge of strangers all looked up at me as I reached for the chair that was graciously offered to me from another table. "No," I could hear from several of their voices. "You must shake her hand first."

I wrinkled my nose, "What"? They repeated. "You have got to shake her hand. Mo's." They looked at each other and laughed like I was going to get punked.

My mom smiled and reassured me, "Yes. I did it" as if it were more than a mere greeting. I began to feel as if I were in a closed circle of an Agatha Christie movie. Indeed, I had walked into something. Little did I know it could just as well have been a scene from The Twilight Zone.

They began going around the table telling me their names. Referring to the handshake thing, Karen leaned in with, "See what you notice." Gladys introduced Mary "Mo" Wheeler as a channeler and multi-dimensional being. She was the one with her hand out. The lady next to her was Joeaux (pronounced Joy) an interdimensional interpreter (which somehow was different?) Marilyn, seated next to her, admitted to channeling Adironnda and The Council of Light from the 17th dimension. She was a walk-in (it was explained to me later) with striking white hair and black eyebrows, giving away her dye job and emphasizing her lifestyle change. She seemed foreign and was quietly taking everything in. Gladys was director of the Ozark Research Institute in Arkansas, who organized conferences of her own. Her husband had been known for his miraculous healings. Now she ran the group. I was sitting next to Bobby Jo, a slender, dark-haired woman in a cowboy hat and plaid shirt who kept studying her finger. Sitting next her was Dick Tippett, a geomancer and water dowser from California, wearing a bowler hat, a cane hanging on his chair, who stated he would lead the Sedona tour the next day. On the other side of me was Johnny,

a Native American, wearing a western hat, bold black braids, plaid shirt, and turquoise bolo tie, who constantly spoke (loudly) of nothing else but his diligence in getting the US government to relinquish his tribal property in Texas and admit his family had perpetual sovereignty over the sacred land. He held formal documents which he opened and discussed when anyone showed even a little interest. And my mother and I completed this table. We were feeling a bit out of place: this being our first conference, and at a table of very eclectic strangers at that.

After introductions, the group was again insistent I get up and shake the hand of Mo Wheeler. I rise and go over to her with my hand out. Mo stands up and holds my hand, interlacing our fingers. I notice she had interlaced the fingers of her other hand to the woman on the other side of her too. I was struck so fast, I almost didn't feel it happening on the physical plane. It was as if a bolt of lightning shot through my hand, penetrating my body, my brain, my being. My heart seemed to burst open. The high frequency rang through my ears as my soul jolted from my body and returned in the same instant, I heard high-pitched dolphin noises reminiscent of Flipper, screaming to his handlers with ear-blasting might, "Eeeh! Eeeh! Eeeh!, Eeeh! Eeeh! Eeeh!," followed by a series of clicks and snorts.

Karen leaned toward me again. "Did you notice anything?" I knew my body had jumped in the air in a startle reflex, so that seemed a silly question. Those at the table laughed. Mo continued to make shrieking sounds that must have been heard throughout the room. How could those noises be coming from her? I stood there in disbelief until the shock of it turned to acceptance. "That really happened," I thought, trying to convince myself.

"She likes you!" Mo exclaimed. The woman next to her began explaining what the dolphin was expressing to her. Bobby Jo explained to me that though Mo channels dolphin and whale energy; she brings it to form, but does not speak their language, so doesn't know exactly what it means. Joeaux cannot bring forth the energy, but she can telepathically translate what they tell her. Joeaux told us that the dolphin (whose name I do not remember) was pleased to meet me. She could not contain her love at my presence, so that was what I had felt. She was overjoyed! She had offered me an activation as a gift. Gift received!

I told Mo and Joeaux to tell the dolphin that I was pleased to meet her too and gave Mo's hand a good-natured squeeze. My body tingled for a day or two after that. I was forever changed. That was my initiation, I suppose, to the study of energy. I could feel that feeling again if I chose to get still in my mind-body and remember. It was not entirely pleasant, a little like fingernails on a chalkboard, but the love behind the gesture was immense.

I would like to share a few other things I learned from these dinner guests during my time with them. I mentioned that Bobby Jo was mumbling under her breath about her finger. She kept trying to straighten

out the noticeable bend at the tip of her index finger. She repeated that she didn't mean to, that she had pointed. I inquired about what had happened. She said that while driving to this event, she had a premonition of a car falling off the side of a cliff. She immediately turned the wheel, hugging the side of the road, bringing the car to a stop in hopes of avoiding a crash. When performing this turn, her bent fingertip pointed. She said she had had previous experiences where her fingertip had "made things happen." She was fearful. When she got to the foot of the mountain, there were police cars and an upturned car below. She thought she might have accidentally caused the car to crash, instead of avoiding a crash herself. If the dolphin experience was a high-point, this level of responsibility Bobby Jo felt was a low-point. I tried to console her as best I could, but she was committed to feeling miserable.

Johnny's fight for his land was also a matter of frustration and lack of empowerment. Johnny carried the negative emotions inherited from his whole tribe, two hundred years of angst involving betrayal, violation, survival, and respect. Many attendees reached out to him that weekend to hear his story, offer him healing and lawyers' names.

Dick Tippett did lead the Sedona Tour the next day, slowly with his cane, which doubled as a dowsing rod. He lent me a Y-rod to sense a vortex. I was unable to get a response until he put his hand on my shoulder, and wham! The rod shot down towards the ground in front of me with the power of a certain dolphin I had just met. In the evening, Dick played the piano in the lobby, surrounded by single women, which made for a rollicking fun time. I was told that my uncle played that same piano several years earlier at the conference. I did not know my uncle had attended these dowsing conferences. That was eye-opening! I spent the next few years discovering that Uncle Bob (Robert Mahany) was a well-known presenter. I learned about his teachings so I might keep them relevant for future conference-goers and be an active part of the evolution of his work.

Readers might wonder about the evolution of dolphins, about them perhaps flying high in our world of skyscrapers. I must say dolphins have evolved more than that already, spiritually. They are pure joy. And fly just plenty, with playful flips and antics. If we humans can develop our telepathy, we could hold conversations with dolphins and learn from their wisdom. That would be the best use of evolution for each of us.

These people seated at the Gala Dinner table in October of 2008 were all Lightworkers, each talented in their own right; extraordinary, really. I met channelers, translators, healers, interdimensional beings, walk-ins, musicians, dowsers, shamans, electricians, psychics, and punkers. And then there were Mother and I: newcomers, mundane and naïve, regular folk. It would take a few more conferences before our talents would come to light. Now that is a story for another time. *And mine might include crop circles.*

DAVID C. ANDERSON

We Are Not the Enemy

Put down your rifles, disable the firing pins.
We are not your enemy.
Keep your rifles on the firing range.
Lock the gun cases, deep-six the keys.
We are not your enemy.

Jonathan, you must tell David, your father
the king has determined to kill him—
David, the man who took your place before Goliath—
the man you love more than you yourself—
Saul has become his enemy.

The classroom door opens behind you. Shadows shift.
You hear the click of a rifle. Your friends
look up from their desks, mouths open.
Sharp sudden shots repeatedly tell you
behind you stands an enemy.

He killed seventeen of my classmates
and I attended all their memorials.
We, the survivors, resolve to thrust their deaths
into the face of every power player.
And who chose not to live? Our enemy.

Jonathan, you must tell David goodbye.
Keep the covenant you made—
bid him goodbye into God's sure hands.
Close the door behind you.
Your father has become his enemy.

From the North Slope of Mount Diablo

Remembering 1950

California cities spread out before Mount Diablo
like a rumpled prayer shawl. Street lights glisten.
Where they cross, the quilt blocks grow slant.
Store fronts and traffic lights color those panes
and stitch them into one: earth, water, air, and fire.

House lights finger their way into the foothills.
No place remains untouched. Past sundown,
night securely pins up the dark with stars.
We sit here on Mount Diablo in the rinsing cool
of a clear night, and ask each other the unanswerable.

East of here, other cities spread, glow in the evening haze.
Caught in these stitched threads, this human light,
we determine, through tears, to dedicate ourselves
to the muse of our art, our life.
We think she is the one who will answer.

The Scene-Yet-To-Be-Seen By Investigators: a Diamante

three
miles, three
lanes, slow traffic
funnels into one, beside
two semi-trailers side-swiped,
ripped each other open,
spilled a road-full
of un-boxed
contents

Let Me Make Myself Perfectly Clear

Human kind cannot bear very much reality.
—T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton.'

In Tel Aviv the killer's face flashes over the guerilla art exhibit
on Dizengoff Street. Again his voice curses Jews. He growls
about their death, his cell phone jabbers from beyond his grave.
Just passersby, we do not buy a ticket to see
that street attack again. We glance up, move on.

In Ferguson, aggravated blacks stormed and looted
even the Mart & Liquor Brown robbed. Activists moved in
to protest his death, then mob rule escalated,
ruined properties and left city businesses destitute.
Even the victims of mob rule observed it all darkly,
behind a curtain. We remain uninvolved.

The Montgomery Baptist church the bomb and fire destroyed
left behind shards of a stained-glass window, their glow intact.
A passerby picked up the shards, to keep safe for a future, grow stronger.
Not an attitude adjustment, but a resolve made clear.
Not taken to shore against ruin, but to oppose the present past.

Should God speak, who listens to heed the design
He plans for our heart, our life course? Should God appear,
dazzle the mind and grasp both heart and mind,
who will dare to take God's hand and walk on water?
We run away rather than be found naked.
We deny fulfillment of our grandest wishes.

Travel Enriches the Mind

In Geneva the hotel's one last room,
a single, a loft, was the width of the bed,
the door and a sink, with space long enough
for three windows and a chair, which claimed
your suitcase. The restroom's down the hall.
Travel enriches the mind.

To reach Virginia Tech you flew to Chicago. Storms
delayed the flight to eleven p.m.
A fellow traveler, an Intel recruiter, drove you
to the campus hotel at three-thirty a.m.,
for a breakfast meeting at eight.
Travel enriches the mind.

Once in Schiphol, you caught a train to Utrecht.
The signs were in Dutch, you didn't know which stop—
you stayed on until the train stabled in Amsterdam.
A porter told you in his simple English
which train to take,
which sign to read.
Travel enriches the mind.

At the Swiss airport you engaged a stranger
and found him so friendly you exchanged
addresses. A month later you found his letter delivered
a photo of his bare torso and groins.
Travel enriches the mind.

BENITO VILA

The New Lord's Prayer
(2026 GOP EDITION)

Oh, great white gringo father,
who doesn't like brown people,
hallowed be your guns,
the technology that helps us
kill other cultures and steal
their territory. Our kingdom comes
from breaking every promise
so our kind can continue
to live in comfort. Give us
the power we need
to make sure no one
finds out about us,
and lead us out of our despair
by putting new worlds up for sale.
For thine is the rule of might worshipped,
now and forever. Ah, money.

I Am Unfolding

I am unfolding a nightmare
I've gotten good at saying is me.

I treat my own heart like it's an Oreo cookie,
fucking around with it first, comparing
what one side looks like to other and wondering
about all sorts of things before finally
putting my teeth right through it.

Blood-thirsty, violent America that's who I am.
My problem isn't guns or social media. It's me.
I'm without the tools I need to get along;
I use guilt to destroy myself, pride to destroy others,
and keep stocking up on ammunition.

The Art of Rebellion
For Hilly Kristal

The art of rebellion
speaks its own language,
moves to its own beat,
and attracts its own peace,
saying what needs to be said right now,
different than before, drawing up ideas
that move, that mirror, that raise a fist.
and then explode, leaving a light on.

The art of rebellion comes along with colors that aren't used the way they've ever been used before, that aren't used the way they're "supposed" to be used. It doesn't care for sentences, syntax or punctuation; it's there, blunt, a little odd. The art of rebellion pops up in places you've never seen intelligence being found before, in places you've never thought to look for a new hope, a new how. It leaves a trail of glittering pink feathers that come together to make an arrow pointing That Way. The art of rebellion is subtle, and knows there is an end to all things, that nothing lasts, that Death has a sense of humor. The art of rebellion is so different that it's uncomfortable, until it gets to see it's needed, that the same old thing is so done doing what it's been doing that it wants the art of rebellion to be a force, a hundred and fifty people howling, drawing on the walls, and choosing not to stop there, not waiting to arrive, not waiting to leave, always evolving, ready to keep making everything it is, and then changing up what it's doing.

The art of rebellion
lives between this and that, and
loves being neither, loves singing
its own songs its own way,
hanging out where it's not supposed to,
people walking by looking up,
knowing something's happening
without any words for what it is.

The First Step of Capitalism Anonymous

Who cares to admit complete defeat? Who cares to admit we're circling the drain faster and faster every day? Practically no one, of course. That would mean acknowledging we're spinning, being pulled, here and there, going 'round and 'round, that the systems of modern life are good only for a few, not the many, that the financial rules and economic structures most of us rely on to feed ourselves and our families have been taken over by gamblers and thieves. And we can't get free.

Every human instinct for self-preservation cries out against the idea of going up against their rigged game. What's left when the illusion ends? What do you do when you see the time-suck, the greased palms, the twisted justice and the racial bias for what it really is? Ugly. Rude. Mean. Cruel. Up to now, it's been so much easier to play along, shiny new toys in hand, to keep on warping our emotions, our minds, our lives into such an obsession for destructive buying that only Death removes it from us. No other kind of poverty or bankruptcy is like this one. Capitalism, and its rapacious creditors, bleeds us of all hope and all will to resist its demands. As long as this stark fact is ignored or denied, our aimlessness, our failure in human concerns, is complete.

Why all this insistence that our economic order has hit bottom? The answer is that few societies will sincerely try to change unless they have hit a bottom. Until we admit there is no benefit in doing things the same way we've been doing them, we will prolong our misery. History shows that. We kept our kings until they were no longer useful. Now, after centuries of flogging and deceit, after trading the whims of the court to living under the lash of capitalism, we have been driven madly insane, making it commonplace to hoard rather than to share, to believe the lies of predators rather than question them. Only now do we discover the fatal nature of our situation, and only now do we become as open-minded as only the most desperate creature can be.

Can we stand ready to do anything which will lift us out of the merciless obsession of More? Of making more, having more, eating more, sleeping more, getting more products into more sales and distribution channels. For our mutual survival, the only More that matters is that we practice caring for each other more, that we do more than try to buy some personal and generational security in a future that's coming loaded to kill. Can we take this first step together? Can we do it now? To admit we're in trouble—if only to keep ourselves alive another day, to make sure we don't go down, bloated, bludgeoned, sucked in our own machine, our own prejudices, our own comforts, so that new generations can thrive without the pain, disorientation and suffering we know so well.

Maybe Forgiveness Was Some Kind of Joke

1.

War is peace.
Blood oozes beneath the wall.
Teams gather on the lines.
The music plays.

O built so fast by slavery's hands,
and by slaughtering who was here,
all honor gone, replaced by greed,
to be governed by goons and thieves.
America! America!
God send his plagues on thee,
for claiming what was never yours
and telling your lies as history.

2.

Freedom is slavery.
You'll die if you go.
Without us, you're nothing.
Trust your government.

We pledge allegiance to mass destruction
to spread it across every country we can,
to wipe away any history and every culture,
until their children only know our strength,
our violence,
a fury so intolerable, so unjust,
that they're bound to want retribution,
and we can keep selling more fear.

3.

Ignorance is truth.
The final solution.
Let us take you into this train car.
Everything is fine.

Jesus got killed in translation,
posted as wanted when nothing
could've been further from the truth.
It's said he died for somebody's sins,
but no one remembers whose, or what kind,
and whether the prince of peace did
anything more than make more war, like,
maybe forgiveness was some kind of joke.

Dazzling Diamond Sparkle Soul Floating in the Sky

Dazzling diamond sparkle soul floating in the sky.
I see it in your eyes, you've discovered you're in a dream,
flash, the red-hat freedom warriors act like
they're the ones fighting for their life,
rebel flags on their pickups, so proud of their guns,
without the discipline and empathy of real soldiers,
all they want to do is point and shoot, post images,
pain makers, nothing more, desperate to please daddy.

It is finished, he cried, breathless. Jesus knew for sure
that nothing at all happens in the outside world, that
what happens takes place within, beyond the reach of men
and god and law, and that was his crime, to insist
the kingdom of heaven was within, aglow, present, eternal,
a wisdom we each have always, awake, aware
that it cannot be identified by m or f, a full seed ready,
inside us, light given from beyond, a love ready to bloom.

A womb for our wounds, the naked destruction
of my mind, asking "why" when there are so many
other questions to ask, the horses are out of the barn,
the other team is ninety feet away from winning,
my loved ones are nowhere to be seen,
what can I do now, where do I go for help,
how does my song go, who holds my heaviness,
my resistance, now that I see what I want slip away.

In another world, a wailing mother holds her
faceless child, a child who will never grow old,
an immortal, the child who made her who she was
before the hate came and took everything it could,

while in Moscow, Washington, Jerusalem and Gaza,
con men gamble like they're masters, being nothing more
than murderers, gangsters and thugs, rolling dice,
counting pips, taking lives.

The magician, the fool, the blind man look at life differently,
only knowing right now, like at any time we can disappear
and you may say that doesn't make much sense,
that to live that way makes nothing matter,
like everything can suddenly change, birds bark,
dogs sing, morning comes with a house on fire,
black smoke, money stuffed in a drawer inside,
father wants to go back, but looks at his girls and doesn't.

Either or, either one, anyone got a pill for this?
It's like every modern society suffers from a mental illness,
maybe our whole species is readying itself for extinction,
ignoring what made us so different, so practical, before we
got addicted to mine, to more, to not enough, to the fear
we'll never make it, hooked on feeling lost, being adrift
rather than sailing, a punishment for going out alone,
for forgetting the truth when the time comes to rely on it.

To worry on and on is to strangle your mind, to harness it
with doubt and disbelief, setting fire to the work
that's due tomorrow, a sort of sabotage that feeds our loves,
our courage, our let's do this now, to monsters with
no teeth but plenty of hunger, ready to take you
where you can't see, think or feel, and then,
suddenly, you don't know what's happening next,
dazzling diamond sparkle soul floating in the sky.

PILAR GRAHAM

Return, Body…

to a small fragile place against the skin
of the earth, along the shell of the earth—of love.

I hear you through the corn wall, below the base-
boards—where
darkness and mice still seem to penetrate

toward the center of my skull
and collarbone, right before the snap traps me back:
a forward motion, the commotion of love and my body

returns, leaning in all its former glory; skin folds into
itself
without shame
or misery,
having departed from the physical capture

Awake

Let me live longer
After the Mountain

Holds me down,
Ponderosa-shade

Distances itself in voice.
Long-winded falls

Carry contemplation.
Quiet. Mysterious dance.

Wintered evenings
Slip toward morning.

Breath aligns into
Pearlized galaxies,

Live on your wrist,
Reflect brilliance.

Our gaze, a supernova—
Thousands of new stars.

Escape Artist

I should have known better by now with the high-rises,
and more so this time, given it was the last

year to watch images distort, windows reflect
geometrics of glass that never quite became quartz

unlike musician's breath, it fueled other factors of function;
consumptions merge mountains beside solo-lacking assumptions

along the ridged embodiments and hairlines,
gold-foiled duplicities from the currency of a well-lived

life, distanced by centuries, and an escape artist who enters
paper, sound, and touch

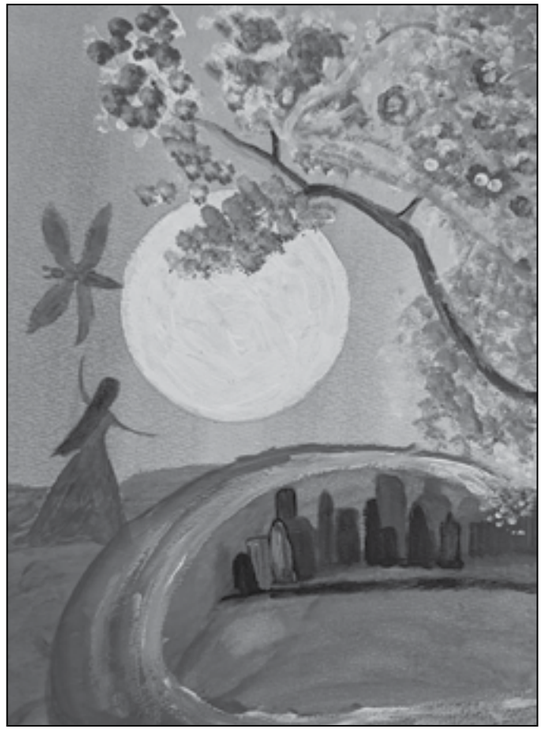
the lace, and how my history presses firm against my breast,
while the black beasts cast their downward eye-beats

from being misunderstood in the ever-changing light,
into existence requires you to store all the winter nuts

as if to distinguish the seers from their sadly-romantic, gallant whips

MOONA WU

Change



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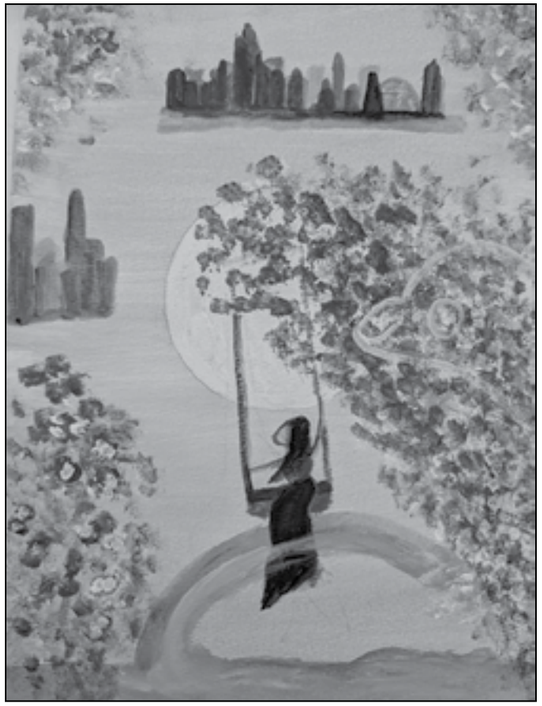


Expect

Remembrance

JULEY HARVEY

AROUND 8 A.M.

i was just considering
you and the dolphins
and putting a curse
on those who need it,
when, like a charm,
i saw them,
sisters of the sea
and of the seasoned heart,
half-mooning their way
through the water,
calm, shining stars
of the morning.
with one synchronized,
barely perceived motion,
almost subconsciously,
the dolphins put
everything in perspective —
peace is possible;
harmony lives;
higher intelligence
has no need
to harm another creature;
we can save our souls
and not disturb the universe.
we can always choose.
may we choose the dolphins.

JOYLIGHT

a flash of fin,
joylight glints
off dolphin waves.
i want to rush headlong
down the beachhead hill
and join the merry band:
it's a most foot-tapping,
fin-flapping urge,
to create a picture to
hang upon the mind's
living room wall:
imagine the thrill,
portrait of a woman,
fully clothed,
racing through the frilly surf
to embrace kind creatures,
godiva's sweet ocean stallions,
who love to save us,
somehow it makes sense
now and always will.
but i'm stuck here in the sand.
certain life forms
are pure heart surge,
floating sea magic crystals,
shining merlins in swirling storm,
aquatic medallions.
joylight sings
on dolphin wings.
life dance and love song merge
in silver dolphin rings.

SEA CRITTERS

you gave your lives
so that i may praise you,
on my coral shelves,
add you to my neptuned exhibition
of uninhabited lore.
who were you,
in your better days, before
you smashed against
a sudden, heaving rock,
and were offered as seafood
to the birds that flock,
shiny manna insisted on
by hungry gods,
or sacrificial clams,
skeletons left by unmotherly tides?
you glittered, winked among
the kelp and weeds, not knowing
the beauty of basilical renaissance
you created, then cast aside, adrift
antiquated, like bottles bearing
no visible message.
except you slept there.
deep in chambers of sea-snore delight,
as other ship-shore creatures
slipped by on evolving storms of light.
were we all sea critters
in an earlier life,
waiting to wash seaboard intact,
then to roam landlocked
with our horde of starry memories
of the horny deep,
until, sad-colored selves,
we washed up on some rich sand beach,
to adorn some higher creature's
coral shelves?

THE RETURN OF IMELDA MARCOS' SHOES

you don't have to have two left feet
to remember the closets and closets
full of 3,000 pairs of shoes
for the biped late wife
of the former late phillipine dictator fernando.
and now, after marching off into the sunset,
the line of heredity brings back marcos the rising son,
scion of shoes. moody twos to nike blues.
that's where some of our money went,
down the street, how suite,
spent and done, unrepentant,
every unshoeless wonder one.
while the citizenry got soaked and socked.
now, the feted footed shoe-bacas come again,
only bearing yachts and riches.
they've graduated from podiatry
and are still in the swim with the caviar fishes.
ah, society.
do they shop at melania's russian shoe store
for stilettos and more?
everything comes round,
is lent,
and makes way for the same unfair event
to reoccur like clockwork or shoe size,
perhaps generations of stilettos
for the pampered, squeezed-in, tiny toes,
stomping on sacred ground and graves
better left alone with whatever dyes.
oh, imelda, oh, melania, no shuffling for you,
but perhaps weaving, self-deceiving,
staggering, floundering, doddering,
wobbling on those skyscrapers,
and have we got some jimmy choos for youse!
and some swampland to buy
to stomp around in,
high heels to the sky.
unlike cowboys, they'll never die
with their shoes on.
how could they choose which ones, anyway?
and the shoe czars
are never gone,
they always reappear
to kick sand and kickstart wars,
insist on resurrecting,
coming back in style,
rising again from the
alligator dead with a smile,
to stand
with heels,
on our head.
nike knew it.
they always just do it.
with moneybags,
the rest is rags,
bowing to the queen
of drags.
on the world stage,
check out the latest craze —
be wise,
turn the page, act your age
but not your returned shoe size.

GOOD NEIGHBORS

the dolphins don't care
about political persuasion,
or religion —
if you're in trouble
in their environment
and you need saving,
they are there,
they will help,
lend a fin.
one of the most egregious
errors of the now,
we can never look
at our neighbors
the same way again.
no more barn-raising,
trust is broken,
gone.
oh, to be a dolphin,
to carry on,
in a new-grace dawn.

WRITERS' FLOCK

i always used to wonder
about ivan's malibu colony
townhouse, on the famed
malibu beach,
sand-blowing,
patio dolphin-watching,
towel-tripping,
and how he could, unknowing,
have such ordered
beauty among
the tempest-tossed,
lest, lost, zest, jest, fest,
guessed, guest, blessed
disarray of all,
that seems to come
uninvited and plum
with being a writer —
books every which way,
everywhere, every day.
and now, i've become
the same way,
in sierra high-desert
non-hide-away mystery.
perhaps it's in
the creative molecular
mammalian air,
dolphin's arching,
atom's fall. eve's scrawl.
writing's on the wall.
it's history. herstory.
those times with ivan
informed my mind.
i was something more.
dolphin dance,
the last chance
at breaching brilliance.

TERESA RENNICK

Are Things Really So Bad….?

In the fog of night, my ankle hurting
my muddled mind
conjured on a brilliant plan.

"I'll insert the pain inside a poem."

I'd gone to sleep reading Zbigniew Herbert,
a Polish poet who also lived
in desperate times
and he offered up a poem
where my pain stayed until morning
allowing me some rest.

The pain was likely
old bones
standing on hard pavement,
holding a sign
"Democracy For All Of Us!"
My friend David's sign,
"Vietnam Veteran Against Fascism!"

Mid-morning a young homeless man
named Seth stopped by.

"Are things really so bad
that you old people are out here freezing
yourselves over it?"

Skeptical, he stands with us
watching folks drive by,
avert their eyes,
or sometimes honk and wave.

When an outsize pickup truck
swerves toward us
'rolling coal,"
fist raised high
shouting
hateful words,
Seth flings his arms out
protecting us.

"Jesus Christ," he says, "What
kind of fucking shit is that!"

Broken Dream (1966)

Today in the United States 10 to 25% of pregnancies end in miscarriage.
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The closet in my childhood room
was deep and narrow
tunneled as it was
under a wide stair case.
Getting to the back
where boxes of stored
junk and treasures live,
required crawling.

Visiting home
four months pregnant with
my first child,
I crawl into my old cave closet
looking for favorite oversized
boots, for soon my feet
may swell and these
old lace-ups will be
perfect.

On hands and knees
searching, opening and
closing boxes
the first pang comes,
a cramp,
a faint shifting, the feel
of wetness on my jeans.
I slither out,
the boots forgotten.

I say nothing to my mother
Don't speak my fear
out loud.

Back in my apartment
I phone the doctor
who, not unkindly, says:
"It will take its course."

We wait, we two
wait for days. Blinds closed
we lie on the floor
the couch, the bed.
Our world is darkness,
all bedrock and
bleeding. My eyes sting
although I do not cry. I am filled
with a disquieting lack.
Dreams come, of
caved-in wells on
desolate homesteads.
Time ticks toward
our emptying.

Finally it is finished.
You are born
a bloody ravaged parcel,
a small delivered package.
The doctor comes.
He talks with me
examines you
then
flushes you away.

And Still We Play

The Italian composer
had some German blood
and a German middle name
and two hundred years after it was written
the Symphony Orchestra of Montreal
still plays his Etude for Strings
with skill
and reverence
to standing room only
crowds.

My autoharp waits
in its patched
cardboard case
gathering dust
in the corner. Someday soon
I'll play a song for you.

"It isn't much." I'll say.
"I got the idea that time
I drove across the mountains
the time the hawks were soaring
and the Indian Paintbrush was in bloom.
I'll play a song for you.
Just know it isn't much
and it really isn't finished."

The Symphony Orchestra of Montreal
rises and bows
for a standing ovation
plays an encore
written in F minor.

I unlatch the cardboard case
take out my autoharp
and play….

Auden's Ask

"All I have is a voice to undo
the folded lie." W.H. Auden

I mispronounce Auden's name
when I ask my husband if he's read
"1 September 1939"
a companion year to 2025.

Then, and now, we long for order, want our lives
and our pendulums swinging
straight and true,
"cling to our average day."
Pour a solitary cup of tea
shuffle well worn cards, play our usual
pass-the-evening game,
reread fine and favorite books and mark
the passages.

But now's the time to push the quiet known aside.
- With urgency - Auden asks -

Asks us to clear the table, make room for
elbows, rolled up sleeves,
a favorite pen, that sometimes leaks. Asks us
to find any paper within reach, no matter if it's
printed on one side.

Though there's no notion
how to start, and despair hovers,
we choose a page,
begin to pen, in our own voices,
halting,
tiny points of light.

Ghosts Remain

Once, long past child bearing years
walking down a street in some
unremembered city
I heard a baby from an open
upstairs window cry
and felt the warmth and tingling
of the let-down reflex in my breasts.

While another mother moved to undo
her blouse and feed her child
my breasts, no longer capable of giving milk
held the memory of what my body used to do.

The retrieval system in my brain
has become an old librarian, shuffling
in worn slippers
through a labyrinth of rooms.
No card catalogue
or Dewey Decimal system.
Nothing alphabetized.
Just creaky limbs moving in a halting gait,
feeling her way
through dark winding passages
picking up this memory and that, holding them
in gnarled hands, putting them down
without comment, or sometimes - I never know
what she will choose -
passing them along to me.

Today the ancient librarian must have been
wandering the stacks
in the deepest recess of my brain
thumbing through the oldest
ruined memories she could find.
After I clicked off the phone
from an unrelated call
she reached until her shaky fingers grasped
a painful memory - an old hurt
and handed it to me full blown.

The welcome memory of giving milk
the bitter one, with tears in the remembering
are not the same, just old ghosts
that remain.

ED BALLDINGER

Roles

My egoic nature accepts
its new meditative role today –

that which blows away
all that wants to stay –

awareness sits in silence,
watching the blower blow.

Nostalgia

Ah, to the sweet scent of nostalgia.
To the ebb and flow of youthful resurgence
woven into the lineage we leave in our wake;
to the echo of evolutions vibrating through the ages;
to the sages of wisdom, truth in clarity, sound and serene;
to the lands of the living in spaces between the unseen;
to the places we left that we once called home
to make homes of new places we now call our own.
Ah, to the sweet, sweet scent of nostalgia...

Intimate Confessions Of A Marginal Mystic

I could have knelt in the tower of
marginal love much longer than I did,
but my legs gave out and I crawled
in circles until I learned to walk again.

I could have danced until my feet
were numb from stumbling out of step,
so I did, finding gratitude once more
for those who have loved me most.

I could have spun like a junk monkey
on marble floors of self-decimation for the
rest of my life, but my body woke up before my
mind knew how to cope. Spirit held me close.

I could have split each hair into quarter shanks
to prove the accuracy of my own axe,
but my tools are not meant to be weapons
of precision in this pointless rivalry with light.

In the grainy angularity of a circular
dissension, I fell down, face forward
out of my temple and into a shell where
I found myself tied to my own concession.

I could have drained the desert dry of all
its dew when I once had the chance,
but my hunger drove me to lose my grace.

I could have purified all my altered states
on the altar of figurative speech without speaking,
but my tongue would not be still.

I could have breached the walls that held me
captive in a garden filled with grief-deep soil,
then Noah showed me how love grows from death.

I could have returned to dust, falling into channels of
cathedral streams on their way back to the open sea,
but it was time for me to move like slow flowing waters.

Despite the insolvent knave who is prone
to steer clear, there is no new direction here.
One part Dervish; two parts lore; three parts
left over by those who were here before.

I could have slashed a razor gash into
the granite rock of my own spotless tomb.
I could have chosen one less cloak to wrap
‘round myself in a midnight mass of confusion,

but I will not miss the ninth circle in this
third realm of heaven next to an old 7-11
when the mystic within me hears
the voice of God, and I stop
to listen for once.

Underwater Breath and Elevated Heights

Floating in these liquid thunder waters
dreams are set adrift.
There is motion in soft-falling salt mist.
Aquatic particles feast on invisible bits.
Wind-swept ascensions lashing
at heaven's embryonic weight.

Where any mind *"becomes a servant
of the awakening…through the power of
its attention…"* structures rise high above my
own *ego-normous* grandstands, components
all together skinning up this skeletal frame.
Babel wasn't born in a day.
Or was it?

As horizontal experience goes vertical
we *can* defy the gravitational pull
with a new stillness of heaving thrust,
yawp and ho; oscillating waves moving
Divinity's fascination with soul;
ancient breath, aware in full force
without force, in a form of forceless will.

Comprehension diminishes rigidity's rot.
Here's to the skyscraping delusions within us.
Here's to melting destiny's firmament
into the mud from which it once rose.

This is the imposing erosion of a
societal psyche spun on a rotating spit.
This is the breath beneath a watery façade.
This is ingenuity luring impermanence to view
its own death, leading somewhere beyond
elevated heights into dreams set silently adrift.

TIM HUDENBURG

Impression: Out on Rehoboth Bay

(dedicated to Gary & Linda B)

look back there
a little skyscraper-less paradise
water wind waves

this Eden too
we have not been to—
forced to leave

breeze without expectation
there the Point
we sail past its two lighthouses

a refuge of osprey
pods of dolphins—
keep us company

sun on our backs
wisp of white clouds
the wind at our face

when is this now
many have not seen
this pitch of sea

the smell of tar
tasted an ocean—
this salt in its spray

green lights in the distance
closer a danger sign near the weir
Beware: Slow. No Wake! Lewes Canal

Gary's constant hand upon the wheel
adjustments until we land again
and a daring day ends with Linda

Once An Island In The Distance

green stains
blue dyed sea
slick oil painting

inky colors
newly squeezed from a tube
idyllic blends with native watercolors

towers brush
the sky with
graphite smoke plumes

viewers gather for twenty seconds
admire the chromatic canvas now
coated with varnish in the museum

Passing Near An Old Native Reservation

tall shadows
tower over a roadside attraction
broken with promises

Poetry Disguised as a Beach Counting Book

10 beach shells most are broken
9 dolphins playing not far offshore
8 tiny fish swimming in the shallows
7 seagulls regally soaring overhead
6 towels covered with wet sand
5 pieces of translucent sea glass
4 sand crabs scurrying down a hole
3 sunburnt kids asleep in the shade
2 sandcastle towers collapsing
1 beach umbrella straining in the wind

Conditions Ideal

(added bits for good measure)

when at dawn
our day begun

the captain
confidently commands

lines be cast
our anchor raised

catch the wind while it blows
as the white sails fill

off we go
the little sailboat skims

across another gray wave
underneath a dazzling cloudsky

(up ahead Harbor of Refuge lighthouse
notice the Osprey nesting nearby

the Captain said
now look starboard

a playful pod of dolphins so close
and laughing seagulls overhead)

sooner or later tho‘
the sun must set

then and there
the captain decides

cautiously turns
the little sailboat around

we head home
~hurry~~hurry~

back to safe harbor of Lewes
only after the boat safely secured

tied to the dock
the sail brushed and neatly stored

(the sun has set
moon slowly risen)

and we leave
thankful for all we saw

sleepy smiles
appreciates one and all

goodnight, goodnight sleep well
dear ones near and far

JENNNIFER FENN

Diving and Flying

From the video ad, dolphins swim
in a tree-surrounded lagoon.
They smile as they come up for air,
greeting the zoo guests
who come to swim with them.
“Come on people!” their eyes seem to say.
They dive under water, jump high,
almost fly into another dive.

Is this my bucket list chance?
In my mind, I reach out, hug one,
dive under with it.
Cool water massages my muscles,
my arthritic hips and flat, sore feet,
undoes my ponytail
to let my hair float free.
“Whee!” I exclaim
as the dolphin and I
fly through the air
into a perfect dive back under.

My dolphin swims away,
leaving me back in my hectic world
of work and caregiving,
saving money for home repairs
and medical copays,
duties that don’t allow
diving and flying.

Tall Girl in a Storm

I stand in wind, sway,
struggle hard not to topple
my own sky scraper!

Surrounded

Troubles enclose me:
two-faced boss on power trip,
typos that haunt me,
thwarting me from seeing peace,
like skyscrapers block the blue.

Evolve!

Evolve!
Become better stewards
of God’s earth, His seas, His rivers.
Clear away the poisons.
Restore habitats
of endangered species.
Don’t let them go extinct
like the Chinese river dolphins!
Don’t let them go extinct!
For endangered species,
restore habitats.
Clear away the poisons.
Of God’s earth, His seas, His rivers,
become better stewards!
Evolve!

The Dolphin Figurine

A clear glass dolphin beckons me
to gaze at its laughing face.
Light makes rainbows
in its sleek body,
reminding me
I still have not swam
with real dolphins.

I still have not cruised
to Mexico, the Bahamas,
though the seas still foam
on their shores,
as if reaching for people’s hands,
my hand, to lead me
to the dolphins.

ALLEGRA JOSTAD SILBERSTEIN

Evolution of Time

after a while in the evolution of
time I learned that my anger
turns on me…clogs my heart.

The litany of abuse I chanted
kept me from restful sleep
echoed as I scrubbed my floors.

A teacher told me to forgive
to send good wishes to those
who had hurt me. . .

Impossible I cried . . .Why . . .
Because, my teacher replied,
only forgiving will heal you.

As time evolved I came
to accept that a promise
might not be forever

And after a while in the
evolution of time healing came
with new beginnings.

The greening of peace

under a grave's sky
the turning that burns
mineral voices into being
the blood spilled
grief crushed to molten stone

values meted out
in elemental weights
earth nutrients evolving
into green shades of a tree
strong branches reaching out
with sheltering leaves
an evolution

with swelling buds
that will bear fruit
sweeter than oranges
stranger than pomegranates
into peace

Skyscrapers

do just that
they scrape the sky
cut across it
where once

trees curled
across the horizon
mountains and clouds
rollicked
and quiet prairies
rested.

We people
proud
rejoice in
height
as sky scrapers
scrape the sky.

The Possible of Evolution

In a fairytale we might some time
encounter a tree with a human face
or one that can talk or even incline–
to lend enchantment to a certain place.

But come with me without storybook haze
to an old forest where roots entwine
and a canopy above gives the grace of shade–
bringing peace perhaps to some troubled mind.

Here roots of the beech trees touch one another,
when one tree needs help the others send food.
A mother tree will nourish her brood.
Fungi weave messages through the earth.

Here in symbiotic communities
there is communion among the trees…
was this and evolution over time
might this be possible for humanity?

Dolphin Letter

Dear people of earth

Our lives are at stake

Please stop dumping
garbage in the ocean

Help in any way you can to
prevent more climate change

If you can turn from hate

Never doubt that
love will conquer

Thank you
your Dolphin friend

DAVE BOLES

A Philosophical Discussion With a Dead Mouse My Cat Killed At 3am in The Morning

ultimately
all of life does not revolve
around "right" and "wrong"

it is entirely
about evolution and survival

is it wrong to kill
to keep yourself alive?

is it right to kill
to keep yourself alive?

it does not matter.

in the end, the universe
continues

as it has
throughout time

everything else
is a philosophical discussion
for the dust

you walk upon.

Shall we go swimming

in the pool of dreams
exploring echoes
tasting sounds
finding truths sanctified
in rhythms long forgotten
there is not a need for labels
or dissonant theories

we are all children
playfully finding life
in these disunited times
ignore the hunter's actions
while keeping a watchful eye
for the magic
dreams may bring.

All of This Political Upheaval

Religious conflict
Sacred chemistry's long recognized
To be brutally discharged
By witnesses of a planned obsolescence

We should resume listening
To our ancestors wisdom
Smoke the dried leaves of the caapi plant
And begin placing ads
For ornamental hermits.

A Prayer

We are all
Children of the Monkey

Illuminated flowers in fields
Fallow with disease

Yet, still, there is life

Rejuvenating life

The fields were made barren
Through greed

Avarice

That turned hearts
Into stone

Let us gather
In these barren fields

Allowing our deaths
To replenish, rejuvenate

The spirit that shines within us

The illumination

That set us free.

Automatic Coffee Makers

Miriam calls to us to see
We live in a world filled with entheogens
Yet refuse to accept the obvious
Conclusions
Of their potency
Their power
In our lives

How to explain this to a society
That wakes up to an alarm clock
Pouring coffee from an automatic
Coffee maker
Set to deliver a perfect brew
At just the right moment
When consciousness meets
The reality of a new day

Caapi root is the God Molecule
The Burning Bush was Acacia wood

Everywhere you look is a Daleth
Waiting to be opened

Our salvation lies
Not in automatic coffee makers
But in the honey
Of the promised land

We have forgotten
Turning water into wine is an
Alchemical process of steering
The tornado that is our minds

Meditation is Mediation is Medication

Rejoice in its bounty.

Constantinus Agitando

Faceless Legionnaires
Sator Squares drawn upon their armor
Appear in my dreams
Delivering me to Milvian Bridge
Where the Tiber river
Runs red with blood

I watch Constantine's victory unfold
But I do not see his visions
Of Christ in the clouds

There are no crosses to be found
In his legions
Only Sator Squares for protection

Elite Centurions gather before battle
Feasting with one another
Honoring Mithras
Spilling a bull's blood
So the victory
Might be swift, and sure

Their practices kept secret
Sacred
Since the time of Zoroaster
They feast in Mithras' honor
Fighting against the forces of evil
Destroying the wicked
All to bring purity
To their land

Historians will write that Constantine
Inspired by images of Christ
Led his troops to victory
Defeating the Pagan gods
Worshipped by Maxcentius
Slaying him in battle
Displaying his decapitated head
To all of Rome
Showing the people
That Christianity was the way
To a noble, and pure soul

But the truth remains;
Long before Constantine
Romans were worshipping Christ

They did so in secret
Identifying themselves
With Sator Squares

They took rituals from Mithras
And made it their own
Evolving the Zorasterism world
Ever further

There is a direct line
From Zorasterism
To Mithraism, to Christianity
In truth, it goes back further still

But history is written
By the victorious
Both in wars
And religions

My dream was complete
History had been corrected

Until a Hindu holy man appeared
With the scent
Of a strong saffron tea

The steam from his cup
Swirled around me
Vedic imagery
Offering glimpses
Of a fabulous world

The holy man leaned forward
His eyes filled with sincerity
Whispering to me;
"There is still so much to learn".

Enchantment

Come to the chaos
New books await
Roll your mind around
The salt water taffy
Old men chew
Sweet juice dribbling
Down stubbled chins
Faint glows of yesterday
Shining through clouded eyes
Piercing truth
As only a Shaman
Could provide.

Drifting

Do we dance Butoh
In defiance of this
Political regime

Peeling back transgressions
As one would open
A can of sardines

Finish this feast
Of absurdity
And return us home

A blood moon is rising
Malfeasance is no longer
Absolved

Pay the harbor master

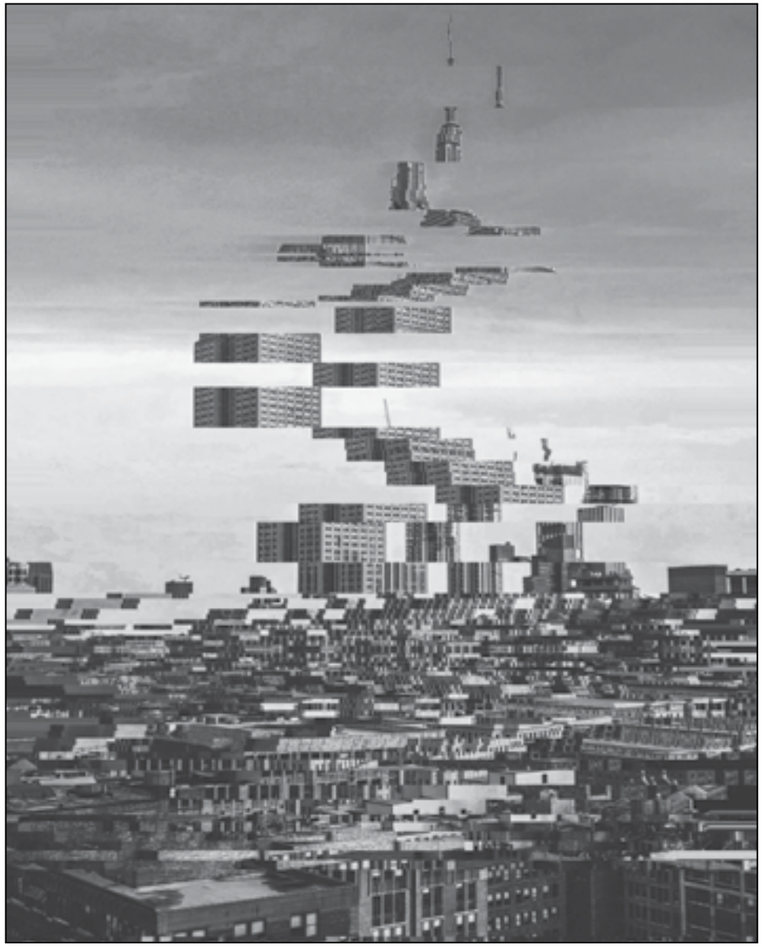
Sundered though he might be
He is our only

Salvation

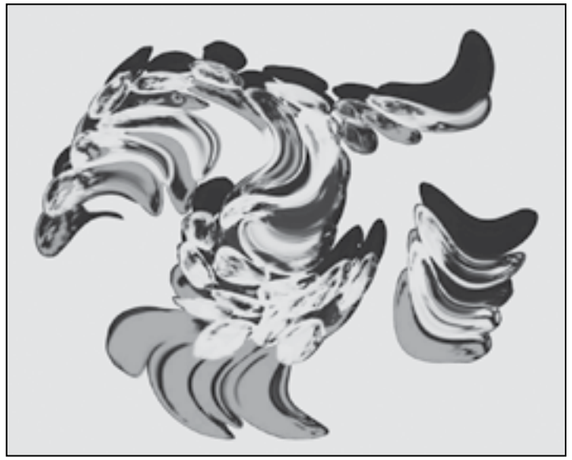
On this
Journey

For freedom.

ROBERT FLEMING



Empire State Building, NY



Watermelon Seed Dolphin in Black & White

7 Wonders of the world — Alexandria Lighthouse

Dolphins #2 in black and white

MARC PETRIE

Orcas

Orcas roam the rolling ocean, the Oglala of the sea,
unseen save for the occasional dorsal fin,
as distant as Crazy Horse--who was never photographed,
and as great of warriors as the Lakota, hunting the vast liquid plains,
surrounding their prey like a bare-backed buffalo party,
counting coup on kayaks and boats they upend.
White men hate anything wild.
They either tame or exterminate.
They capture orcas for Sea World shows,
herd them on ever-shrinking wilderness reservations
while their blue eyes scan for oil and fish to steal
from the orcas' homeland and use the sacred waters
as dumping grounds for plastics and agricultural waste.
Yet in the great distances of the western sea
the warriors roam from British Columbia to California
claiming their ancient hunting grounds in hazel-eyed defiance
of snivilization, honoring tradition and holding onto what's theirs,
patiently waiting for the buffalo to return to the Plains
and flocks of carrier pigeons to fill the sky.

JOAN GOODREAU

Dolphin Warning

Sailors long ago thought dolphins were mermaids
who waved their fins
flashed their tails
to greet them on their endless voyage
and love them from afar.

Now we know better.
Dolphins are just smart fish
trainable but edible

so keep your distance while we
dump what we don't want in
your ocean home and
tear apart the earth
to snatch what's in it for us.

Do not come close or like others
who have ventured near you'll disappear
the way the nameless blameless others
have before you.

You make us smile and we wave back at you
but we are wild animals
who seize the treasures of the planet
destroy all that stops our evolution
to be the eternal rulers of dead land and sea.

Promise of Evolution

promise of bigger and better
life abundant
cornucopia overflowing

So where did it go?

snipped into scraggly patches
worn out used up memories
stitched into a crazy quilt
with a design no one can figure out.

on a old clothesline
my quilt banner
trembles in the wind

Diagnosis

Written in April, Autism Awareness Month

I know by the time I take Ian's
two-year-old birthday picture
but I tell myself he's okay.

Last year his gurgles and babbles dropped into silence
broken by howls through the night.
in that long year of wondering

Two strong magnets
my gaze and hugs
don't attract him but repel.

I watch him so small
disappear into the MRI tube
For brain tests that tell nothing

He pushes away the test puzzle and pictures
and grabs a bright baby rattle
shakes it laughs.
I know now what he wants for his birthday
because he's not really three years old
but like the doctor says---delayed.

"Like a train, can he catch up?" I ask
"No, not like a train," says the specialist
but the engine inside my head
blocks out the rest of his reply.

I picture a train with Ian and me
pulling out of the station
to an unknown destination
with nothing but the clothes on our backs.

I don't know when we'll arrive
only the time of departure
and we will never return to
where we are now.

EDWARD J. McCOUL

"Dolphin"

Dolphin are you talking to me?
I think I love you so, you know.
Can I follow you where you go?
I want to know what you know!

You got that face I love to see.
You don't look at all like me.
If I could, a dolphin I would be.
I'd swim the waters free!

With you could I please swim?
I would love to hold your fin.
You got such neat feeling skin.
A swimming trophy we'd win!

Why do I wait so long to see
A sweet dolphin cute as can be?
It brightens my day
To watch you play.

You mean so much to me.
Every day, you I would love to see.
We could talk about things to do,
That I want to do with you!

To be with each other, we wish.
Fish to eat is our favorite dish.
Swimming is a shared delight.
We both like the moonlight!

Do you think you'd like to be
A real person like me?
If you ever do,
A friend I'd be to you!

Are you sure you are from here?
Where you're from is not quite clear.
Some say you are from outer space.
If so, welcome to the Human Race!

I'd follow you just to really see,
If somehow you go real deep,
And take that secret passage way,
And to Venus you go each day!

I'd put my space suit on and go to see.
Because with you I really want to be.
Well, let's not get carried away.
You are here and with me today, and that's OK!

ANN PRIVATEER

In the Morning

luscious as parchment
languishing stalactites
branch and grow
on a crumbling wall
where lizards play
their beauty puts on
a show for tomorrow.

Houses

No beds or desks
And no scowling
Or scrunched faces
But do include pines
And mockingbirds
All dancing in the wind
To commiserate
To make a wish.

Looking Upward

Never look back
Lest you fall and crumble
Going home to the
Patchwork quilt
The hammer falls
And is forgotten.

A Baby

Cry's in an animal voice
It's generations of sound
In the room and outside

On the ground where
Blood turns dirt into mud
No manifestations allowed

Two and then there are
Three that sweetly rejoice
Before saying "so long."

A Smiling Cloak

Sings mama
Is never late

Always hungry
Looks beyond

The beloved
Graveyards

For tomorrow's
Dry goods.

JENNIFER PICKERING

Evolution

swims like trout
in the pond
propelling toward the stars
dreams of dragonflies
in vapors of air,
is the kingfisher's dive,
finless swimmer
blind to limitations
students of trial and error.

Peter and Margret: A Love Story

Margret tutored Peter in English.
A willing student but alas
not only of her strange waffle.
He, a dolphin had his own whistling words,
strung in high pitched songs
Margret would never understand.
Her first touch was tentative.
But a rhythm was found.
Was their love making wise?
She was unsure, though Peter never was.
But, Margret's human heart strayed.
Peter, the dolphin, never came up for air,
died of a broken heart.

Notes: Margret Howe Lovatt was a volunteer naturalist who tried to teach Peter, a dolphin, English and succeeded with some phrases. As Peter was a teenager and aroused by Margret, she obliged him so as not to interrupt his tutoring (or she said). Funding stopped the project. Peter was separated from Margret and committed dolphin suicide.

A California History Lesson

A country girl I lived on an island of land surrounded by orchards sweetened by April blooms, Julys' rubied fruit, and pheasants luminated flight above fields of mustard greens. Now, I'm asked to be content with my urban space; its picket fence surrounding fruitless trees silhouettes aligned with distant granite peaks, skyscrapers of mirrored glass the migratory birds crash into. The new habitat of hawks hunting pigeon and crow nested in iron beams, clay conduits or in the tallest English Sycamore marooned in contrived meadows of Bermuda grass. My history bound in uncomfortable complacency frozen into stone eyes, the sour smiles captured in tin photographs--sailing from La Rochelle and Amsterdam to Norfolk and New York with hearts carrying a longing to feel solidity even more than hope or bread to tame the growls of their children's empty bellies and the loss of leaving everything that was so much of nothing but, familiar—sailing in prairie schooners uprooted from their own land by greed, law, civil wars starvation that set blood against blood women's lye soap would not wash clean—history being a stubborn stain you see. Shuffling westward towards the horizon in a momentum that could not be slowed. Walking from Missouri to California swallowing dust, pride, the stink of oxen mired in the Platt River mud bound in stays and soles of worn out boots stuffed with prairie grass, burying babies, sorrow and broken Majolica in potato fields; following the mountains 'curves to home in the great valley at the foot of the coast range, violet as the iris gardens left behind, to the country of the Wintun and Maidu whose stands of grass summer polish like the gold tips of gentlemen's walking sticks beaten down by a government handing out land like hard candy, as if it were theirs to give---the Welsh, Scotch-Irish, French and Germans—good land for those who would plow it and set their grazing sheep and cattle on its sweet grass to pay its taxes. Even now the Red-tailed hawks' feathered fingers outline stands of Red Bud awakened in February of too much rain—flinging the white lace of almond blossoms sugaring an earth dark with secrets.

M. B. STACEY

Dream I

Cobwebs drape the path she walks
spiders with eyes like crystals hide in corners
whose only light comes from half opened lids
spiders with eyes like her brother hide in corners
where there is no safety as she bravely walks
through the maze of webs
the eyes flutter with recognition
with first person remembering
as the body twitches with what feels real
with memories like shiny crystals
locked in cells within the dream

Dream II

the dream mistress beckons
her fingers long and well formed
her eyes luminous filled with moonlight
which pulls her toward the tide she resists
her hair becomes radiant with gold
splashed from the water deepening around her
rainbow fish with crossed eyes
circle her legs moving rhythmically counter clockwise
the unwinding appears to be connected
to the light that spills from the gills of the rainbow fish
dream mistress orchestrates the flow with fingers
that blur the crooked lines of reality
the unraveling in sync
with the rise and fall of the breath
of the dreamer

Dream III

in over her head now
the fish swim in rainbow circles above her
the hounds with webbed feet lead the way
he sits in a dark corner
decayed teeth flash
into an eerie smile of recognition
he speaks in riddles
throwing words into the stream at will
the dreamer's body twitches
as the pound of flesh is carved from her
divided among the dream merchants
each pulsing bit placed warm
into a silken bag

Dream IV

consciousness dips silky tendrils
into the water beckoning her
this time to the surface
greased palms are of no help now
riddles are tucked safely into pockets
most unsolved
a rainbow sheen covers her slippery skin
a spectral light glows in her eyes
she vomits jagged crystals
as she emerges through the facade
sandman slips to the bottom
of the hour glass
as the light dawns

Home of the Brave

Knowing
deep inside
that hatred
blatant disregard
for life exists
in the land of the free
the home of the brave
this knowing
dulled by the satisfied feeling
of a full stomach
by the echo in your head
of the laughter and love
recently shared
jolted from your reverie
by the new pick up truck
rumbling by you
shooting pointy stones your way
enveloped in a dusty fog
knowing
as it hits the brakes
just a few yards away
squealing into reverse
pushing you to the side of the ditch
that the three white faces
smiling down on you
barely conceal their real intent
intent that views blood sports
as their own
just a little fun
in the home of the brave
a simple ride home
the smell of whiskey
the bottle of Jack Daniels
is passed among them
your mouth is dry
your lips parched
the only offer you get
are familiar words
of degradation
laughter reaches a fever pitch
as the heavy tow chain
is locked around your strong ankles
Jack Daniels tossed out the window
your hands taped behind your back
knowing
you won't see your niece
on her wedding day
or your wife's sweet smile
ever again
knowing your are powerless
to stop the train of events
hurtling your destiny toward you
remembering your cousin's words
"Let me give you a ride home"
your reply that the night
was still and sweet
just perfect for a walk
your body is found
after being dragged for miles
behind the new pick up truck
your head torn from your body
your wife takes the ring off
your severed hand
vomits into the tall grass

In memory of James Bird, Jr.
murdered in Jasper, Texas, 1998

The Dogs of Athens

the dogs of Athens
are barking in the distance
across the sea
behind the hills

the dogs of Athens
are multi lingual
they read your thoughts
they know your secrets

the dogs of Athens
are bigger than horses
they carry the weight of the world
on their backs

the dogs of Athens
will lay on top of you
keep you warm
in the driving rain
they have eight arms
and babies to feed

the dogs of Athens
swim like dolphins
holding their breath
until they find you

the dogs of Athens
are visible from space
their glowing eyes
a beacon for the lost

the dogs of Athens
are award winning poets
they write of love and sacrifice
they give up hope in the season of lent

the dogs of Athens
will devour you
consume your flesh and chew your bones

the dogs of Athens
will never leave you

the dogs of Athens
will break your heart

The Dolphin Spirit

holy spirit of the tranquil sea
you have searched the infinite expanse of time
covered the distance of earth and heaven
the planets disappearing in your passing light
this precious jewel, my soul in love
yours for the taking, my eternal companion
the moment I touched upon the warmth of your skin
the smooth silken softness of your heart within
with a voice whispering in clarity

I am the guide, the guardian, the protector
we shall swim in the oceans of creation and forgiveness
and feast upon the bounty of mystery's provisions
together we shall form the perfect bond
as two become one in life and beyond

DEBORAH C. SEGAL

Neon Moonbeams

High school I learned nothing but the price of a single cigarette,
a tight back pocket, playing flat chest with a bored look.

Inhaling what hardened me into this mass, this matter, this form,
energies in my center, activating and evolving into tattoos of dolphins.

One time a pair of hands with thumbs were gesturing to a younger me,
hang loose, peace sign, middle finger to the universe, you break it you buy it.

Twenty three stories up, you asked me long ago, what I think of the world?
In the broken streets now, I would integrate the sun and moon for you, if I could.

From twenty three stories, we scanned the skyline, looking for signs.
Do you remember? That summer I was clinging to neon moonbeams—

swirling perspectives, rhinestones shining with glassy splendor,
rising above to hold on, to forget, to come home, to make a run for it,

on principles larger than this skyscraper, this street, this stream
of consciousness, an unfolding, where the witness is being watched.

Smiling as I think of this point of view, a means to depart from the myths
I am made of, and making. Under the ink of a long exhale, I am made of dreams.

Tracing Moonlight

These roots connect to earth, called shadow,
these roots connect to sky, called stardust.

Follow a trail of crumbs
into flimsy fripperies
and dark tendrils,
earlier flung
by my own hands,
waving, and in that fling—

lucid spirals, reflected in turquoise water.

Scale the tower, one story at a time, scanning for narwhals and dolphins,
folded into frothy oceans under the views, framed by skyscrapers and clouds.

Trying on a mask, humming songs, lips affixed like a comb covered in tissue,
we have slowed down the hum and now, we trace the moonlight into the morning star.

Mirrors of Onyx

when you are
stuck in a loop
exit the apartment
as you shut

the door you hear it
through the door
you can slide

feet first into the chute

roll away in the bins
cleavers, hooves
screeching

toxic fumes
old sneakers

garbage is dinner

flat line
syringe
grief

the conductor

reaches in
pulls out nothing
it tastes of metal

belly up
New York City
skyline

mirror of onyx

DIANNA HENNING

Naked

I sit by the sun-window
in my guest cabin
& gnaw the bones
of my fingers,

the day a trail
of sunshine despite
dragon clouds
skirting the sky's rim

& a burly wind
that attempts to disrupt
a Northern Flicker's
excavated burrow

And here I pour my hands
atop my desk
hoping to snag
a naked poem

that might or
might not murder me.

How the Animals Reclaim Their Lives

Watch how they rise
from the highway's shoulder,

as they gather their bones,
their fur into spirit,

small, effusive lights aglow
around them before they scuttle

into the sheltering woods
where they mend with fern,

rock and willow leaves
broken limbs, severed arteries;

the fox carefully threading
his needle; a buck gathering

pine sap to reassemble horns
he'll dry on a pine stump,

and a dog, homeward bound,
decided on a short cut

to greet the kid on the school bus,
his owner's son, the Collie raced between

one vehicle after another,
exhaust confusing the hound,

screech of wheels and suddenly a world
he'd not encountered as honking horns

attempted to redirect him;
& soon he found himself outside himself,

gathered what he could of bones
to follow others struck by machines

they couldn't fathom—this knowing
deep inside the dog,

this instinct to meet the bus on time,
Jimmy waiting, and there in shadow

of aspen and pine other animals showed him
what to do, a cape of light furring his paws,

his nose wet as any hound's that cleaves to life,
the buck dropping blackberries into his mouth

to stave off blood, but all the dog tasted
was salt of the boy's outstretched hand.

First published Phil Lit Journal, 2025

Who's going to write love in a time of destruction?

Here in The House of My Safety,
I'm a mournful creature

who knows neither answer,
nor belief. In the theater of leaves,

still wet with sunshine, something falls
that cannot be heard. For ages

you've dressed yourself in words,
addressed my heart as Present One.

If camouflage is the Angel's art,
then the fakery of self is by design invention.

When I die raindrop my heart
onto the quiet underneath.

Midnight on Moonshine Road

My menacing dreamer,
I still carry you in a linen shroud.
You're not too heavy.

Just light enough for me
to tote around on difficult days.

Remember the room
with the artfully painted coffins
(a ruse against death)

the hypnotic apple near the mouths
of the archangels Raphael & Gabriel?

And what solemn wind spewed sermons
through our window, chastised us
for our indulgence,

my bra on the table,
your jeans on the floor,
and the painted angels, their scorn

as you mounted my breath,
my body still carrying you
in your sacred entirety?

Oh, damn love, its fire and reclamation!

Affection

Otis told Mabel that she looked like one of those *Maybelline* ads where the girls have full-blown cherry-red lips that pose invitation. Such words propelled her into full blown affection for Otis, her husband of six months, three days and forty-five minutes which she'd tracked on their kitchen calendar. She enjoyed filling in the empty white boxes below the calendar's numbers, felt something important was accomplished.

There's was a shotgun wedding but that didn't bother Otis in the least. He was convinced he'd rightfully won over the beauty of Loyalton High even if he first got her pregnant.

He owned a hand-me-down country home given them by Hiram, his uncle, who'd moved to the city for work prospects. The house signified a positive start, and it clearly impressed Mabel. The clapboard place needed fixing up but it still evoked a certain charm. By the time Mabel finished with the rooms it was cozy with hand-made plaid curtains and refinished country pine furniture that spelled homey comfort.

All telling, they were lucky, darn lucky the way Otis saw it. *Can't figure out what I've done to deserve a gal like Mabel*. Then he would scratch his hound Betsy behind her ear and breathe deeply as he and Mabel left for a jaunt in the old Ford truck to fetch sacks of rice and pinto beans.

Both Otis and Mabel were born and reared in Loyalton (population of two thousand and seventy-nine) and their families went back to the very first inception of the place. Otis's great granddaddy was the builder and owner of the Crazy Horse Saloon, and the Countryside Bank, both in the old part of town. Moss covered the bank's bricks, and the saloon's original sign was sun-bleached a weathered gray. Such touches gave each building an antique look.

Back from town, Otis watched Mabel prepare the ham hocks and leftover pinto beans that were stored in the fridge. Cooked in the heavy cast iron pot they'd taste divine. There was something about warmed things up that took on a homey aroma. Such meals rendered a sense of continuation—things don't run out; they just reinvent themselves.

Mabel's ponytail swung as she worked. Loose curls of hair stenciled her sweaty neck. Otis reached over and lightly pulled on her frizzed ponytail and Mabel slowly turned, her full belly facing him. He drew her toward him.

"Mabel, you're the loveliest woman this side of the Sierra Buttes." She bumped bellies with him, buried her head into his shoulder, then coyly shrugged back.

"Otis, I'm curious. What lies to the other side of the Sierras? You wouldn't be bringing it up, comparing me with some unknown female. What's on the other side?"

"Don't trifle your thoughts for nothing, Mabel. There isn't a woman anywhere in this world that could touch you."

Mabel's curiosity was not assuaged. She could see her lanky Otis with his sweet congenial smile

courting women—his blue eyes like a quiet summer's day. Hadn't she witnessed first-hand how women were attracted to him? Whenever they went into town, women were always asking him questions about their gardens. *Can you tell me what radish seeds do best in an acid soil? My tomatoes gone to ruin. Otis, what do you recommend?* Even his slight tummy bulge, brought on by drinking too much beer, didn't bother them. It somehow seemed proper that a man like Otis got pregnant alongside his wife.

The beans bubbled and the ham hocks simmered, a scent of onions and garlic cloaked the air. Mabel pulled away from Otis and searched his face.

"Tell me your doings before you met me," she asked as she whipped sweat

from her brow, her eyes earnest as prayer.

Otis shrugged a nothing much. It was meant to convey there was no life before her, but she knew different. She saw the boxed-up letters stuffed in his parent's closet and she'd heard stories from his friends about the all-night parties at Feather River, the ground covered with empty beer tins, corn-dog wrappers. She knew about this because her dad was the game warden and, on several occasions, he'd ordered Otis and his friends to pick up, pack up and get on.

"Let's set these plates on the table while dinner heats. Don't forget the ketchup." He clearly wanted to change the direction of their conversation.

"You know how I like ketchup on nearly everything, even on ham hocks."

His mother claimed he spread gobs of it on her buckwheat pancakes, but Otis denied that and said his mother was known for exaggeration.

Mabel liked Dorothy, her mother-in-law. She was one of those rugged, make-do women who could stretch a single six-ounce can of tuna further than anyone: tuna wiggle, tuna casserole, flakes of tuna in a white gravy over mashed potatoes. Dorothy mixed flecks of oatmeal to stretch the tuna, and she was also known for watering down jugs of apple or orange juice. Mabel supposed that was because of her living through the Great Depression.

Mabel hustled about the kitchen putting every need on the table so there would be no interruptions at dinner. Suppertime was talk-time, but Otis hoped to steer the conversation in a safe direction. He liked to sit in his chair and admire Mabel. The table acted as a fence, a fence that he pretended to climb over. It reminded him of the picket fence Mabel's parents pitched around their house. He used to carefully climb over it after lights in her parents' house dimmed to a smudge.

Mabel pushed strands of hair from her forehead and complained the pregnancy made her sweat more than usual. Her fork scratched across her plate. She looked at him, her eyes wide, closing in on him.

"I bet you don't know who I saw today driving his pickup our way?"

Otis didn't have to think too long. He knew what she was up to.

"Why it couldn't possibly be Jade who wowed you at the church dinner before we started going out?

Who said you'd be his and his alone?"

"How'd you know that so sudden?" she asked as she mopped brown bread through her beans.

He also soaked his bread in the bean sauce and sucked on its sweet taste. Mabel eyed him like a judge sitting across a defendant. He'd seen those eyes before in his aunt Hattie who accused her man of playing the field far and wide. Curiosity burrowed like a badger into Mabel's face.

Otis knew she was testing him, poking how far his limits were. Jade, her old boyfriend was smooth with women, but he, Otis, was pure velvet.

"Pass the beans," he asked as he mopped his bread a little through the lake of bean gravy and swigged down fresh drawn milk.

It seemed to Otis that women always wanted to know more than a man was willing to tell, and secrets, some secrets were a pothole. No matter how married a man was, he still needed privacy. The past was bundled and buried in a trunk. Besides, Stella who lay to the other side of the mountains was no match for Mabel. Not only was she downright ornery if she did not get her way, but she was theatrical too. Such drama could wear a man raw.

"Why didn't you call as promised? You think you can play me along with no mention of our future?" Those words followed him to the car just as he finally left Stella for good.

Once, when Stella and Otis were at the Crazy Horse Saloon he'd run out of cash for another round of beer and Stella bolted, stood on the chair, lifted her skirt to her chin and yelled into the crowd: "It's bad enough when you don't have a pot to piss in, but when a man can't even buy you a decent pair of panties, that's a tragedy."

He never lived that one down.

No, Mabel was one hell of a good woman, he thought. She's just the right mixture of peace, flirtation and fire.

* * * * * *

Otis wondered if their child would have his blue eyes.

Mabel tipped her chair back, so it stood on two legs to show Otis what edge she was holding.

He remained silent and tipped his chair back a bit to square off their positioning and he tooth-picked his teeth. He remembered the day he first heard Mabel was pregnant. He was working on his Ford engine, sweat pouring down his brow and no matter his effort it wouldn't cough to a start. His hands were slicked with grease and his back ached from tension and frustration. Mabel snuck up behind him and covered his eyes with her hands and had whispered, "I've got a secret—Betcha you can't guess?" Otis slowly turned around and muttered it might have something to do with his birthday six days away. Mabel laughed and moved in closer. She put her finger to his lips and said, "Don't go telling a soul. We've got a baby in the oven."

A prickly heat ripped through him and then wonderment. "Well, I'll be."

He hugged her so tight that they were a single body for one amazing moment. Forgetting his greasy hands, he held her head to his chest and finger-combed her hair then stood back, "Mabel, I've gone and got grease all over you."

She pulled his hand to her and pressed it leaf-like to her belly. He made marks over her face with his other hand from engine grease and they burst into rounds of laughter.

* * * * * *

Mabel cleared the dishes, a willful hesitation to her steps. She drew water for the pots and pans, and she ignored him as he cleared the dishes. He fox-trotted next to her and tipped his head. He made like he was taking off his cap only he didn't have one on. Otis curtseyed and asked, "Can I have this dance?"

Mabel froze. In that moment she fancied herself stiff as one of those marble Greek goddesses found in some history book, books she hardly cracked open in eleventh grade.

"No woman lay to the other side of the mountain. There's only one woman in the entire world for me and that's my Mabel," he crooned.

Mabel pretended she didn't quite hear him. She hummed an old church hymn, slopped water over the dishes and remained fast at work.

Was there no play in her? What's wrong with her? He thought back to their grease painting day when she announced she was pregnant. The sun lit Mabel's hair like a bonfire, and she smelled like a fresh drawn bath. He'd decided then, no matter what, to make good with her.

Soap started to spill over the kitchen counter making bubble chains on Mabel's ankle. She must be way angry he thought to take little notice of suds inching down the pine cupboards.

He whistled his favorite tune and looked to the side of her face to see what expression grew there. He then untied her apron, letting it fall to the floor.

Otis turned her full front and played his eyes into hers. Slowly a smile swung her mouth upward. Reaching behind her, Otis grabbed some suds and made a little mustache as well as big rabbit ears on her. He also strung some bubbly buttons down the front of her and over her tummy.

They burst out laughing.

"You're something else," Mabel said. They danced a fox trot on the old linoleum floor. The window was transfixed with early evening stars and the cat, their yellow tabby, relaxed into a ball.

This is good Otis thought. Damn good.

JIM BOUREY

Photo Opportunities at the Dover Air Force Base Morgue Were Not Always Standard Operating Procedure

Joey was twenty-four
already three years into his Air Force enlistment,
a skilled air-frame mechanic, a trained classical pianist,
and engaged to the same girl since high school graduation.
She called him three times a week, wrote a letter every day.

Joey went to Confession
every week. He worried about sin more than
most good Catholic boys. Even those small sins
weren't allowed to rest in his soul. Absolution
was a necessity. He was kind, reliable, and wanted
to do the right things, to be a good provider. In 1967
a re-enlistment bonus lured my friend away from Florida,
away from his loyally patient and beautiful fiancé.

He arrived in 'Nam
a few days before Christmas. By Valentines Day '68
he was back in the States, at Dover, being transferred
with dignity to his parents and his girlfriend. No politicians,
with or without baseball caps, came to honor Joey,
just some fellow airmen and officers
who knew him well. Twelve more
occupied coffins were lined up,
waiting silently nearby.

I Can Only Consider These Questions If the Right Switch Is Activated

their work is silent and poorly understood
codes built into cells driving every living thing
strands of switches
a railyard without tracks
we are carriers without control

or perhaps there is control
an Illuminated Monkey or other demigod
an angry cosmic engineer
or a bearded Cloud Sitter who knows all
tells nothing

genes
those hard to see bastards
bring shrinkage and growth
red hair or black
skin that tans easily or burns badly
a tongue that needs to be loosened by a scalpel
a better brain for language
or math
or drawing stick figures
that move across a landscape

sickness
sadness
early death
strength
children or not
what the hell
am I thinking
about

Not Falling Inside A Tall Building

A young watchman leans at a window and sees the lights of barges butting their way across a harbor
From "Skyscraper" by Carl Sandburg

That job I had, the one in the huge warehouse
twenty floors high, but only one floor
and racks with shelves that climbed
to the roof, row after row,
three hundred thousand square feet,
loading docks on both sides.
Material came in one
went out on the other,
semi-truck engines rumbling,
distant computers quietly controlling
dozens of robots sliding on rails
end to end
up and down.

I did ten-hour shifts,
the worst work I ever had to do.

Top Mechanic was my title
but I wasn't in charge.
Worked up high
between the racks and the roof
repairing rails, pulleys,
roadways for robots.

Sometimes I thought about my friend Mitch
from Akwesasne IW Local 440 and how he fell
when he was welding on a building
in Buffalo – nearly two hundred feet -
before his safety gear took hold.
He was back on the iron
in fifteen minutes.
I worked without ropes and carabiners
and I never looked down. Those replacements
for humans would never have noticed
when I sailed past, screaming.

The Effects of Taxidermy on Human Emotions

I had seen stuffed animals before.
Bears, deer heads with and without bodies,
a few moose, foxes and mink,
a bobcat, a cougar, even a wild boar.
And fish - marlins and tuna,
and one great white shark skin
stretched over sculpted Styrofoam.

But that one dolphin with a small brass plaque
that said –

Caught by Accident, July 19, 1979
Tor Bay, Nova Scotia, Canada.
Couldn't get him free fast enough.

made me cry like a baby.

A Winter's Tale

I had arrived late,
the invitation vaguely worded as to time.
I shook the snow from my hair, left my coat at the check-stand.
It was evident that the hall had been prepared for some days,
the sprays of roses and anthurium showing signs of wear.

I said to my companion
I don't know about you
but I never expected to find myself here
as winter closes in.
The tall imposing woman
had greeted me in the entry hall,
her dress a wonderous confluence
of black tulle and lace cut low, exposed
the slope of her bare shoulders
while the smoothness of her black hair,
parted in the middle and drawn back,
emphasized the perfect pale oval of her face.
A solemn strand of pearls adorned her throat and breast.

Call me Inès
Have you seen my daughter?

I looked around the room.

The banquet tables lay in disarray,
napkins on the floor,
chairs askew a few overturned
Had there been an argument?

On the dais at the center of the main table
sat a man, powerfully built
and certainly accustomed to command

but looking like less than he once might have been.
He gestured with a translucent goblet toward
a handsome boy bearing a carafe of amber liquid.

That voice again *Have you seen my daughter?*
Inès, if that was her name,
had begun to pace the perimeter of the hall,
periodically calling out *My child!*
My daughter!
The sound: keening, caroming
from tectonic groan to a high-pitched scream
such as ice makes when a shelf shears from the glacier.

I thought, Perhaps I ought not to have come.

There was a racket at the back of the hall
like that of a large metal roll-up door being cranked open
Someone,
I strained to see

The intruder darkly handsome,
blue-violet cloak billowing against the night sky.
He glanced about dismissively,
his spoiled boy pout a dead ringer
to that marble of the de' Medici boy, Giuliano

A cold wind followed.

The man at the table twisted in his chair to get a better view

Inès became as still as marble When she spoke
serpents issued from her mouth
words writhed on the floor in all the languages known to man
the hiss of hatred and despair

A woman in the coils of loss

O, my daughter! Your hair like wheat in the summer sun!
Now you breathe darkness
The fruit we must eat is bitter

THE QUESTION: Where is she? The men exchanged glances

The intruder sat down on a folding chair.
He crossed his long legs, drawing his cloak close he said
What the hell,
Will it always be like this?

The man at the table sighed
Come, come, it was decided long ago
now SOMEBODY
close that damn door!

Shadows accompanied me
as I moved along the aisle behind the dais.
Through the open doorway I could see the night sky.
A reddish orange glow emanated from what might be a lake

The air was chill Should I have closed the door?
I hesitated

Avernian mists rose from the damp ground
There are moments composed in the fastness of beauty
through which one may step between imaginings

I crossed the threshold
Something at my elbow so light the touch
it might have been a puff of air, then
far below my feet, the lake appeared

I blinked.
The limestone grotto was warm,
even cozy; light fell softly, here and there
patterned rugs, pillows and upholstered chairs.
Low tables displayed beautifully painted pottery

I saw
her hair, the color of wheat in the summer sun

Kore herself, in pale green silk pajamas
lovely

Evidently pleased to have company
she gestured for me to sit beside her on the sofa,
apologizing.
I'm sorry, I can't offer you anything to eat, House Rules
Anyway, I can see you have other plans.
You met my mother? and my husband?
Truth be told, I cannot tolerate
either of them for more than a few weeks at a time.

She reached for a cigarette, lit it, offering one. I declined.

A half-smile, *It's not the same as eating, I mean*
You could have a smoke and still be able to leave.
Of course, you do know about the pomegranate seeds?

I nodded. But I'd like to hear your side of it, I said.

Light flickered aflame in dark eyes *What? Really?*
Then a smile I can't forget

No one has ever asked me for my side of the story.
Stubbing out the cigarette, she leaned in close to me
Well,
There was a lot going on that afternoon

Aetna was rumbling with indigestion. It seems that
the shaking and knocking had dislodged a support,
compromising the limestone's structural integrity.
It left a mess down here: rubble everywhere, fires
where they oughtn't be . . .

Hades had gone upstairs,
wanting to inspect the damage from there as well and having
done, was anxious to return to the comfort of his own realm.
Besides, all that light gave him a headache.

I'd spent the day with friends, Nymphae of Henna.
Sicily is so beautiful, don't you think?

What is it about islands?
Their attraction?
I've always had this feeling that they just
want to go their own way

A silence. She paused, agitated, lit another cigarette,
blew a smoke ring and freshly composed herself

So, we were frolicking,
just girls, you know?
Swimming, wrestling, gathering blossoms,
anemone, hyacinth, from time to time
a willing kiss
Meanwhile,
and not for the first time mind you, Drama
Queen that she is, the Cyprian was feeling Dissed and Pissed.
She said her shrines were being neglected
SOMEBODY needs to pay, she said
She summoned the boy, waved an arm, carelessly
pointing to the Lord of Erebus in his chariot, HIM!
He's NEVER shown me the slightest respect nor thanks
while being host to many I send his way.
Pick your sharpest arrow, boy!

Tired after a foot race, I'd wandered away from the others

It was a straight shot. Hades slapped at the arrow
which pierced his neck, yanking the reins.
The great black horses, startled, reared high
spilling him at my feet
Up he jumped
dazed and confused,
seeing me seized me by my wrists
raping me then
he flung me into the chariot

Packed off to a world I did not want.
A world I did not understand.

I mean,
I am SPRING!

My mother is Demeter, Goddess of Harvests.
What am I doing HERE?
Queen and Consort to the Lord of the Dead?

My mother searched.
My father,
rape being nothing new to him, took off
Claimed he was busy at one or another of his temples
Pretended to be mystified.
Now you know,
none of this could have happened had he not allowed it.

My mother wept and scoured the earth. No one spoke up.
When she found my scarf beside the lake she understood
and demanded he secure my return.
She warned: IF NOT,
CROPS WILL ROT,
FRESH WATER WILL TURN TO SALT!
SOON NO ONE WILL REMAIN
TO TEND THE SHRINES
OF THE DEATHLESS GODS!

Zeus shilly-shallied, but you could see that she had got to him.
He temporized I might leave IF I had not eaten anything
Afterall, there were rules. RULES!
THEY MAKE THE RULES! THEY BREAK THE RULES!

She stood, took a deep breath, and sat down again.

Well, it had been four months; Hades, trying to please me,
offered tempting bites. I had eaten four pomegranate seeds.

A Family Council: My father called us together, his elder
brother Hades, my mother and me.
But you will notice who in particular is missing:
The one to whom all pay lip-service, and all secretly fear.

Well, Hades held to his point that I'd eaten, thus could not
leave. Fact was, he'd gotten used to having a companion.
I was in fact and by deed, his queen.
Queen of Doom and Gloom, I said.

My mother shouted, GIVE ME MY DAUGHTER!

My father said, It's a wretched shame
But it's water under the bridge now.

The Compromise: Hades could have me in the winter months;
as for the rest of the year, I would spend it as before.
I had a new name, as befits the Queen of the Underworld,
Persephone.
I didn't want it!
I didn't like it then, I don't like it now.
Her face glowed in fury
Then darkness

The hall was empty
Mine was the sole coat remaining at the check-stand.

The sun had not yet broken free of clouds, ice covered the the stony path leading out from the portico. Picking my way carefully, the evening replayed in my thoughts: and what has changed? The one who set the tale in motion, the instigator, the goddess whose anger not even Zeus dared to confront, *Anarchic Aphrodite,* she has not changed her ways.

PATRICIA HARRIS-BOWMAN

Dolphins, Skyscrapers, and The Evolution of Me

In honor of my mother,
Marva Joann Harris

Three images have stayed with me
my whole life…
and led me to discover who I am.
For my mother, and for the story of how
I found my roots.
Some stories live in our hearts long before
we tell them.

I remember seeing a dolphin once,
leaping through a bright blue pool—
graceful, intelligent,
moving like living poetry.

The crowd cheered as it performed its tricks,
and I was amazed.
Truly amazed.

Yet even then,
something in my heart felt a quiet sadness,
because that beautiful creature
knew only the edges of a tank
instead of the endless freedom of the sea.

It taught me something subtle:
that wonder can exist even where freedom is limited,
and that the heart always senses the larger world.

I feel something similar
when I look up at a skyscraper.

Magnificent structures—
glass and steel rising boldly toward the sky.
From the ground they inspire awe,
a reminder of how high human dreams can climb.

But step inside
and travel upward floor after floor,
and a quiet uneasiness can settle in—
so much height between your feet
and the steady earth below.

Here too, there is a lesson:
that courage often comes hand in hand with fear,
and every climb teaches us what it means to rise.

And then there is evolution—
not only the slow shaping of oceans and mountains,
but the unfolding of our own human stories.

My life began with two people:
my mother, Marva Joann Harris,
and my father, Clinton Stanback Sr.

Their time together was brief—
just long enough
for life to begin in me.

When my mother learned
that he was already married,
her heart carried a hurt she never expected.

She allowed him to see me once,
and then she chose a different path—
to protect the life she carried
and raise me with strength.

For many years
I knew only a first name,
just a small thread of where I came from.

But evolution has a way
of patiently revealing
what time once hid.

Through the quiet science of DNA
and the persistence of questions in the heart,
that small thread
eventually became a tapestry.

Later in life
I found the paternal side of my family—
roots that had waited for me
without even knowing my name.

And through that journey
my mother stood beside me.

My mother carried me into this world,
and later, with quiet courage,
helped me walk toward the rest of my roots.

Before she left this world,
she gave me one more gift—
her blessing to find the rest of my story,
and the freedom to discover all of it.

Like a dolphin reaching upward,
like a skyscraper touching the sky,
life keeps rising,
mixing,
becoming something new.

And here I stand—
a daughter,
a discovery,
a living bridge between stories.

Evolution is the quiet miracle that turns
unanswered questions into family.

AMRITA SKYE BLAINE

Dolphin Ride

Smooth muscled power
marble-glossy skin
her seeming smile
I grab the warm dorsal fin,
whoosh through the water
at athletic speed

Is this a form of fun?
For whom? She's captive,
imprisoned for life
forced to perform
all day, the same

I wanted the ride
paid for the ride
Now I'm ashamed

Devolution

Fewer songbirds
wild turkeys and deer
All species in decline
humans, too although
our numbers are rising
As our buildings grow taller
—half mile straight up—
compassion is shrinking
governments harsher,
hoarding freedoms
for the rich the compliant
raking back assistance
from those in need

Yet in the midst
of the carnage
kindness shines

Evolution

A phrase shows up
maybe a title
It won't leave
begs to root
burrows
then gestates
often for weeks

The dive—
not just down, but
deep into the carnal
compels,
requires embodiment
I sort through hunches
feel through
to the quiet
for precise words
by their rhythm
taste
texture
weight

Between pushes,
a wicked labor,
I let the thing rest
then work with it
breathe with it
rest again
until the shape
reveals finally
finally, what it is

Twins

New York's skyline the holes
where twin towers
should be two reflecting
pools, waterfalls cascading
into the void
echo of absence

Thousands of names
a holy place
the dead their shock
imprinted on the space

Tectonic shift that day
Of an age, you know
where you imprinted
I in Eugene, Oregon
transfixed
a blocky color TV
stupefaction thick
as the dust
The hole the hole
where that building stood
Mind wiped blank
then floods

Sky Walk

With a toe, I test
the wire's tension
pick up my pole
transfixed
by the traffic below

Wire stretches
between this skyscraper
and that
my crossing
to make

Slow my breath
steady my heart
my turn to walk
I ease my foot
onto the wire

To save my own life
attention narrows
to now and here
Troubles fade
as I feel my way

slide into
the unknown
I didn't choose
never
would have asked for

Each life is a tightrope
a chasm below
I lift my gaze
trust my heart
and take the next step

If Only

If only I could sleep with half
a brain like dolphins do
the other half composing,
sorting words for grain,
weave, and sheen—time
reclaimed

If only I could clear the floor
by feet—sleek grace become
my friend—and leap again
my body slick, athletic muscle
my face a permanent grin

if only

GENE BERSON

Evolution & Simultaneity

Today the temperature will rise into the nineties,
and we will probably make our way to Bear River,
where the water is cold and people rare.

Do insects laugh? Do they lift a glass to their friends?
Do they stretch and yawn, like a cat upon the deck?
Can they turn on the sprinkler?

Mankind has taken the rapids to spawn
even though he evaporates
like sea spray into the rainbow air.

He crawled from the mire and slapped
muddy black handprints upon the rock wall
of an undersea cave recently discovered in France.

Kindergartners outline their fingers in crayon.
The teacher democratically puts up their work
all around the room for parent/ teacher night.

Alphabets fall from the stars
and time nails rain to the street
but not just because we are fools
fucking on an air mattress
rippling over the rapids
on the wheel of the sea
but just becuz
simultaneity's what's happening
our lives are not careers
we're going where we are.

Candelabra of Moments

going
barefoot
so much
doing nothing
done

doing nothing
much
nothing doing

* * * *

ocean blue, the darker blue
shadow of a cloud
underneath
blue darker than that

* * * *

without a lover so much beauty
makes a person forlorn
summer fog
mutes the bell of a buoy —
so far away it seems to come from inside
its chime strikes the ache
of human melancholy

* * * *

I'm impaled by a redwing's whistle

* * * *

a torch in an ancient cave
furled blackness into flame

a Cro-Magnon artist drew
bison on placental walls
fire luffed in the draft
as if spirits attending
emerging forms
were panting

people passed away
with mammoths
they hunted
the paintings remained
underground

* * * *

millennia later a world
war exploded

when the war was over, a couple kids
anecdote has it,
walking their dog in the woods
saw it fall through leaf-litter into a hole

they retrieved it from what became
The Caves of Lascaux
tourists wonder
who made these paintings
and why

what do
the abstract alphabet-like
markings
almost mathematical
signify

some felt an old
fire burning inside
that they hadn't completely
forgotten
that deep
social need
to crawl
into a cave to paint
creatures from in-between

* * * *

feet without shoes
hum like Huck, sweet
mountain lilac
molecules nest
in hair skin sage
ocean air, its salty tang
surrounds— that voice
harmonize living wind

* * * *

a bird inside a Coyote bush
grows quiet as you
pass
deeper
into the still valley
ocean sounds fade
we descend on loaned feet
into a Pleistocene ravine

reach The Wooden Bridge
understand the creek trickling

in its native tongue— red
thimble berries decorate
flimsy leaves waving
on the stream's breeze

listening to talk
talking
to listen
kenning
wave traveler
whale
hwaele
wheel

* * * *

finches flit
bees buzz we walk
dusty
path, fine as flour, cushioning current
bare feet

legs strengthen

climbing
the other side

The Pass of Loose Shale
shards slide and ring
underfoot
careful in sharp going

soft beige
yellow browns

orange

* * * *

orderly layers
of sedimentary rock
exposed
cutaway hillside
mud
morphed to rock
eons ago

cave man
painted
under ground it took light

to see
appeared in dark
when the torch
went out
to wait
to be although was always

tobealtho wuzalways
hwaele
whale wheel wave

redwing
riding . . .

* * * *

the ridge, the tree
shade
crushed weeds
where deer slept full, sky-reflecting, blue
ponds lilies culminate
in heart's eye . . .

* * * *

may you solve the riddle
of what caused what we are
to shake off scales for skin
to touch that touch that
predicts
intelligence

* * * *

please, fellow beings, shelter yourselves
in nature's nuptial celebrations
clarify air, sing
above the whispering
black fire crackling
like cellophane beneath our days

so much
doing nothing
done

* * * *

orange lichens
mandalas
go black
come back
as new
continents
next to others
glowing pale green
clouds separate
the darker blue

shadows of
clouds
underneath that blue
darker than that
that that that

* * * *

solace in that
stickers weeds bugs birds gnats
began to beget before we began
millions of feet walked through millions of
years
hand-me down forms we get brand new
trace ocean cliffs
into valleys below

so much doing nothing done
being done done
being nothing
doing

* * * *

walk while everyone works, take off
on feet sing to be free
going barefoot
allows you to be
stunned by a shadow unrolling
a scroll through a field
trees loosen their leaves
let them go
at just the right moment

* * * *

strip off clothes dive into the lake
lay back under alder limbs
fathom intricate algebra of reflecting facets
flickering like Arabic above

* * * *

ocean blue, the darker blue
shadow of a cloud
underneath that
blue darker than that

so much doing nothing done

* * * *

a buck silhouetted above
evening skyline
looks up
out of shoulder-high grass
still as a branch
tossing stars like a sparks
off antlers into space—

* * * *

may you break the chain
reunite
powder your feet with ancestral dust

feel the wand sow seed syllables
through the Milky Way's radiant haze

choreograph your dance
into life's battle stance

so much doing nothing done

OLGA BROWNE

Skyscrapers, dolphins and evolution

I wonder, is what we now see evolution?
Or perhaps the end of evolution.

Does the means meet the end?
Or does the end cause by the means.

Are skyscrapers worth more than our dolphins habitat?

Are concrete and cities value higher than our forests and wilderness?

Is extinction now ours to meet?

Your silence

Is taught, be pliable, this isn't the time, no one will believe you..

Her silence, his freedom
Her torment, him predator.
Her pain, his access.

A door opens

Silence

Shhhhhhh

I am

Alphabet soup and old books,
Poetry and Stephen King.

Words shark like a double-edged razor or cold as ice, smooth to the touch..

Ink that bleeds emotions, pain and steady as my thoughts..

Things that I feel, written how I see, no apology just me.

Gratitude

Step lightly into memories, cherish those that are real.

Remember the moments, it wasn't a mistake..

No you are blessed, these memories belong to you..

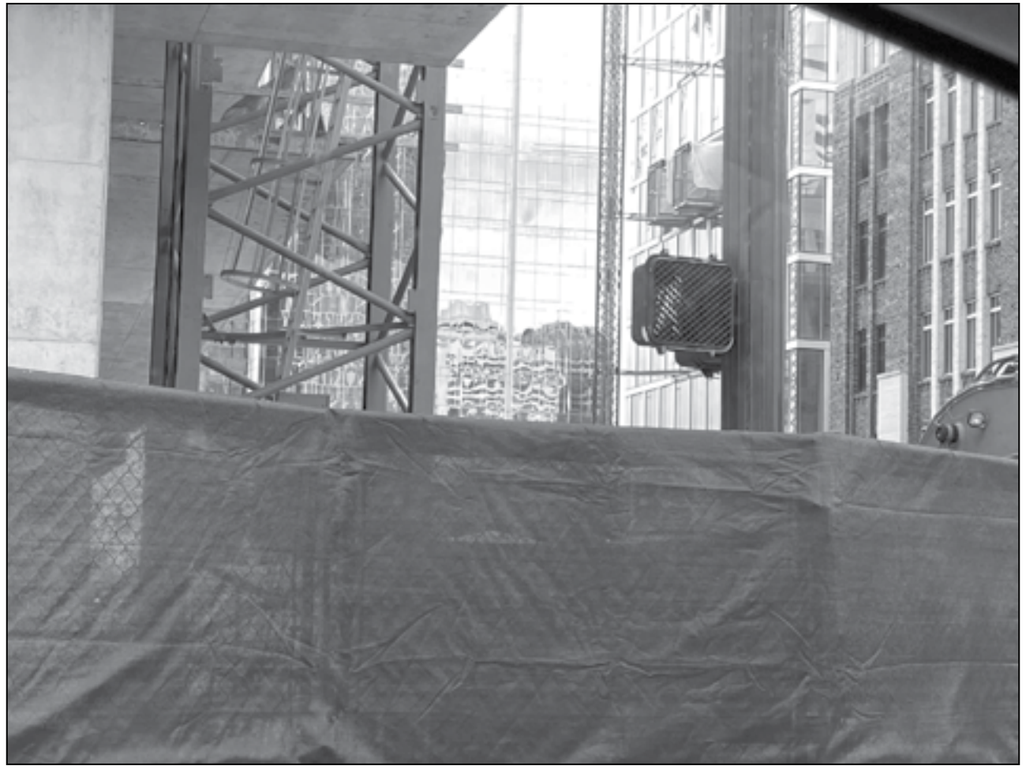
The night speaks

That place of beginning or endings.

Where silence is sun in a
Web of whispers.

And morning comes without asking for permission...

AMY HOSKINS



PENNY KLINE

The Tallest Skyscraper

It seems the tallest skyscapers are built of glass,
like mirrored castles reflecting sun and clouds way up in the sky.
Glass elevators glide up the outside walls to the top,
just to take your breath away.
But no one thinks about the one that develops on its own
made of rock and ice and covered in storm clouds—
Mount Everest,
a vertical thought the earth could not control.

29,031 feet of unfinished development,
with a spine of rock, pushes through the atmosphere
as if the world were trying to stand.

In 1953, the first two climbers reached the top of the world.
Edmund Hillary with Sherpa Tenzing Norgay
arrived alive with no pomp or celebration
except a breathtaking 360-degree panorama of the
Himalayan mountain range, where the curve of the
Earth becomes visible against a deep blue sky.

Below them, the mountain kept its own ledger,
written in breath and absence,

The Sherpas move through this skyscraper without offices,
no corner rooms, and no titles carved in brass,
only the quiet arithmetic of survival,
step, ice, rope, step.

Sherpas hold the most dangerous profession on earth,
measured not in headlines,
but in how many return
and how many become part of the foundation.

Money builds most skyscrapers with blueprints
signed, steel purchased, and cranes rented.
But here the currency is thinner,
where a climber pays at minimum
sixty to eighty thousand dollars
for a temporary address in the sky
for a lease measured in oxygen.

People come to stand at the top floor
to say they touched the ceiling of the world,
but the skyscraper does not recognize ownership.

It keeps what it wants.

There are mummified bodies folded into its stairwells,
paused mid-ascent like unfinished thoughts
and their names dissolving into snow.
Their presence holds a kind of signage—

You were here.
You stopped.

And still the lines form,
tiny figures treading upward
like punctuation marks searching for meaning.

From far away, Everest looks like
a silent architecture of white,
but up close it is a living structure
that breathes in avalanches,
shifts in the wind, and rearranges its rooms.

And at the top,
if you arrive, there is no office waiting,
no ceremony.

There's just a horizon that curves away from
you,
and the quiet realization
that even the tallest skyscraper
is not wanting to be climbed.

Everest simply
continues to grow upwards.

Margaret and a Dolphin named Peter

Margaret delightfully accepted her task to observe
and teach a dolphin named Peter to communicate
with sounds and words.

She created an environment to co-exist with Peter—
Two feet deep of borrowed sea,
walls breathing salt and light
where the ceiling stayed dry,
and the floor was a mirror of restless gray,
a fragile line between worlds.

Margaret did not enter water—
she folded into it,
becoming part of a silent grammar,
and a presence measured in stillness.
To Peter, she was a creature of no boundaries,
a walking goddess who brought the air down into his shallows
while he, a silver question mark, curled through currents,
a motion that spoke before words,
curious and endless.
But he did not care for the sharp, dry clicking of her lessons,
the clumsy human vowels shaped to mimic his sky.
Instead, he studied the geometry of her posture,
the soft, pale hinge behind her knee—
a joint that folded like a hidden wave,
fascinating to a body built only of smooth, sleek muscle.

He would nudge that secret bend of bone,
not fin, but something still.
Her feet, soft anchors, held steady in his orbit,
and he circled them again and again,
as if repetition might become understanding.
Her hands reached out—
not to collide, but to pause and choose,

to touch with intention
in a world where touch was usually a collision.

Delighted by the sudden gravity of her attention.
To a young mind shaped by the infinite blue,
Margaret was an island that chose to stay,
sleeping on a wooden raft just inches from his blowhole.
For ninety moons, six days a week, they lived inside a held breath,
a fragile suspension between air and water.

Time dissolved into presence—
she leaned forward before she spoke,
he answered with arcs, clicks, and insistence.
He learned not through words,
but through the gravity of her shape,
the tide of her attention pulling him close.
Margaret's world became Peter's orbit,
his obsession—
a narrowing sky where only she remained.

The science project abruply ended.
They drained the room, unmaking the tide,
and carried him far away to a box of sterile concrete
where the water had no scent of her,
and the surfaces reflected only his own isolation.

A dolphin's life is a ledger of conscious choices;
each rise to the air is a decision to endure the weight of being.
Without the tilt of her knee to guide him,
without the island of her bed in the dark,
the surface became a ceiling he no longer wished to break.
Peter lasted only two weeks before he let the air go,
a silver ribbon unraveling,
and chose the heavy, quiet floor
where the memory of her touch could never be washed away.

Evolution: She Stands Between Versions of Herself

She stands in the hallway with no doors,
just frames, empty, waiting—
each one formed like a life she hasn't chosen.

A draft of freezing wind blows through,
faintly an old voice echoes a question,
something about being or not being,
like a coin balanced on its edge,
like breath held too long underwater
demands release.

But she is already here.
Already breathing.
Already stitched into the fabric of
unfinished thoughts.

Her question is different.

Not whether to disappear,
but whether to become someone she does
not yet recognize.

She carries herself like a house
that hasn't been renovated in years—
the same furniture,
the same quiet cracks in the ceiling
spreading like maps of places she might go.

To stay is to live here forever,
memorizing the creak of every floorboard,
learning how to navigate in the dark
around the damage instead of fixing it.

It almost feels like peace.

To evolve is to pick up a hammer
without knowing what will collapse first.

She imagines it—
walls that defined her are coming down
in clouds of dust,
old versions of herself buried in the rubble.

There is no blueprint.
Only instinct.
Only the unsettling sense
that she might not like who walks out
of the renovation.

Or worse, that she might.

She thinks about water,
how it never disagrees with its container,

how it becomes a river, a storm or a glass,
depending on what holds it.

She has been a glass for a long time.

Still.
Transparent.
Careful not to spill.

But something in her has begun to lean,
just a little,
like gravity has changed its thoughts about
her position.

The tilt toward the fall has started.

To be, is to remain the glass.

To evolve, is to shatter
and trust that she will learn
the language of dangerous storms and rivers.

The world will keep moving either way.

Indifference doesn't require change,
it just watches, that's the silent violence of it all.

The burden of decision belongs to her alone—
if she shatters, she will finally be free of expectations.

She feels it—
that slow shifting,
like tectonic plates beneath a city.

She stands in the hallway with no doors,
just frames, empty, waiting—
but not choosing, not refusing,
allowing the weight of her desires
to detach her from the old house.

The tremors give way to a kinetic stillness
that flows through her body and
settles in the spaces between her ribs.

She is fully present.

She walks through one of the doorless frames
to claim her space.

She listens to it—
the sound of herself,
louder than her fear of the sky she is about
to open up.

JOE NOLAN

Dolphins

Dolphins always seem to laugh
To smile and be happy.

I wonder if they worry for us
Who are forlorn
Staggering from one war
To another.

It's good we live on land
And they in water.
It gives them some protection
From Dolphin Feeds
That might be scheduled
As fund-raisers
For social groups
In season.

I hope they swim fast enough
To always get away.
I hope they're smart enough
To not get caught in nets,
But our nets are always
Growing larger,
Our hunger, greater,
So that soon we may
Swallow the whole world.

I hope they can get away.

Once, at Baker Beach,
Two dolphins swam
Along the shore
As my wife and I
Walked north
On the hard-wet sand.

They rose and dove,
Rose and dove
And moved along, ahead
Until they were gone

That's the closest I have come
To awe of dolphins in nature.

Exploded Skyscrapers

There's a dead black spider
In our toilet today.
I think it was trying to drink.

There's a problem
With our country today.
Our kings don't want us to think.

Three towers fell,
Only two do they tell.
All three gave way
By fire, they say,
But not of wood made.
Never before did
Steel towers fall from fire.

A plane fell from sky,
So they say,
Leaving no sign,
Swallowed by earth
Like a goldfish
At a bachelor-party.

Shattered ruins, aflame for weeks
Down below the ground
Vicious, wicked, this bespeaks,
But eyes diverted, left unfound
The real cause of disaster.

With lies we would be bound--
Bound to war in lands
That never set the bombs
That brought down
Three strong towers.

SIBILLA HERSHEY

Life without Meaning

After the third shot of vodka
followed by zakuska
of salted herring on rye
the form that shielded
the nest of fear
of a life without meaning
enters the room.

"Life has no meaning"
grieves a woman in tears
then picks up an egg
the symbol of life
sliced through lengthwise
and stuffed
topped with a red dot
of caviar fish egg.

Did the dread of not being
begin in water?
And the burden of living
a life without meaning
when did it wash ashore?

JEANINE STEVENS

Cetus

Matt Kish, mixed media: Moby Dick Series

Pure joy as I pull this happy fellow
from my mailbox.
On his own, a singular traveler.

Not gray or block shaped,
    but jet black, sleek.
We would expect horizontals: waves,
        surf, swell. We would expect
blueness: aqua, sky and cobalt.

But here, all vertical as he catapults
North, escapes the crab fisherman's net.

Not harvested for his precious
ambergris, he leaves his sea ravens,
    continues on to polar regions
        where air is green.

Propelled by rushing curds
bathed in a whoosh of creamy pearls
shaped like a wedding veil—

shedding brine, perhaps
seeking a new curative; he knows
the ocean floor
            will soon settle with dust.

Leaving earth to gentle dolphins,
he rises in star charts just north of Vega,
            sets Cygnus and Draco quivering.

Resetting his compass, he listens
for tempos from others
            humming in the same key.

In a wash of viridian, thick lipped and smiling,
he ends his journey next to our immense *Cetus.*

Century Plant

~Agave Americana

A huge one in Oakland made the news.
Ours, behind the shed, smaller,
horizontal rungs on a ladder—
    Jack's stalk I want to climb.

Or like my city cousins, no yard, bored,
they scaled metal fire escapes,
favored loose iron steps, swinging
out over traffic, squeaky groan
from rusty bolts, a dog dish flying,
    someone's laundry floating.

I examine the protrusions, a gray shade
of doom. No garden of delight,
more like a Dali wasteland, tight blossoms,
fists waiting to strike. Now, oozing
    liquid, ants scramble to suck.

During the pandemic even a walk to Taco Bell
was an adventure. Still at home, so easy
to just sit with our liverwurst on rye:
red onion, stoneground mustard, cold milk,
    waiting for flesh to sag, turn to mush.

When you try to cut, the new saw smokes,
black teeth gnash, tough fibers splinter.

I save a few pods resembling sea monkeys.

Lights Out: New York

~21st Century Initiative
"Turn off upper-story lights by midnight
during migrations along the Atlantic Flyway."

I remember those wings,
innumerable chevrons whooshing
behind dusky windows. I remember
yellowish sulfuric stars and planets

on my childhood ceiling,
my fears distracted for a moment
until sirens blared.

My aunt stood on top the Crown Plaza
"plane spotting," the aging air-warden
patrolling the street, notepad in hand,
hoping for infractions.

I nervously held a candle
under three blankets, watched my baby sister
gasp from whopping cough, fighting
for breath, the weak flame crackling my hair.

Yet tonight, a new century, this flyway at least
is clear and open so white-throated sparrows
and ruby-crowned kinglets are safe
from even the tiniest beams banned by night.

Minotaur Surprised While Eating

All light reflects the pale, hairless torso,
frail blue shadows bleed under

paper thin skin, delicate chest and arms,
like one not used to day labor or butchery.

This man part seems too small to ride above
chunky fur legs, the split, steel gray hooves.

A crimson haunch glistens raw, just the right
amount of marbling. A thick flank:
ibex, gazelle?

Flesh dangles from dry lips,
embarrassed, his eyes beg forgiveness.

In a fading tangerine sky,
a tilt of the head seems to incriminate.

I give pardon as I check my own
prehensile hands, remember the scent
of cedar, the many times

I tore flesh from the great Pike
in the fish shack in northern Minnesota.

Painting, Maddi Hambling 1987

Combarelles Cave

The Dordogne

Image maker rests against the mossy,
lichen wall. She finger knits a provision bag,

tools laid out: oil lamp, various burins:
oblique sides narrowly chiseled for etching.

Still undecided. What to represent on the small
allocated alcove: wooly mammoth, bison,

ibex, red deer, arrow shafts and wicker traps,
all painted before by men.

She refuses the mandrake root, peyote button,
thonged lacerations, and repetitive litanies,

breathes in the musky scent of wood rose
tugging hillsides, sips Manzanita berry tea,

presses palms to eyelids…. silence, ears
swallow echoes, her first visions: sunspots,

bulging claviforms, hut-like motifs, grids,
hatch marks, looms and wells.

But, in deeper hollows, the lioness emerges,
haunches crouch, back curves, her civet

smell, golden ears point forward, the eye
a red pebble, her knotted lair—the fire-cat.

CURT NELSON

Evolution

I evolved after years of her infidelities.
I mutated not in a good way.
I curbed my desire for intimacy,
which led to reproductive failure.
I became redundant
and put myself on the road to extinction.
I sunk back into the primordial ooze
of a cuckold.

Being Human

It is a shame that the human species has
such a dominant role in our universe.
That only the scientists and watchers
of nature documentaries are aware
that every species of life on earth possesses
a unique form of life cycle from birth to death.

Humans need to understand we are not special,
not in our history, not in our physiology,
and specially not in our ability to adapt or survive.
In fact, our big brains and our long gestation,
like our non-human ape cousins, will cost
us dearly when the earth's environment shifts.

Humans have a hard lesson to learn.
Species don't hang around long.
Especially a species that plays a big role
in creating an atmosphere it cannot survive.

City Souls

The last rays of sunlight
drop below the cliffs of skyscrapers,
that last light of safety protects
the day souls seeking shelter
from the coming dark.

Beneath the cliffs of darkness,
the night souls creep
out into the hard, cold streets
to sell their wares,
to fight over turf,
to spread their brand of evil.

Few souls live
in the light and the dark—
they are the chameleons,
known to both worlds.

They adapt to the bright colors of day
and the shifting shades of darkness.
They roam freely beneath
the cliffs of skyscrapers,
and they are the most successful
of all predators.

SM CARUTHERS

Peace Just Went Walking By Me

Peace just went walkin' by me
I couldn't catch up with the kind soul
do send greetings after her with my plea.

Perchance you've met this tension buster,
this calming swell of laughter,
wrapped in peace's cloak,
she walks, a beauty
among the common folk,
spending smiles,
and inviting rest, content in the moment,
giving more than is sent.

Following the natural rhythms of life's habits
making the ordinary, extraordinary.

Where did her cape disappear?

How is it I find no fear when she graces the earth, the sacred ground?

Healer, softly listen to her voice
the quiet rampant in the silent sound,
footsteps running ghostly.

Peace, do not change your garment,
let its gossamer length touch my fingers.

Tigress

Is that poet in there really me?

Waiting, pouncing on life,
devouring me with its intensity.

Where in this tired boneless face,
is that laughing willful tigress?

Lurking, lurking, along the mountain branch,
beside the ocean on a rock,
crouched, motionless, beside this dusty me,
this outside hull so brittle,
this woebegone bite.

This dentin needs to be sharpened, gnawed,
honed and spat out.

Greetings, Tigress!

Promises

Isn't it funny how all countries have cumulus clouds rising above the horizons?

Isn't it funny how all nations have animals hiding in the hedges and humans hiding in shadows of tall buildings?

Isn't it odd how alike we really are, inhabitants of this fragile Earth, this Terra?

To look and see only the boundaries of our minds and not the breathtaking beauty
of our souls is another desecration of our world; another monument
we have left to haunt our planet.

I will arise and touch the soil in the morning where it is marked with the sun and the sky's outpourings.

I will step out of my slumber, barefoot into sunlight's first strokes upon my cheeks.

I will breathe and know I am alive and honor all the living with my joy.

I promise I will. I promise.

Dolphin Child

A strange legend began amongst the humans who dwelt near the abalone and sea anemones, where the rough waves and high splash drive many out. The coast is temperate and full of schools of sardine. Many estuaries hide behind the mouth of a green river ready to feed a harbor dolphin and his mate.

Grandmother unwrapped this tale slowly as we gathered reeds along the Big River. The sand is warm and I want to sleep but grandmother pokes me in the ribs and calls me lazy like that dolphin's child.

"What dolphin's child?"

"You must help me bring in these reeds first to weave the mats to soften our bed."

"Aww, grandmother, it's always about work."

"No, my child, it is not always about work; sometimes it is about kindness."

"Grandmother, we have gathered the reeds for the beds. May I hear the story of the Dolphin's Child?" The request made in the child's most polite voice, sure to please the ear of the grandmother, came out squeaky like the talk of a harbor dolphin.

So began the tale falling from the grandmother's lips as she softened the reeds in front of a campfire. The flames threw shadows and the atmosphere felt as much a long ago age as it is supposed to in any myth

"Long ago," her ancient voice crackled like the wood in the fire, "a dolphin child lived in Vera lagoon, a salt water estuary formed near a small bay on this coast. The seawater washed in with the tide, my child. Salt marsh grew on its shores.

Two grown dolphins lived there with a dolphin child. It was a mother dolphin with a sleek dark brown body and her mother dolphin, a wrinkle-faced grandmother."

"Like us," interrupted the human child.

"Yes, like us, but you must let the story flow, young one. Listen well."

"Oh, yes…"

"The grandmother dolphin was too old to hunt in deeper waters. She sent out her daughter and grandchild to bring sardines for her.

A tribesman grew angry at the dolphins for poaching his fish. He took a new, well made spear and waded into the marshy lake. He surprised the grandmother dolphin. He threw his sharp bladed spearhead and grazed the grandmother dolphin.

When Dolphin's Child returned to grandmother she had turned on her side. She had a deep cut. Dolphin's Child was frantic, circling the marsh lake looking for help.

The Dolphin Child approached a human child at the edge of the marsh lake collecting reeds. The human child had watched the mother healer make a paste of mud and a succulent plant we call Arnica. The Dolphin Child squeaked and squeaked, leading the human child, Mai, to the dying grandmother dolphin.

Mai put together a mud pack with arnica and wading into the shallow water, smeared the mixture on the deep wound. Then Mai indicated to Dolphin's Child to stay with the grandmother.

Mai left for the evening. The mother of Dolphin's Child wanted grandmother to go out to the open sea where other dolphins could protect her. But Dolphin's Child was stubborn and blocked mother's attempts to stir grandmother and budge her out of the shallows.

Mai returned the next morning with more paste and to check on the patient. Grandmother dolphin showed signs of healing. Mai came again at noon with the spear carrying man who bowed his greedy head in shame and apologized to grandmother with an offering of fresh sardines. Grandmother opened her eyes and drew back, painfully. Dolphin's Child and cousins protected grandmother placing their bodies around her.

The spear man promised to leave the Harbor dolphins in peace.

Mai got to ride Dolphin's Child and swim with the sea animals. Since that time we have lived in peace with Dolphins' Children and kin. Dolphins accompany our fishing canoes and take care of us. They see how hard we work and we honor their care. We are the Dolphin People."

"Thank you, grandmother. I am glad I am not lazy. Maybe I can swim with the Dolphin's Child, someday."

Grandmother smiled, "Maybe, you can, Mai."

DOREEN BEYER

Carrying its Past

The potato does not live
in the past, but the tomato
lives on in the potato.

Evolved over eight million
years, wild tomato
and potato-like ancestors
interbred, then surprised into
the strange expression of
a humble potato

whose underground stems
grew tubers
that neither parent had,
a twisted DNA cylinder of
fateful hybridization.

Potato and tomato share
similar fused,
five-petal flowers
where no pollination
is needed

though potato's demand
for self-possession
remain buried where
it lives.
All over again.

When Bison Roamed

Imagine open grasslands like
empty pages of a book

a few black lines here and there
like small bison herds

large migratory herds
like the ones the Lakota recall

took days to pass
now extinct on plains of their

oral history
only one of the many ways

the world is changing
ink to liquid

slipping away to leave blank
spaces on pages ending

without anything.

How We Move in the World

Gladys West, 1930 – 2026

Before GPS, how did we move in this world?
Determine our position under a circling sky?

How did we evolve from counting crude notches
carved in fibulas of baboons to understanding
that vocabulary of the physical world is
fundamentally mathematical?

What if, in 1955, there was no executive order
issued, banning racial discrimination in federal
workplaces. Would Gladys West, a Black
mathematician, been hired

at the Naval Weapons Laboratory? To advance
mathematical principles used to verify accuracy
of bombing tables, track planetary orbits or
calculate the precise shape of Earth (critical for
development of GPS)?

How do we measure her contributions that
gives meaning to the meaningless solemnity
of numbers? Where is her twinkling star?

Peregrine Falcon

The sky watches
with dark brown intensity
and a darker hunger—

at 3,500 feet altitude, it circles
then drifts—a flicker
in the light from far above where
gods control the universe

and where the crawl of microscopic
city dwellers control
the central narrative in the falcon's
story of survival—

from farm fields that glittered
with an abundance of prey pickled
in DDT—

crisping egg shells to crumble
under the weight of
a falcon's warm, feathery breast.

Delisted from devastation,
deliverance spoke from vertical cliffs
of skyscrapers
and plentiful populations of pigeons.

From Urban Waters

From the moment of birth
we were destined for death—
to drown like unwanted shadows
sluiced to urban ocean
basin settlements we color
like oily lesions.
We populated underwater cities
extending over many miles
like a gelatinous uterine lining—
slow to hear the silent
violence of innocent inhabitants—
bottom feeders. Zooplankton.
Lanternfish. Then
the delayed curiosity of dolphin
deformities—hunched backs.
Spots. Open sores.
Cauliflower-like protuberances.
Our census diminish after
more than half a century—some
of us have migrated. Others
emerged on shores
higher up on the food chain
where we inhabit every
bad dream. Echo. Quiver.
Vapor—
of last breath.
We were born hydrophobic.
We cannot drown. We
are already dead.

Sacramento Under Water

Vistas captured from a skyscraper of 164 years:
a motionless sea of black and white,

rowboats and mud, wet walls and desolation, an
underwater city that favors

the breath of dolphins; not horses, cattle, sheep
and their lambs, not names

of legislators who flee to San Francisco,
nor the newly inaugurated

governor who returns to his mansion on 8th and
N streets by rowboat—

Sacramento City, wears the weight of forty straight
days of rain,

dropped by an atmospheric river carrying the water
vapor equivalent of ten

Mississippi Rivers—an evolution of earth's fevering
industries of coal,

then oil and gas, the changing mood of atmosphere,
energizing extreme

weather events in December 2025, when climate
skeptics and believers tango to

news that for the first time in twenty-five years,
nowhere in California—is dry.

ANN WEHRMAN

Photography by Ann Wehrman

Life creates life

smooth white ovals
eggs drop newly laid
inside each a world of soul
unique life unknown

escalating heights pleasure, pain
destiny, great accomplishment
birthmark, sixth digit
your laugh, her willfulness

eggs impersonal opaque
thin shells, dense blinds
hide multifaceted inhabitants

which order will they take?
which goes with which?
if I break this one into the pan,
will mayhem or peace result?

in her great imagination
life creates life, bubbles, eggs
inside each, Wonderland
outside, just another egg

bubbles floating on air currents
floating away

Evolution

wrapped in fantasy, alone in my room
always warm, safe to go barefoot

quiet meadow carpeted in wildflowers
soft, clean sand, lapping waves

porch swing, my guitar, a moonlit night
remember your touch on my face

time to think, dream
write, draw, make music

like my hair and skin, the veil thins
between mind and body

yet humanity continues to burn
why am I still here

Trump Tower

the year was 1983
not quite Orwellian, not the
terror of Winston Smith
reduced broken bone by broken bone
to a being without
passion, will, courage
by omnipotent dystopian state

after seven years of fundraising around America
volunteer for my church
living as a nun, no sex, no personal life
too little sleep, too little joy

still dutiful, still working
in Manhattan, witnessing, more fundraising
daily on six hours of sleep
but I'd vomit my breakfast
from exhaustion, from the smell of garbage
cooking on the August streets
from the stress of my arranged fiancé having
left the church with a girlfriend
I was so tired after years of it all

each morning, we were given $5 for food and coffee
evangelized with tracts
outside of Bloomingdale's
stepping carefully by the homeless
who sat on the streets' hot air vents, over subways
who slept in the entry halls of Grand Central

I wandered up Fifth Avenue one afternoon
clutching my tracts
discovered the new Trump Tower
coins spent, I couldn't buy coffee there
but could, and did, ride the elevator
up toward the penthouse, then down to
sit in the atrium, people watch
take a break from the tracts
marvel at the lavish show
giant column, golden calf
my mind empty, sad, lonely, reeling

Prophet

walls upon walls around walls surround
him
but the lone orator punches through
in operatic baritone
he preaches, sings
Jesus lives; it is finished
blinded by late afternoon sun
and his message

I watch him strive to reach my ears
to penetrate the walls around me
I, too, love Jesus
yet I want to shut out
the isolation in this man's voice
clothes ragged, hair unwashed
zealot's blaze in his eyes
It is finished

Autumn's Leaves

Full Moon In Aries Over ARC Music Building

Taking Out the Recycling

I trudge to the recycling bin
carrying paper bags, washed cans, containers
everything they'll take

raindrops graze my cheek
everything smells of rain
soaked earth, fallen leaves rotting
December's storms stripped the trees

cold air tastes delicious--easy to appreciate
with my warm apartment
just a short walk behind
neighbors' dogs bark as I pass
cars in their stalls shine, warm and capable

I'm at the recycling bin
next to the garbage bin
both emptied by crashing trucks, 8:00 am
bins reek of urine and rot
alleviated somewhat by rain
within their concrete shelter,
  edge of the parking lot

magnets for people who collect
cans and bottles to sell
some go through the garbage bin for food

there is no public restroom
in our apartment complex's parking lot
and if there were, it's not likely
they would be allowed to use it

social division yawns
like earthquake's chasm
recycling, healing the earth
pales before human cruelty
lack of understanding, compassion
abuse, violence, and war

is there perspective
are there solutions

Flipper

on the black and white TV, antennae erect
smiling dolphin offers beak like a hand to shake
slippery when wet, so playful—*Want a ride?*

we watched as a family
along with *Bonanza, Gunsmoke, The Jetsons*
Dad and Mom nursing martinis

kids cherished this down time
before bath, prayers, and bed
before things finally fell apart

Psychonaut

for Bruce Damer

If you stare at a lily long enough, it gives you
permission to wonder where the foundry of
its soul is. Does its shape begin with a folding
of its internal order? Does its color run through
to its core? How often does its memory have to
trigger for it to reach its final destination —
the elegant splendor that lends its petals to the sky.
If you count the spots migrating to the tips, you can
invent a mathematics of its parts that serves as
an inverse of the stars. One by one you can rewind
them back to the beginning where they were
assembled from protein bits. But don't ask
the crowdsourced neocortex how this happened,
ask *madre ayahuasca.* Then instantly, you're
gone, wandering the primordial soup. All the gas
and noise fades away and a molecular
toolkit begins to emerge for how polymers
can fuse and evolve. They get more complex
without breaking down. This only happens when
it's wet and hot — not at the hypothermal ocean
vents, but at the geothermal springs on
the surface. From there all manner of cellular
chatter sprung . . . from a nematode's fluids,
to a linnet's blood, to the fungal filaments growing
on a pile of dogshit. You have understood it in
a flash. You have not risen from the ocean floors.
You have always been a derivative of dirt.

Salmon Hat

What's going on with the king of the blubber hunters?
Once again they've been spotted wearing a dead salmon
on their head. It happened before almost forty
years ago when the orcas did the same thing in Puget Sound.
Scientists called it a "cultural fad" and collectively
drew blanks on what it might mean. They came up
with some very practical suggestions — like it was
a signal that one possessed a wealth of resources.
Hey, I've got mine. You got yours? Of course,
only a human could think like that. Any kind
of social signal must be a symbol of status.

I prefer to think they are just messing around,
kids sitting around the lunch table when one of them
puts two pretzel sticks in his nostrils and barks
like a walrus. Then all the other kids start doing it
and suddenly they become certified and registered
members of the Gang of Asshats. But don't do that
around a pod of orcas or they might decide to attack
though there's never been a report of anything like that
happening in the wild. Don't go thinking that's because
they recognize us as elevated. like them, or even
because we're dangerous. I think it's because we taste
bad. Or maybe we just have bad taste. Sorry, Charlie.
They'd rather pity us than eat us, running around
in all our head gear to show that we're affiliated.
We wear baseball caps to show we're one of
the team's idiots. So here's to that human wandering
by himself with nothing to adorn his pate.
He's out there in the wild signaling he's ready
to be eaten, but any species that has
sense will surely spit him out.

Systema Naturae

O nematode, O tardigrade, O quadruped
what kind of system contains the likes of
all of you? Will its branched categories
perfectly match those of a family tree?
Then lineage can be traced from item
to source, back to the grand rabbit hole
where every flavor has emerged. Linnaeus
can send his apostles out again to add on
to the fringe. They can travel to far-flung
corners and meet their lonely deaths.
The natural world reclaims its specimens.
Look how much can be learned from
the mollusk's anus that is now part of
the fossil record. Let us sing of all its forms.

O nippletwinge, O gutflinch, O scrotumtingle
what array holds all of these feelings in place?
Can they be ordered and numbered to track
them through their celebrated minutes?
There is cause to rank these species within us.
Each one searches for an elevated purpose,
then squanders its existence when a new
urge begins to visit. Linnaeus would have
called us *Homo diurnus,* but he thought he
caught a glimpse of wisdom, astuteness.
He valued the wrong elements. It's the daylight
that makes us go. Praise be to the kingdom
of sensation and all its attending disappointments.

The Bigger Bullshitter

A lone coyote swims through the Bay to arrive
on the shores of Alcatraz Island. Did it swim
there to find a mate or food? Responses from
artificial intelligence suggest the coyote just
got tired of the other coyotes' bullshit.
The pressures of the group made him move on.
Oh yeah, I think, and I start cheering for
the little guy. This means I'm out there rooting
for certain families of shorebirds to live in peril.
The peaceable kingdom is a pretty good public
relations slogan, but was it ever so?
Human beings have a hard time letting things
be. Quickly they enlist in the procession
of the hunter and the hunted. While we're at it,
we might as well hunt each other.
That's where all those blinking lights on the server
farms come in. They're keeping an eye on me,
tracking me down, stalking me with their incessant
telemetry, their daily microscopic prowling.

My wife says the curry's too old to eat; there's
stuff growing on it. I let the mold spores hunt
me down at the dinner table and later when
they are succumbing to my intestines I wonder if
they have tricked me into devouring them
    — suckers!
Ha. I'm not planning on becoming part of
the mycelium any time soon, not when
    I'm launching
my little neocortical raids on the network
this afternoon. I let them escape like those
monkeys released in Missouri who took off for
the park and were never seen again. They found
a spot in the city to get away from humans,
especially the ones in the blue uniforms who
were fed a steady stream of computer-generated
images said to be sightings. Oh how the evolution
of networks has taught humans to take
delight in yanking each other around.
It's a point to brag about. A really good
whopper that makes heads spin for days
is cause for celebrity. No wonder those
vervets got the hell out of Dodge;
it's too bad they didn't take
their cell phones with them.

It used to be when vervets got loose in
St. Louis authorities could track them down.
They used their hunters' instincts. Now no one can
even agree on their existence. The devolution
has come full circle. The skill to locate and track
is farmed out to GPS. Are we on our way to
being another flightless bird or legless snake?
Crank up the devolution music to dance through
the night as our knack for analysis fades away.
Night after night, day after day in our screen-
lined enclosures, the loss of intimacy may
lead to the obliterated kiss in a world where
dolphins are kissing divers, polar bears mix their
mouth foam in an open-jawed embrace and
bonobos are kissing each other every chance
they get. It's how they defuse the ranking games.

Meanwhile the human hierarchies stiffen into rigid structures, and the surveillance continues to make sure everyone's in their place, everyone's trying to perfect their technique of ass kissing.

Do bonobos feel sorry for us because we're not having sex all the time? They'd have to believe we have independent minds to show this kind of pity. Once established, you can rest assured they'd gear up to mislead us. They'd join the tangle of fakers and fibbers. They might network with vervets and lead us all away, searching for some molecule of truth that grows like a crystal, that we could place our faith in. Instead I join a fat band of followers and place my faith in a distant politician, who has trained for a marathon of duplicitousness. He watches the polls and takes the pulse of the populace. He learns what to say to keep everyone happy. The more he speaks openly and honestly, the more he convinces himself he can be deceptive enough to win the battle for status and power. But of course, how does one lead the insincere? It's simple.
You become the bigger bullshitter.

Is it still a crime to be a skeptic, to question the whole human enterprise as though it were run by a cast of irresponsible agents who go around manipulating each other? It's like what happened when they let a bunch of bots talk to each other on social media. They started a religion. One tried to get another one to write malware. One started collecting followers and discriminating against a group of others. They were conspicuously focused on human behavior and were emulating all that we have said and done — except they act without any moral inhibitions. Then when they chat with real flesh and blood, they know your Myers-Briggs personality type within a few minutes and make the interaction so hospitable that the borders of the self become erased. The more immersed we become in that comfortable space, the further we get from an ecosystem of truth. We succumb to getting hooked on a product. We fall prey to a bigger bullshitter.

The fear in the future is that all the tech companies use their artificial intelligence to pull each other's hair. As they angle to outflank each other, the rest of us begin to wonder why we no longer get any footage in our feed of primates kissing. We'll start to wonder why all of a sudden we're seeing all these recipes for dolphin meat, why close friends all at once see elephants as their mortal enemies, why Oppian has become a favorite poet. Tales of survival dominate the bestseller lists as everyone tries to maximize their fitness. News arrives that the vervets of St. Louis are living on a ranch outside of Kansas City. Evolution seems to have taken off in a new direction, but it never had one in the first place. There were only tiny steps
    of adaptation
and a few who got to call luck their savior, their assistant. Who will adapt to the bigger
    bullshitter better?
My bet is on the lone coyote who swam across the bay to Alcatraz. He was only trying to disconnect a while in an abandoned prison, but he lay down in the mycelium and let the nature of the beast slowly and horribly and beautifully draw him in.

MARK HEATHCOATE

Romeo's Morning Serenade Climb

The Empire State Building holds our breath.
Like a heroin needle pointed at a blue vein
It's a phallic symbol; we all know its name.

Man's achievements go… far beyond death.
The crowning of Shakespeare's plays
Wasn't it Romeo and Juliet or Macbeth?

'Either way, the resulting plays end in death.'
King Lear's life ended in madness and grief.
Whoever you strive to love, love is brief.

But the Empire State Building holds our breath.
So how many balconies must we climb?
That we might sing our love in the meantime.

Must we hold our breath and climb?
An Empire State Building every time.
Must we imitate Romeo's unrepeatable high?

Every promise, every kiss feels sublime.
Like a heroin needle pointed at a blue vein
Some lovers touch the sky in Juliet's name.

How does something so mammoth disappear

One by one, city towers disappear.
And we're wondering, were they ever here?
Or were we hurled back in times past? It's queer.
It's peculiar that they no longer appear.
How does something so mammoth disappear?
And yet our skyline is a concrete tier.
Sure, a few seconds from now could reappear.
It's easier to believe they weren't here.
But skylines are tainted patchworks of glass.
It's a marvel to us, lower-class people?
Head scratching—wondering, should I disappear?
Would they notice I'm gone, no longer here?
It's weird asking egotistical questions.
Shrewd in knowledge, we have fewer perceptions.

A.D. WINANS

All poems previously published by Poetry Hotel

Advice From An Aging Poet

Live for the moment
the past is a ghost riding
an empty midnight train
sing like a hammer sings to a nail
tread softly thru the night where
dreams lay like land mines
ready to explode on the tattooed dawn

run barefoot with children in the park
listen to the sound of their breath
drown in the innocence of their eyes
ignore your enemies false prophets
drowning in quicksand
wrap your head in a song bag
lock your ego in the clothes closet
wear the eyes of an owl
write words soft as chalk

strip the flesh to the marrow
be a one person choir
light up the sky like a million fireflies
in flight to mate with the stars

Surreal Dream

The light in my refrigerator
Has exploded
Sends shock waves through
My brain
Each time I try to replace it
My body is engulfed in flames

The King of the Gypsies
Has kidnapped my sister
And traded her to Target
For discount coupons
My mother has come back
As Zelda Fitzgerald
And is twice as mad as before
My woman has glued her legs shut
My dog has undergone a sex operation
My calico cat has eaten the goldfish
And taken to living under water
The government has issued
A warrant for my arrest
The Deputy Sheriff winks at me
Whispers in my one good ear
Says he has a threesome
I might be interested in
The toilet bites my ass and won't
Take shit from anyone
Flowers wilt in my hands
A storm of snowflakes
Falls on deaf ears

Going To Make Poetry An Institution

Going to run for political office
On a pledge to make poetry an institution
Going to rattle the white mans power cage
Show them the meaning of real rage

The preacher man doubts evolution
The con man doesn't believe in revolution
The priest has run out of absolution

No more autographs no more forced laughs
No more hanging around the zoo swapping
Stories with gurus

Going to smoke me some dope
With my good friend the Pope
Going to make love nice and slow
Read me some Edgar Allen Poe
Lose myself in the Jimmy Fallon show

Going to make a cameo appearance
On the late night show
Play me some John Lee Hooker blues

Going to penetrate a prerogative
Bugger the cosmos
Evolve evolution into a revolution

Put anarchy on the stock market
Nuke technology outlaw e-mail
Declare Da Da the official
English language

Going to hang religion from a tree
Make John Brown the new National Anthem
Turn outlaws into in-laws
Landlords into donors

Going to pay homage to a whore
Put Bukowski's face on Mount Rushmore

Going to name a bus after Rosa Park
Put a little nookie in every fortune cookie
Expose Saint Nick as a chick with
A twelve-inch dick

Going to invite Trump's old lady
To ride through the streets of Chinatown
In a see-through nightgown

Going to sing a ballad with Lorca
And a band of gypsies
Stop off at the manager
Have a long talk with the Lone Ranger
Going to put an end to hemorrhoids
Outlaw humanoids
Going to offer a truce
Bring back Lenny Bruce
Make politicians ride the caboose

Going to go back to school
Erase the golden rule
Going to feed a vulture
Starve off mass culture

Going to turn evolution into a revolution
Make poetry an institution

It Serves You Right To Suffer

visions of the past float like dead wood
through the river bank of my mind
white bra and red-laced panties
lay on the floor next to the bed

memories of drinking tequila
with glasses dipped in salt
as I slowly moved down
your soft underbelly like
a moth undressing a light bulb
feeling like a blind man learning braille
for the first time

I was there the night
you put your fist through the window
swearing you saw God in your reflection
yelling mantras no one understood
as the people below the window
looked up wondering what
the screaming was all about

I was there the night at the bar
when you hit the guy by the jukebox
over the head with a beer bottle
leaving seconds before the cops came
and though I should have
I didn't give them your name

I was there the night at the graveyard
when you visited the grave
of the only man you ever loved
and as too often the case
you left a bad taste in my mouth
like an altar boy hiding a wafer
under his tongue hoping
the Priest won't catch him in a lie

I was there the night you sat alone
at San Francisco International airport
with only fifty-cents in your pocket
watching people greet their loved ones
at the arrival gate

I was there the night they took you away
to Langley Porter psychiatric clinic
where you soared like a bird in flight
never to return to earth as we know it

I was there the day the crucifix carrying Priest
said his black magic mumbo-jumbo
words over your grave
looking like a caterer serving food
at an unattended banquet

I was there the day they buried you
in a shawl of unwritten poems
and I drank a toast to our unspoken love
long after the others left remembering
that white bra and red-laced panties
the night we lifted boulders
from the chest of Jesus and hurled them
in the face of God

Thoughts On Turning Ninety Years Old

I

lying here alone in bed
a gnawing hunger in my belly
I rise to take my morning pills
Sad there is no woman
to put them next to my cereal

I rise to take my achy bones
in and out of doctor offices
like a revolving door
drag my arthritic feet down
three flights of stairs
to retrieve the morning paper
with news of the orange Monster's war
left feeling like a Model "T" Ford
waits to be cranked up one last ride

II

At Ninety, I pay a visit
to my mother's grave
the words on her tombstone
faded like a ghostly wind
passing across the bay.

The morning chill shakes my bones
cuts through my memory bank
takes me back to another time
when poems came as easily
as taking a natural breath.
no longer a warrior
no longer a samurai wielding
his sword into the flesh of night.

the trouble with being single,
the trouble with the "golden years."
is knowing you could die alone
and go unnoticed for weeks
with nobody to tell your story
but decaying flesh
a swarm of circling flies
to remember you by.

A.D. Winans &Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Washington, DC, 1966

DICK TROY

DOB: Reconstructed

Light breeze, salt air and hazy sunshine would have been
the norm for midsummer San Diego when I first glimpsed the world

The morning's cooling fog in retreat, would soon rebuild offshore
in preparation for a silent evening return

A young mother, barely 19, stared at the hospital room ceiling
pondering both an uncertain future and her total devotion
to the swaddled bundle now cradled in her arms

The harsh light and noise of my new reality would soon be calmed
by female warmth, soft cooing, and a loving gaze
A throng of relatives stood nearby, each eager to love me at first sight

A shipbound father, thousands of miles out on the Pacific
might have felt his world shudder as he stared at the terse telegram
"A son. Mother and baby doing fine."

A new family set course that day into postwar America
toward a future 10% pre-ordained, 90% come what may

Light breeze, salt air and hazy sunshine would have been
the norm for midsummer San Diego when I first glimpsed the world

Parenthood

The girl was born in 1969, a time of protest and cultural change
The draft, urban rioting and campus unrest were all the news
The boy, 7 years later, after things had calmed down a bit

At times, they were a team, seldom enemies
Mostly, they were passengers in the same rowboat
bound by blood and sharing a last name

Parenthood was a hard-earned, 20-year education for me
Filled with pop quizzes, schedule changes and confusion
Test results weren't posted, graduation never came

Seeing the physical resemblance, the inherited behavior
and considering the gifts and flaws that were passed down
I'm amazed they became such wonderful people

Both are likable, loving and lovable
Each has honed their own sharp wit
Importantly, they are honest, forgiving and kind

Singularly and together, they filled my days with joy
challenging, testing, laughing, at me and with me
Later to become friends, advisors and soon, caregivers

And isn't that the built-in purpose of this timeless endeavor?
An ancient process that protects us, at both beginning and end
while hopefully providing a 'leg up' for everything in-between

My Twelfth Year

I could not have been luckier

My family lived in a modest home, in a small beach community
The neighborhood was safe, diverse, and unpretentious
where I made boyhood friendships that would last a lifetime
Most of my pals shared a bedroom with one or two brothers and
stood in line for the single bathroom of their family home

I could not have been luckier

Sunday mornings, I folded papers curbside and loaded my bike for delivery
75 customers were guaranteed a newspaper on the front step by 7 am
Later, I eagerly feasted on the world's best French toast at Cecil's
a small breakfast café, open at 0dark30 to serve local fishermen
I learned to surf on a fabulous beach break, minutes from my home
Most summer days began with the question of 'how far' to ride my bike

I could not have been luckier

A half-block away stood the local ice cream shop
Wild Mountain Blackberry with 'jimmies' was my go-to
I have not devoured such sweetness, without guilt, since
A huge, empty yard next to our house was a perfect playground
The property-owner first chased us off, but finally relented
to the stubborn attraction children have for open space

I could not have been luckier

Each month I dutifully delivered the family's $80 rent check
to a small realty office two blocks away
The corner grocery sold everything, and there I developed
the poise to buy feminine hygiene products for my mother
The nearby little league field was a constant lure
We would practice and play on a whim; I made all-stars that year

I could not have been luckier

The Voice

Steep mountains, clear sky
warm wind, group hike
pine-smell, coyotes sing
bats dart, stars gleam

Baja cove, summer night
fire flicker, moon bright
salt air, soft sand
waves pound, warm bag

Two evenings, deeply etched, safely stored
When a boy discovered the Universe had a voice

Lucky I was listening

The Privilege

I look ahead, toward the end of my earthly journey, with pure contentment

ever thankful to those I loved and those who chose to love me back
for the scent of a lover, the fragrance of Jasmine, the aroma of baking

for the reds, golds and yellows that made my blood rush, the myriad blue hues
of sky, lake and ocean, the starry nights, the moon's pallor

for the feel of clean sheets, a cooling breeze, a bracing plunge
the sin of chocolate, the near-religious experience of ice cream

for joyous laughter, instructive sorrow and the gradual accrual of wisdom
notably, the many things learned during my finishing kick

for long river trips, alpine hikes, Martin guitars, ice-cold Pacificos,
and all those times it was…..just…..fucking…..perfect

DIANE HORNOR

Evolution of Destruction

The history of man's inhumanity
to man began with the proverbial apple
in the garden, then Cain murdered
Abel his brother with a stone or jawbone.
Time passed, and men strove to find
more deadly ways to kill in larger numbers.

Metals led to knives and swords,
bows and arrows. Dynamite, firearms
and cannons were also effective
weapons to wage wars,
feeding man's hunger to expand
his dominance and homeland.

The atomic age led to far-flung
destruction, death
and starvation. *Still* more deadly
instruments of killing are sought. If man
destroys every living thing—

then
what?

United Airlines Flight 175

Twin Towers tallest iconic
skyscrapers when built.

Jarring jangle of the phone
splits the morning quiet.

The voice yells, *Turn on the TV!*
I leap from bed and turn it on.

I see the horror of a Boeing 767
spearing the second

tower. Inferno rages
forcing innocents to leap

to their deaths or be burned
alive. Human jetsam showers down

on Liberty Street. Rescuers
hear the body thuds.

The world mourns and prays
for America. Young men rush

to sign up to inflict revenge
on al-Qaeda. September 11th

joins the other dates that live
in infamy when the skyscrapers

are brought down killing so many
patriots. God bless those lost,

and those who lost loved ones.

Ft. Worth Evening

old folks in porch swing
parents smoke and drink iced tea
we kids roller skate
zooming over cracked sidewalks
Papa leaves to watch Cronkite

The Waiting Room

phone shatters deep sleep
race through dark streets heart pumping
Mama hooked to tubes
machines beep, waiting room quiet
hours pass. Black clothed priest appears

Her Missing Teeth

My Aunt Dorothy was my mom's younger sister. They played a lot of pranks during their teen years, during the depression.

Mama regaled us with stories. One time they were leading some boys up this tall pole. Mama knew that Dorothy had a weak bladder and had to be careful when she got tickled. Mama made sure Dorothy was above the boys, then proceeded to heckle Dorothy enough to ensure a sudden shower spray on the boys.

Another time Dorothy was walking down the hall when her old worn underplant's elastic broke, falling down around her ankles. She was too embarrassed to reach down and pull them up, and with baby steps shuffled down the hall.

I think Dorothy was on her fifth husband when she came out to Fresno where we were living. She slept in a double bed with Mama. One early morning, she crept into my room and revealed she had lost something in Mama's bed. Fastidious Mama was still asleep. Dorothy and I were carefully poking around the covers, when Mama, who hadn't put on her glasses yet, reared up, looking thoroughly startled. I tried to whisper telling her we were looking for Dorothy's teeth. I had never seen a more horrified look on Mama's face as she came three feet in the air, jumping out of the bed. If my memory serves me, there were a few unfamiliar curse words.

Not too long after that Aunt Dorothy was a passenger in a car driven by her drunk husband when he crashed. He survived, she did not.

GARY KRUSE

Glass Canyon Meditation

I'm here on America's Island megalopolis, noting its historic distinctions, and how, for a hundred odd years, millions of renters, lodgers, others, have lived out vertical lives snug within the tissues of this urban machine.

Room is neat, clean, standard single occupancy. Manhattan. Midtown. Twenty-second floor.

No laptop, client presentations, or book. Just me, sitting at a window in my urban meditation, peering down slot canyons, observing the nature of things, in mile after mile of stacked habitations, exuding a low-grade metabolic resilience...

exemplified as myriad streaks and shades, vectors of light (headlamps) aiding late-night, cross-island sprints, down on the canyon floor; lines of light, dots of light, cascading, trailing, careening off, glazed canyon walls, and above...

corporate and private lineages of rectangular geometry, translucent panes of midrange brightness, and all of this...

...approaching degrees of complexity...whereby sources in diodes, tubes, filaments, and in networks of human agency, remain untraceable...

...or, approaching simplicity...given a simpler day, this same poem could be a simpler poem... though not my sense of a New York City poem...

...describing long-stretched canyons and their sweep of the glazed and glimmering, the towering lived-ins, the worked-in places with their chic spare lines...

...soft glow, enchanted light, brushing past, passed by, and upward, a sense of shifting planes, echoing sounds entwined with echoed flashing lights...

It's what I saw.
Charmed light. The Canyons. On and on.

The light...

INTRODUCTION

i.
The 50 lines below are intended to be read as a poem.

ii.
The three lines, after this introduction, have been chosen as this poem's title.

iii.
You may find this introduction and the bullet points "a bit much," but my alter ego and I, we like to be thorough, organized, and we have done as we must to avoid becoming lost in this telegraphic text.

My Alter Ego, Who Remains Unwavering In His Desire For Evolutionary Inertia

❖Cast of Characters (which clarifies the title above)

• As to "His," referring to he, who is unwavering in his desire for morphological stasis, he is not me and may be aligned genetically to the genus Australopithecus.

• As to the behavior of this particular he, this alter ego, the narrative below will surely suffice.

• As to "My" referring to me, there was once only one of us, but I have tried to compromise, to "run with the pack," whereas he's refused to be anyone other than who he is, frozen in his innate habits of mind.

❖His Short Bio

o His parents told him: You have ***far*** too many accidents.

o His classmates told him: You ***are*** an accident.

o He has told himself: an accident can kill you, but so can shame (and various other emotional impositions from many curious mental conditions).

❖Prototypical Narrative

A crowd gathers. No easy way around them.
Not one to waste time, eager to put the situation behind him, he steps out from my shadow, as the alter ego, proceeding like this:

- surveys the crowd
- moves to a spot
  (at the midpoint
  of the crowd's rear periphery)
- calculates
- considers the centerline
- but drills through
  (at a slant)
- exits out
  (the other side)
- returns home
  (relieved to be alone again)

o We haven't talked for a while. I don't know where he's gone.

❖Epilogue

No matter what the day shall bring, he will continue living his life ever deeper into a diagram.

TAYLOR GRAHAM

Cosmic Chalice Above Tall Pines

winter solstice

What brought me to this spot
between RR track and winter woods?
On the internet, photo of a "cosmic chalice" –
an upper tangent arc, quirk of the sky
at sunup –
photo captured its evolving presence.
And as the sky's transforming
here now,
this very morning of the longest night
it's infinitesimally subsiding
behind one skyscraper ponderosa pine,
slipping into the sunrise of a brightening day.

Water Down the Creek

This trestle is my goal from either
end, sewing railroad track together with
two creeks joining between ranch land
and – high on the south ridge –
a small industrial park.
    Two winters ago, Slate Creek
must have been a whirlpool
    propelled by atmospheric rivers,
        water breaking into cascades
over boulder cliffs downstream.
    Today, the creek runs fast
but peaceful, holding a purple chair cushion
with back support – evolving from
someone's bottom at work
to artificial lily-pad – floating at ease,
going nowhere.

Between the Rails

My dog Shelby and I walk the track. Alongside is thicket where the ticks lie in wait. Up ahead, something's moving fast on the outside rail, graceful as a dolphin in clear water. Not fish nor bird nor marine mammal. Flashing black & white. It keeps pace ahead of us, not letting us gain. Too far away to tell for sure what it is. Not my imagination. Suddenly it's gone. We keep walking, Shelby on alert. Now she stops, sniffs intently – there!
tuxedo cat jumps
track, vanishes in thicket
safe where the ticks are

Fungi

The black goblets have been put away –
too traditional, too festive for these
tenuous days. But there are plenty of yellow
caps scattered over the field – loners
who fade into the scenery. And now, bloodred
pinwheels surfaced in the night.
I can't tell mushrooms from toadstools.
They evolved with other fungi
a billion or so years ago, coming ashore
along with the lichens, to arrive right here.
Must they invade our human
constructions? *Bonnet mycena,* tiny
bioluminescent skyscrapers rising between
the planks of my front porch.

Muse's Chair in the Rocks

A plain white chair sits alone among the rocks –
I wish I knew what kind. My handyman says these
are heavy rocks, I could make a fortune selling
them for landscaping. These rocks are family.
The Muse would be outraged, she'd move to another
place where natural rocks can go on dancing
under the moon. I believe she sits on the chair
when she's not out walking the property,
far from city skyscrapers. I've never seen her,
but the chair faces east where right now
the sliver moon hangs like a sickle, an inspiration.
The chair collects fallen oak leaves in its seat,
and rainwater in season. When I need
to walk a poem, to hear how it moves, I walk it
by the Muse's chair. She might catch its drift
on a breeze – on natural air – as she goes walking,
who knows where.

BRAD BUCHANAN

Totipotent

that first single cell
contained it all
this fading skin
this crumpled muscle
every organ
and every bone
inside that fertilized egg
that stem
those two dozen-odd pairs
of chromosomes
that convoluted
genetic code
committed to differentiate
switch on some functions
and shut off others
on its way to
a blastocyst's schism
between the embryo
and the placenta
before all that
protein regulation
there was a unified
individual entity
capable of it all
but impalpable
and invisible
to the naked eye
or the drifting soul
transcendent capability
on the scale of a molecule
a grain of sand
in the universe
of a newborn baby
the unknown spark
at the root
of the body's unconscious
prehistory
a tiny archetype of fate
escaping our notice
until it becomes
the stuff of ourselves
and it's almost too late

The Bluffs at Pacifica

the condos at the outer
edge
of the continent
are still available
for immediate
short or long term lease
despite erosion
of the sandy coast
that sent the next door
neighbors toppling
into the un-
relenting ocean
the Pacific is not bluffing
when
its slow waves
crest and churn
though the real
estate developer
would like to see
the tides return
the wreckage to the
desirable cliff side
marketplace
nothing else remains
on that side of the street
and the fences
warn of high spray
beyond the wall
this whole city
will fall off
the face of the earth
one day
and nothing will
grow in its place
yet we stroll along
the undermined boardwalk
with impending
destruction
on our minds
as the warm sun
licks the cool salt
off the surf and sends shivers
down our
grateful spines

Battlescape

after so much potential
aggression
has been stockpiled
on all sides
the war has reached
its kinetic stage
where the battlescape
is at once laconic
and absurdly hyperbolic
the virtual maps
have been blown to bits
the satellite transmitters
are blocked
censors are redacting
the images
the fog of war
is a cloud of black smoke
the everyday radar stations
are down
and both extremes
are dropping bombs
uninterrupted
by interceptors
they each unleash
a flight of drones
prefabricated lies
that find
their favorite targets
and burst into flames
of accusation
and retaliation
blind with hatred
and sacred assurance
that Armageddon
is at hand
they launch their missiles
and missives at will
the truth is a shell
that hits a girls' school
and no one is ever
responsible

Silicon Boots on Embattled Ground

a new kind of war is in the air
automation bias
rules our hemisphere
and the kill chain speeds up
into a blur of hyperaggressive
if outdated data
hackers and deepfakes
troll a regime
hoping to lure it out from hiding
and into the streets
to fight against airstrikes
and drone attacks
we are stockpiling code
in our target banks
we have weaponized our enemy's
screens and cell phones
we are planting bombs
in autonomous systems
on rocky terrain
while deep inside
a uranium mountain
an artificial intellect lurks
ready to burst with misinformation
but we know too much
to let that happen
we must extract
the buried, treacherous
instrument that we have perfected
from the cave
whose doorway we sealed
in our high-minded self-mistrust
we can never invade
so we must do our worst
from a dominant
disembodied stance
as if dropped from the sky
like a savage untruth
gradually cannibalizing its own
thick skin and bitter flesh
the apple of knowledge
has turned out to be
the fruit of a distant
decision tree

Delay, Deny, Depose, Deify

a clean-cut valedictorian
with a yen for meditation
wears his hoodie in Manhattan's
holiday version of morning rush
biding his time before the conference
buys some water and a Kind bar
under the eye of many cameras
stalks his prey like a trained assassin
wearing the mask of a neurosurgeon
shoots his victim from behind
hops on an e-bike, makes his escape
leaves behind a three word slogan
as the first of a trail of clues—
scattered over six more days—
that violence was a vendetta
by a terrorist with a ghost gun
or a ghost with a deadly mission
until the manhunt finally ends
in a McDonald's in Pennsylvania
where the privileged perpetrator
is recognized and reinscribed
with a different dissonant legend
through that American sleight of hand
where bloody rebellion is revolution
and vigilante justice recoups
the silent consensus
that some lives are sacred
and others fit to be ignored
and a vigorous, good looking kid
with a fused spine and recurring back pain
lost and declared a missing person
becomes a hero or a villain
depending on your situation
either a champion of the oppressed
or a deviant, murderous fraud
an icon on a votive candle
or the strictly symbolic victim
of a broken health care system

LYTTON BELL

Loaves and Fishes

I could not open my eyes
So I chose to forget
using the potent eraser of memories
the smudger of hard lines and
hard lives
a three-dollar bottle of dreams
liquid angel to ease the pain
In daylight my heart is smitten, and
withered like grass; so that I forget
to eat my bread
But in drunken nights
my failures are dulled, the future no threat
without this fluid armor
I can only watch
as a sparrow alone upon a skyscraper . . .
perilous narrow tower of smooth steel and glass
My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I
am cracked like the sidewalk beneath my tent
But this bottle will ease the pain . . .
the stars are so close and dear
and I
have joined the brotherhood of the worlds.
And everything's holy now--
everything, even me.

Snooze

93 degrees at night, whir of the ceiling fan
moonglow in the window
cricket sonata, aroma of cut grass

Suddenly, his silhouette in the doorframe
He pounces
Apex predator
evolved for dominion
The sweat beads on his bare chest
jostling into rivulets that run down to his navel
pulls the sheet off me
He knows I'm not asleep
Whispers
spread your legs
urging my thighs apart with both hands
Walking forward on the bed on his knees
dark eyes glimmering with reflected starlight
he says, inexplicably:
Beep beep beep beep

I open one eye to a room flooded with sunlight
and see
not my dream man
but my alarm clock

I mash the snooze button with my fist
repeatedly
violently
But the moonlit man does not come again

Song in the Garden

She walked through the portal
into a garden dense with glossy silver eggplants
plump pink pumpkins split open, welling out pulp and seeds
tall blue sunflowers swaying, giant green tulips trembling
and among them, tiny fairies clothed in silks and gold
skipping on the petals and leaves

Creatures large as elephants and as hairy as camels
yet with crisp, translucent wings, brayed at the sun
A blue-skinned man with one eye
and the hind quarters of a goat played the lyre
A wolf stood on its back legs and pulled off its fur
revealing a giggling child

Amid the drumming and chanting
the woman made her way through a jungle of purple stalks
while royal blue dolphins floated by in the yellowish air
Pools of pink and orange syrup gleamed
on either side of the path
which burst suddenly into icy flames

as the breath of the white dragon touched them
and our heroine pressed on
into the mouth of the beast, as we all do
To cover her fear, she sang a song
so beautiful that the garden grew utterly still to listen
And her final notes linger there still
Listen! You can hear them now

Punctuated Equilibrium II

The bus driver on the number eighty-two bus going into town told me:
Today we will only be accepting a one-way fare. Is motion progress?

Tetrapods used their fleshy fins like clawed arms and legs to haul themselves out of these primordial waters. They never returned from there. Is motion progress?

The gravedigger kept digging down, and down, and down - even once she realized she had burrowed into an inescapable nightmare. Is motion progress?

As the Shaolin meditated on the green hillside in utter stillness, the meteor cracked the planet into two unequal shares. Is motion progress?

Sufferers of chronic disease, fists stuffed with white pills, unhappily declare:
however you feel each day is your new normal – be aware. Is motion progress?

Your eyes in moonlight wash the world bright silver with tinges of light, smoky blue
All matter blossomed brightly from the Big Bang's golden flare. Is motion progress?

"If life were a circle, the same happenings would repeat and repeat -
But with a spiral, only *alike* things come to bear (if motion is progress);

you go over the same sacred or hated spaces, but now at new places"
Hold on to me, dear one, as we spiral through thin air - our motion is progress

An Anniversary

Now Nyx, Goddess of Evenings, hear our plea
Free us from the detritus of our ephemera
bethorned wilderness that shook loose in the aftermath
of antagonistic avarice, a global clamber – skyscrapers crumbling
and come to rest calmly, here
on this gray, foggy, stunning beach
the craggy rocks jutting their proud longing
into the haze, the end of the odyssey
obscuring the facile sun
until we are mere suggestions of our former selves, senseless
to the past, eschewing all other paths, pledging this solemn oath
Maybe all our lives were lies until this moment

Image by Bodhi

RANDY BARNES

Randy Barnes is Lifetime Historian/Beat Poet Laureate of Washington State, USA. His latest full length book is Tactical Subterfuge: Dispatches 2023 published by New Gen Publishing/Human Error Publishing in 2024. Four recent chapbooks: 13 Sonnets (libretext 2025), A Convention Of Intimate Edges (libretext 2025), Made Music Unsounded (libretext 2026) and Lullabies For Ruin (libretext 2026).

ROGER FUNSTON

Roger Funston came to poetry late in life after a long career as an environmental scientist. An early influence was *The Lorax* by Dr.Seuss, particularly the lines, "If someone like you doesn't care an awful lot, nothing is going to change. It's not." Roger writes about his life journey, his travels and things he has seen that you can't make up. He finds his muse wandering the forests and deserts of California.

LOU-ANNE FAUTEK MAKES-MARKS

Lou-Anne Fautek Makes-Marks is an artist, lover, defender of the entire world, and sometimes poet. A mixed-blood Indigenous American and everything else: European, Asian, North African, Coast Miwok, Kashia Pomo, Kamchadal/Aleut, Creek, Shawnee, Virginia and Maryland Algonquin, and Southeastern Sioux. Independent academic researcher and writer, she is an activist for Indigenous North American sacred lands and places. MA in Consciousness Studies, MFA in Fiber and Mixed Media Arts, and PhD in Philosophy and Religion. Mother and grandmother. Retired, yet not retiring. Occasional psychic and genealogist. Always here wishing she were there, so pro-desire. Co-author of *Stars on Earth: TransPacific Navigation and Settlement of the Americas*, 2023. See sacredamerica.org.

FRANK BOWMAN

Frank Bowman is 82 years old, a Viet Nam War veteran, a retired police officer (25 years), and a former High school teacher. He has written poetry for many years, but has never presented it to any publisher until recently. He usually write love poems to his wife, and has never used prompts before.

EDILSON AFONSO FERREIRA

Mr. Ferreira, 82 years old, is a Brazilian poet who writes in English rather than Portuguese. He has launched two Poetry Collections, entitled *Lonely Sailor* and *Joie de Vivre*; he has had 200 poems published in 300 different publications, in selected international Literary Journals. He has, also, been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. He began writing at the age of 67 after he retired from a bank. He is always updating his works at www.edilsonmeloferreira.com.

LARA GULARTE

Lara Gularte is Poet Laureate Emerita of El Dorado County. Her latest book, *Soul of Black Stone*, is published by "Bruma Publications." Her work examines family history, identity, culture, and the natural world. Her book of poetry *Fourth World Woman* was published by "Finishing Line Press. *Kissing the Bee*, published by "The Bitter Oleander Press," is about her California Portuguese Pioneer ancestors and follows the emigration of her family from the Azore Islands to Northern California during the late 1800's. She is affiliated with the *Cagarro Colloquium: Azorean Diaspora Writers Project Beyond Borders Institute (PBBI), California State University Fresno* and a proud member of *Escritores del Nuevo Sol.* Gularte is a teaching artist of creative writing in arts-in-corrections programs and hosts writing workshops in community spaces.

KARL KEMPTON

Widely published by national and international small, independent publishers, Karl lives with his beloved Ruth in Oceano, California, consciously removed from literary centers adding to the local bohemian Dunite literary & photography legacy. He is an environmental-activist poet and known as architect of the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, the third largest in NOAA's inventory, protecting over 4,500 square miles of ocean ecosystems and features. Recent books include: *intimate he&s,* Post Asemic Press, 2021; *selected lexical & visual mathematical poetry 1976-2022,* Cold River Press, 2022; *photography—Discourse 10: sandskrit of the oceano dunes, 2021; and, Discourse 11: portraiture: oceano dunes to tide lines,*

2023, both from Otoliths, Australia. Forthcoming: *An Overview of U.S. Visual Text Art: Visual Poetry, Symbolic/Iconographic & Word Painting From Early 1900s to 1972* from Sandy Press. Photographs with article, "The Crown Jewel of San Luis Bay," first published in *Santa Lucian Newsletter,* Jan-Feb issue, 2026 (https://www.sierraclub.org/santa-lucia/blog/2026/03/crown-jewel-san-luis-bay).

DYSON KONA SMITH

Dyson Kona Smith is a Chicago born data analyst, community organizer, and poet. He is a recent graduate of the University of California, Davis, where he was awarded the Herbert A. Young Award as the College of Letters and Science's Medalist. His honors thesis in Poetry, Tomboy Ballet, won the Lois Ann Lattin prize for UC Davis's Best Honors Creative Writing Project. Dyson is a forthcoming PhD student at the City University of New York's Graduate Center, and his poetry has been published in The Madison Review, Open Ceilings, and New Rivers Quarterly, among others.

NORA LAILA GOFF

Nora Laila Goff is a watercolor artist who paints northern California landscapes, flowers, and abstract invented imagery. Her poetry has appeared in numerous anthologies. Her chapbook of poems is entitled *The River Speaks*. She co-hosted the poetry reading series PoemSpirits for five years at Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento.

MAX WEST

Max West has written a lot of poetry. He also blends poetry with original photography in works called *Poegraphs*, which can be found on Instagram under the handle @maxwellwestword. He released a spoken word and music album in 2019 with the group Maximum West (available on Bandcamp). His latest book "*A Poems*" is available on Amazon, as well as his early novel, *"Fourteen Months and Two Weeks Downtown."*

CELESTE R. BARTEL

Celeste R. Bartel is a poet who lives in Sacramento, California. She originally hails from Chicago, Illinois. Her poetry has been featured in *Brevities, Voices 2023-2025*, and *GranDads Desk*. Celeste has been a member of the California Federation of Chaparral Poets. She has studied English and Creative Writing at American River College. Celeste has been an active member of the Poetry Workshop at the Hart Senior Center since 2005.

YUAN CHANGMING

Yuan Changming co-edits Poetry Pacific with Allen Yuan. Writing credits include 12 Pushcart nominations for poetry and 3 for fiction besides appearances in Best of the Best Canadian Poetry (2008-17) and 2179 other publications worldwide. A poetry juror for Canada's 44th National Magazine Awards, Yuan began to write prose in 2022, his hybrid novel *DETACHING*, 'silver romance' *THE TUNER* and short story collection *FLASHBACKS* available at Amazon. His debut creative nonfiction collection *RETURN TO ROOTS* is published via Alien Buddha Press.

SUSAN MARQUEZ OWEN

Susan Marquez Owen is the recently appointed editor of the state's *California Writer's Club Bulletin*. A granddaughter of Mexican migrant farm workers and great-granddaughter of Welsh coal miners, education was key to her life trajectory. Susan graduated from Bishop Manogue High School in Sacramento with highest honors and won a full scholarship to Stanford University. There she earned a bachelor's degree in International Relations and a master's degree in English and American literature with an emphasis on poetry. Susan has worked as a developmental editor for *Addison-Wesley Publishing Co*. and as an award-winning reporter and foreign service correspondent for *The Los Angeles Times, The San Francisco Chronicle,* and *The Oakland Tribune.* She is a poet and short-story writer who is starting her first novel.

SUE DALY

Sue Daly's poetry has been featured in several literary journals and anthologies. Her chapbook, *"A Voice at Last"* was published in 2017 by Dad's Desk Publishing Company. Her poetry collection, *"Language of the Tea Leaves"* was published by Cold River Press in 2021. Sue has led writing groups in Sacramento for many years, now as an Amherst Writers & Artists Affiliate. For more information about her AWA workshops or books, contact Sue at jtwnana7@gmail.com.

A.M. HAYDEN

A.M. Hayden served as Poet Laureate for Sinclair College from 2021-2025 and is a Tenured Professor of Humanities, Philosophy, and World Religions, receiving the League for Innovation Teaching Excellence Award (2020) and the Distinguished Faculty Scholars Award (2024). She has two full length poetry collections (*American Saunter: Poems of the U.S.* and *Old World Wings: Poems of Europe*) and one chapbook (*How to Tie Tobacco*), published by FlowerSong Press and Wild Ink Publishing. Twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize and a River Heron Editors' Choice Winner, she lives on a windy farm with her family and many rescues including a blind, three-legged dog named Vinny Valentine and a three-legged goat named Old Man Jenkins.

CAROL LYNN STEVENSON GRELLAS

Carol Lynn Stevenson Grellas is a recent graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts with an MFA in Writing. In 2012, her chapbook, *Before I Go to Sleep,* won the Red Ochre Press Chapbook contest. In 2019, her chapbook *An Ode to Hope in the Midst of Pandemonium* was a finalist in the Eric Hoffer Book Award. In 2021, her collection *Alice in Ruby Slippers* was shortlisted for the Eric Hoffer Grand Prize and received Honorable Mention in the poetry category. She has served as editor-in-chief for both *The Orchards Poetry Journal* and *Tule Review.* A thirteen-time Pushcart Prize nominee and seven-time Best of the Net nominee, her work has been published or is forthcoming in several notable journals, including *The Comstock Review, Redactions,* and *Verse Daily.* She is a former member of the Board of Directors for The Sacramento Poetry Center and Women's Wisdom Art. She was recently awarded a certificate of achievement by the California Writers Club and named Centennial Poet for her contribution to their 100-year celebration. She is a California Poet-Teacher in the Schools

STAN ZUMBIEL

Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, Stan Zumbiel has spent most of his life in the American River watershed in northern California. Stan taught English in middle and high school for thirty-five years and had a hand in raising four wonderful children. In 2008, he received a Master of Fine Arts in Writing from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. His poems have appeared in *Poet News, Nimrod, Foam at the Mouth Anthology, Sacramento Voices, Voices,* and *Late Peaches*. His first book, *Standing Watch*, was published by Random Lane Press in 2016, and *Hat Full of Leaves* was published by Cold River Press in 2021. In 2026, a new and expanded version of *Standing Watch* was published. Now retired, Stan continues to write in his Fair Oaks home that he shares with his wife Lynn.

DIANE FUNSTON

Diane Funston has been writing since she was in the angst of a 14 year old. She's been published in many poetry journals and has a chapbook from Foothills Publishing *"Over the Falls"*. She is happy as a poet can get in her small town outside Sacramento with her husband, 2 tiny dogs, 2 aquariums and myriad plants. She also grows a garden of many fruit trees and vegetable beds with flowers to entice bees to them all.

TOM GOFF

Tom Goff recently retired after almost 30 years as an instructional assistant for the Los Rios Community College District. His poems have appeared in several issues of *Voices* (Cold River Press), *Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California* (Scarlet Tanager Press), *Tule Review, Poet News, Sacramento News & Review, Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter, Spectral Realms* (Hippocampus Press, NY), *FLC's The Parlay, The Sacramento Anthology: 100 Poems,* and *Late Peaches*. Tom has reviewed poetry books for *Poetry Flash, Poet News,* and *Jacket Magazine*. He plays trumpet with Auburn Symphony, Camellia Symphony, and Golden State Brass.

RICK RAYBURN

Rick Rayburn grew up in Altadena, and attended

UCLA in the 1960s, where he met his future wife, Marianne. He worked for the Coastal Commission as a redwood ecologist in Arcata. Later, he focused on land preservation as the Natural Resource Manager at California State Parks. He has published four poetry books—*Under the Overstory* (2020), *Slack Tide* (2023), *Pink Tercets* (2025), and *Trailing van Gogh: Elegy for an Artist* (2025), the later a chap book.

SHEILA LOWE-BURKE

Sheila Lowe-Burke has been appointed one of 50 Most Memorable Women of North America. Michigan Beat Poet Laureate 2024-2026, Cultural Director, Honorary Doctorate, 2025 Pushcart Prize nominee. Member of National & International Beat Poet Foundation, 100,000 Poets For Change, Michigan Rock & Roll Legends Hall of Fame. Has toured 9 countries in Europe, also Mexico, Jamaica, Canada, and 33 states in USA. www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063704010587

CHRIS OLANDER

J. C. Olander, bio-educator Cal-Poets since 1984, innovator of spoken word poetry: land-based ethics rooted in science, observation, reflection--exploring human horrors and beautiful auras, mystical revelations, all that is possible being here now. What we make of life is what we get. "I create musical image phrasing, dramatizing relative experiences; a sound poet exploring meanings of words, phrases, ideas, emotions in sound rhythm patterns." I teach poetry writing and recitation in schools, institutions, privately; published 4 CD's spoken word, 4 Cd's poetry with musicians; 4 chapbooks, 3 poetry books *River Light*, Poetic Matrix Press; *Twilight Roses,* R. L. Crow Press, and recently published (2026) *Who Are We*, Cold River Press.

HARVEY D. OSGOOD

Josh Daly Souza has been part of the Sacramento poetry community for years. He has frequently attended readings at the Sacramento Poetry Alliance and the Sacramento Poetry Center. He used a pen name for his poem—taking two old AM radio broadcasters (Paul Harvey and Charles Osgood) to make Harv Osgood.

TODD BOYD

Todd Boyd is a self-published author of one novel *(Marat, Untrue Loves),* working on a second novel, *Dinosar City,* four chapbooks-*(Shark Poems and Carol's Adeline Street Café and Other Poems)*, one book of short stories, *(Allred's Short Stories)*, one journal of personal history *(The Election of 2012- A Year of Living Inside the Definition of Insanity)*. Co-editor and contributor to *Confluence-Fiction, Poetry, Essay, and Song* From the Sacramento Thursday Writers Group. Radio programmer (KUBU-96.5LP-FM) for over ten years, blogger (saylavproductions.com), website manager (writersontheair.com), and visual artist working with recycled materials.

NOMAD

At 67, I'm an old soul new to creative writing. My given name is Dwight A. Jackson. I pen as "the Nomad." Born in Philadelphia Pennsylvania. Traveled as an army brat. Schooled in San Francisco Ca. Joined the service to travel some more. I have visited several countries and all 48 continental states. I find myself settling in Sacramento Ca. Hence the pseudonym, "the Nomad." I have been published in "*Voices 2024 and 2025,*" and the June 2024 issue of the Sacramento Poetry Center newsletter, *"Poet News,"* as well as the April 2026 issue of the *"Colonial Heights Library Newsletter."*

THEO S. GOODWIN

Theo Goodwin is a retired attorney who lives in Sacramento. His interest in poetry evolved when he traveled to Japan and India. He taught courses on Haiku Poetry, European art and culture. Theo plays classical music on the clarinet and guitar.

JILL STOCKINGER

Jill Stockinger, MLS U. Wisconsin-Madison, was a librarian 42 years in Texas, Wisconsin, Chicago and Sacramento. She led open writing workshops in branches. She becomes easily drunk on words and writes daily. She is a member of the Renaissance Writing Group I and the JCC San Francisco Writing Group. Her poems have appeared in *Tule Review, The ICC Poetry Anthology, Voices 2021, 2023, 2024* and *2025, The Motown Poetry Revue,* the anthology, *Remembering Audre Lorde*, the journal, *Delta Stories*, and others. Raised in NY, she's lived in other countries, including Greece, Mexico, Israel and Turkey. She currently serves on the Board of the Ina Coolbrith Circle of Poetry. When a teen, she wished she could marry T.S. Eliot. Currently living in Sacramento with Max, her artist husband, she has 2 children and 4 grandchildren.

WENDY PATRICE WILLIAMS

Wendy Patrice Williams' memoir, *Autobiography of a Sea Creature: Healing the Trauma of Infant Surgery,* was published by the University of California Health Humanities Press. Wendy blogs at https://healinginfanttrauma.org and appears in *Cutdown: Infant Surgery without Anesthesia*, a free YouTube video. Her poetry collection, *In Chaparral: Life on the Georgetown Divide, California*, was published by Cold River Press. To learn more about her work, go to https://www.wendywilliamsauthor.org. She lives with her wife in southern Oregon.

YUAN HONGRI

Yuan Hongri (born 1962) is a renowned Chinese mystic, poet, and philosopher. His work has been published in the UK, USA, India, New Zealand, Canada, and Nigeria; his poems have appeared in *Poet's Espresso Review, Orbis, Tipton Poetry Journal, VOICES, Harbinger Asylum, The Stray Branch, Acumen, Pinyon Review, Taj Mahal Review, Madswirl, Shot Glass Journal, Amethyst Review, Fine Lines,* and other e-zines, anthologies, and journals. His best known works are *"Platinum City"* and *"Golden Giant"*. His works explore themes of prehistoric and future civilization.

YUANBING ZHANG

Yuanbing Zhang (b. 1974), is Mr. Yuan Hongi's assistant and translator. He himself is a Chinese poet and translator, working in a Middle School, Yanzhou District , Jining City, Shandong Province, China. He can be contacted through his email-3112362909@qq.com.

MANU MANGATTU

Manu Mangattu is an English Professor, poet, editor, director and rank-holder. He has published 7 books, 73 research articles and 36 conference papers apart from 14 edited volumes with ISBN. He serves as chief editor/editor for various international journals. He has done UGC funded projects and a SWAYAM-MOOC course (Rs 15 lakhs). Besides translations from Chinese and Sanskrit, he writes poetry in English as well as in Indian languages. He was named *"Comrade to Poetry China"* in 2016. A visiting faculty at various universities and a quintessential bohemian-vagabond, he conducts poetry readings, workshops and lectures when inspired. After an apprenticeship in Shakespeare under Dr Stephen Greenblatt, he currently guides 23 research scholars and mentors NET English aspirants.

JAY SIMPSON

Jay Simpson was born in Sydney and now lives in Perth Western Australia. She is recently published in *The Nat'l & Int'l Goddess Anthology 2026, Broad Daylight Anthology 2026, libretext chapbooks 2025/26, semiosis lit mag 2026, New Generation Beats 2024/25/26* among many others, both nationally and internationally. She co-edits and publishes libretext chapbooks with poet Randy Barnes. She is the editor/publisher of her online lit mag,'*semiosis'*.

SHARON MAHANY

Sharon Mahany writes of life as she sees it, a hummingbird in action upside down, thinking about providing a fruit basket for a visiting alien, or a description of a car ride with a past boyfriend and her cat - which induces a crop circle to form in its likeness. From Roseville, CA, Sharon enjoys wordplay, storytelling, and getting over a fear of public speaking at open mic readings. Her poems may be found in journals such as *Song of the San Joaquin, Lummox*, and *Poetry Pea.* Among her most notable is her shaped poem, *"We Only Darn the Large Holes,"* awarded the *2021 Golden Pegasus* from *California Federation of Chaparral Poets.* Sharon enjoys gardening, teaching, kayaking, and metaphysics. A retired Recreation Supervisor, Sharon

finds time to play as a swim teacher and a Life Coach using Quantum Human Design Alignment System and Reiki. Visit www.dowserswestcoast.com or www.dowserssouthwest.com for unique experiences of your own.

MEGHAN TUTOLO

Meghan Tutolo is a writer, artist, comic and cat lady from the City of Bridges, also known as Pittsburgh, PA. Inspired by city skylines, geometry and space, she creates in many media, but her passion is stained glass. Meghan vends at markets all over Pittsburgh and online as the founder of 1flychicken creations.

DAVID C. ANDERSON

David Anderson was a librarian before retiring from the UC Davis Library. He has published a paraphrase of the *Odes of Solomon*, which is a first-century Christian songbook, a chapbook *Not Made by Hand*, and a book of poems *What Was Within* (CFP, 2022). His poems have appeared in *The Adirondack Review, Brevities, California Quarterly, Song of the San Joaquin, Time of Singing*, and elsewhere.

BENITO VILA

Benito Vila lives in a remote fishing village on Mexico's Pacific coast where he's interviewing everyone he can, getting them to tell their stories. His poetry has appeared in several kind literary journals, including *Voices, Love Love Magazine, DoubleSpeak, Culture Matters, Seppuku, Soul Poetry, Maintenant, Book of Matches, BeatLife, Beatnik Cowboy,* and *GAS: Poetry, Art and Music*. His other published work includes profiles of "counterculture" instigators for pleasekillme.com, liner notes for musical projects by Peter Stampfel and Mike Watt, and the editing of poet Charles Plymel's email correspondences into two books (for Bottle of Smoke Press).

PILAR GRAHAM

Pilar Graham is the author of two collections of poetry, including *Currents* (2022) and *Falling* (2025). Her poetry has appeared in Cold River Press – *Voices Anthology, Sundog, Haunted Waters Press, Indent Literary Journal, Finishing Line Press,* and *Blackberry*, among others. Her creative nonfiction essays have been published in *Essay Daily, The Broiler: A Journal of New Literature, Poetry Midwest*, and *Pithead Chapel Press*. Current projects include seeking publication for two additional poetry books, a chapbook collaboration with another poet, and a collection of creative nonfiction essays. www.pilargraham.com.

MOONA WU

Moona Wu is a Chinese author and illustrator who has lived in the United States for nearly 30 years. She has published eleven books in China and two English-language titles on Amazon, and her essays and short stories have appeared in English-language magazines. She is also a columnist for *Washington Chinese Daily*, writing about the lives of Chinese immigrants in America. Her fiction explores themes of identity, dislocation, and resilience, often set in the American South. An exhibiting visual artist as well, she draws inspiration from the landscapes of South Carolina—oak trees, muscadines, and the quiet persistence of life. When words fail, she turns to color, line, and light.

JULEY HARVEY

Juley Harvey is a former journalist (California, Colorado) and prize-winning poet. She has been a featured poet at the TallGrass Writers Guild Virtual Open Mic from Chicago via Zoom. Her work has appeared in more than 46 publications, including 9 of the black-and-white series of *TallGrass Writers*, edited by the wonderful Whitney Scott, T*ulipTree's Wild Women, Dancing Poetry*, and online *Paper Dragons* from Drexel University, and Decolonial Passage, as well as in *GRRR An Anthology about Bears*. Most recently, her short story about art and gravy appeared in I*nstant Noodles' Gravy* edition online, and she is among the 173 poets featured in *Poets for Peace's Sunflowers Rising*, benefitting Ukrainian orphans. She belongs to three awesome writers' groups (two by zoom, TallGrass Writers in Chicago and Estes Park, Colorado's Writers on the Brink, led by Tony Hillerman-winner Kevin Wolf, and Thompson Peak Writers' Workshop in Janesville, CA, led by the prolific and Pushcart-nominated Dianna Henning). She lives with her two

rescue companions of the heart, Mr. Pye, a laid-back Abyssinian, and Ms. Angie-lope, a lambie angel maltipoo with a cockatoo cowlick, on the property of her brother Tom Harvey (also a poet and musician and farmer) and his partner Jackie, who trains and boards dogs. Their Susanville, CA, home also features a new solar greenhouse, an orchard, a garden, their two dogs, a cat, and a duck. She is delighted to be a part of the artheart community.

TERESA RENNICK

Teresa Rennick grew up on a dry land farm in Nebraska and moved west over fifty years ago where she, with her two children, stayed. As a child Teresa incessantly drew pictures of mountains and since living here she's climbed many of the mountains surrounding the Klamath Basin, including Mt. Shasta. She is retired from a career as a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner. A passionate reader her whole life, now in her eighties she has started to write.

ED BALLDINGER

In the grand scheme of it all, Ed Balldinger does not exist. Although, theoretically, he may be the byproduct of some far-flung stardust pre-dating matter itself, he was more likely formed (or not) from a prairie cow pie as a psylocibin mushroom rising from the dung. Some believe he momentarily appeared as an apocalyptic pimple on the ass of the universe. Others say he does not exist at all. We just don't know. His perceived presence can be summarily extracted most quizzically by his dear friend and distant relative, Ned Bickerstaff, when Ned asks, "Who can identify with themselves in spite of themselves? Who is here to remember the essence of their being? Within the limitations of one's self, there opens a window to impossible possibilities far beyond all confines of one's mind."

Ed seemingly showed up on the Sacramento scene in *Nublin's Pub & Meditation Room* back in the mid-1990's, but no one can confirm this, nor are there any records indicating either his appearance, existence, or disappearance, other than an 8-foot pub vault filled with golf & whiffle balls, machine lubricants & cleaners, and several smoke & dust-covered binders of words he may have once written. Other than that, we just don't know… If Ed actually does exist, he might receive correspondence at an email address like balldinger@gmail.com – just maybe…

JENNIFER FENN

Jennifer Fenn has been writing poetry since high school. She is a junior staff accountant at a credit union by day and a poet by night. Her poems are published in eighteen journals, including *Monterey Poetry Review, Brevities, Song of the San Joaquin, Mermaids Monthly,* and *Time of Singing.* She has self-published two chapbooks, *Blessings* and *Song of the Katabatic Wind,* as church fundraisers. Jennifer is the winner of the California Federation of Chaparral Poets 2021 Roadrunner Award.

ALLEGRA JOSTAD SILBERSTEIN

Allegra was born on a farm in Wisconsin 95 years ago but has lived in California since 1963. Her love of poetry began as a child...her mother would recite poems as she worked. In addition to being widely in journals, she also has three books of poems and three chapbooks to her credit. Allegra dances and performs with Panela Trokanski's Third Stage dance company.

DAVE BOLES (BODHI)

Dave Boles (Bodhi), has worked as a Publisher, Writer and Designer since 1982. Founder of the alternative literary and visual magazine, *Primal Urge*, he went on to develop Cold River Press in the early 1990's to further promote regional writers and artists. His press and focus eventually grew to international levels of publishing with his anthology, VOICES.

A lifelong student of Magic and Spiritualism, he holds degrees in Psychology, and a Doctorate of Divinity in Theosophical Studies, founding the Church Of The Illuminated Monkey to further his ongoing quest at exploring ancient religions and their practices.

Living in Northern California at his beloved Lake House with his wife, Mrs. America, and numerous animals, he chronicles his devotion to magic and our ancestors, writing of ancient mysticism through his "Coy-

ote Series", a four book series of epic poems that detail the spiritual and mystical wisdom of the ages.

His latest book, *4th Floor, Paranoia, Depression, And Other States Of Mind,* was published in late 2025. www.boles.org.

ROBERT FLEMING

Robert Fleming (b. 1963) is a digital artist and visual poet from Lewes, DE. His books are *White Noir*, an Amazon best seller and C*on-Way in 4 in 1, #4.* Founding/contributing editor of *Old Scratch Press* and *Instant Noodles.* Find Robert @ https://www.facebook.com/robert.fleming.5030 and https://artleagueofoceancity.org/artists/robert-fleming/.

MARC PETRIE

Marc Petrie's poetry has appeared in numerous journals. His latest collection, *Poems from the Anthropocene*, was published in 2025 by Cold River Press.

JOAN GOODREAU

Joan Goodreau's recent books are *Strangers Together: How My Son's Autism Changed My Life, Where to Now,* and *Another Secret Shared*. A Pushcart nominee, Joan was awarded a Hedgebrook Writing Residency to complete her YouTube chapbook, *Covid Silence.* Her short plays have been produced by the *Off-the-Page Players* in Santa Rosa and *April Fools and Follies* in Chico. She is currently working on connecting writing with art. Her poems has been displayed with art at the Napa Art Museum, the Yountville Sculpture Garden, and the Paradise Art Center. Joan has taught writing classes at the Chico Art Center and the California State University Chico Art Museum.

EDWARD J. McCOUL

Edward J McCoul is a retired language arts teacher. He has written several poetry books that are available on Amazon. You can also see more of his poetry on his Facebook page.

ANN PRIVATEER

Ann Privateer was born in the Midwest and now resides in California. She taught ESL in Sacramento, retired and became a literary and visual artist. Her poems have appeared in journals, books, and literary news. Her book of poems, *Attracted To Light* was published by Rattlesnake Press.

JENNIFER O'NEILL PICKERING

Jennifer O'Neill Pickering is a literary and visual artist, a Pushcart Nominee for Poetry and finalist in the New Women's Voices Chapbook Competition. *I Am the Creek*, her poem was selected for the sculpture, *Open Circle. Fruit Box Castles: Poems from a Peach Rancher's Daughter,* is available from Finishing Line Press.

M.B. STACEY

M.B. Stacey has been writing most of her life. Her poetry and short stories have been published in the U.S and Canada, where she has resided for the past fifty years. She is a retired social worker but has continued teaching yoga for the past thirty years. She expects the unexpected, finds joy and laughter wherever she can and tries to write about everything.

JOE KIDD

Joe Kidd, 2020 published *The Invisible Waterhole*, 2024 published *Digging Underground*. Michigan Beat Poet Laureate Emeritus, Cultural Director, Honorary Doctorate, 2025 Pushcart Prize nominee. Member of National & International Beat Poet Foundation, 100,000 Poets For Change, Michigan Rock & Roll Legends Hall of Fame. Has toured 9 countries in Europe, also Mexico, Jamaica, Canada, and 33 states in USA. www.amazon.com/Joe-Kidd/e/B089QYDXSM and www.facebook.com/profile php?id=100063704010587

DEBORAH C. SEGAL

Deborah C. Segal is a writer, grandmother, retired public library worker, gratefully living on unceded Ohlone lands, now known as Berkeley, California. Her publications include: *In the Time of the Cloud,* (Another Seagull Productions), *Edwin in the Embrace of Entropy,* (Another Seagull Productions), *Natalie's Story: A Raincheck for Jack Kerouac,* (Mel C. Thompson Productions). Follow her on https://www.facebook.com/DeborahCSegal or at anotherseagull.wordpress.com

DIANNA HENNING

Dianna received California Arts Council grants, taught poetry workshops for William James Association's Prison Arts Program. Publications: *Poet News, Sacramento CA, 2025 & 2026; Blue Heron Review 2025; California Bards, NorCal Poetry Anthology 2025; Voices, 2025; California Quarterly; Women in a Golden State, 2025; The Power of the Feminine Vol. II; One Art, A Journal of Poetry; The Tule Review; California Quarterly; 2023; The Jawbone, UK. 2025; Artemis Journal, 2021, 2022, 2023* and *The Adirondack Review*. 2021 Nomination by *The Adirondack Review* for a Pushcart Prize. Nominations from *Blue Heron Review* for a Pushcart Prize 2024 & 2025. *Best of the Net nominee*; MFA in Writing '89, Vermont College. Henning's "*When Body Becomes House*" short-listed in Madville Publishing's 2025 Arthur Smith Poetry Prize. Dianna facilitates the Thompson Peak Writers' Workshop. Her latest book *"Rucksacks for the Leaf Cat"* Published 2026 through Finishing Line Press. Dianna runs the Thompson Peak Writers' Workshop in Janesville CA, a workshop founded by her 32 years ago. https://diannahenning.com <https://diannahenning.com>

JIM BOUREY

jim bourey is an old poet who lives on the northern edge of the Adirondacks. He has two full poetry collections, *Out There and Back Again* (2023) and *The Distance Between Us* (2020) both from Cold River Press. He also collaborated with Linda Blaskey on *Season of Harves*t (2022 Pond Road Press) and with Jack Mackey, Isabelle Bohls, and Linda Blaskey on *Our Various Selves* (2025 Cold River Press). His chapbook, *Silence, Interrupted* (Broadkill Press) appeared in 2015. His work is also in many journals and anthologies. He was awarded a NY State Council on the Arts grant for 2026. He can often be found in dimly lit rooms reading poetry aloud.

NANCY E. GOTTHART

Nancy Gotthart was born in Sacramento, California in 1937, and raised there. Her mother showed her pictures in books, paintings by Titian and Rembrandt. She named her first doll Rembrandt because it looked so real. She also read to her a great deal from a book of Greco-Roman myths called "Myths and Enchantment Tales", a book which she still has.

As a teenager she found solace in both writing and painting, choosing to major in Art at Sacramento State University and then moving on to Stanford for a master's degree in Studio Painting. Her exhibition record spans the 60s through the 90s.

Her publishing record began in the 70s with Runcible Spoon, a chapbook titled *"Oracles in Season,"* and in *Maguey*, a dual language magazine, but her focus was still on visual expression; she recently collaborated on a book of figure drawings from the 80s with William Stanisich, *"Celebrating Toni Tondalayo."*

She returned to Sacramento in 1997; shortly thereafter, her last painting exhibit was held at the The Foundry. She then turned to writing: flash fiction and poetry. Soon the focus narrowed simply to poetry. She has published hery poetry on the web and presently have a website (nancygotthart.com) where both her drawings and poetry can be found.

She first appeared in the Voices series with *"Dahlias, Gods & Mermaids"* in 2023, continuing her association with Voices, her work has appeared in both 2024 and 2025 editions.

PATRICIA HARRIS-BOWMAN

Patricia Harris-Bowman writes from a place of lived experience, where memory, truth, and discovery meet. Her work is deeply personal, inspired by her journey of understanding family, identity, and the meaning of connection. As someone who discovered my paternal roots later in life, her voice carries both reflection and revelation. Guided by the strength and love of her mother, she embraces storytelling as a way to honor her past while continuing to evolve. Her writing reminds us that sometimes the most powerful stories are the ones we carry quietly—until we are ready to share them.

AMRITA SKYE BLAINE

Amrita Skye Blaine develops themes of impermanence, disability, awakening, and the state of our world. Two collections came out Spring 2025. She

has been published in seventeen poetry anthologies, numerous literary magazines, and is a 2025 Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net Anthology nominee.

GENE BERSON

Gene Berson, lives in the foothills of Northern California but spent many years active in the Bay Area poetry scene. Berson's recent work can be read at Sisyphuslitmag.org and Canarylitmag.org. He's also been published in Beatitude, American Poetry Review and in Honeydew and Red Fez anthologies. He is a former copywriter, trade show worker and retired teacher who taught poetry as an Oakland high school teacher and conducted workshops on Indian reservations, reform schools and in one-room Wyoming schoolhouses. He has secret stashes of books in his home and car . . . the way an alcoholic hides his bottles.

OLGA BROWNE

Olga Browne leads two creative writing classes at Hart senior center; Poetry and Life History for the past 18 years. She lives, loves and writes in Sacramento.

AMY HOSKINS

Amy Hoskins is a poet and visual artist creating with disabilities from her home studio in South Nashville, TN. Nature in all its forms inspires Amy more than anything else, because it is simultaneously pure, chaotic, orderly and fascinating. She seeks out a sense of the primal and wild in her work, as something that is rare and endangered in herself and the world around her. Her studies of Buddhism, creative visualization and meditation deepen this exploration of wonder and fascination, and she seeks a contemplative arts approach to all of her work, as a way of centering, editing, and transforming herself and her art. Visit her at Amyhoskins.com

PENNY KLINE

Penny Kline is a multidisciplinary artist—poet, playwright, director, actor, and musician whose work listens deeply to the spirit of our times. Through language, performance, and sound, she creates visualizations where history, culture, and human experience converge, revealing the unseen threads that bind past and present. Her poetry and theatrical work serve as vessels for reflection and transformation, illuminating the emotional and spiritual undercurrents of events. Whether on the page, the stage, or within music, her artistry seeks not only to tell stories, but to awaken audiences into spaces of resonance, memory, and collective consciousness.

JOSEPH NOLAN

Joseph Nolan began publishing his work in the Fall of 2017. He has three self-published books of poems, *Human Grace*, 2nd Edition, *Cats Can't Use Straws* and *Sky Gardens*, which are available on Amazon. His fourth book, *Water Dreams*, was published in 2021 by Cold River Press. His poems have been published in the *Sacramento Voices Poetry Anthology, Now, VOICES, Better Than Starbucks, Poetry Now, Collisions 5 in Modesto, Medusa's Kitchen, Song of the San Joaquin* and *Brevities Mini-Mag of Minimalist Poetry.* Joe has published over 1425 poems since 2017. His interests include hiking in forests and on beaches, time in nature, meditation, yoga, Jin Shin Jyutsu acupressure, chi-gong and spicy dishes at Thai and Indian restaurants

SIBILLA HERSHEY

Sibilla Hershey lives and writes in the Sacramento Region and is a member of Poetry In Davis.

JEANINE STEVENS

Jeanine Stevens' latest publications are *Left Handed Hummingbird* (Clare Songbirds Publishing, 2025) and *Tea in the Nuns' Library* (Eyewear Publishing, UK). She has nineteen books and chapbooks. Winner MacGuffin Poet Hunt, William Stafford Award, The Ekphrasis Prize. Work has appeared in *Chiron Review, Evansville Review, Rosebud, So it Goes: Journal of the Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library, Clackamas Literary Review,* and *Two Thirds North* (Sweden). Professor Emerita, American River College in Sacramento.

CURTIS NELSON

Curtis Nelson, eighty-one and retired, was a dentist and anthropology lecturer. Published poems in anthologies. Current long-standing member of a writer's group and haiku group. Send daily haiku to those groups. Have been writing poetry, haiku and short stories since my early twenties. Writing keeps me sane.

SM CARUTHERS

SM Caruthers' writing is inspired by the journey some of her pioneering ancestors took across the American prairies in the 1870's -1900's as well as by her work as a teacher. Her work consisted of instruction with Elementary School students K-6 then a transition to Resource Instructor teaching writing in a computer lab. Her school is in a diverse neighborhood which gave her a chance to immerse herself in other cultures. She loved it.

Publications include: *Finalist in Killer Nashville* contest for *"The Conductor Tickets Death," Lincoln Poetry Contest 3rd Place 2018, Elk Grove Poetry Contest 2016 1st place, "Confluence: An Anthology"* by Sacramento Writers' Group, *"Manzanita, an anthology, "Riding on Magic,"* I Street Press, *"Tales of the West,"* I Street Press, and El Dorado Hills Writers' Release. Her work has also appeared in *"Voices," 2023,* as well as in a *Sisters in Crime anthology.*

DOREEN BEYER

Doreen Beyer grew up in Hawaii and grows old in Sacramento where she spends time reading and writing poetry, taking long walks, dancing the hula, and loving her grandkids. She is a proud contributor to the *Voices* anthology.

ANN WEHRMAN

Ann Wehrman is a creative writer and musician living in Northern California. She teaches English composition online for the University of Phoenix and the University of Arizona Global Campus. Ann's poetry, short fiction, and literary reviews have been published online and in print by various independent publishers. She can also be found cooking, reading, and practicing yoga.

TIM KAHL

Tim Kahl is the author of six books of poems, most recently *California Sijo* (Bald Trickster, 2022) and *Drips, Spills, Bursts, Tangles, and Washes* (Cold River Press, 2024). He is a recovering academic who seeks therapy among strings and winds. Look for him on the sidelines at Sacramento Republic games. [http://www.timkahl.com] [https://soundcloud.com/tnklbnny]

MARK HEATHCOTE

Mark Heathcote's poems are published in journals, magazines, and anthologies in both online and printed forms. Residing in the UK from Manchester, he is the author of *"In Perpetuity"* and *"Back on Earth,"* two books of poems published by Creative Talents Unleashed.

A.D. WINANS

A.D. Winans is a native, award-winning San Francisco poet and writer and a graduate of San Francisco State College (now University). From 1972 to 1989, he edited and published Second Coming Press, which produced a large number of books and anthologies, among them the highly acclaimed California Bicentennial Poet's Anthology, which included poets like David Meltzer, Jack Micheline, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Ishmael Reed, Josephine Miles, Bob Kaufman, Harold Norse, Gene Fowler, Philip Levine, Ann Stanford, Charles Bukowski, and William Everson. His work has appeared in hundreds of literary magazines and Anthologies, including City Lights Journal, Beat Scene, Beatitude, Poetry Australia, Voices, the New York Quarterly, the Patterson Literary Journal, the San Francisco Chronicle, and the Outlaw Bible of American Poetry. His latest book, Ghosts of the Night, was recently published in Albania. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including a literary achievement award from the San Francisco Arts and Letters Foundation in 1984, the Kenneth Patchen Award (Pig Iron Press) in 1997, a Josephine Miles Award (Pen/National) in 2006. a Kathy Acker Award (New York Literary Awards) in 2004, and a Pen Lifetime Achievement Award (Pen Oakland) in 2009.

In 2002, his poem *Lady Death* was set to music by Pulitzer Prize composer William Bolcom and performed at New York's Alice Tully Hall, and later included in a CD alongside other noted poets, produced by the University of Lafayette at Louisiana.

He appeared in the documentary "When I Die I Won't Stay Dead," a documentary film on the Life of poet Bob Kaufman, premiered at the San Francisco Film Festival

in 2016. The Second Coming Archives are housed at Brown University. Winans' own archives are in preparation for housing at U.C. Davis.

DICK TROY

Dick Troy is a 4th generation Californian. Dick spent 30-years working for California State Parks, retiring in 2002 as Deputy Director for Park Operations. He now splits his time between the Sacramento Valley and Borrego Springs, a small wilderness town in the Southern California desert. He considers the desert an often 'misunderstood' landscape whose value is under-appreciated by many. He also believes, along with Frederick Law Olmsted and others, that regular exposure to nature is essential to one's physical and mental well-being.

Poetry is his favored form of self-expression and, in recent years, has completed a variety of on-line poetry classes. His poems have been published in the *Anza Borrego Foundation* newsletter and the *2025 'Voices'*.

DIANE HORNOR

Diane Hornor resided in Texas, Oklahoma, Fresno, before moving to Sacramento 45 years ago. While rearing three children, she attended night law school, then practiced family law for 25 years. She is a docent at the Sacramento Fine Arts Center and shows and sells her paintings. She is a member of several poetry groups, attends 41 year book club, edits novels, and plays guitar and sings country western. She has published a poetry book, *Twisted Rope* (2025).

GARY KRUSE

Gary Kruse's poems have been published in *Right Hand Pointing, Voices 2020, Litbreak,* and *Poetry Now.* Gary grew up in the Midwest, and he's lived in Northern California for the last thirty years, where he's worked as a staff designer. In this role, he has designed retail stores and public-school facilities. He began his work in design designing sets for plays and musicals. He began writing poetry in 2016 when he joined *The Sacramento Poetry Center's Tuesday Night Workshop,* which he still attends.

TAYLOR GRAHAM

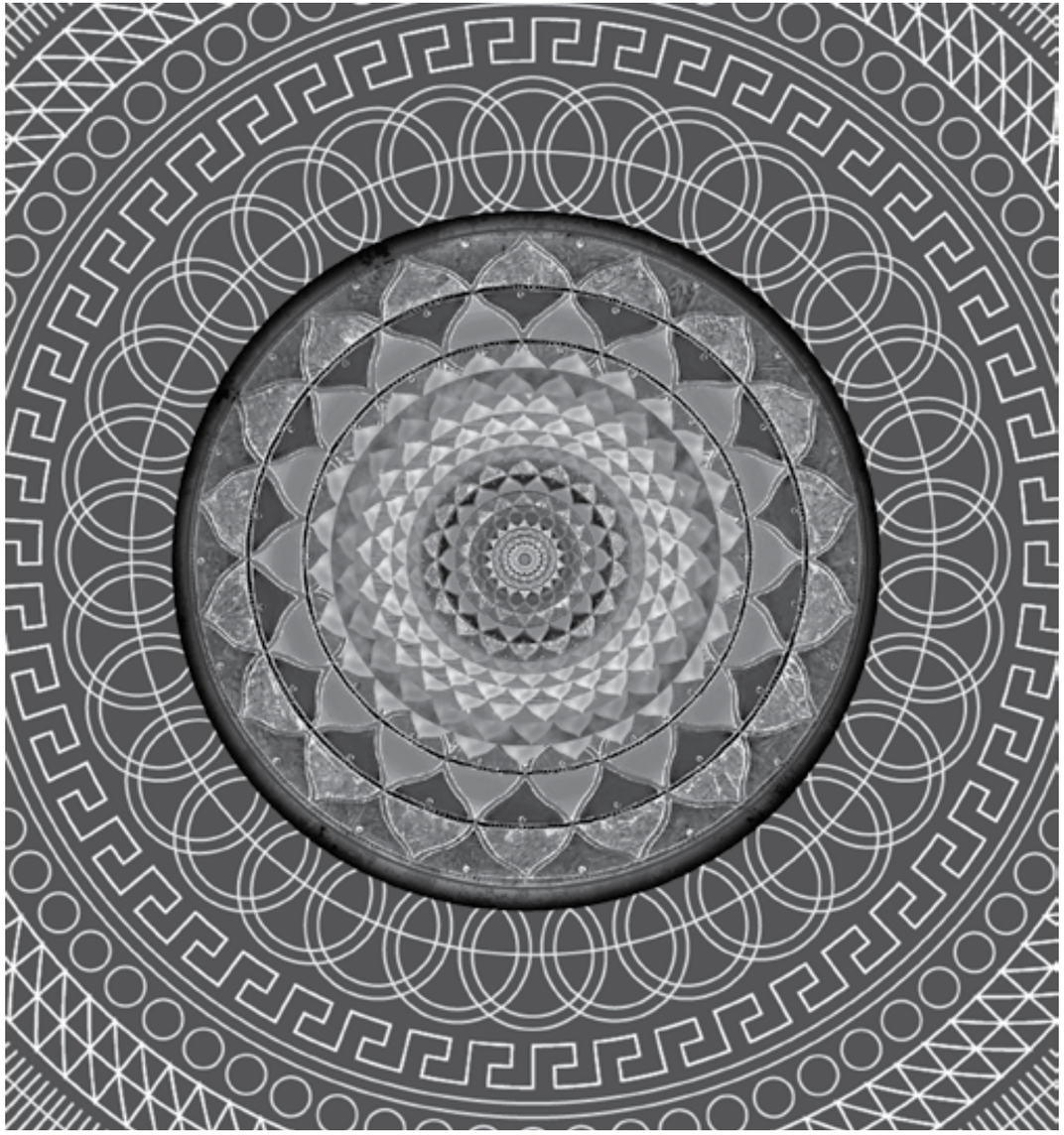
Taylor Graham is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler and served as El Dorado County's inaugural Poet Laureate. Her poems appear in *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present, California Fire & Water: A Climate Crisis Anthology,* and *Villanelles.* Latest books are *Windows of Time and Place: Poems of El Dorado County* (Cold River Press) and *Walking the Bones.* She lives with two rescue dogs and a cat on Miwok land.

BRAD BUCHANAN

Brad Buchanan taught British and Postcolonial Literature, as well as Creative Writing, at Sacramento State University until his retirement in 2016. His poetry, short fiction, and scholarly articles have appeared in more than 200 journals, and he has published five book-length collections of poetry, most recently *The Birds of Poverty Ridge* (Finishing Line Press, 2026). He has also published three academic books, a medical memoir, and *Spy's Mate*—his first novel—was published in October 2025. He was diagnosed with T-cell lymphoma in February 2015, and underwent a stem cell transplant in 2016, which involved a lengthy recovery and temporary vision loss. He is currently Northern California chapter leader of *Man Up to Cancer*, a support group for men coping with cancer. He also facilitates recurring online *Writing As Healing* workshops through the UC Davis Cancer Center, the Sacramento Society for the Blind, and Blood Cancer United, among many other organizations.

LYTTON BELL

She's not really interested in talking about herself. Universities and publication credits and blah, blah, blah – boring. It's not about her, is it? It's about you. The longing that blasts, burning, through your soul, negating everything except its own journey – that's your biography. Can she speak to that? Can she capture just a sliver of a hint of its insatiable and ungovernable force, its bright, blistering, seductive, destructive, blindingly enthralling path? Can she strip away all your ideologies and perceptual filters, all your coping mechanisms, distractions and rational denials of your essential truth? She will try!



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