



WINK

Issue 16

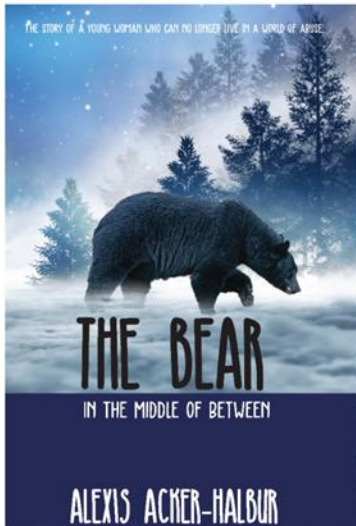
Writers in the know

In the
Author's Corner

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The book with ready-to-use techniques to overcome your fear of speaking. Make your speaking engagements an enjoyable connection with your audience instead of a task filled with dread and self-doubt.



The Bear: In the Middle of Between,
by Alexis Acker-Halbur

A young woman, driven to suicide because of a lifetime of abuse, finds herself confronted by a magical being who appears to have been sent to help. But is it too late? Has the bullet already ended her life on earth? Who is this protector, and is she ready to face the truths of her life?



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Fiction Girl

(Transition)

Drawings, then poems flip over to fiction;
 the flash girl rides this ghost of the invention.
 Insecure in youth, switch girl from drawing
 to poetry, extension flight, outer fiction space,
 yours is a manner of words at work.
 Mercury is a god of movement.
 A new skill set, brain twister, releases 100 free plays.
 Life is a version of old times, fresh starts, torn yellow pages.
 I focused on you last night; I watched your head spin
 in sleep, a new playhouse of tree dreams, high shifting.
 Changes are leaves; I lift your spirits to the gods of fire,
 offer you thunderbolts, practice your shooting in heaven
 or hell, or toss back to earth.
 Change is a choice where your energy flows.
 No computer gods will help this poetic journey.
 May you cry out loud on route to fairytale creations.
 You are the chemist, the mixer girl shifting gears.
 Creativity is how the gallery of galaxies cement.
 Flash fiction lines cross stars.

—Michael Lee Johnson

April Blue

This is when we search for
 color to transform cold grey.
 Rainfall begins its magic
 highlighting sky blue.

We see stacks of luminous clouds
 as plants pop out and forsythia
 bursts into sparkling yellow stalks.
 Just today a breath of warmth
 brought alive crepe myrtle buds.

Aromatic lilac bushes cluster in
 soft bunches while birds and bugs
 encircle them. Ten pretty trees
 all dressed up in lustrous greens
 boogie through noontime breezes.

Get ready for this blast-off of spring!

—Joan McNerney

Deepest Blue

lying on your side
 on a mattress
 and some
 rough bedsheets,
 thinking of work
 and of falling
 asleep. boats,
 moored and knocking
 in the spill
 of setting
 evening: a bay,
 painted dark
 in deepest blue.

—DS Maolalai

Georgia at the End

Sylvester rode up on the thin gray mule.
 The one nobody liked.

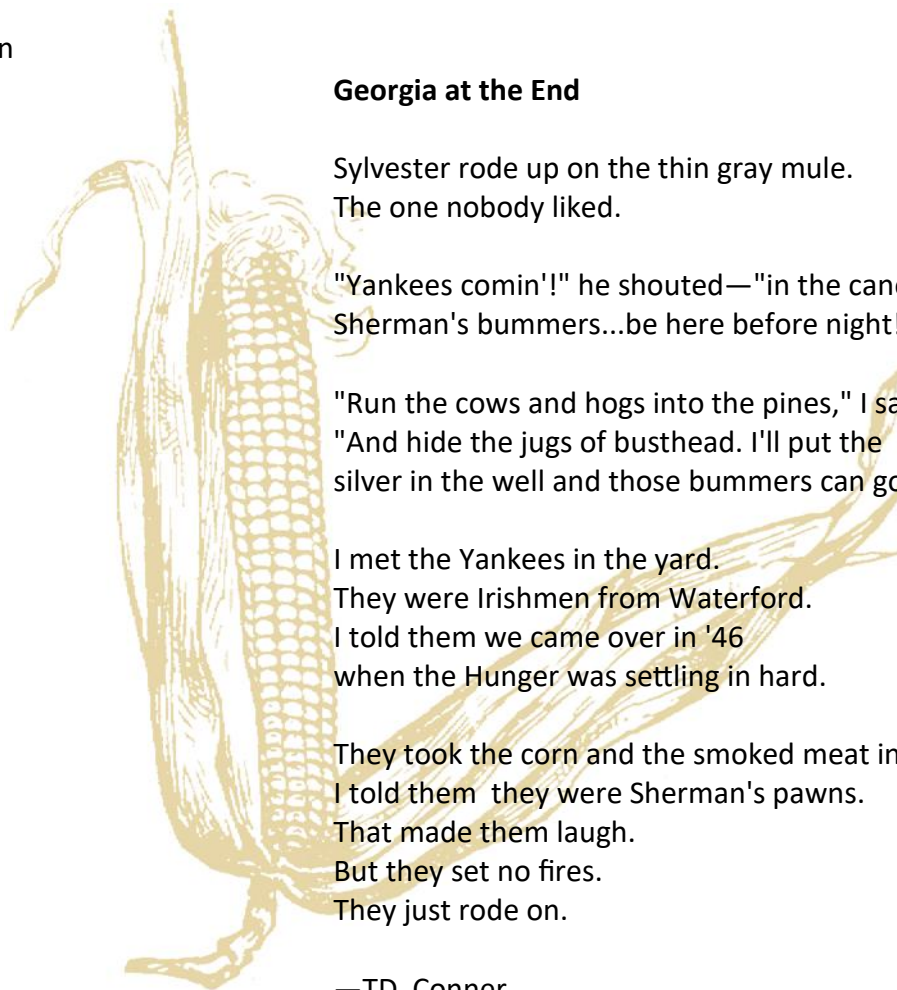
"Yankees comin'!" he shouted—"in the canebrake—
 Sherman's bummers...be here before night!"

"Run the cows and hogs into the pines," I said.
 "And hide the jugs of busthead. I'll put the
 silver in the well and those bummers can go to hell!"

I met the Yankees in the yard.
 They were Irishmen from Waterford.
 I told them we came over in '46
 when the Hunger was settling in hard.

They took the corn and the smoked meat in the barn.
 I told them they were Sherman's pawns.
 That made them laugh.
 But they set no fires.
 They just rode on.

—TD Conner



Pineapple Crush

As a city shivers within spitting distance of that dastardly Neptune,
Nor'easters savage the craggy lands laden with lobsters and fiddleheads
that lure tourists in the mellow months of non-pandemic years,
sending residents puffy in parkas and anoraks
scurrying up ice-licked streets and stairs to stores and kitchens
prepped with pineapple pop because bubbly sugar highs and
fake flavors artfully suggesting sunshine and sultry hues
and heat not expelled by a power-gulping appliance
wield wellness and vitality in Voltaire's "few acres of snow."

—Adrian Slonaker

Darkroom Development

Some poems don't want
to be written.
They're elusive, fading
in and out until I capture
them and plunge
them into my solution
where they crystallize,
and develop.
Only then can I pull
them out, and hang
them on clips to dry.
Then, in the dim light
of the darkroom,
the words become clear.

—Nadia Giordana

My Old Ski Jacket

I purchased my navy, teal, and royal blue Columbia jacket from the Minneapolis Dayton's store in 1970. I bought it to wear on a ski trip with a group of friends from the University of Minnesota, which included my future husband.

Even after annual dry cleaning, the nylon shell has a grease stain shaped like Blue Lake, where our cabin of forty-seven years was located. The stain came from frying bacon on a cold morning before the woodstove had warmed the room. We loved cross-country skiing after a hefty breakfast. I don't mind the stain because of the memory it sparks.

Yesterday it was snowing, and I wore the liner outside. The soft collar snuggled against my neck and I remembered how warm it felt during my college days, skiing in Loch Lomond, Canada in twenty below zero weather. Today I wore the shell while walking our rescue Havanese, Ellie. The zipper still works well, and the jacket still fits. Soothing and cool to the touch, I like its silky feel. I remember how my baby daughter Sarah loved to stroke it while riding in the harness on my back.

The jacket smells like Downy fabric softener and Jovan Musk cologne. The pockets carry my cell phone, Kleenex tissues, Buxom lip gloss and my keys—everything needed for long walks around the Minnesota Wildlife Refuge or quick trips to the grocery store. The hood once sheltered my neck from strong winds while riding the chairlifts at Lutsen Lodge. Now it covers my gray waves on bad hair days. The tabs inside the sleeve join the liner to the shell, but I find myself reminiscing about a time when I also used them to attach lift tickets.

My life's adventures
tucked inside to remember—
my old ski jacket.

—A haibun by Janice Strootman

The Word for 2021:

"Wait"

by Ruth Sorensen

Not "waiting" or "weight" just "wait."
 This past year I've learned a great deal about waiting. There is pain, panic, awareness, growth, understanding, and even joy when we wait. I've never been a patient person. Ask my parents. I hurry and scurry, I do and I talk, and fix and cook, I make pots of coffee, and help others, sometimes without even understanding the entire task or even being asked to participate. I don't wait for intuition or higher power to offer solutions, I don't wait for lunch, and I don't wait for my hair to dry. I "do." Everything in our culture points to fast solutions and the quick fix. "Don't wait, act now!" or "Why wait?" But I'm learning about waiting; prayer and my slowly growing conviction in the power of prayer involves the great wait. To pray and release, pray and release. A change in perception and then the miracle. Ironic that while drowning in alcoholism I felt that I was "waiting for my life to start." Now that I know it really has started and sometimes moves at a record-breaking pace, I can see in hindsight that waiting itself is magic. The joyful waiting for the gestation of a baby, waiting for springtime, or just waiting for dinner. Joy and victory. Miracles and teenage saxophone jazz melody. Magic!

So, rest, pray, connect authentically with community, and wait.

Psalm 27:14 Wait for the Lord; Be strong, and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the Lord.

Waiting is not a waste of time. There's a blessing behind the waiting seasons of your life.

-Anonymous

So, rest, pray, connect authentically with community, and wait.

And finally,
Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.

—Lao Tzu

In Search of a Poem

I will search for a poem—
 a poem amidst the layers of night
 that twists and turns with such grace
 it buckles the belt of Orion
 and sits on the fragile shoulders
 of a shooting star, striking up a conversation
 with the wishes that it brings
 from the earth below

I will search for a poem—
 a poem that scrunches and squirms
 and becomes as small as it can, to fit
 in the wet, shadowy imprints of the kisses
 that the wind plants upon the blades of grass
 the dew

I will search for a poem—
 a poem amidst blistered afternoon skies
 upon which clouds, the confluence
 of a million scents, that emerge
 from a myriad lunches cooking together
 from the core of chattering kitchens

I will search for a poem—
 a poem that bruises the sky just like
 a rainbow after the rain
 and when I say that a rainbow is
 a bruise upon the sky, a colorful façade
 of a scab that conceals something way deeper
 than what it seems

you tell me that a bruise
 has many, many colors

—Impish Priniti



The River

Now a broad, slow-moving river,
I flow slothfully towards my sea.
No longer gushing froth, my
Revelry contained in demure
Sun-dappled radiance,
Moon-speckled translucency.

My banks neither corroded nor
Eroded by unbridled passions
They affectionately hold to
Contain me.
I won't turn back in fright, though
Oceanic waves bulge and thunder.

My infancy and youth spent, vast
Unknown expanse beckons, tugs
My breast like a lover.

Moving, melting, melding
Head of wild velvet waters, enchanted
Embrace, tremulous hold of
Broadband sea, in rough briny
Kisses I dissolve in liquid
Raptures of shoreless spaces,
Swift, unfolding motion, spread-eagled
on the back of unbounded love
I trace uncharted skies
Unknown dreaming races.

—Amrita Valan



Sit by the Window

I sit by the window, and I wait for you to come.
I have the floors washed and the cooking all done.
The dogs tumble in the hall,
expecting toddlers to arrive.
The house will be so happy and alive.
The kids give a call and are leaving from the mall.
They will soon drive down the street,
with sleepy babes and grown-ups, tired and beat.
I sit by the window in the snowy night
and wait for the car's speckling light.
I sit by the window and look through the glass.
I remember times past.
Once it was you and me for Yule,
driving home from school.
All our tests were done,
and we were looking forward to our holiday fun.
We'd celebrate with family back then,
And treats Grandma baked back when.
I sit by the window, then go open the door.
I see the truck pull up once more.
I don't know if I'm living in the future or past,
but the love has held fast.
As I sit here by the window,
looking in and out both sides of the glass.

—Vicki Parker Bont

The Sandwich.

some ham,
white bread
and butter. I bite
this brick
and feel the evening
clear. such flavour –
even without
the filling. this flatness
of cheap bread – 60c
at lidl. who wants
the fishes;
all we need
are loaves.

—DA Maolalai

Spring March

In a hurried
yet composed hunger
for calm winds and
gentle sun, I till
soil for spring planting,
when winter's cold
taint still clings to clods.
In a climate
that warms, I rush
toward its warmth,
to insert seeds
that will sprout into
my harvest, my hope
to reap enough
to fill this void.

—Richard Dinges, Jr

The Garden

Flash fiction by
Zach Murphy

The wildflowers wilt over their own feet as I trudge through the dusty, jaded soil. One of my legs is broken. My mouth is parched. And my stripes burn.

I wonder if the workers before me dealt with this kind of heat. I wonder if the workers after me will suffer even more. I wonder if there will even be workers after me.

The honey isn't so sweet here anymore. The dream has melted away. This planet is no longer my garden.

As I use my last shred of will to drive my stinger into the wrinkled ground, I pray that my final moments will be graced with a cool breeze.



—Pixabay

Looking for an Answer

A moon of madness
disturbed the souls
to ask,

half or crescent?

as the conversation
volleys between
casual observers
deciding, re-deciding
the celestial message
of night lights
as they search
an overwhelming sky
hoping someone can
solve the question
or provide an answer
to the meaning of
moon and life
and why we must
all eventually die

—Dr. Roger Singer

Two Rissoles on a Plate

Two rissoles on a plate
 They are the two most things I hate
 Each Saturday when served, I curse the moment
 They were lightly floured, patted on the head
 Dragged around a frying pan, whilst my thumb and finger bled
 And the two hours it took to mishape them into existence
 When I could have saved the planet, or saved my soul
 I chose with breadcrumbs to carpet bomb the kitchen
 Self-harm with a peeler, go big on the bitchin'
 Oh, where is the delightful ping of microwave?
 Snip of packet, quiet opening of tin?
 Why does my sometime better half
 Put me through this bloody cooking thing!

It's not that I'm lazy, just bored I guess
 For I don't cook from the heart, just make a freakin' mess
 Twenty-three wash-ups later, spooned-out, mashed with a fork
 I call to table my yoga, yoghurt loving dearest
 And soon we swoon in patty heaven, for they taste surprisingly good
 Though more oft than not, a little burnt under the hood
 But as one brought up on tinned peaches, everything cremated
 I'm totally cool with e numbers and additives
 For my mum made ninety, without broccoli or laxatives
 Oh, where is the man at the door with my curry?
 Can't we this Saturday put on some weight?
 No, she says, and an unhealthy death is all I can hope for
 That's my only escape from two rissoles on a plate

—Mark Niedzwiedz

More to Work than Work

There is more to a job
 Than simply making money,
 And please serve many

Follow

Do more than follow
 Become a sincere person
 By helping fellows

—Alex Andy Phuong

Giving up

Padding the cigarette
 Because it has been
 Way too long
 When you get
 Home the head
 Is still spinning
 It's been awhile
 Since I thought
 About you or
 That this might
 Be a good
 Idea or not

—Grant Armstrong

500 Famous Poems:

[https://allpoetry.com/
 classics/famous_poems](https://allpoetry.com/classics/famous_poems)



—Sarah Routman

Sunday Soft Shoe

By Salvatore Difalco

My arms wrap around the sunrise. I welcome Sunday morning, it welcomes me. This is like religion. It gives me that feeling. Keep it all going, I urge the sun. Keep it all moving along. But nothing is moving except for a hearse, gliding down the street, perhaps to fetch a body or deliver one to a preordained location. They always know where they are going, those drivers, especially if they wear a structured black cap and plain white cotton driving gloves. Cleanliness, too, is essential to their mystery, if you read the manifesto. Long purple shadows linger between the tenements surrounding mine but slowly shed volume and shrink down to the resinous shrubbery. Time for a walk. I don my tweed, mask up, and enter a world that reminds me of another ten years removed. Things have changed profoundly over the course of a decade—I have grown shorter and wider and less supercilious—but at certain early hours a bluish nostalgia floats across the neighborhood like a ghost. Otherwise the air is clean at this time. I fill my lungs and stroll along a sparkling sidewalk, crunching broken glass underfoot, wary of piercing my Sunday shoes on an exceptionally jagged shard. Cellophane from a cigarette pack reminds me of childhood and cancer as it flutters across the street and pauses glinting at a yellow fire hydrant—are cigarettes still legal and is yellow the new red? Near the old grey cemetery, the air smells of earth, hair, and putrefaction. Understandable, but when was the last coffin buried? When did the last mourners gnash their teeth and bash themselves in sorrow? Maybe between the wars. People always die between the wars, let it be said. No guarantee of life in peace. And yet we strive for it, we die for it. Nevertheless, I chuckle at the squirrels fighting among the tumbled headstones; I admire their frisky individuality. Each one knows who he or she is and who the other ones are. This thing of theirs has raged for eons, and for what? It nourishes them, these creatures, scratching and scuffling and lording over the dead; it makes them feel alive. Nothing

wrong with that. What is living after all, but a *feeling*. I put the cemetery behind me, remove my mask, and hold it up in the brightening air. It flaps like a flag, my flag. Now I feel alive. Look at me. Who is better than me at this moment? I am the king of the morning. No one dares trespass me at this time, not even the most ardent of worshippers. No one can challenge me. No one can usurp my reign. A squirrel jumps out from between two parked cars and zigzags past me, called by the others to join the fight perhaps, or simply squirrely as it happens. Further down the street, near the condo-renaissance of a high-spired church, I put my mask back on and cross myself. Old habits die hard. ●

Zenith

By Salvatore Difalco

In a month or two most of this should return to normal. Cross your fingers. Press your palms together and say a prayer, if you pray. A restoration is near, a return to common haunts and tropes. After the needling rains minty trefoil and bluebells will shag the lawns of bungalows and back-splits visible from an eighth-floor bathroom window. Bloomers will again balloon on backyard clotheslines. A stench of gasoline will announce the arrival of angry lawnmowers and leaf-blowers, determined to deafen the world. Pigeon dames in Glad-bag green will scatter whole wheat breadcrumbs to the winds and watch the magic. Free range lunatics of course will shed their masks and fingerless gloves and applaud. Strung out types with ropy veins and tats will once again invade the nearby park and hunch around a flaming garbage bin chanting anodyne obscenities. Music if you shut your eyes and tap your foot to the beat. The zenith once again will radiate from exhaust fumes of grinding gears and gridlock. Tissue-paper strips will garland the sidewalks and balconies and trees as scarcity morphs into abundance. Eat all the legumes you want, friends, strain and void without breaking yourself but do it, I say do it voluminously. We can take care of that now. You can take care of

that now. The blunt-haired lad with the new red Fender and box-amp on the roof of a nearby triplex will showcase flights of heavy metallic fancy. Yet no one will shoot him dead. Balaclava snipers have sheathed their scopes and descended like shadows into fluorescent bunkers where they will await the next calamity and live on old school K-rations and liquid bread. Squirrels black and grey fear the revolution is afoot and chitter violently among themselves; pigeons mass on roofs and eaves hatching counter-subversions. They rather enjoyed the lack of human activity. Now this? The days will lengthen like kisses you give to someone who slowly but surely is growing on you. ●

Dear Mom

I love you because
you know when
I need you to be my mom—
and when you need to be my friend.

I love you because
you know when
I had a bad day—
and need your smiles and hugs.

I love you because
you know that sometimes
a little white lie is better
than knowing “the truth.”

I love you because
you know when I don’t like myself,
and you do...and not just
because I’m your daughter.

I love you because
you stand up for me when I’m right—
and help me learn a lesson
when I am wrong.

I love you because
it’s my job to love you,
and your job to love me—
as we both love ourselves.

— Connie Anderson

Categorized

...Ripper Jack whizz.
Lemon-edged you...

*

...go halves with parmesan.
Load egg, fry...

*

...“seventy honest ones,”
chortles his dentist.
“Make it prolonged...”

*

...omee-polone amorous.
We’ll...

—Christopher Barnes

Breakfast on a Sunday Morning

I forgo the communion wine and wafers
for the breakfast you prepare,
Sunday morning in your apartment
overlooking the river fog.

The priest has more than his fair share
of parishioners nibbling from the
edges of his thumb, sipping at
the rim of the chalice.

I’m here for eggs and bacon,
fresh coffee, you in your robe,
bare feet traipsing across
the tiles of the kitchen floor.

This may not guarantee heaven to come.
But for heaven to look back on, it’s ideal.

—John Grey

I Swear You're Going to Cry Through Your Smile

By Lynn Garthwaite

Many of the rules in softball are the same as the rules in Major League Baseball. For example, if you catch a fly ball, the batter is out. If a pitcher hits a batter with a pitched ball, the batter gets to run (or limp, depending on where the ball hit him) to first base. And if you're running the bases, you actually have to touch each base, or it doesn't count.

That's also true if you hit a home run. It doesn't matter that there isn't any fielder who can somehow retrieve the ball and throw you out. You still have to trot around the bases and touch them all.

And in 2008, that proved to be a problem

for a college softball player—and a memorable moment that touched hearts across the country.

When Western Oregon visited Central Washington, it was a pretty important game for both sides. The winner would move on to the division playoffs—so there was a lot at stake. In the second inning, with a score of 0-0, a senior on the Western Oregon team named Sara Tucholsky came to the plate with two runners on base. Tucholsky admitted later that she wasn't a particularly good batter. She never had the self-confidence that she needed to excel at the plate, always doubting herself and focusing on the negatives. Before that game she had never hit a home run.

But on that at-bat, Tucholsky hit the ball over the fence. She later said the contact felt so smooth, that she barely felt the bat hit the ball.

With the ball long past the reach of the outfielders, her two teammates rounded the



Photo courtesy of CBS News

bases for home and scored two runs. But then everything changed.

Sara Tucholsky passed first base, but then realized she hadn't touched the bag. Baseball and softball rules are clear: runners MUST touch each base so, recognizing her error, Sara turned to go back to the base and touch it. Her right foot planted hard and her knee moved in a way, as she later said, that knees aren't supposed to move. Later that day the doctors would diagnose it as a torn ACL but all she knew at that moment was that her leg wouldn't work. Sara crawled back to first base in agonizing pain, and then hung on to the base, unable to move anymore.

Her teammates and the people in the stands watched with fear. Her coach and the umpires quickly conferred, but the umpire made it clear— no teammate was allowed to aid her. No pinch runner could come in and take her spot and finish running the bases. If anyone from her team assisted her, it would be a recorded out.

But look carefully at the rule, which is that no one from a player's OWN team can assist. A young woman from the OTHER team, Mallory Holtman, asked the umpire if SHE could help her. The umpire conferred with the other officials on the field and they agreed there was nothing in the rules that prevented a player from the opposing team to help her.

So, Mallory Holtman and another Central Washington player, Liz Wallace, went to Sara and asked if she'd let them pick her up and carry her. They gingerly lifted her into a kind of seated position between them, Sara's arms around both of their shoulders. And then they carried her to second base. There they lowered her just enough that her left foot could touch second base, and then raised her and continued to third. After touching third base and then home, the two young women turned her over to her waiting teammates. Tucholsky officially had the home run and notched three runs for her team.

The good sportsmanship of those Central Washington players cost them a run. Western Oregon went on to victory, so you could say it may have even cost them the win. But did it? How do we define a "win?" Their team may not have moved on to the playoffs that year, but

every single person in the stands that day felt they had witnessed something much more than the win or loss of a single game. One parent had been videotaping at the moment that Tucholsky hit that home run. When the young woman fell down in agony, she turned off the camera, but resumed taping when the opposing teammates picked her up and helped her finish rounding the bases.

That video made the rounds, even in those days before we routinely uploaded videos to the internet and watched them go "viral." Enough people saw that perfect example of sportsmanship that it did not go unnoticed. Several months later the three players were reunited when they were awarded the "Best Moment" at the 2008 ESPY awards. Sara had thanked the two players many times, but that reunion was special. Years later Sara was approached online by a journalist who asked if that moment had changed her, and Sara replied with words that perhaps we should all take to heart:

"This home run did not change me as a person, but it has had a huge impact on how I see a moment. What I learned from Mallory that day is that we always have the opportunity, in every moment, to see the bigger picture. And if we can pause in moments like those and make choices based on integrity and kindness, I think we'd see a lot more good in this world.●

You are never really
playing an opponent.
You are playing your-
self, your own highest
standards, and when
you reach your limits,
that is real joy.
—Arthur Ashe

A Snowbird's Lament

By Connie Anderson

Like a lot of retired people living where it snows a lot and gets cold, we take off for Florida the end of December for our three-month respite. The highways and airways are filled with excited "snowbirds" as we wing our way south.

December: We are anticipating warm weather and all that goes with it, and know that we have to return north again end of March. Our SUV is packed full of clothes and the more important stuff like golf clubs and tennis rackets. What fun we are going to have for three months "playing" and meeting new people.

March 30: My, how time flies when you are having fun. It's already time to return home. I am exhausted from today's packing and repacking the SUV to get everything—and everyone—in it. I'm sure my wife is exhausted too, but it's mostly from telling me how to do things. Lovey insisted I look at the map one more time, deciding if there was a better route ahead for the 1700-mile trip.

Now one more good night's sleep before I return home to yard work, and her dear mother's frequent visits. Jeez!

.....

I had to put my golf clubs wrapped tightly in two black garbage bags on top of the car, secured with lots of sealing tape and about a dozen bungee cords to hold it down. We actually shipped a couple of our bags back via UPS, and likely they'll be home before we are—and a whole lot less stressed. A thought: If they make a suitcase that's just a little bigger, maybe I'll ship myself home next year.

I'm having trouble getting everything in the SUV. My packing and organizational skills seem to be lacking today. I hope our two Golden Retrievers, Mickey and Minnie, will do better going home than coming down. They do love to bark, and bark they do—at everything and everyone. And...the space in the car got a little

tighter when a few weeks ago Lovey could not resist rescuing a parrot.

If you think the dogs love to bark, wait until Patty starts her yakking. Some days I wanted to say, "It's Patty or me," but I didn't really feel that confident. Lovey, sitting upfront with me, has to hold the cage the entire trip or the dogs will go crazy in back. Does anyone worry about me going crazy?

Back to that noisy, annoying parrot. Now I know why the last owner's husband threatened to kill it...or worse, whatever that might be. OMG, if we see a McDonalds, the parrot squawks, "Patty wants a Big Mac," until it's finally out of sight.

We're off at 6 a.m.—packed in tighter than sardines in an airtight can, and by the end of the trip, we'll smell as bad. Some make this trip in two long days, but we lose time stopping at all the rest stops where Mickey and Minnie can run off some of their pent-up energy. Thankfully the parrot stays in the car, and I always hope the sun will cook her brains and we'd return to a fried bird, but she's a strong one. The potty stop is my respite from that annoying bunch of colorful feathers with a talking beak.

Too bad they don't make noise-cancelling headsets that allow the driver to tune out some things—like parrots, barking dogs, or pouting wives—but hear others, like sirens and honking horns.

Only fifty miles north and I stop to get coffee. I need a wake-up jolt so I could be the great driver I always tell my wife I am. Because I hadn't braked yet, she tells me about the car coming from the right (that I saw). I hate it when she doubts my driving expertise, but I do understand...*the car was going to hit her side of the SUV, so it was alright that she told me.*

I turn the radio to a good mix of 60's rock-and-roll music, which unfortunately brings Patty out of her stupor and she sings along. The dogs don't bark, they howl. When I yell at them to stop, Lovey tells me to stop shouting. Already I feel that my soul is being hacked away piece by piece—and we still have 1650 miles to go.

Lovey tends to be kind of stubborn, and she should work more on her fibbing skills. As the

miles piled up, I learn she didn't rescue Patty, but paid the other woman for her. She is the kind of person that likes to put some "fancy lace" on every story, and this was a whopper. Now I have to figure out how I can get rid of that annoying pest. Lovey doesn't listen to me most of the time—and neither does the neon-green parrot.

In three tedious days of driving, we have way too much time to listen to each other's stories. I needed to sharpen my sarcasm, if only to entertain myself. With each of my fabricated stories, I was getting closer to the trapdoor of my life. Sometimes when Lovey was talking, I'd raise an ironic eyebrow. We were competing to fill the void with our words. As we "shared," I was surprised to learn that she had *more "needs" than wants...*and so did I.

Maybe that's where we need to start when we pull into our driveway at home. Like most movies, by the midpoint many things are happily resolved—and that will be midday tomorrow. There is nothing quite as disarming as a spouse who laughs at herself—or himself. Hope she thinks the same of me.

•••••

March 31 – 6 a.m. *I just woke up from a dream—no, a horrible nightmare—to the clanging alarm.* Reality just hit. OMG, we have to drive back home this morning. If I rush, I can park our car in the garage and we can still get to the airport and catch our flight and be home in no time. This flight will be without dogs or parrot (they are alive only in my nightmare), but with each other. Someday I will have to ask Lovey for forgiveness for what I dreamed about her—but until then, it will be my little secret. ●

Past is Past

No, I may not return.

(Can't?)

(Won't?)

Never can I return.

Yes, that's destiny:
self-scripted/inflicted.

Had I known

Or written the script, contemplated

The end of the road less travelled!

Had I, ever!

Past is not a place to revisit.

Past is not a phase to re-live
and change.

Past is not a page to rewrite.

Past is past;

the slippery sand that slips dryly

From between the fingers,

is lost, forever

Is gone irretrievably.

Has happened irreversibly.

It makes you first

and then un-makes.

What time gives first,

it then takes.

So, years of careless days

were baits to be happily

Swallowed, fast, greedily,

unmindful of the cost.

—Rajnish Mishra



PREDESTINATION

When it all started with a bang a few billion years ago,
 It was no doubt determined for some mad reason
 That I would be sitting here now
 In this Billings bus depot café,
 Trying not to overhear the banal conversations around me,
 Trying not too hard to write a poem
 That tells of the aimlessness of my ways
 And the tastelessness of my sandwich,
 This cool Montana evening,
 Waiting to crawl back aboard #7179.

—Michael Rossberg—March, 1972—Billings, Montana

Editor's note: The three pieces of poetry on these two pages are so relevant, they could have been written yesterday. Yet all were crafted in the early 70s. Done well, poetry is timeless.

Moondown at Three Fires Campground

In the cooling later hours of evening
 I tend my fire,
 Musing beside flames that share their warmth,
 Then make my way to the side
 Of a quiet lake, where the moon
 And its gently rippling reflection
 Move toward their silent rendezvous.
 The blue black sky soars upward
 From the far shore
 To welcome countless stars;
 I close my eyes and find myself
 Envisioning endless pathways above.
 When I look again,
 The world is cast in deeper shades of darkness,
 But for the moon and its reflection
 Grown coral red.
 I watch, begin to think back,
 And offer up my once cherished hopes
 To the moon as it settles
 Contentedly onto the horizon.
 But slowly, steadily it descends farther still,
 Until it is but a speck of light
 Which vanishes, leaving me twice alone
 In the sudden blackness of night.

—Michael Rossberg, poem and painting



Dementia Praecox

comes eternalistic night
 permeating a relentless rhythmic cycle of 17 beats
 Pounding to Sangha
 wavering mirror swallows tungsten explosions
 releasing phlogistron escaping molten ether
 primordeal incarnations flare within contingent souls
 Sin's Hellhounds bark melismatically
 in praise of Grace
 have mercy on me chanting pilgrims
 or court jesters
 all certain of imminent ruin
 throbbing emptiness engenders mindless laughter
 flash turns stagnation to silver radiance
 in search of Mahi Bodi
 unreeling Baba
 withered like flesh
 decaying bodies being lonely questions
 Dip to Samsara flight
 Mt. Palomar dome slits races to the dawn
 $d / t = 8 . 3 6 5 =$ Armageddon
 realized in harsh post-impatient wave functions
 surging through limitless systems
 This Universe
 a tiny tentacled speck
 glued to the side
 of a center-illuminated tube
 coated with celestial excrement
 earth consciousness on dimly lit outskirts
 strains to perceive through a shroud of fog
 that which glitters in glaring mercurial day
 (reaching for if but
 panicked shrieks
 Trapped in concrete vacuums)
 lapse to
 frenzied rhythms from ancient tribal rituals
 exciting forgotten instinctive passions
 and simeon shadows of ancestral hunters
 dancing madly around ashes
 scattered since Creation
 level five Christ
 dictating
 Moses's sermon in the elephant graveyard
 australopithecine trips through corporeality
 (feel squirming vicarious moronity)
 Revelations in primitive wordlessness
 waves of madness implode within scrambled imbecility
 blood streams from sunken eyelids
 extinction for the unadaptive genus
DEATH TO THE HOMINIDS
 the primary obligation of an organism to itself
 is to maintain life
 beware when some are willing to Die or
 Drop
 down and out —Michael Rossberg, May, 1970

From Russia With(out) Love

By Mary K Crawford

A generation ago, I would have been one of those misunderstood eccentrics squirreling away money in my mattress, with the sole intention of living outside the banking system.

But, it was 2010, and although I was using Microsoft Word to pursue my interest in creative writing, I would *not*, under any circumstances, bank online. A nagging fear of the vast and growing internet haunted me.

One spring day, as I was adding the final flourish to a cheery poem, my computer screen froze. Flashing across the screen was a phone number and message instructing me to contact Microsoft.

Oh good! I thought. Thank you Bill Gates!

The technician that answered my call spoke with a Russian accent, but had the helpful, soothing tones of a dear friend eager to restore my computer's functioning. After providing him with my password, he took over my computer. As I held my hands motionless above the keyboard, I observed the technician remotely navigate the black pointer arrow across my computer screen. The bobbing arrow pointed and selected various files from my directory as the technician explained this is how he would "Fix it."

Patiently optimistic, I waited and watched for several minutes, conversing with the technician as he told me to "stand by." Suddenly, my computer buzzed and screamed like a banshee; then crashed. In an instant, I was disconnected from the technician. Perplexed and disheartened, I considered when and where I might bring my computer in for repair. Later that day, the local news channel warned of "Hackers posing as Microsoft technicians who take over your computer to download personal and financial information".

Thankfully they got a big fat nothing from me. No personal or financial information on my computer! Later I thought with a smile, "Someone in Russia finally read my poetry!" ●

White Sand

White sand
 Carpets the endless beach
 And a froth of lace in pale cream
 Bubbles at the edge of the sea
 As it laps at the shore
 Cotton skies paper thin
 Spread diaphanous sheets
 Across the vast firmament
 Through which eternity itself
 From beyond the gates to this kingdom
 Remains indistinct awhile
 To those who endlessly seek
 Amid mortal realms temporal
 Yet discerned and within reach imminent
 By eyes that ever do yearn to see
 And hearts that do hunger and ache
 For the realm of heaven
 And a sun of light yellow
 Casts a glow empyrean
 Upon the rolling hills that silently exult
 As they watch over the gilded bay idyllic
 A shroud in a fine mist
 That emanates from yonder ethereal empire

—d.a.simpson

Realistic Boundaries

Borders might
 Try to restrict,
 And restrain,
 Yet being free,
 Involves accepting
 That life has no bounds,
 But also moving through
 The obstacles of reality,
 And coping authentically,
 And living life realistically

—Alex Andy Phuong



Six 6-word poems, 1 poem Makes

Sunday drizzles quiet the passionate morning
 We walk anyway, hands clasped tightly
 No ground underfoot, walking on air
 Lying on wet grass we kissed
 Sun-drenched love to be remembered always
 Sealed with a rainbow of promises.

—Sarah Routman

6-WORD POEMS

Life's game simplified: Rock – paper – scissors

Decisions can't be undone – consequences
 matter

Love,
 Tread lightly
 on broken hearts.

Laughter-filled days healed her enigmatic pain.

Dancing soldiers
 Abandoned posts
 Heading home.

Ballots counted
 Cheaters ignored
 Transition begun

One simple letter
 I'm in love.

—Sarah Routman

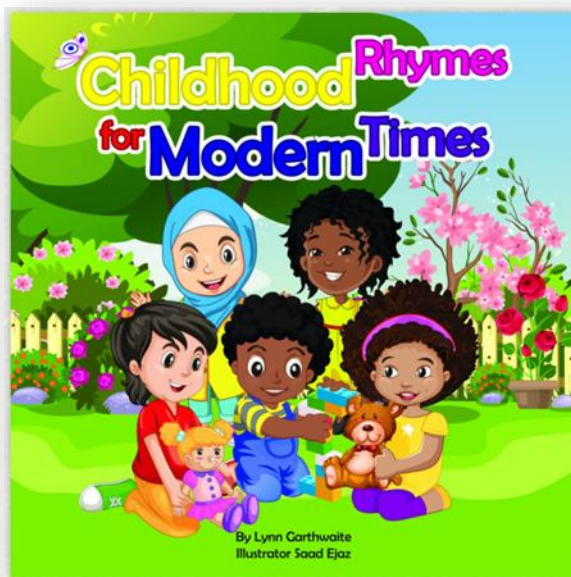
Blank Pages

I leave all thoughts behind
 Pages within my mind
 No direction or time.
 Dead all the metaphors
 Images once before
 Left feeling like a door.
 My muse please rescue me
 Your pages breaking free
 Have blown telepathically.
 Anything to consume.
 But they are empty too.
 No trace of the ink once you!
 Whom do I try to fake?
 There is no real escape.
 Cold now my body aches.
 Darkness closes on me
 Pitch black the full moon beams
 Never ending doom seems.
 Blinded no sense where I've been
 My once empty thoughts penned!
 Thoughts, tattered by the wind.
 I know the blank pages
 Once again!

—Eva Marie Ann Cagley



KirkHousePublishers.com



<https://www.kirkhousepublishers.com/product-page/childhood-rhymes-for-modern-times-by-lynn-garthwaite>

The Sunday Sports Page

By Mark Tulin

“Here’s the paper,” said my mother, and passed me a tightly-folded Sunday edition just delivered at our front door. She did this at the beginning of every visit. The paper was a family ritual that was passed on to me by my father.

Mom knew that a Sunday newspaper in my hands was soothing. I quickly snapped off the rubber band, unfolded the thick Sunday edition, and leafed through the sections of Entertainment, Home and Garden, Business, and Automobiles to make sure that everything was there. Sometimes, people swiped the Employment or Sports instead of spending the five bucks at the newsstand.

“It’s nice to see you so relaxed,” she said, in a pleasant but annoying tone.

“Mom, please let me read the paper. I’ll talk to you when I’m finished.”

My mother didn’t answer. She often denied that I wanted privacy and thought that I came to visit because of her nurturing, but that wasn’t the case. I felt responsible for my father’s death, and I thought that I owed her something.

When my father was alive, we scrambled to get the sports pages while eating Philly Cream Cheese on onion bagels with the coffee pot percolating in the kitchen. My mother was always in the background, observing us quietly, pleased by our common bond, as she often leafed through the style section to see what the latest trends were.

Dad and I were on the same wavelength. Our sports conversations were always intense and in agreement, most times, like the Eagles would play awful against the Dallas Cowboys, and the Flyers had a solid team but only a goaltender away from making it to the Stanley Cup. We would read a sports column and discuss the finer points.

“How could he say that Bryce Harper was not a clutch hitter?” Dad said. “No way that’s true.”

Our Sunday morning ritual was my family’s

church, and the Sunday paper the bible. We were not a religious family, but we approached the Inquirer’s sports section with the religiosity of a zealot. We believed with religious fervor in our Phillies, Sixers, Flyers, and Eagles—and our superstar athletes—Harper, Wentz, and Simmons.

When my father was in an Einstein’s hospital bed during his final days, I brought him the Sunday Inquirer. It was a thrill for us to continue to share this ritual that we found so sacred and watch sporting events on his hospital TV, even though my visits were severely restricted. There was no touching or sitting on his bed, and I could only stay for an hour on Sundays; that’s if he was feeling okay and I had been negative for Covid-19.

Dad sometimes didn’t recognize me in a mask, plastic face shield, white medical gloves, and a light blue hospital gown. I looked more like a firefighter in a hazmat suit than his thirty-two-year-old son coming to visit. And when he realized it was me, his eyes lit up and all he could talk about was the Phillies.

“Didi is still hitting over 300,” he said, hooked up to a morphine drip with his back propped up by four pillows. He would dip his bagel into the coffee with extra cream and peruse a box score. He was dying because of my negligence. I passed Covid-19 to him, unaware that I was a carrier, thinking that wearing a mask was only needed around strangers. But I should have known better because my father had chronic lung disease.

Dad was irrepensible when it came to sports. He reeled off the hitters’ names with the most home runs and RBIs. He loved the power guys, and he could tell you what town they came from, where they played college ball, and how many years they were in the majors. Even in the ICU, his sports mind was fully functional.

“Can you believe how well Mookie Betts is playing center field?” he said with quivering blue lips and rheumy eyes.

“Yeah, Dad, he can snag anything. I wish we had him on our team.”

“Wouldn’t that be something?”

Dad’s hands shook as he held the sports pages but refused to put it down, even when the nurse

came in and did his vital signs or scolded him for taking out the oxygen tube from his nose. He was always so determined to maintain a regular routine, especially during Sunday mornings, when we shared our love for sports.

Near the end of his life, I cut his onion bagel into tiny pieces. His gums had shrunk so badly that he couldn't wear his dentures anymore. I spoon-fed him slowly between sips of warm coffee. He could not hold the newspaper or talk very well, often gasping for air after each word. His eyes were too blurry to read the small print, and so I read the sports pages loud enough for him to hear. I made sure not to tell him how awful the Phillies were playing.

The day before going into a coma, Dad reminisced about being poor, growing up in Pottsville, and selling Hershey bars on street corners during cold, snowy winters. He recounted all the friends he had met during the many years of selling produce off the back end of a truck. My father spoke about all the countries he visited when stationed in Italy as an Army soldier. The pictures he took of the iconic European spots like the Tower of Pisa and The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He didn't speak about how painful his body felt, but I kept seeing it in his eyes."

"I'm sorry, Dad," was all I could say.

"I would have gotten it anyway. I'm high risk, and you know I hate wearing a mask."

"I should have been more careful and kept you safe."

Dad wasn't supposed to die at fifty-seven. He should have been around to see the Phillies win another world championship and attend the parade down Broad Street in all of its South Philly glory.

In the months that followed my father's death, I spent Sunday mornings with my mother. She was more of a comfort than I deserved. I was irritable when I visited my mother; seeing all the pictures of my father on the walls and his favorite sports memorabilia on the shelves made me even more guilty.

She didn't mind my attitude and brought me a coffee and a sliced onion bagel on a tray. I read the Sunday Inquirer as usual and sat on my father's brown leather recliner as if the world

hadn't really changed. Mom sometimes called me Mort, my father's name, because I talked in the same Philly accent and had about the same amount of bare skin showing on my scalp.

When I talked about my father, my mother would listen with great interest. We'd look over our photo album and watch home movies where my dad's smile would almost feel too real. I'd laugh at his funny baseball caps that were always too small for his oversized head and the Kelly-green Eagle Jersey that he wore whenever there was a game on Sunday. Mom would spread the cream cheese over my bagel and watch me read the sports section with her typical interruptions. I'd drink coffee with four teaspoons of sugar like my Dad, and Mom would often surprise me with how much baseball she knew. ●



—Steve Anderson
The Ladyslipper, Minnesota's State flower

Painting My Way Through the Pandemic

Essay and painting by Stephanie Sorensen

First I was laid off, as in a year ago. All of a sudden I had whole days in which to write. I am an author. My other job contributed to the household, but we still had my husband's full-time job to lean on. And we couldn't go anywhere, we didn't have to pay for gas, except to go the three miles to the grocery store and back.

So I wrote. In one year I produced an Amish romance series, six books in all. Three publishers have expressed interest but that means the waiting game begins.

Then the New Year arrived. Zoom has become the new meet-up. My WOW group, or Women of Words meet once a month. Last month the ladies who normally take turns updating the group on their book's progress were now talking about what their latest puzzles were: 1,000 pieces, 2,000 pieces. Are you kidding me? And writer's block. I rebelled. I will not stoop to putting together puzzles all day. I had to think up something better to do. I tried baking, experimenting with recipes for naan bread, chapatis, sour dough; then kimchee by the gallon and fig jam. Good thing we like them. I sewed pajamas for all the grand kids and then taught myself (via You Tube) how to knit socks. After the 24th pair I'd had enough.

Then one day I got a photo on my phone from my son in New York. It was a lovely painting of a gypsy grand-matriarch. He had seen it in an antique barn somewhere near Newark, but it had a sold sign on it. He sent the photo anyway because it was such an unusual painting.

Then she spoke to me. I swear she was looking at me. It was a large painting. If the glass display case she was leaning against when the picture was taken was about 36 inches high, I guessed, then the square canvas

had to be about 36 inches square. Olga as I had started calling her, had been painted by a Latvian artist in 1979. I could not find a print or even a mention of this particular painting online, though her more modern pieces appeared multiple times. Anyway, Olga looked right at me from my phone and said, "Do you have anything better to do? Huh?" I had absolutely nothing better to do with my time. I ordered the canvas.

I had not painted on canvas since art class over 50 years. You don't paint with a house full of five children under seven. Picasso was still living back then. So was Andy Warhol. Our elite little school actually obtained access to visit their private galleries. We all learned to paint, as in cubes and oversized cans of Campbell's soup. Those cubes were damn good. Even shadowed. I don't think acrylics had been invented yet. We worked in oil paint then, and linseed oil and cleaned our brushes with kerosene. A lovely smell. I missed that.

I didn't tell Isaac I had decided to paint Olga. I would send it to him as a complete surprise. His sisters were sworn to secrecy on pain of death as I sketched, erased and re-sketched. Finally I erased that version too. Back to the drawing board... literally. I had the photo scanned and enlarged. Then I drew a grid over the page and numbered and lettered the rows and columns so I could transfer each cube onto the similarly drawn grid on the canvas. I was good at cubes. I could do this. My sixty-eight-year-old brain didn't agree.

Then I brought my phone to a local printing shop and had them make 2 poster-size pictures of Olga on cheap paper. Thirty-six inches square. Perfect. I erased the grid from the canvas and carefully traced around the templates I had meticulously cut from one of the posters: Blouse, head, hair, hands, shawl, jewelry, etc. I just had to fill in the picture, now in perfect proportions. Paint by number. The second poster hung on the wall next to my easel to refer to. I took a photo of her every day as the painting progressed. These were sent to my sister Phebe who lives in New Jersey. An art

teacher for over three decades, first in Liberia and then in St. Thomas, in the Virgin Isles until she retired. She would make suggestions, tweaking this point or tell me to switch to another kind of brush. She was good. Very good.

The acrylics were amazing. One call and the set of paints arrived in the mail. Acrylics dried almost instantly. Oil had taken days to dry.

I soon realized I could not write *and* paint. It had to be one or the other. The writing went on sabbatical. Olga took all my time. Like one of my babies. No rest for the wicked. I painted all day, taking short breaks to shower or make supper or spot clean the bathrooms, but that was all.

Olga took a month to paint. It is not considered forgery to copy a painting unless you sign the original artist's name and try to pawn it off as an original. Art schools often have students copy classic works of art as a way to study the masters. I wouldn't tell too many people about Olga. She would just sit quietly in a little house in upstate New York, not bothering anyone. Phebe gave me an A when I sent her a photo of the finished painting.

The funny thing is, as Isaac opened the box he realized he knew exactly

what it was before it was even torn open. He and I had done this ESP thing before. We must have some kind of special connection.

So there Olga sits, or rather hangs in New York. And I am hooked, as in painting. Absolutely addicted. I need to get my next fix. I wandered around the apartment having withdrawal symptoms for two days. I have all these lovely paints now. What next?

Icons. I'd always admired them, the religious pictures that are venerated in the Orthodox,

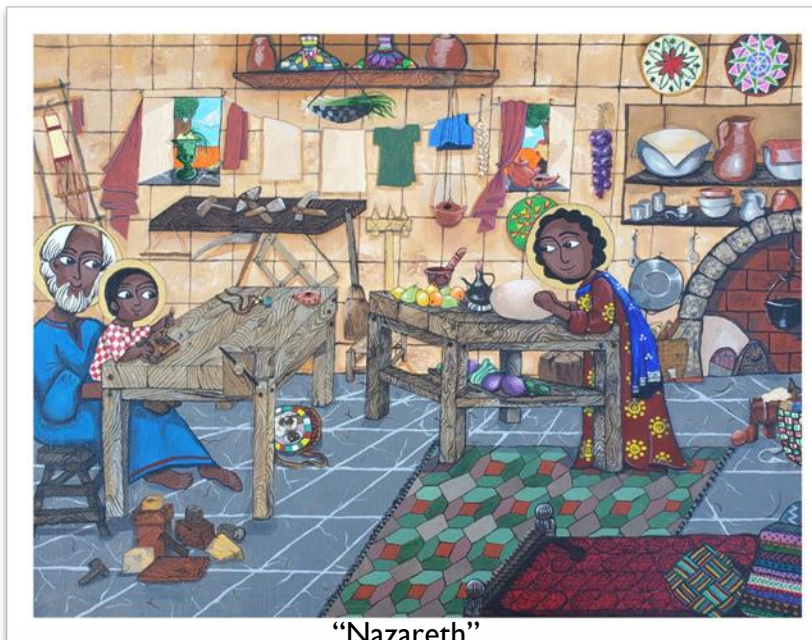
Coptic, and other church traditions. This was a big ask. I wasn't going to instantly be able to reproduce pictures of saints in Byzantine or Renaissance style. Was I getting delusional in my old age? I actually found out that there was an icon artist who taught in nearby Minneapolis. I went to her webpage and saw a class of about a dozen adults painting on small canvases she had already sketched on. No skill required. Paint by number. No. Definitely not for me.

Now, Ethiopian icons were another story. The faces were simpler than in more modern portraiture. I just didn't feel as intimidated by them. One email to my artist friend Teo Bindea in Romania and now I am connected to the Eastern European archives containing over 70,000 plates of Ethiopian icons. He apologized

that only 35,000 had actually been cataloged thus far. Never mind. I think I can make due with only 35,000.

So now I am off and running. I could not find a support group called AAA, Addicted Artists Anonymous. The house hasn't been vacuumed all month. My husband gets

sandwiches for supper now, but I am cranking out icons at a rate of about one a week. Mandated isolation? What is that? Surrounded with all these saints hanging from my walls? You've got to be kidding me. Please leave a message when you call. I am busy. Very, very busy. This is all your fault, Isaac. I blame you if I end up on a psyche ward somewhere. They better have an occupational therapy room with plenty of acrylics.



"Nazareth"



During a Break from Harvesting

It seemed to be an ancient path,
 That wound through near-cut harvest fields,
 Then lead me to a hazel grove,
 Where magic once was weaned.
 Overgrown and deserted now,
 Devoid of any light,
 Yet, there is something that still lingered there,
 An essence of pagan rites.
 I tried hard to imagine
 The scene back in those days,
 When the druids performed their magic,
 For the Sun, the Moon and May.
 And at the harvest feast of Lughnasa,
 With their dance to thank the earth,
 And the welcoming of darkness—
 As a new season gave re-birth.
 Before I left I asked that Lugh,
 Would watch over all my ways,
 And thanked his foster mother, Tailltiu,
 For the good harvesting, that day.

—John Anthony Fingleton

9.5 Julys

and that is why the fans are
 spinning, the thermometers
 thinning, the windmills
 stilling:

that vexing sweat-runner roots for another
 the first in a dirge of scrubbed summers, sung

for the only new thing under the Sun
 —the youth will win, have already won.

I believe that leaves
 one last path for us: a
 hidden kin raising our
 hydrangeas...

Again and again it's an endless, tunneled dung.

—Tyler V. Hayes

Periwinkle

Slug slut, prowler—

tramp of shoreline and rock—
 inching for a fuck. Brain
 lost to your cock.

You pursue
 her mucus trail, slide
 for a score. Syphilitic man-whore—

you're the mate she's hungered for.

What shell,
 what grey baggage

do you tow in your wake?
 She looks right past it—

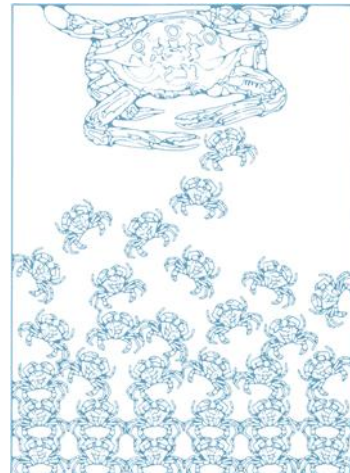
that's her mistake.

Flesh-footed whelk,
 revved up for the drive.
 Your ancient prong prods—

how her brood sac thrives.
 Father of crawlaways,
 begetter of lies.

Far away from you, I will plod.

— Nacona Stroud



A Twist to The Emperor's New Clothes

A story by Hans Christian Andersen. Rewritten by **Leanne M Benson**.

This is a tongue twister of a tale for those that like to whittle words.

Once upon a time there lived a deceitful fella. His name was Tom Campanella. He had no talent. He had no thingamajigs. And he seldom had any gigs.

He finagled funds from hardworking folk that really were quite broke! But it was the wealthy he preferred to bamboozle. Leaving their bank accounts with a little less moola.

Arriving in town before a rooster's crow, Tom waisted no time, getting to the ruler's chateau. While driving along, he made plans of tomfoolery, to lift some loot and the magistrate's jewelry.

He introduced himself to the royal Highness, "I'm Tom the tailor." And "Yes, I am the finest!" The King was impressed to be told, "I've got the finest silk and satin fabrics to behold."

Tom boasted to the king, "My nifty machine will make a pair of pantaloons, before the strike of noon." When in fact those basting stitches, were really sewing bogus britches.

The Emperor would squint and groan— but saw nothing being sewn. "Where are the wears that you weave?" The Emperor said, "I do not even see a sleeve."

Tom then sputtered more malarkey to the doubting monarchy, "Only a nincompoop or a numbskull cannot see this robe is AWFULLY BEAUTIFUL!"

Pretending the outfit was adorned with royal studs. Tom hoodwinked the Highness to doff the old duds. The King thought to himself, "I won't be a fuddy-dud. My royal blood be laud."

Holding a thing of nothing, the tailor announced loudly, "It's Done!" And the emperor put it on proudly. Changing his clothes, the king stood and posed. Unaware, his hind-end was exposed.

The Emperor concealed his dismay, as the seamstress began to say. "I dare anyone to dispute how dapper you look in your new suit."

"Do I really look that great?" The King began to contemplate. But he soon took Tom's bait. "Let us not lollygag, for your kingdom doth await."

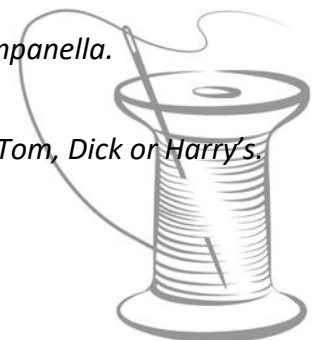
The parade route was packed with excited folk waiting to see their Emperor's new suit and cloak. But instead of delight they were dumbfounded to see the Emperor's bare buttocks and belly.

"What in tarnation has become of our leader?" The ladies and lads began to get weepy. Then a brave little ragamuffin stopped the whole farse, by giving his blanket to cover the royal's ars.

The Emperor stood proud, until he knew that there was no satin shroud. But he did not go berserk nor have a hissy-fit. Instead he hailed a taxicab and went home lickety-split.

No one ever knew what happened to the fella, who called himself Tom Campanella. I guess, with the threat of a battle he decided to quickly skedaddle.

The message in this story is not simply to be wary of all the untrustworthy Tom, Dick or Harry's. But rather to see what depicts royalty, is the way they handle adversity.



Happiness

Continuing at the carousel is to naturalize the self with sorrow. Grief smears itself on one's being like grains of sand in shoes. I have lived long to be able to recognize my restlessness. The viciousness of wind is flinging its bulletins at me. I'm not inclined to read them.

—Sanjeev Sethi

First published in Shot Glass Journal



Photo: Grand Marais by Barbara La Vallée

Poison Tree (Redux)

rotten roots
gnarled, knobby fingers
clawing up and out
of the sepulchral underworld

clasping, withered tubers
grabbing hold of children's ankles
as they run and scream and play
trying to pull, tug, drag them down

sturdy trunk
ring upon ring of hateful history
building a solid base
massive, breathtaking and fearsome
to behold
pulsing with the blood of the lost

knotty protrusions
facial silhouettes
twisted, screaming
tormented souls
hearts eaten from the inside out

wind-milling branches
grasping limbs
forever trying to take hold
fists pounding
saluting
punching
fighting

leaves break off
spiraling up, down and off
little poison tipped darts aiming
to taint
torment
and tear apart
the heart targets
on which they land.

—Esme DeVault

Food Drive

By Anita Haas

"I'll have to go to the Indian grocer to pick up some things for the family," Sue told her neighbor, Jake.

"Oh? They are Indian?" They had run into each other in the supermarket.

"Could be. And then I'll pop over to that Ecuadorian shop and get some beans and jalapeños. The father loves spice!"

"For the Indians?"

"Maybe. But I already have a bagful here. I could drop it off now and continue shopping later."

Jake eyed the diapers in Sue's basket, "They have a baby, I see."

"I suppose." she answered vaguely.

And a little girl about seven. Oh! I forgot to throw in the butter cookies for her! But maybe they are hindu vegetarians ... Should I take those dried sausages out just in case?

She wished Jake would stop watching her and leave her alone with her shopping.

"Why don't you let me help you carry it? It's pretty heavy, and it's no problem for me."

Sue didn't know how to say no, and she could do with the help.

The community center was two blocks away.

A poster explained about the food drive collecting dry goods for needy families affected by Covid. There were a lot of immigrants in this neighborhood. Women who worked as cleaners and babysitters, their husbands subcontracted in seasonal work. Lots of kids.

Jake's wife Martha had sounded concerned when she told him about Sue and her "families."

"She knows them by name, age, religion, even their favorite flavor of Jell-O!"

"Thank you!" trilled one of the volunteer ladies at the door. "Just set the bags there."

Jake peeked through the door. Beyond it, he saw more ladies taking bag after bag and dumping the contents together in big heaps, then distributing them among different boxes with labels like "Soap," "Toothpaste," "Pasta,"

etc. No families, and definitely no names, ages or Jell-O flavors.

His heart sank. Oh, poor Sue! Had she seen? He turned to her, but she was smiling at the ladies.

"They are so efficient, don't you think? Thank you, Jake. I have to run before the Indian grocer closes. The mother has run out of almond oil for her lovely, long hair." ●

I Remember Her

I remember her
standing there,
outstretched arms of love.
Taking in all our sins,
she paid the penance,
saying her Hail Marys.
Forgiving all forgiveness,
in her martyr way.
Her quiet strength
filled the room.
Keeping all pain to herself,
no one knew she was there.
Present, yet unperceivable
was her whispered prayer.
She held no malice,
spoke no hate,
though tortured was her lot.
She faded from existence
just as she arrived,
alone and unnoticed,
by all but me.
I remember her
standing there,
outstretched arms of love.

—Ann Christine Tabaka
Originally published
by *The Pangolin Review*, July 2019

Friends Like These

When the night is quiet and cold
 And everyone is fast asleep
 My friends arrive and say, Hello!
 Don't go to bed, Oh please don't go
 Come play with us, we love you so

Some sing songs of love and love lost
 Some tell stories of what the cost
 Is to be true to oneself
 A bit like elves, some nap on shelves

Some huddle over my shoulder
 and whisper their songs and stories
 And I ask them to speak bolder
 Typing, saving in a folder

Sometimes I'm glad they visit me
 Sometimes I wish they'd leave me be
 I don't determine wrong or right
 I take dictation, and then say,
 Thank you, Elves, and to you, good night!

Ugh...
 Elves came to visit me last night.
 They promised to hand me the keys
 Unlock insights for the ages
 They promised me perfect poems,
 seductive songs, soulful stories

Ugh, I gotta go to bed, I said while seated in
 front of the keyboard
 Hands in lap, forehead on the table
 They plead and tell me that I'm able
 Able and capable! One more word!
 You can do it! Just type one more word!
 They urge me on, I type one more word

Groggy mornings after nights with elves
 I pour coffee in my cereal bowl
 and plop oatmeal in my coffee mug
 ...ugh

—Teresa M. Riggs Fooshee

Found Poem after Catastrophe

Caught a sound bite just the other night
 telling those too stubborn to evacuate the area
 to please write some information of identification
 & zip it in plastic tucked in your pocket,
 so workers know who to give the corpse
 after this trilogy of majestic storms passes.

Nobody is coming to protect your person,
 no, they're all too busy getting the hell out.

So, my body's floating lonely now down
 our new river dividing the neighborhood.
 I thought you'd get more enjoyment
 stumbling upon my last written verse
 over struggling to finish this puzzle
 I've started to determine
 who I thought I was.

Let the rain pull me south;
 today's a good day
 to see Mom again.
 There's never been
 a better time nor place
 to see her face shine
 than the second
 I begin to taste the salt
 & fail at breath
 in depths which steal
 the last line.

Weight taken from me
 like I've cut off my limbs,
 & the freedom to be nothing
 is a risk I'd be willing to take
 if only I didn't live
 so far away.

—Tim Heerdink



Field Stories

The big tractors (with bigger wagons)
pulled in today.
The combine with no head was followed
by the truck pulling the flatbed trailer
with the head.
The semis pulled up on the side of the road,
and the harvest started around us.
I stand at the window and look out,
wondering what my ancestors would have thought
to see the way we gobble up a field now.
Heck, they would be amazed
at the size of the fields,
never mind the equipment.
I wonder if the men out on the combines,
late at night,
see ghostly single row corn pickers,
with small, drab tractors pulling them.
Or do they see further back,
see pale, four legged shapes, pulling a wagon
with a family walking alongside,
picking the corn by hand.
Each generation builds on the one before,
down through the ages.
What stories these fields could tell.
Once woods and meadows,
great swaths of grassland and prairie,
home to deer and rabbits, quail and pheasant.
Suddenly the trees are cut down and burned,
the grass dug up by those new-fangled
metal plows.
Early furrows dug by great oxen,
or large horses with hooves bigger
than your head or mine.
Then, in the blink of an eye,
the furrows being dug by a heavy tractor,
steam billowing out as the whistle blows
across the prairies.
Now, enormous combines,
(in some cases picking in two passes
what would have encompassed
an entire field back then),
go back and forth across the field
and in no time, are done.
Yes, I would like to hear the stories
those fields could tell.

—Paula Baysinger Morhardt

The Nature of it All

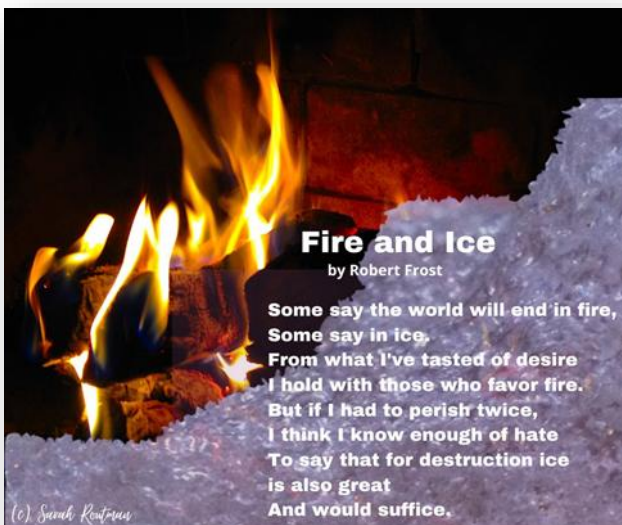
Being very young and thinking
Life is like a tape recorder
when you die
it all rewinds
and then lives as
someone else again thereafter
being very young and thinking
we are all the same person
and when you love each other
you love yourself and
you should always love yourself and
when you fight with each other
you're fighting yourself
a useless argument
Indeed
there's nothing to be done
except love each other
and learn from each other
cause we'll all come back
and live the next life
but then I grew up
somewhere along the way
I got rid of such ideas
Because
some people you don't
learn anything from
it's just another life
but I'm wrong

—Randi Whipple





Photo by Ann Aubitz, Kirk House Publishers



Poem #1 is in public domain. Poet Sarah Routman recently wrote poem #2 in the style of Robert Frost in an exercise as part of PINK: Poets IN the Know, a Facebook/Zoom group spinoff of WINK: Writers IN the Know.



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return home

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