



YOUNG RAVENS

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Introduction

In the eighteenth issue of *Young Ravens Literary Review*, we delve into the treasure heap of minutiae that enrich our lives. While minutiae may only be small, precise details, they are far from mere trifles in their impact on who we are and what we truly value as humans.

For a “well-loved book” may become a “talisman” (Carlene M. Gadapee, 52). At other times, there is no book or magic item among the “colorful, breakable things” of the whole world that can fill the space of grief and questioning inside us (Paul Hostovsky, 64). Still, we seek out even the briefest moments of beautiful startlement to try and “escape an imperfect world” (Louis Efron, 44). Sometimes, even the simplest of routines and tasks like “sitting under shade” may provide us with gentle, sure purpose (Terri Glass, 76).

And yet, at some point we all find ourselves wondering if everything is all just a “gigantic, cosmic coincidence” (David Henson, 7). *Perhaps*. But perhaps pausing to marvel at even the most mundane thing is the true secret of minutiae because our “species survives on the strength of the stunned” (Angela Townsend, 8). In the end, aren’t we all just seeking to make sense of the “mosaic of stardust” that is our transitory existence (Julie Allyn Johnson, 70)?

Shelby Lynn Lanaro

Guarded



David Henson

The Full Moon and the Tree Limb

One winter night
when I was home from college,
I lay in bed staring
out the window at the moon,
round as an orange
and balanced at the end
of a bare tree branch.
I could hardly believe
my eyes when the moon
seemed to roll slowly
the length of the long limb.

I was amazed rotation and orbit
had cooperated to achieve
such a feat.
I realized the tree itself
had to grow for years, lifting
the limb to the exact height.
Someone had to build the house
at the correct angle,
install the window just so.
I realized even I
was in on it,
leading my life
to arrive at that precise
time and place.

I wondered could it all be
a gigantic, cosmic coincidence?

In the decades since,
I've never seen such an eloquent
performance of the moon
and a tree limb.
If I happen to one last time,
I won't wonder how or why.
I'll simply wonder.

Angela Townsend

The Goofus Saves the World

The jelly is everywhere.

We may be scraping along the dry toast of a Wednesday, majestic as burlap, when it declares itself.

What is that object on the kitchen floor?

What is that mystery, glistening phantasmagorical on the linoleum?

What is that literal odd ball?

You must find out.

In an instant, the laundry is demoted. The email to the Water & Sewer Authority must wait. The angst trapezed between “already” and “not yet” drops without a net.

You crouch beside the dishwasher. The gelatinous orb glows at you.

The orb snickers.

The orb is a vitamin D softgel.

You have not discovered an egg from Shelob’s lair, but you have been found out. Do not lodge a protest. Do not fight the truth.

You, under your rings of responsibility, are still a goofus.

This is the best news since the return of the Choco Taco.

Duty and dust have failed to solemnify you. You are the same child who leaned out the car window to see if a line of rainbow-helmeted bicyclists were Skittles on a quest. You are the explorer who checked hotel armoires for Narnia. You are the correspondent who sent floral notes to the Tooth Fairy, sensitive at six to unsung heroes.

You are the little one no less little for occupying taller territory. You use a four-color pen on your tax worksheet. You wonder why no one seems to notice that Margaritaville is earnest and poignant. You would rather inspire a FunkoPop than win an Oscar.

The exclamation points between your eyebrows keep you out of trouble. You stop yourself from putting tin foil in the microwave just to watch it burn. You resist putting circus peanuts on people's chairs. You will wait a year to see if you still want the Ant-Man tattoo on your instep.

You will wait for surprises between coffee refills and deadlines. You will make surprises for the sleepy-eyed and suffering.

You will make this world glisten and whistle for those too old to get up for odd balls.

The jelly is everywhere, but there are risks involved. The world doesn't know where to shelve a spoon-carrying goofus. You pick up softgels and hard questions, ladybugs and butter knives. You are nobody's fool but no stranger to innocence. Your puns and your pleasure threaten the burnt and the burdened.

So you walk softly, Hello Kitty flashlight in hand. There is no bravado in your beam. You are one beggar showing the others where to find comic cosmic crumbs. You are vitamin G raising the recommended daily allowance of goofing.

You are gratitude disguised as curiosity, a sticky-fingered child taking the pulse of joy.

You are as essential as oxygen and as sweet as jam, underestimated and overqualified for the serious business of adulthood.

You are saving the world, in service to the Grand Comedian who makes walruses and nebulas and turnips shaped like Gene Hackman for the sheer zest of it.

The jelly is everywhere, and most are too satisfied with toast. The goofus is the EMT of the earth, an exuberance mask for the gasping and the grim. We admire the photographic memory and the polyglot, but we forget that the species survives on the strength of the stunned. It is not the impressive but the impressed, not the expert but the amazed, who break our stony ground and save our broken hearts.

May you rise for every gleam and crouch for every curiosity.

May you wonderstrike the weariness from Wednesdays and worlds.

May you effervesce us back to the bubbles of our birthright.

The jelly is everywhere.

Janis Butler Holm

Door is Ajar



Diane Webster

Millennia Siblings

Like a ventriloquist
my whoop echoes
between the canyon walls
created millennia ago
when pterodactyls
glided between monoliths
and searched for siblings
cawing from crevices.

Ravens flutter from shadows
disturbed by my shouts
mingling with theirs
as sounds confetti upward
to lie silent on the canyon rim
like fossils laid to rest
when the asteroid crashed.

Adrienne Stevenson

Solivagant

kick up fallen leaves
disturb the forest floor
steps mark out a trail
more used to foxes,
squirrels, deer, ants
all remote cousins

observe changing light
filtered through leaves
branches bend, shift
sun and shadow
demarcate the path
where steps alight

enjoy solitude
walk little or long
alert to minutiae
tiny bugs, nodding ferns
shelf-like fungi
none of which respond

to probing thoughts
but issue scents, colours
details that impact
memory, retained to form
finest lines under the pen
tiny, perfect verses

Julie Pinborough

Summer Bugging



Michael T. Young

The Ache

What lures the hiker out to the woods
and big fields of sky, is a trail of bird song
tucked in the cloud folds, a trace of starlight

caught in the stream and covering the shore stones
in a constant shine. It persists in flashing there
long after he trudges on, beyond meadows

where the dream that woke him rings
inside the bellflowers. He grips his walking stick,
and travels toward a kind of understanding

that claws up through his ankles. It's something
mistaken for an ache. But after miles
pushing through shade and pine scent,

when finally he sits in his cabin, removes
his shoes and leans back in his chair, it settles
into all his limbs with the clarity of a revelation.

Meg Freer

December Passage

—For Rodney's Bees

Through the train window, a winter sunbeam tracks
across shorn fields like a pale searchlight. Horses
in colored blankets pick their way through the snow.
Tiny blue lights on bushes by a farmhouse glow
like juniper berries. Two little houses in a town
look good enough to eat, a lemon square
and brownie frosted with powdered sugar.

Farm owners have tucked bees away in hives
under pillows and blankets and hope their wings
won't slow to a stop as they huddle around the queen,
vibrating their bodies in a tight ball to stay warm.
Even with stored honey, and supplemental fondant
sandwiched between sheets of newspaper,
many bees will die, and farmers cross their fingers
all winter until they hear a gentle hum
under the warmth of spring sun.

John Kaprelian

When the Bloodroot Blooms

when the bloodroot
blooms sneaking out of
the ground in early
spring its leaves
unroll into tiny
parasols that shade
the ground from the
radiance of its white
and yellow flower
a tiny sun a bit of
warmth and hope
against the still
brown and bare
forest floor

Terri Glass

The Fairy Slipper

In the forest, the first
spring flowers appear:
small clusters of trilliums,
pale lavender oxalis, pink fawn lily
and the tiniest of orchids,
one fairy slipper whose
little billow is so deep red,
my heart synchronizes
with its pulse of color.
She is Thumbelina's gown
with a violet cape, a royal
spectacle on the moss carpet.
How I love this little orchid
so brave to shoot up among
towering sword fern and wild azalea.
How alone she is, but more vibrant
than any spring flower opening
under the canopy of fir.
How I long to be this fairy flower
showering the ground
with red, purple and pink
in a world of forest green.

But I am hover like Gulliver
over a Lilliputian.
I must leave her alone
in her blazing secret
of beauty.

Meg Freer

Creeping Charlie and Peeling Paint



Hugh Carroll

ink

popping the lid
on a violent heaven

ink
squiggles off the stick
bone ivory
annihilating into
cerulean blue
becoming sky
its aroma
intoxicating
a vibration
you can breathe

iris widens
pure magenta
cyan conjuring
with indigo
and jade

somehow eyes feel

the frequencies

down to the feet

redolent

with memory

summer's goldenrod boyhood yellow

September's burnt melancholy ochre

violet's first amethyst kiss

red's primal scarlet uproar

midnight's longing blue quiet

forest's calm emerald pulse

the ink by itself

was always more exciting

than any shapes they made

on paper

Marie-Andrée Auclair

Cartographer

I watch you
pencil me
supple strokes

If, or better, when
you want to know someone
—you, me—
draw a map
indefinite frontiers
to embrace shifts
in promises

sketch too
meandering veins
of navigable waters
topographical arteries
to contour obstacles
mountains, cliffs
as necessary overedge
to adventures

with graphite
coloured pens
define known bodies
landscapes of familiar roadways
and barely felt trails
through green forests
plot paths across untamed land
— allow for fence mending —

assign hues—a colour scale or two—
rainbow insets for legends
before spreading an overlay
to protect delicate boundaries

consider aquarelle
after draw-dragging some truths
between your designs and mine
then, satisfied
add India ink.

Neile Graham

The Goddess of the Visible Invisible

If she were anything, she'd be
a bird, small and brown
the colours of the earth
around her, umber, mahogany,
cedar, and dust. The shade
of dirt, of the branches
she clutches and hides between.
She cannot be seen beyond
the flash of wings, her startle
among the leaves. Who is she,
the twitch of fears both big
and small? The rawness
of what is and cannot be.
Hidden, she sings about her turf,
the air between her branches
and how you must stay away,
you and you and all those crows,
thieves of eggs and children,
each note a warning. Does it matter
if she can only wound you
with her words? They're what
she has, what she's best at.
If not for those, you'd notice her.
Not noticing her is what she's
best at. But she has wings
and she's that bit of rustle
that burst of air that she draws
In, pushes out and spins
around you. She is nothing
if she does not sing. She sings.

Rick Rohdenburg

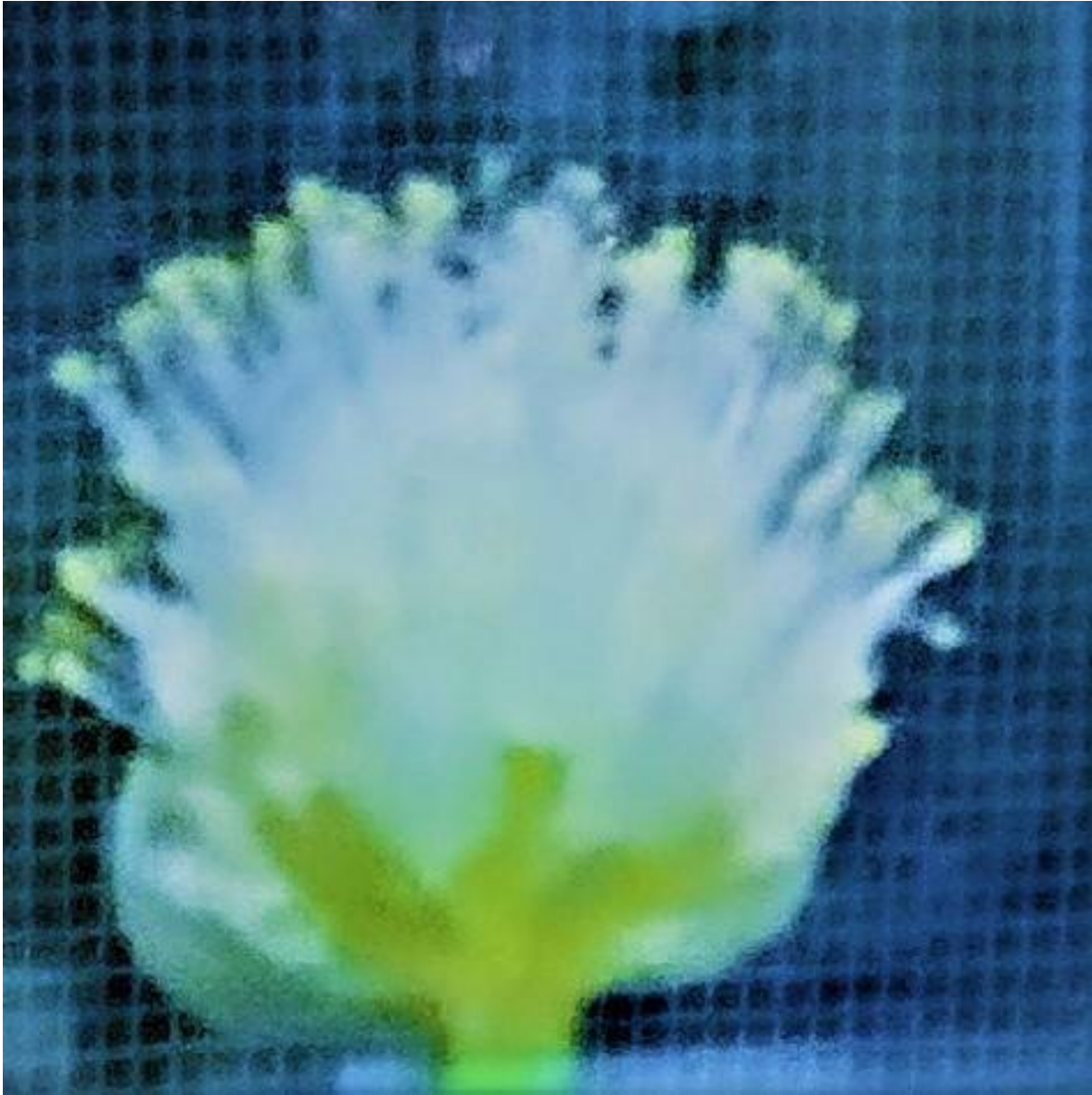
Note to Plato

You say I have learned nothing.

But here is a stone
in the shape of an idea.
Here is another.

KJ Hannah Greenberg

Onion Flower



John Savoie

Zukes

*My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow.
Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress"*

Zucchini swims its own green sea,
rollicks, rolls, burrows, breaches,
flashes pale barnacled belly
to dazzled day, showing what is
so seldom seen, then splashes down
through lapping leaves, the darker dream,
the breath of life spurling the deep,
as snap beans curl, lithe and giddy
as dolphins dancing on their flukes.

Note: spurl originates as a Scottish (and Northumbrian) variant of sprawl, though the context here suggests to emit a slow spiral of pearl-bright bubbles.

Sariah Gibby

Orchid

Before I spit purple fire,
you do not see me wave.

I cast my green sails
to the dull dust
and feel nothing
but the drip of ice,
the tender touch of fly legs.

My tails twist
from the moss.
They point at you,
they shake.

I am something
until I breathe flame:
then I am
yours,
and you never look
to my roots.

Julie Pinborough

Velvet Rest



John Kaprelian

Microbiome

A herd of acarine bison graze
the edge of a pilose forest
Demodex peek from pores like prairie dogs
watching bacteria battle for
dominance over the moist valleys
and great plains of this undulating
terrain dotted with fungal copses

Deep below a vast and diverse
community lives mostly in harmony
performing tasks they evolved to do
over eons inside my ancestors
carrying on traditions building
artisanal proteins creating custom
scents adding their thoughts
to mine sharing my dreams sometimes

I wonder if I am a man or just
a ragtag assemblage of living parts
a colony a collection a village
with one voice one vision one set
of hands but so very many selves
interwoven independent yet inter-
dependent and aching for one another

I am We

Patricia Feeney

The First Time

Early in our marriage, my husband and I lay spooned on the couch watching *Hill Street Blues*. During a scene between Dennis Franz and Daniel Travanti, my husband slid his hand over my waist and laced his fingers through mine, gently, deftly, as if he'd done it forever, as if we'd lived in utero, as close as twins.

Years later, our eighteen-year-old daughter spoke to me about sex, quizzing me on my history, unwittingly hinting at her experience. I didn't ask her, "Have you had sex?" but "Have you ever held hands with someone?" Her face reddened as if I'd probed a personal, unspeakable detail. "Holding hands can be more intimate than sex," I said.

"You're right," she answered. She didn't tell me if she had.

My daughter's thirty-one now, well past questions about sex. But she recently asked when I first held hands with her dad. I told her I wasn't certain. I shared my memory of holding hands while we watched *Hill Street Blues*.

"But before that? You don't remember?"

I flipped back the early pages of my mental journal, now mere whispers of thundercracks from our past. "I imagine it was on our third date. We sat in Dad's Thunderbird and kissed for the first time. Knowing Dad—the romantic he is—he would have held my hand when he walked me to the door that night."

My daughter's in love with a new man. She speaks openly of him, no longer issuing warnings to stay out of her business. She's introduced him to us, something she's never done with previous men. She has a track-record of two-week relationships with men who have no access to their feelings. The new man has clocked ten months. She's met his family. His friends. And he's met hers. She said they talk. The new man listens.

"I can tell him anything," she said. "I trust him."

She now understands the intimate touch of entwined hands. Maybe the first time is etched in her memory. Maybe someday she'll look back on the feeling of his hand in hers. She doesn't know it won't matter if she remembers the first time.

When I hold my husband's hand today, I feel the connection of decades of marriage. His hands are rough from physical work, heavy from the weight of caring for his mother, his children, our pets, and me. But beneath the sinews and gnarls of age, beneath the hardened skin, I feel my husband's tenderness, softer, more resilient, as deep as the undercurrents of a roiling river, more intimate than any touch of our past.

Marie-Andrée Auclair

A Girl at the Beach

She runs
on the wet boundary
of lake and shore
splashes,
a slapping sound
a heart-like rhythm
faster.

We all run
young bare feet beat the sand
arms beat the air
we are birds about to soar
on long wings.

She halts,
screams, hobbles
one foot up, dripping blood.

She yells
at nobody, at all of us
Why me, why me?
Alarmed, we have no answer
only silent questions
why you, why not me?

There is parental attention,
cleansing, bandages
and an ice cream cone.

The day breeze dies
the dark creeps closer.
We pat her shoulders
in search of our own comfort
and circle around her
like clumsy seagulls.

Louis Efron

Requiem for a String Quartet

wood arms bud

stretch sunward

and

softly sway

deeply veined ruby-bronzed

leaves conduct

visceral vibrations

in melodious winds

like warm knives dividing blocks of stiff maple butter

hungry chainsaw blades

in calloused hands

slide through trunks, weakened

like old, hinged attic doors creaking downward

woodland torsos slam shut against taut soil

leaving fleeting impressions

at the base of forgotten podiums

once pretty

unkempt bark faces

now polished

faceless

beneath strings

of weeping instruments

orchestrated to lull those

mourning our ebbing earth

Holly Day

Escape

I reach out for the door and my husband reminds me
not to touch the handle with my skin,
to use the sleeve of my jacket instead.
He reminds me a little sharply, as though I haven't been living through this
right alongside of him, as if I don't understand
how serious this all is, I do, I do.

When we get home I wash my hands over and over again, just in case
and I don't hear him washing his hands but I don't feel like getting yelled at
everything has to get scrubbed down before we put it away
the beer cans, the container of cream cheese
the whole outside plastic wrapper of the loaf of white bread
I don't know how long I can keep living this way.

Meg Freer

Jar of Ash

It began on a Thursday, an aural pastiche
of explosions, pyroclastic flows, phreatic blasts
for weeks until earthquake, landslide
and eruption swung trees like pendulums,
a shockwave blew them to the ground,
cooling lava crackled like shattering glass.

Five hundred miles away, our sky burnt and dark,
ash from Mt. St. Helens dusted the grass like grey snow.
We scooped it into a jar that still sits on a shelf—
in memory of those who died, in tribute to rivers
that found new courses—while the quilt of diverse plants
and ecosystems blankets ever-changing slopes.

Heidi Naylor

Let Me Explain: Highway 75

But, it was dusk
and twilight, with
bronze-tipped, wind-ripped fields
alpine hulsea, cheatgrass, sedum and goldenwood

so that's what drew the eye
that, and the audible thrum of grace
lipstick edging the Sawtooth outline of Heyburn
like the glowing coal when you blow on a campfire

and, sure, I watched the road
curved and dark, heavy
an unwound strip of empty typewriter tape
absorbing the day's thousand sun-washed stories
connecting
the gravel lane of lake with the hard left north at Eva Falls.

from nowhere came a thump;
and can a glimpse be searing?
for I did see, then, the young deer
small sweet deer
cartwheeling
off my front hood
delicate hooves tucked, and it bounced
once in the thickety meadow
settled in the fragrant musk of dogwood and arrowleaf
west of mile marker 178.

I slowed on a shoulder of gravel and chat
then stood in the hot wind
without a gun
without a husband
without a witness
as the engine ticked down

and a chickadee mourned
the unsparing
inevitable
conclusion.

Holly Day

Floating

Astronauts send us notes on how to survive being quarantined
in our own homes, post lists of things one can do
to make the time pass less painfully, how we should use this as an opportunity
to learn a new language, practice and master an instrument
develop new skills. But they're just astronauts
and none of this is helpful to anyone
who has spent a winter with their face pressed against the glass
waiting for spring.

The days stretch and fill with puzzles and arguments and coloring books
angry games of chess that never end properly
and still those astronauts
send notes of encouragement from their stations thousands of miles away
taunt us with pictures of the Earth, and how clean the air has become
what it looks like when most of the smog has been blown away
and when half of the lights on the surface of the planet have gone out.

Jason C. Gadsby

Bumblng Around



Sariah Gibby

**For the Peach Trees that Grow
Where the Heart Falls**

All sidewalks lead to
corn stalks growing in gutters.
I think it's the way the wind blows:
the swallowtail butterfly flaps
its wings, and a breeze
captures scraps of plastic bags,
corn sprouts, and lost
locust legs,
tossing them to wastewater.
Is this how great things come to be?
Does history begin with brown chickens
unearthing purple-flowered potatoes,
toy soldiers, and
cowbird skulls?
Is time written in the star-
ling droppings that drop
cherry pits in seas,
is it written in the clock
of thirsty juniper rings?
Is time written in the notches
of my mother's back
as she leans over the graping green tomatoes,
kneading blue veins
into black dirt,
gathering mud into her brows
and aging as each fleck
sweats into invisible wrinkles,
cracking her face
like lightning
or like the shells
of the hollowed-out gourds
she crushes beneath her knees
while she weeds to the tunes
of musicals: people
sing as if guided by ghosts
or God;
she uproots the roots
dripping with ants
guided by pheromones.
She pauses.

Listens.

Hummingbird powerline hum,
cats stretching in the beets,
katydids crack-leaping
in the yellow rose thorns.

She sits in her corn rows
and feels beneath her palms
the tunnels carved by rats
as if to say, *I'm here*.

She leans over the sunlines
cast by the trellises
and grapevines,
and she traces the twin wings
of a redhaven peach sapling
that got lost
amidst the rabbit-bitten cabbages,
the white moths,
and the burial dreams.

Gary Lark

Jigsaw

It's been there
on the desktop
waiting for my hand
to unhook it
from itself.

I slide it to the edge
and start the uncoupling.
Plants and birds,
house and sky
tumble piece by piece
into the box.

How many times
has our puzzle
been together and apart?
Do we know
when we are either?

The scarf and the mountain,
the lily blooming in spring,
the choir singing a note and then silent,
a swirling galaxy melting into another.
We keep it here, on the shelf.

Emma Huang

Quoth the Raven



Carlene M. Gadapee

Executrix

I tiptoed around the house that was not mine,
but mine to clear out, to catalogue, to sell,
to dispose of a lifetime of accretions. In every

drawer, every closet, every cabinet there were
secrets. I have memories of a few small things:
a photograph, a chair, a cup, a bowl. I didn't

recognize much, but it was mine to reapportion.
You'd think I could have completed this task
quickly, but no, I looked for connections never

built. Only tangled curtains and mismatched socks.
The strata of a life too often closed and locked.

Ben D'Alessio

Blue Jay

I know this blue jay,
he doesn't bother anyone.
His wings repel the mist
that sprinkles from winter skies
like stardust landing on a cat's whisker.
I know this blue jay
He doesn't need anyone.
Quiet is the night,
until the raptor is spotted
in the tall, tall oak,
whose scream he imitates
with barbarity and fervor.
He finds succor in the Japanese cherry blossom
reborn each spring
in the salt air.
For reasons kept secret
the blue jay returns,
year after year,
and will not leave us as orphans.

Louis Efron

Ode to the Ballet Dancer

in frayed cushioned chairs

cloaked in darkness

eyes like sequins stitched in velvet black

escape an imperfect world

for a moment

façades of effortless endeavors

perfected in everlasting glassy reflections

gracefully twirl and soar

in silver pools of radiance

exposing all

but our need for love

behind the crimson curtain

where wrapped roses wait

to wilt

Joseph Farley

The Effort

In the end it was
All an exercise
In futility.

Not much wisdom
Worth passing down
To the children.

Don't stare too long
At the fires in the world
Or the fires inside you.

You will burn out your eyes
And be left
With red images

That you will try
To interpret
As best you can

Until you come to terms
With the fact
That you are already ash.

Neile Graham

The God of—

Waiting just on the brink of—
a cliff, a kiss, a dream

a dream of—
whatever you imagine now

splayed in summer light
under the tree where tiny apples

have begun to burgeon
as they eat the light

pulling everything, everything
from the suspending branches

the archeology of years
tamed inside the column of bark

reaching down—
down and through all the messages

antlering through the soil
feeding and being fed and feeding

it's the book fallen from
your hand dressed in paper

anointed in ink like your fingers
your eyes are closed—

your hands open
your palms open to—

the weight of the air
the messages borne—

by apples, by the words on those spread
pages, by the scent and feel of—

the ground you tend pressed
beneath your spine

Shelby Lynn Lanaro

Bashful



Lori Levy

Enough

Some things are wasted on me.
Good coffee, good wine.
Just give me instant coffee
and don't bother with the red/white,
sweet/dry stuff. I only pretend to like it.
If you want more than a dutiful thank you,
don't buy me a fancy crystal serving dish:
give me the ceramic bowl you made yourself,
your hand, your heart. No gadgets for the kitchen—
a knife is good enough for slicing and chopping—
and, please, no flowers for my birthday.
I have no patience to arrange them in a vase
or to care for something that will die
in a few days, a few weeks.

A good meal, on the other hand,
is never wasted on me: the taste, the colors
and shapes, like art on a plate.
Cake or cookies will win my heart.
A hug is always welcome.
A grandchild to play with and
a good book, of course. A pen and a notebook.
And, you, my family and friends,
give me your words, your stories.
I don't need more. I won't say no if you offer
to take me on a boat through the mangroves
or a jeep ride through streams, over rocks,
to a waterfall, a green river where I can swim.
Still, a chair on the beach, music in the background,
is more than enough.

John Brantingham

Symphony

I can hear the carpenter
next door humming,
syncopating with his hammer.
He vocalizes
only occasional notes.
I cannot make out the tune.
The rest of the symphony
must exist tightly
down inside him,
a concert helping him
through his day.

Peycho Kanev

**I'm Looking at You Pouring
Yourself a Glass of Beer**

This room needs our bodies
much less than we need its emptiness.
There is always something to avoid,
to keep between the thoughts of
two bodies, touching each other, or
breaking away, or entirely broken.
Outside
the darkness feels more civilized
than our animal need to walk towards
the horizon that we know is there but
can't see it.
However, we are moving towards it.
At the end
the ending enters inside us
and we walk into the infinity.

Maura H. Harrison

Minutiae, Mere Trifles



Carlene M. Gadapee

Dolce Domum

My fingers touch the spine of a well-loved book
like a talisman, *The Wind in the Willows*, and on a whim,
I pull it from among the others, careful not to disturb
the stack. I trace the deckled pages, worn smooth

with age and use, and four-year-old me is lifted once more,
wrapped in my nightie, to my father's lap. Every night,
after my bath and just before bed, he reads to me, chapter
by chapter, patient with my questions. He does all the voices:
Ratty, Mole, Badger, and pompous Mr. Toad.

I re-read his escapades and journey with Ratty and Mole.
Mr. Toad, in the washer-woman's dress, escapes the dreary
prison and I laugh aloud. I will find my way home again.

John Delaney

Bubble Wrap

He jumps into the open cardboard box
onto bubble wrapping at the bottom.
How well the medium inspires play!
The crinkly cracking sounds, the scrunching up.
Hiding under wraps and sudden popping.
Or just sitting there, luxuriating
within the confines of cat imagination.

He shames me to find joy in little things.
His walnut brain more curious than mine,
less willing to take everything for granted,
challenged to coax objects back to life
with the prodding of his paw's forgiving.
I'll never gripe I'm bored to death again.

Nor dare say that life is not worth living.

John Janelle Backman

Someone Else's Phone Call

You couldn't help but eavesdrop at the pay phones inside North Station in 1981: each phone stood inches from its neighbor, amplifying the voice of the caller next to you. The whole bank of phones was smeared in a thin layer of grime, like the trains that steamed and rumbled and picked up commuters just outside the open doors. *Commuter* included me that day, trudging home from my low-wage back office job in Boston's financial district, calling my new wife, hoping she'd let me write the next weekend.

Back then I wrote poetry mostly, with a little fiction thrown in. One of my writing dreams—at twenty-four, I had a lot of them—involved a scribbled personal note on a rejection slip from *Poetry* or *The Atlantic*. Not money: even I knew that was unrealistic. My new wife had a master's degree and a career-track position in her profession. For reasons beyond me, she tolerated my dreams, but I always feared the day she'd say, like the critic in my head, "Enough. Get a real job."

I dialed the number and she picked up on the third ring. The hiss of the engine twenty yards away rendered her barely audible. It didn't help that the woman on the next phone was chirping, loudly, into the receiver.

I looked at her with the intent to glare but never got that far. She was new to the world too, about my age, but dressed in a better suit. The smile never left her face. Whoever listened on the other end meant as much to her as my wife did to me. I couldn't ask her to pipe down; she was struggling to hear too, her manicured fingernail in her non-phone ear.

I turned my attention back to my wife when the woman next to me chirped, "OK, I'll see you in an hour. Love you. How'd the writing go today?"

How'd the writing go today.

My wife asked me the same question every time I returned from the café or library or wherever I'd schlepped my notebooks and pens. She was eager to hear whether I'd started a new story, or finished a poem—works that wouldn't move us forward, wouldn't get us a house or finance a child or do any of those things our friends did.

It never occurred to me that anyone else would pursue so futile a dream. Suddenly this woman—who'd hung up and hurried off barefoot, carrying her stilettos, to catch her train—had given me an ally. Now the writing had to go well. It meant something. I had an obligation to this writing friend I'd never meet, and through that writer to every writing friend I'd never meet, and then back to the one ally I'd never appreciate as much as she deserved, the woman who loved me enough to cheer me on.

Shelby Lynn Lanaro

Exposed



Marc Isaac Potter

Eventually

Eventually in meditation
One sees the blank wall.

Not a vehicle for something,
Just a blank wall.
Then you are home.

You, a person, get up
From Meditation,
Drive the kids to school,
And wash the dishes.

Krystle Eilen

Ekstasis

sometimes i have to look away
for i've had more than enough beauty
to take in,
and for i would not want to overestimate
what is worth of me;
i would not want to spoil the heavens by
being an undue witness to the sublime;
i'm content with the sting, spare me
from seeing the divinity too clearly —
why would i refuse to continually relish
the taste of ruin?

Andrew Mauzey & Jeff Stillion

My First Communion

Cathedral and strangers,
burning candles, holy glow,

smoke hangs over me
like a kiss on the head.

I walk toward the table,
this slight view of trumpets and angels

and a bleeding son
singeing the evils of man.

I pretend to pray:
Father, please,

I don't have a soul at all,
I'm sorry.

Candles melting,
rings of golden fade.

I watch them
walking their path,

racing to the ground.
I like to see them fall.

Anne Whitehouse

Blue

Dusty, worn blue,
sun-faded house.
The ghost of the sea
breathes over it at night,
leaving a taste of salt.

When I hung up the clothes
I had brought with me,
I saw they all
were shades of blue.

This is the color
I come back to,
the very hue
of my soul.

Paul Hostovsky

Letters from Camp

I've been reading the letters I wrote to my mother
over fifty years ago from camp—she saved
them all. When she died I found them
in a shoe box in my 9-year-old hand and
voice. A hand so loopy and innocent I could
weep. A voice I know like the back
of a very small hand that used to be mine

and somehow still is. The recurring theme
is winning (“We won the baseball game, I hit
a homer.” “We won the swim meet.” “We lost
the tennis tournament because it was windy and the ball
didn’t go where we hit it.”) And also sugar (“Send
more candy.” “We had fribbles from Friendly’s.”
“Dinner was pizza and coke and desert was
choclit cake. The coke and cake were yummy.”)

Winning and sugar. Sugar and winning.
And it occurs to me, though the letters stopped,
the same themes continued for fifty years: winning
at school, winning in romance, winning at work, always
the need to kill it, to destroy the competition. The sugar
that was alcohol, the sugar that was sex, the sweet taste
of every conquest. How despicable I suddenly am
to myself. Only the misspellings are endearing,
those phonetic, understandable, forgivable mistakes.

Sarah Bricault

this potato

It hides in the back of the cupboard,
shoved behind cans of tuna and
the occasional mixing bowl.
My kitchen isn't the most organized, but
this potato doesn't judge.
It sits there in metamorphic silence,
shoving forth roots in the darkness,
searching, searching for the dirt
that must be around here somewhere.
It is dark and dry in the cupboard, so
this potato thinks itself buried.
I am surprised when I spy it, my hand
searching for that last can of chicken soup.
I pull it forward, and he says
that potato has gone bad.
I think of rot, the brown goo that
I sometimes find with forgotten
vegetables, and I say —
No, this potato has not gone bad.
This potato — is badass.
Imagine the optimism, the unfailing
urgency to propagate, the faith
that dirt and water are just beyond
reach. He looks at me.
At the potato. *But it's wrong. Throw*
it away. You can't use it now.
I shrug off the dismissal, miffed on behalf
of this potato. I tangle my fingers
in nascent roots, trace the dendritic
searchlings and secret it back
into the cupboard. Perhaps I will remember
to buy it a pot, to fulfill the wishes of
this potato. Perhaps not. But I
am giving it another chance to grow,
I gift my future self the unfailing optimism
of this potato

and all it might become.

Sariah Gibby

Potato Salad

Mom says the potato salad is
heaven, that I should
die on those egg white roads,
paved with yolk. I eat heaven

on warm summer nights,
when we build fires
and hear the maple tree's
green flesh hiss and rise in the smoke.

Mom serves potato salad
and whispers that the secret
to heaven is apple cider vinegar
and prayer.
We sell our souls to celery,
and we praise

Grandma for her recipe
that takes us to where she
sleeps: a place that's
gold like pickle juice,
but soft, like mayo

and love.

Paul Hostovsky

Hospital Gift Shop

I come here looking for something for you
among the colorful, breakable things
presided over by an elderly volunteer
who looks up brightly from her book,
then goes back to reading
as I sniff around for something
like food—not food but something
like food to take upstairs to you,
something pithy and buoyant
and wooden and old like a good walking stick,
a long stout pole with a beautiful
twist at the end for carrying around
when walking in quicksand country—I want
to ask the woman reading if she carries
something like that. Who knows,
maybe she keeps it stashed away
in a box on a high shelf in the back like
hope. But I don't ask. Instead I finger the spines
of the paperbacks, looking for a book for you
that isn't here, or anywhere—a book
whose old, damp, faintly sweet
bad-tooth breath you smell when you open
its crackling stained pages and read
that death is benign as a library fine
waived by a beautiful librarian
who asks you if the story of the body
pleased, then asks you if you'd like
to exchange it for another story
or give the stories up. Give up all the stories—
I want to ask the woman reading if she carries
such a book. But I don't ask. Instead I give you
this woman in the gift shop quietly reading.

Kendra Whitfield

Unfolding

Fumbling open the patio doors at four a.m.
Gasping for air after a sweaty nightmare
About swaddling blankets and teeming beetles,
The pre-dawn chill enfolds me in misty closeness,
Beckons me back to bed with the promise of new.
Watching the cat dabble her soft white paw
In the water bowl before she bends her head to drink.
Does she believe she's a jungle cat establishing safety before
The vulnerability of lapping, closing her eyes
To the freshness, the cool quenching?
Sinking into the leather chair, legs lotused,
Bowing my head above the fragrant steam,
Inhaling promise from the dark depths of the blue mug
Clutched in my sleepy fingers
Needing the ritual more than the rush.
Crumbling, leathery leaves crunch underfoot.
Electric red geraniums greet me,
Defiantly bright in early sunlight.
Nightly frosts neither blacken nor bend them
Just strengthen their resolve to wait for snow.
I hope they last 'til spring.

Heidi Naylor

Three Days at Girls Camp

We made time at the lake each afternoon
for some of the girls had never been camping
and fewer still boating in the chill and silk
of these mountain waters.

First day: kayaks, cheap floaties and blow-up tubes
a couple of sparkling new paddleboards.
Short forays with our generous motor boat couple
but mostly dipping in, splashing around Billy Rice beach, to
corral tadpoles, trap frogs & tiny fish, and is that a leech?

Second day: shivering lineups to try the rope swing
Splash and *ka-johnnnng*, the laughter is ringing
We keep an eye on kayaks and boards
zigging unsteady strokes, zagging a glittery sun path
beach sand absorbs the shouts, the lovely echoing voices.

Third day: vying for seats on the motorboat, to dive
from its tongue into dark satin folds of melted glacier.
Is that the blue kayak, that dot way out there?
Canyon shadows deepen: a low, velvet violet.
When, when might our paddleboarders return?

Elizabeth McCarthy

Raindrops Peony Vermont



Krystle Eilen

Ode to Rain

no word rings truer than
the sound of the rain,
bringer of life amidst
the manifold quiet and
sprouting of flower unfamiliar,
much like a mother's womb —
resounding life's
still reverberation
like an endless, seamless wind.
modest outpour,
how shall it be that
i, sitting in my room,
may return to idyllic shuteye
and refuse such dwelling?

Paul Hostovsky

Howard in Heaven

I hear licking
coming from
the bathroom.

It's my cat
Howard
in the shower
after I have

showered,
the damp
hanging there

rich as
a rainforest
after a rain,
so thick you could

drink it,
which Howard is
doing
in delicate

little sips,
licking the tiles,
nipping the droplets
clinging there

with the quick
pink arrow
of his tongue,

and it sounds
downright
delicious.

Julie Allyn Johnson

and now, a few words from our sponsor

these houses are never the same
but the vibe, the intrigue, the *longing* sure is
tonight I find myself encased in a sophisticated
40s new york city ambience
though a few rubes & rustics pocket narrow hallways
wide-eyed and ruminating easily identifiable
appearing in all the wrong places

an Olympic-sized pool corrals the entire 2nd floor
I see an oak-paneled bottom through a horde
of truncated legs, naked bodies splashing about
drinks in hand, voices that irk & aggravate

floor-boards ripped open at irregular intervals
how does the water keep from draining, I wonder —
but this is a dream
nighttime reveries operate however they wish

how is it that an old house
in the country middle of freakin' nowhere
has an Olympic-sized swimming pool
on the 2nd floor, no less...

I'll slumber in silence, blind to an antipode sun
 covers cast aside south of midnight, what do I care
 dream your own dreams, scramble the backroads
 stitching together the rivers, summits & valleys
 I'll seek a mosaic of stardust, its gentle swirl of grooves
 quilted comfort

layered amulets

nested charms

Jane Hertenstein

Midden Piles

I was on a cross-country bike trip, riding solo from the UK, John O'Groats in Scotland to the tip in southern Cornwall, Land's End, a journey of over 1,100 miles over nineteen days. I was in over my head with the constant roundabouts, headwinds, and my inability to stay on course. I was zigzagging between almost lost and actual lost.

I'd stopped at a caravan park in Lochgilphead, still the outer fringes of Scotland, where the next morning I awoke to fierce winds whipping up the narrow loch slip to a frothy brew. The proprietor had taken mercy on me and allowed me to stay in a camper instead of what I'd been doing—camping. He said stormy weather was on the way, and I might want to stay two nights. When I opened the little aluminum door it flew out of my hands and smacked the side of the trailer. I ran across the grounds to the bath/toilet house. Even within the cement block walls I could hear the wind whooshing.

At the shower house I met a woman who had recently retired. She was staying at the campgrounds while volunteering at a Bronze Age dig at the Kilmartin Dig. I'd passed signs for it on the way to a café stop at the museum.

It occurred to me that I hadn't been spending much time just hanging out with locals, hearing their stories. Of course not, I was always on my bike or else collapsed in my tent. Anyway, I asked the woman to tell me about Kilmartin, to tell me what I had missed.

While growing up in Ohio, I'd ridden my bike to Fort Ancient, the name given to grave mounds that had been robbed of the bodies and artifacts of Native peoples. At Kilmartin there was something similar called cairns that were being excavated. Maggie went on to tell me there were also standing stones.

I'd been to stone circles in Sweden and Ireland, where ancient tribes oriented themselves within the bigger cosmos. I'm sure they had a much better grasp of where they were from and where they were going than I.

I asked her about buried treasure. It was slow going, she told me. Much like cycling, I reckoned. There are bright spots, nuggets in the midst of detritus. Always the biggest bonanza, she informed me, involved garbage. Come to find out that one person's trash is literally another person's treasure. Midden piles is how archeologists refer to the day-to-day domestic waste of a society. This refuse may contain such ordinary artifacts as animal bone, human excrement, botanical material, vermin, shells, and sherds. It is in digging through the ordinary that one often finds a gem.

Good words for living, I thought.

Battling the winds back to the lonely caravan, I recalled I had little food. The story of my life—accidentally leaving leftovers at the restaurant or behind on the train, or when traveling losing my insulated food bag. I realized I'd left it in the hostel fridge in Oban. I would need to face the elements once again in search of a grocery. So I donned rain pants and a rain jacket and struggled forward. Flags and pennants stood out straight from poles. Awnings over doorways ballooned. I found a Co-op where I restocked my store of cheese and bread, cookies and crackers. On the way back to the caravan park was an Indian Takeaway. Curried friend rice sounded good on such a raw day. I told the kid taking my order that I'd cycled here. Why? He wanted to know.

I next stopped at a thrift store to buy another “wee” sack for food. Even here in Lochgilphead I wasn't far from pop culture. In the multitude midden piles of linen dresser covers, lace tablecloths, plated tea spoons, little china creamers, souvenir Jubilee plates, I found a Backstreet Boys insulated lunch bag.

In the big picture, I wasn't doing anything too out of the normal: thrift storing, shopping for groceries, getting takeout. I could have done all this without leaving home. But, here I was in wind-swept Lochgilphead, walking through a prism. Each facets of the experience slightly different, taking on new colors, a new slant. I realized this is what it means to travel, to take time and not just pedal the miles, but to live in the midden. The mess.

Cynthia Gallaher

**Thirteen Ways of Looking
at a White Salt Lamp**

1. you glow, iceberg,
frozen nimbus
behind a nimbus.
2. white hot with
permanency, gray shadows
along your surface only pop
your brilliance.
3. you're an oversized
and chunky birthday candle
for a neanderthal.
4. you glow, but are cool
to the touch,
close eyes
hold onto this rocky outcropping
and pull yourselves
to a higher ledge.
5. the woman who
sold you claimed
you are billions of years
old, older than dirt.
6. imperfect, original
like a snowflake, no two alike
even when unlit
we can find you in the dark.
7. on or off
your positive ions
sally forth
charging the air around you
speaking in a language
no one can hear.
8. here, you represent the ocean
on dry land, the smell of salty sea,
do the tides pull on you,

on us?

9. cousin to seashells,
the fishiness of birth,
femininity in its molecules
arranged in a wild romp
of sodium chloride.
10. tasting you
anytime fingers graze
your surface,
you never degrade,
imperishable.
11. tasting you
even when we breathe,
your ions open lungs,
cleanse cerebral pathways
simplicity hidden
in complex crystals.
12. a glance at you
in the dark bedroom corner
catches a golden nugget
deep within the mouth
of a cave.
13. or a cat,
contented,
curled up
and purring softly.

Terri Glass

Still Life with Matthew

Late afternoon,
under the beige umbrella, he sits
knitting a soft shawl, the color of dijon.
His gray beard brushes against his neck
as he bends his head over his hands
watching the smooth silver needles
make a larger loop every third stitch.
I ask him who the shawl is for—
he doesn't know, but keeps knitting
under the umbrella's shade
while our dogs play tag with one another
in the dry grass.

His hands are hypnotized by the motion,
his face tranquil like watching
a dragonfly alight on a pond of lilies.
Behind him, ripening blackberries
poke through a wide barred fence.
The dogs pant, heavy with play.
Here is summer's bounty:
a simple task, sitting under shade,
the air sensing the closing of the day.
I feel I am in a brushstroke by Monet.

John Kaprelian

Drains to Waterways

Walking the dog I
look down and see
on the storm sewer
grate a rusty fish
and the words “no dumping—”
drains to waterways"

suddenly the street
disappears and below me
I see a vast network
of subterranean streams
rivers aquifers waterfalls
all leading to the sea

Crimson salmon work
their way up the street
against the traffic flow
past shining shad
and transparent elvers
slither past soda cans

I nearly lose my balance
then quickly the earth
closes up and I am back
on solid ground. "No
dumping" I mutter.
The dog eyes me curiously.

Marie-Andrée Auclair

Ghosts I've Met in Train Stations and Empty Seats

In the wait space, no empty seat, my train still an hour away.
I watch you pick up your bags, your coat,
round up your belongings in a last glance
and walk out the door
which means
the seat you occupied is now vacant.

I drop my bag on the floor, sit down
and wince. This chair you vacated
is not empty. I feel like I am sitting
on your lap, into the tepid embrace
of the ghost you abandoned
a phantom about your size.

The shell of you still smells of sweat
stale smoke and ocean breeze aftershave.
It lingers fluid enough to curve
around my shoulders, my legs
nestles near my neck
feeding my discomfort.

I must stand, I fumble with my bag
slowly retie my hiking boots
allowing your ghost to fade away.
I know people who don't mind
left-behind warmth.

Michael T. Young

What It Takes

Just our hands brushing each other
and mine flinching, stunned by the recall
of days dating and holding hands
until our fingers went numb. A memory
that resides in our shadows
trailing us all the way through the park
to the grocery store. It sinks
into fading light, the black line
drawn between the life before
and the life after, all we can never
go back to, all the things we share
but can't put into words, like
when we sit at the breakfast table
and start the day saying,
"last night I had the strangest dream."

Rick Rohdenburg

Desire

Your body is a field of wheat.
Your body is the yielding shore.

Moonrise.
Night like the fall
of fine dark hair.

Yariel Luna

Knoxville 1915

Between the swaying trees cool wind blows,

The cicadas symphony engulf the silence,

The rocking chairs' lullaby lets me know

Everything will be alright.

Terri Glass

The Web

A bridge between worlds—
a spider web holds
two roses in place.

CLS Sandoval

These Strings Hold Me Together

Spiderwebs frosted
in the morning dew
as the sun rises
filtering the rays
yet revealing the weaver
she approaches
the center
to take her pray

Silkworms spin
only one single strand of silk
perhaps even a mile long
crafting their cocoons
to one day take flight

The embroiderer
carefully back stitches
to outline the figures
on her craft
each pull of her needle
revealing one more curve
angle
or corner

I sew
the splits and slits
in my skin
with this thread
at my joints and seams
slowly
carefully
pulling the insides
back into place

It's all that h o l d s me
together

Julie Pinborough

Summer Blues



DM Lichen

Reality

Push your head under the water;
Count the layers of ocean,
Baby blue toddling to royalty,
Falling deep into blackberry dreams;
Remember how many worlds swam in between.

Lift your gaze high now;
Draw interweaving rings and try to time
The turn of all those lights,
As many as your eye can squint into vision;
Remember them when they won't remember you.

Test what metal mantras can peer into you;
Call out one caravan trading red life
With your thirsty limbs
Or one arm of lightning rolling
The boulders of all you tell yourself you are,
Or chide one rogue who plots
The fall of the temple and
The flat note that profanes the choir;

Look at it all going round,
Having gone round all this time
Without your notice.

Elizabeth McCarthy

Broken Tea Cups

what is broken
can never
be the same—
love, childhood,
delicate tea cups

we seek to repair
with glue and tissue
filling cracks and scars,
sealing shut holes
to the past
forming a new vessel
that holds
our love inside

Adrienne Stevenson

Stored Linen

your shrunken hand
cramped by warping tendons
caresses an embroidered blue napkin
carefully ironed and folded away
in bed with others of its kind

each item must be handled
individually, selected with precision
each decision is unique
though from the outside
each one looks the same

you are reluctant to leave behind
minute associations, fading memories
of other hands, times, places
usefulness forgotten, jettisoned
along with the aged linens

life is cruel – nobody wants
these leftovers of lives well-lived
they have moved on to other things
amass their own memories
their turn to be forgotten yet to come

Michael Salcman

In This House

The days grew longer—
They'd lost their natural rhythm
And melody
And you knew you were growing older,
Sleeping more and getting less rest
While forgetting the lyrics
To song after song.

You tried hard to remember
But at the end of the day
They were gone,
Those little bits of you
Now belonged to a stranger
You'd met somewhere else
And no longer knew.

Paula Reed Nancarrow

The Archivist's Dilemma

I promised to be the family archivist.
When in doubt, send it along
I said to my sister, readying
our parents' house for sale.

Now in my apartment living
room I take my coffee
among the coffers of the dead:
letters, ledgers, photo albums.

Not everyone here is family or
even wants to be archived.
This morning I find my father's
first class, labeled in neat white ink:

4th Grade, Picture Rocks, PA 1950-1951

They were lined up in three rows
on the carpet of black paper
clutching their arrowhead corners
still waiting to be dismissed.

Psycho Kanev

A Fake Memoir

Meanwhile,
I open the book

to read about nothing,
to read about me.

My face is stretched
from cover to cover

and the closer I get to the end,
the more my face wrinkles.

At the last page I can see the black dogs
sniffing the air.

Lori Levy

The Glass Half Full

See the glass half full, we are told,
not half empty.
I will try. Here is a glass. I begin to fill it
with the scent of jasmine from my walk today
and a few squirts of juice from the lemons and loquats
hanging within reach. I add the taste of my daughter's
roasted asparagus, as well as the rose water, saffron,
and pistachio flavors of the Persian ice cream
I am served for the first time
at the home of my sister-in-law's family,
who break into a Persian birthday song
and an arm-waving dance
when they hear my birthday is approaching.
I thicken the mixture with the feel of my
husband's arm, reaching suddenly
to pull me closer. Brighten it
with my granddaughter's shrieking giggle
when I try to walk like a model
and look more like a staggering klutz.
I could add more, but perhaps it's enough
for one day, the glass already half full,
a potion of joy, pure, unfiltered,
no trace of bitter or stink of toxic,
no lumps of disappointment spoiling the taste.
I will drink it now.
Watch me glow, drunk on positivity.

Louis Efron

Bigger Picture

vintage projectors

reach through darkened theaters

transcendently from above

like shadowless particles

afloat

in their amber-yellow light

we exist

confined

between the beams'

black cloudy edges

dust

struggles to shine in the flicker of dead celluloid stars

animating our briefest stories

with familiar endings

underscored with unrestrained laughter

and brittle sobs

break

until glass gods withdraw their rays

releasing us to softly settle

Sarah Bricault

a piece of epiphany

I am a collector, a nester.
I surround myself with little things that speak
to me. It is an instinct, I suppose, to
find kinship with a mug, a spoon, a rock. For me,
each piece I hold close is a piece of epiphany, a piece
of the feeling where the world makes sense. I choose each
by sight and sound and soul, because it sings to me
a single note of the perfect song. The bond is
not important, in the grand scheme of things, but it is
a shard of everything. Everything I long for in the world,
in a partner, in a friend. A shard of pure belonging.
This poem is about little things. Like the song your
mother sung you at night. Like the sweet nothings
your lover whispers in your year. Your father's hug.
Your grandpa's laugh. A mug of tea. The little things
that make a life. They say the orchestrated events
are what define living. The exclamation points of
the story. But give me a comma, and I will show you
a softer truth — that that's more to come. What am I
but a collection of commas? So I became a collector
of commas. Let me breathe the moment
with you, knowing that another one follows. The soft
undulation of time is beautiful. It has no expectation,
no pressure, no socially determined value. But it is
a shard of everything. Let my life be
a mosaic of mugs and moments.

Krystle Eilen

After Hours

the night calls upon
a myriad of want —
it's late but nature
is making itself known:

the rain is pouring, a frog
lets out a croak from its own abyss,
and a cult of cicadas sing their synchronous hymn.

the silence is making
them less alone.

Wendy K. Mages

Intuit

Driving along wooded roads,
a cardinal flies before me.

Deep within,
a flutter of good fortune,
a knowing,
stirs, awakens.

“What if?”
I query no one in particular,
“What if it were so?”

Recognizing this flutter,
this intuition,
I pause to sense its presence,
almost imperceptible, yet powerful,
guiding me on my way....

Neile Graham

The Goddess of This

Of being here. The goddess
of lives alive. Look down

to the so-close sight of our toes
side by side and sinking in sun-

warmed sand, grit swelling up
over dusty sweaty skin. Beside

them one hand poised to dig in.
To dig out a wave-tossed

cloud-streaked stone, while
yet another hand lifts, traces

the horizoned trail of the longing
calls blistering from the gulls

as they swing by then land
to dress the shore as if their bodies

were beautiful. Their bodies are beautiful.
The good grit in my palm sifting

the sand the stone the waves of sun
of longing onto you. My open hand on you.

Rick Rohdenburg

Scrap from the Beach

... and then the moon,
on the bright thin legs of a shorebird,
wading the depths of the sea.

Meg Freer

Frost Forest with Blue Sky on Window



Contributor Biographies

Marie-Andrée Auclair

Marie-Andrée Auclair's poems have found homes in many print and online publications in Canada, USA, Ireland, UK, and Australia; to name a few: *Bywords*, Canada; *Flo Lit Mag*, Canada; *Paper Dragon*, USA; *High Window*, UK. In addition to writing, she enjoys hiking, photography, traveling, and adding to her cooking repertoire after each trip. She lives in Canada.

John Janelle Backman

John Janelle Backman (she/her) writes about gender identity, ancient spirituality, the everyday strangeness of karma, and occasionally cats. Janelle's work has appeared in [Catapult](#), [the tiny journal](#), *Tiferet Journal*, [Psaltery & Lyre](#), and [Amethyst Review](#), among other places. Her essays have made the shortlist of the [Eunice Williams Nonfiction Prize](#) and [Wild Atlantic Writing Awards](#).

John Brantingham

John Brantingham was Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks' first poet laureate. His work has been featured in hundreds of magazines. He has twenty-one books of poetry, memoir, and fiction, including his latest, *Life: Orange to Pear* (Bamboo Dart Press) and *Kitkitdizzi* (Bamboo Dart Press). He lives in Jamestown, New York.

Sarah Bricault

Sarah Bricault has a PhD in neurobiology and currently works as a postdoc in that field. Her fascination with the mind and how it processes information often finds itself in her poetry, as do themes related to mental health. Sarah's work can be found in *Brown Bag Online*, *High Shelf Press*, and elsewhere. For more information on Sarah, check out SarahBricault.net.

Hugh Carroll

Hugh Carroll (he/him, aka 'Hughie,' UK, male, 58) was a circus performer. A serious accident in 1991 led to a long disability. Writing helps! He's also into Zen, kites, tech, and chess. <https://hugle.uk>

Holly Day

Holly Day's writing has recently appeared in *Analog SF*, *The Hong Kong Review*, and *Appalachian Journal*, and her recent book publications include *Music Composition for Dummies*, *The Tooth is the Largest Organ in the Human Body*, and *Bound in Ice*. She teaches creative writing at The Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis and Hugo House in Seattle.

Ben D'Alessio

Ben D'Alessio is the author of four novels, several short stories, and a sundry assortment of musings. He's also a legal services attorney in New Jersey and podcast co-host for *The Reckless Musecast*. You can find his work at www.bendalessio.com.

John Delaney

After retiring as curator of historic maps at Princeton University Library, John Delaney moved out to Port Townsend, Washington, and has traveled widely, preferring remote, natural settings. Since that transition, he has published *Waypoints* (2017), a collection of place poems; *Twenty Questions* (2019), a chapbook; and *Delicate Arch* (2022), poems and photographs of national parks and monuments.

Louis Efron

Louis Efron is a globally recognized writer and poet who has been featured in *Forbes*, *Huffington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *POETiCA REViEW*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Academy of the Heart and Mind*, *Literary Yard*, *New Reader Magazine*, and over one hundred other national and global publications. He is also the author of five books, including *The Unempty Spaces Between*; *How to Find a Job, Career and Life You Love*; *Purpose Meets Execution*; and *Beyond the Ink*; as well as the children's book *What Kind of Bee Can I Be?*

Krystle Eilen

Krystle Eilen is a 22-year-old poet who is currently attending university. Her works have been featured in *Dipity Literary Magazine* and are soon to be published in *Hive Avenue Literary Journal*. During her spare time, she enjoys reading and making art. Pfeeney1208@gmail.com

Joseph Farley

Joseph Farley edited *Axe Factory*, *Paper Airplane*, *Cynic Book Reviews*, *Poetry Chain Letter*, and other literary zines. He has nine books and chapbooks of poetry out there including *Suckers*, *Longing for the Mother Tongue*, and *Her Eyes*. His fiction books include *For the Birds* (stories), *Farts and Daydreams* (stories), and *Labor Day* (novel). His work has appeared in *Bindweed*, *US 1 Worksheets*, *Mad Swirl*, *BlazeVox*, *Crack the Spine*, *The Writing Disorder*, *Lummox* anthologies, *Horror Sleaze Trash*, *Schlock*, *Home Planet News Online*, *Wilderness House Review*, *Oddball*, *Big Window*, *Ink Pantry*, and many other places.

Patricia Feeney

Patricia Feeney lives in St. Louis, Missouri, with her husband and three family pets. She is a founding member of The Crooked Tree Writers, a St. Louis-based critique group, and is a member of the St. Louis Writers Guild and the Association of Writers and Writing Programs. Her work has appeared in *The Lindenwood Review*, *Bayou Magazine* (Pushcart nominee), *Windmill Journal of Literature and Art*, *Inscape*, *Adelaide Literary Journal*, *biostories*, *Grub Street Literary Magazine*, and elsewhere.

Meg Freer

Meg Freer grew up in Montana, studied musicology, and worked in scholarly book publishing. She now teaches piano, takes photos, and enjoys the outdoors year-round in Ontario. She holds a Graduate Certificate with Distinction in Creative Writing from Toronto's Humber School of Writers, and her award-winning photos, poems, and prose have been published in many journals. She is co-author of a poetry chapbook, *Serve the Sorrowing World with Joy* (Woodpecker Lane Press, 2020) and author of another chapbook, *A Man of Integrity* (Alien Buddha Press, 2022).

Carlene M. Gadapee

Carlene M. Gadapee teaches high school English and is the associate creative director for The Frost Place Studio Sessions. Her poems have been published by *Waterwheel Review*, *Smoky Quartz*, *Margate Bookie*, *English Journal*, *bloodroot*, *Wild Words*, and elsewhere. Carlene resides with her husband in northern New Hampshire.

Jason C. Gadsby

Jason C. Gadsby is a master fabricator and owner of JCG COUNTERTOPS LLC. in Oxford, Connecticut. A top-ranked pool player, motorcycle fanatic, nature lover, and social butterfly . . . there's never a dull moment to be had.

Cynthia Gallaher

Cynthia Gallaher, a Chicago-based poet, is author of four poetry collections, including *Epicurean Ecstasy: More Poems About Food, Drink, Herbs and Spices*, and three chapbooks, including *Drenched*. Her award-winning nonfiction/memoir/creativity guide is *Frugal Poets' Guide to Life: How to Live a Poetic Life, Even If You Aren't a Poet*. Gallaher was judge for the 2022 Prairie State Poetry Contest, and one of her poems will be sent on NASA's flight to the south pole of the moon later this decade.

Sariah Gibby

Sariah Gibby lives in the Rocky Mountains, where she writes about cows, crows, and cowbird skulls. Her obsession with show chickens and blue eggs grows by the day. She graduates with a bachelor's in English in May 2023, and she is published in the *Sink Hollow* literary journal.

Terri Glass

Terri Glass is a writer, of essay, poetry, and haiku. Her work has appeared in *Eastern Iowa Review*, *Fourth River*, *About Place*, *California Quarterly*, *Young Raven's Literary Review*, and many anthologies, including, *Wild Gods, Fire and Rain; Ecopoetry of California*, and *Earth Blessings*. Her recent books include *Being Animal* from Kelsay Books; a chapbook of haiku, *Birds, Bees, Trees, Love, Hee Hee* from Finishing Line Press; and an e-book, *The Wild Horse of Haiku: Beauty in a Changing Form*. Terri leads poetry writing workshops through CAL POETS in the Schools and through DNACA, her local arts council.

Neile Graham

Neile Graham is Canadian by birth and inclination but is a long-term resident of Seattle, where she can still live close to salt water and rainforest. Her work has recently appeared in *Amethyst Review*, *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, *The Thieving Magpie*, and *Mad Swirl*. Her most recent collection, *The Walk She Takes*, an idiosyncratic tour of Scotland, appeared in 2019. She also has three previous collections and a spoken-word CD. She recently retired from nineteen years of wrangling writers and schedules for the Clarion West Writers Workshop; she won A World Fantasy Award in 2017 for that work. See neilegraham.com for more information.

KJ Hannah Greenberg

KJ Hannah Greenberg's images have appeared as interior art in many places, including *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Les Femmes Folles*, *Mused*, *Piker Press*, *The Academy of the Heart and Mind*, *The Front Porch Review*, and *Yellow Mama* and as cover art in many places, including *Angime*, *Black Petals*, *Door is A Jar Literary Magazine* [sic], *Impspired* [sic], *Pithead Chapel*, *Red Flag Poetry*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Smoky Blue Literary and Arts Magazine*, *The Broken City*, *Torah Tidbits*, and *Yellow Mama*. Additionally, some of her digital paintings are featured alongside of her poetry in *One-Handed Pianist* (Hekate Publishing, 2021).

Maura H. Harrison

Maura H. Harrison is a poet and photographer from central Virginia. She is currently an MFA candidate at the University of St. Thomas, Houston.

David Henson

David Henson and his wife have lived in Brussels and Hong Kong and now reside in Illinois. His work has been nominated for three Pushcart Prizes, Best of the Net, and Best Small Fictions and has appeared in various journals including *Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Field Guide Poetry Magazine*, *Moonpark Review*, *Literally Stories*, and *Fiction on the Web*. His website is <http://writings217.wordpress.com>. His Twitter is @annalou8.

Jane Hertenstein

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

Janis Butler Holm

Janis Butler Holm served as associate editor for *Wide Angle*, the film journal, and currently works as a writer and editor in sunny Los Angeles. Her prose, poems, art, and performance pieces have appeared in small-press, national, and international magazines. Her plays have been produced in the US, Canada, Russia, and the UK.

Paul Hostovsky

Paul Hostovsky makes his living in Boston as a sign language interpreter. His newest book of poems is *Pitching for the Apostates* (forthcoming, Kelsay Books). Website: paulhostovsky.com.

Emma Huang

Emma Huang is the author of the poetry collection *A Shower of Stars*.

Julie Allyn Johnson

Julie Allyn Johnson is a sawyer's daughter from the American Midwest. She prefers black licorice over red, loves Tootsie Rolls, and digs Hot Tamales—practically the perfect candy. Her

current obsession is tackling the rough and tumble sport of quilting and the accumulation of fabric. A Pushcart Prize nominee, Julie's poetry can be found in various journals including *Star*Line*, *The Briar Cliff Review*, and *Granfalloon*.

Peycho Kanev

Peycho Kanev is the author of twelve poetry collections and three chapbooks, published in the USA and Europe. His poems have appeared in many literary magazines, such as: *Rattle*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Evergreen Review*, *Front Porch Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Sheepshead Review*, *Off the Coast*, *The Adirondack Review*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *The Cleveland Review*, and many others. His new book of poetry titled, *A Fake Memoir*, was published in 2022 by Cyberwit.

John Kaprelian

Nature photographer, photo editor, and now a "Digital Asset Management Librarian," John Kaprielian brings his keen eye for natural history to his poems, which are often inspired by his observations. He has been writing poetry for forty years and studied creative writing at Cornell with the poet A.R. Ammons while getting his undergraduate degree. His work has been published in *The Blue Nib*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Riddled with Arrows*, *CP Quarterly*, and many other journals, and he has a poetry collection available on Amazon. He lives in Putnam County, New York, with his wife and assorted pets.

Shelby Lynn Lanaro

Shelby Lynn Lanaro is a poet, lover of photography, and avid home chef, who firmly believes that cooking is poetry. She is the author of *Yellowing Photographs* and an award-winning professor at Southern Connecticut State University. Her photos have appeared in *Young Ravens Literary Review* and *Last Leaves Literary Magazine*. Follow Shelby on Instagram @shelbylynnlanaro or at www.shelbylynnlanaro.com to keep up with her work.

Gary Lark

Gary Lark's most recent collections are *Easter Creek*, Main Street Rag; *Daybreak on the Water*, Flowstone Press; and *Ordinary Gravity*, Airlie Press. His work has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Catamaran*, *Rattle*, *Sky Island*, and others.

Lori Levy

Lori Levy's poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Nimrod International Journal*, and numerous other literary journals and anthologies, including *Young Ravens Literary Review*. Her work has also been published in medical humanities journals, and she has two chapbooks forthcoming in fall 2023 from Kelsay Books and Ben Yehuda Press. She lives with her extended family in Los Angeles, but "home" has also been Vermont and Israel.

DM Lichen

DM Lichen is a Queer, African-American poet and writer from Cincinnati, Ohio. They have poetry shown in *Aji*, *Nzuri*, and *Club Plum*. They have earned a BFA in Creative & Professional Writing from Maharishi International University and work as a submission editor for Dark Onus Lit/Press.

Yariel Luna

Yariel Luna is a BIPOC poet currently based in Milford, Connecticut. His works have been well-received by readers across the world.

Wendy K. Mages

Wendy K. Mages, a professor at Mercy College, is a storyteller and educator with a doctorate in human development and psychology from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a master's in theatre from Northwestern. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee with stories and poems in *3cents Magazine*, *50-Word Stories*, *Antithesis Journal Blog*, *The AutoEthnographer*, *Five Minutes*, *Funny Pearls*, *Harpy Hybrid Review*, *Hearth & Coffin*, *Howler Daily*, *Jarnal*, *Jenny*, *The Journal of Stories in Science*, *New Croton Review*, *Potato Soup Journal*, *Quibble*, *Route 7 Review*, *Scenario*, *Sea to Sky Review*, *Star 82 Review*, and *Young Ravens Literary Review*. Please visit <https://www.mercy.edu/directory/wendy-mages>.

Andrew Mauzey & Jeff Stillion

Andrew Mauzey and Jeff Stillion make music under the name The Sunday Parade and often adapt the various themes and images of their songs to poetry. Their poems have appeared in *TreeHouse Arts*, *Pioneertown*, and *Ekstasis*. They live in Southern California.

Elizabeth McCarthy

Elizabeth McCarthy lives in northern Vermont. Retired from teaching in 2019, she turned to poetry when the pandemic closed the world down and time became a windfall. She is a member of the online poetry group, The Lockdown Poets of Aberdeen, Scotland, and the Poetry Society of Vermont. In 2020, Elizabeth published her first chapbook, *The Old House*. Her manuscript *Digging Potatoes* was shortlisted in the 2021 Hunger Mountain: VCFA May Day Mountain Chapbook Series contest. Elizabeth's second chapbook, *Winter Vole*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2022; in 2024 they will publish her chapbook, *Hard Feelings*.

Paula Reed Nancarrow

Paula Reed Nancarrow is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, as well as a past winner of the *Sixfold Poetry Prize*. Recent poems have appeared in *The Madrigal*, *Plainsongs*, and *The Southern Review*. She lives in St. Paul, Minnesota. Find her online at paulareednancarrow.com.

Heidi Naylor

Heidi Naylor's features, fiction, and poems have appeared in the *Washington Post*, the *Jewish Journal*, *New Letters*, the *Cimarron Review*, *Sunstone*, *Exponent II*, and other magazines. She writes and teaches in Idaho. Find her at heidinaylor.net.

Julie Pinborough

Julie Pinborough is a copyeditor and copywriter based in The Royal Borough of Greenwich, London, UK. Aside from her professional career, Julie uses her photography to encourage connections with nature and to invoke a sense of peace and gentleness. Julie's photography has been featured on BBC London and can be found at <https://juliepinborough.picfair.com/>.

Marc Isaac Potter

Marc Isaac Potter (we/they/them) ... is a differently-abled writer living in the San Francisco Bay Area. Marc's interests include blogging by email and Zen. They have been published in *Fiery Scribe Review*, *Feral A Journal of Poetry and Art*, *Poetic Sun Poetry*, and *Provenance Journal*. Twitter is @marcisaacpotter.

Rick Rohdenburg

Rick Rohdenburg has published in numerous print and digital journals, including the *Chestnut Review*, *Laurel Review*, and *Raleigh Review*. He was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2021. Now retired, he lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

Michael Salcman

Books include *The Clock Made of Confetti* (Orchises); nominated for The Poets' Prize; *The Enemy of Good Is Better*, *Poetry in Medicine*, a widely used anthology of classic and contemporary poems on doctors, patients, illness and healing (Persea Books, 2015); *A Prague Spring, Before & After* (winner 2015 Sinclair Poetry Prize); and *Shades & Graces*, the inaugural winner of the Daniel Hoffman Legacy Book Prize (Spuyten Duyvil, 2020). My fifth collection, *Necessary Speech: New & Selected Poems* was published last year (Spuyten Duyvil, 2022).

CLS Sandoval

CLS Sandoval, PhD (she/her) is a Pushcart-nominated writer and communication professor with accolades in film, academia, and creative writing, who speaks, signs, acts, publishes, sings, performs, writes, paints, teaches, and rarely relaxes. She's a flash fiction and poetry editor for *Dark Onus Lit*. She has presented over fifty times at communication conferences, published fifteen academic articles, two academic books, three full-length literary collections, three chapbooks, as well as flash and poetry pieces in several literary journals, recently including *Opiate Magazine*, *The Journal of Magical Wonder*, and *A Moon of One's Own*. She is raising her daughter and dog with her husband in Alhambra, California.

John Savoie

John Savoie teaches great books at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Best New Poets*, and *Poetry in Motion*.

Adrienne Stevenson

Adrienne Stevenson lives in Ottawa, Canada. A retired forensic scientist, she writes poetry and prose. Her work has appeared in over fifty print and online journals and anthologies in Canada, USA, UK, Europe, India, Australia. When not writing, Adrienne tends a large garden, reads voraciously, and procrastinates playing several musical instruments.

Angela Townsend

As development director at Tabby's Place: A Cat Sanctuary, Angela Townsend has the privilege of bearing witness to mercy for all beings. Angela holds an MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary and BA from Vassar College. She has had Type 1 diabetes for thirty-two years, talks to

her mother every day, and delights in the moon. [@fullyalivebythegrace](#) on Instagram and [@TheWalkingTulip](#) on Twitter.

Diane Webster

Diane Webster's goal is to remain open to poetry ideas in everyday life, nature, or an overheard phrase, and to write. Diane enjoys the challenge of transforming images into words to fit her poems. Her work has appeared in *El Portal*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *New English Review*, and other literary magazines. She also had a micro-chap published by *Origami Poetry Press* in 2022.

Anne Whitehouse

Anne Whitehouse's most recent poetry collection is *OUTSIDE FROM THE INSIDE* (Dos Madres Press, 2020), and her most recent chapbook is *FRIDA* (Ethel Zine and Micro Press, 2023). She is also the author of a novel, *FALL LOVE*.

Kendra Whitfield

Kendra Whitfield lives and writes on the southern edge of the northern boreal forest. When not writing, she can be found basking in sunbeams on the back deck or swimming laps at the local pool. Her poetry appears in *The Raven Review*, *The Rye Whiskey Review* and in the anthology, *We Were Not Alone* (Community Building Art Works, November, 2021).

Michael T. Young

Michael T. Young's third full-length collection, *The Infinite Doctrine of Water*, was longlisted for the Julie Suk Award. He received a fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. His chapbook, *Living in the Counterpoint*, received the Jean Pedrick Chapbook Award. His poetry has been featured on *Verse Daily* and *The Writer's Almanac*. It has also appeared in numerous journals including *Lily Poetry Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, and *Vox Populi*.