



# NUMBER ONE

Volume 44  
2016



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15723-727

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*Number One* takes its name from a small, unincorporated community two miles west of Gallatin, Tennessee, on the Nashville Pike (Highway 31 E). No one is certain how the community of Number One got its name, but local legend suggests it was a stopping place for travellers on the Cumberland Trail, and it may have been a hunting ground or rendezvous point for traders and long-hunters in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some say the name originated as a designation for an early school system, and others claim it came from the railroad lingo of the Louisville-Nashville line, which runs parallel to the Pike.

As a journal bearing the mysterious name of a place very near the location of its own origins at Volunteer State Community College, *Number One* features work that examines sense of place in the broadest of ways. We publish poetry, fiction, essays, creative non-fiction, and interviews about places and the people who inhabit such places. While many of the writers appearing in these pages live in the American South, we are open to including work by writers from around the world.



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## Featuring

The Eleventh Annual  
*Number One* Contest Winners

### POETRY

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### PROSE

“The Country Mouse”  
by Jaime Sanchez  
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“Three Years of Wednesdays”  
by April Young  
page 59



*In Memory of Brad King  
February 21, 1975- January 28, 2016*

## **What We Hope For**

the homeless man hopes that  
heaven is simply the comfy  
childhood bed in which he  
once slept soundly—  
no more, no less, and  
the rich man hopes that heaven is  
fraught with wildness and  
danger where the true  
creature comforts aren't  
tea and crumpets but  
adventure and madness.

the middle-aged housewife  
alone on the sofa at 3 pm with a  
flawless bloody mary and  
afternoon soaps hopes that  
heaven is a place where  
exotic gents with infinite trust  
funds court them relentlessly, as though  
they were co-eds with  
mammoth breasts once again.

and the artist merely hopes that  
heaven is a place completely devoid  
of anything resembling  
success or failure;  
a place that's quiet where  
the golden ink never dries and  
the trout offer themselves with the  
zeal of Malaysian prostitutes at  
interstate truck stops.

~ Brad King

# Food for Future Years

(A poem inspired by William Wordsworth's

*"Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey"*)

Today I lectured on Wordsworth.  
"Lectured" – pshaw!  
I strutted and crowed and danced on the balls of my feet.  
I pathetically attempted to convey the ebullience  
that eddied through my softened heart  
in much the same way that the poet seemed to reach beyond his reach  
to corral with words that moment when we  
"see into the life of things."

I spoke of nature and meditation  
and the place of wisdom that lives beyond consciousness.  
I stretched synonyms and cajoled imagery  
to see if any words were worth  
the moment of experience  
when soul touches soul,  
mind touches nature,  
all that is touches all I am.

I lifted my arms, my eyes, my voice,  
as I tried to carry a roomful  
of baby scholars  
to the banks of the River Wye.  
I engaged every descriptive power  
I have ever possessed  
to give them just a whisper of an idea  
about the presence, the sense, the spirit  
which lives in the blissful moment of  
pure connection,  
and which the poet  
dared to attempt to explain  
though he knew better than all of us  
how futile that effort would surely be.

I tried. Oh, how I tried.  
And then I looked at the rows of faces,  
some blank and unreadable,  
but some smiling, some nodding,  
some radiating the knowing,  
and I knew.  
I had not transported them to Tintern Abbey.  
We had traveled together to this moment,  
a moment of pure connection,  
that the poet would reach beyond reach  
to dare to attempt to explain.

~ Deb Moore



# Catching Chickens

Valentine loves to be held.  
Nips at my jeans, squints into the sun, practically begs.  
But she's scrawny and hen-pecked.  
Comb always bloody. Knobby feet.  
The others I've never touched.  
Sure, as downy chicks. Never since.  
Stunning creatures proudly strutting,  
Every tail feather in place.  
I've tried several methods of capture.

Step One – Earn Trust. Hand feed them.  
Cabbage. Carrots. Cauliflower.  
Step Two – Employ subterfuge.  
Stoop down still as a stone, and then -  
Step Three – Cut off escape. Corner one.  
I do not recommend step three.

I'm working on a poem about catching chickens.  
First attempt – Focus. Concentrate. Think chickens.  
So much depends on a red wheelbarrow  
Second attempt – Relax. Clear your mind. Try NOT to think.  
About a red wheelbarrow glazed with rainwater  
Third attempt – Just write. Stream of consciousness.  
Just . . . a stream . . . beside the white chickens

Some poems beg to be written.  
I've held one or two.  
But they're usually jerky.  
Scrawny symbolism. Knobby feet.  
Others strut across the page.  
Stunning. Majestic.  
Almost untouchable,  
But so worth the chase.

~ Deb Moore

## Fair Park

Here, it is always summer -  
    even as my sister and I slip the fence  
and stroll across asphalt,  
    the bleak winter sky a backdrop  
for Tilt-a-Whirl yellow, Cotton Candy pink.  
    We stand at the ticket booth  
like we used to years ago, when our small hands  
    clutched a sack of R C Cola caps  
and labels from cans of Vietti Chili  
    we'd trade for a strip of red tickets.  
Dragging them on the ground, we'd eye  
    the line at the Paris After Dark haunted house,  
the padded thud of the bumper cars  
    competing with pinball music from the arcade.  
Now dormant, shadowed, we dream of a season  
    that won't come again. No summer sun  
to paint purpose on open gates. No organ-grinder's monkey  
    fingering coins. No rides on the quaking Skyliner,  
the wooden coaster that felt as secure as a house of cards.  
    My sister says the merry-go-round horses  
with the painted-on saddles and real leather reins  
    sold at auction, along with train cars  
from the miniature railroad and the windmill  
    from the Putt-Putt golf course.  
What's left are the outbuildings, the low slung roof  
    of the shooting gallery, the aluminum turnstile  
set in concrete where ponies were hitched  
    and walked with their burden of child.  
Somewhere, our elementary school report cards rest  
    in a drawer, strung with E's and the Fair Park stamp  
that proved we cashed in our brains  
    for a little joy when joy was hard to come by.  
A fickle winter sun impales the afternoon  
    with faded Ferris Wheel orange, Ring Toss blue.  
We edge back to real life,  
    the fence a boundary we won't cross again,  
nor the memory, that dangerous ride.

~ Sandy Coomer



# Morning

I leave you sleeping  
in the quiet morning. The faint sun  
hasn't yet reached the back porch  
and all is hushed with purple-gray mist  
ringing the yard like castle walls.  
I wait for last night's anger to reappear  
but it takes too much work  
to dig it out of memory. I let it sink  
into the recess of those things  
that can't be explained,  
let it sit with the coolness  
of a just-birthead day, quiet,  
against the rages of the past,  
still, beside the future flutter  
of things hoped for  
and feared at the same time.  
I think if I stay here  
and let the day form around me  
I can be reborn with it.  
I think if we move slower,  
we can catch up with each other.  
If we don't speak we can hear  
the breath that brought us together  
all those years ago. We can hear  
the words we used to say  
spring out of the air  
that still holds them true.

~ Sandy Coomer

# Wabash

I catch the river's turn at the slant of afternoon sun,  
low and shielded by a damp cold, the leftovers  
from yesterday's rain.

Tracks in the sand spell coyotes and deer, a lone runner,  
and me, boot-edged and heavy with solitude.  
A place is not complete

without its people, whetted by words, and bound  
by conversation, but perhaps this river speaks  
for us all, its voice

stirring with swell, its channels old and curling like ribbons  
as it traces the cutoffs and oxbows charmed  
by Indiana's terrain.

Frogs are blessed in river mud, herons exalted  
by the sinking sun, and I watch fish flap, ride  
the murky face

with bone-white logs and microcosm, as the river twists east,  
then west, then south, taking twice as many miles  
to arrive as it needs to.

I stand still as history spears past - the birth of small streams,  
a trickle from a hidden spring, mountain snow-melt  
seeping into caverns

ready to burble and surge a wider course. Journeys are like that.  
The first step spreads into something more until it  
roars against the paths

planned for it, sweeps the husks of resistance down as it thrusts  
its way through. If this river could hear, I wonder  
if it would lift a little

at my passing near, if it knows me by my breath along the rocky shore,  
alone with all the voices of my past. Or does a river  
content itself with its own

and nothing more, the way I sometimes do, when my wild heart  
journeys toward all the selves I am, and my feet  
have no choice but to follow.

~ Sandy Coomer

## My Father Watches Alaskan Survival

My father watches Alaskan survival shows  
on the new t.v. we got him for Christmas,  
back to back to back episodes, a chain-smoking  
narrative of salmon and mud, bush plane,  
bear kill, borealis, fishing boats  
churning surf beneath the midnight sun.  
At 80 he swings from silence to gab to silence,  
forgets names of things, should not  
be driving, and now this: Alaskan reality,  
which is better, I suppose, than the year  
he became obsessed with Home Shopping Network  
and bought so much cheap jewelry for us all.  
The mighty matriarchy surrounds him  
with too many daughters and granddaughters.  
We shout him down, out-woman him to these  
very end of days, refuse to leave him  
alone on the tundra to die.

But, we've nothing on those hearty homesteaders,  
their cupboards full of gumption and guns.  
*Look at that! Amazing what these people do,*  
*amazing,* says Dad, with more than a bit  
of longing, a stack of AARP travel magazines  
on the suburban coffee table gathering dust.

~ Leslie LaChance

## Running of the Smelt, March 1898

Barclay's men dip and heave their writhing nets,  
pour a thousand thousand tiny fish glittering  
upon the planks.

Silver darts, smelt. Salvation fish, I have heard  
them called. Supper for spring's lean days,  
river's chill to skillet.

The March sky purples itself with night  
as children's games unfold at volume perhaps  
too full for Lent, boys wild as water

between the banks and hungry as they gather  
now about the boards heaped with fried  
and fragrant fish, oil-and-bone-crisped.

All hold themselves just long enough  
for Father Sweeney's grace, then devour, tip  
to tail, all. Tip to tail, each smelt

one small bite, tiny bones crunch-crushed, oils  
rolled slick across the tongue. As I do, now, eat.  
Knowing plenty cannot be borne

without longing for more plenty,  
each oil-jeweled smelt miraculous.

~ Leslie LaChance

## Sister Agatha Crosses the Ice, 5 February 1898

Light comes earlier now, behind us,  
kindling the Taconic hills to pink,

though we still mount our sleigh in darkness  
Sister Bernadette reining Old Sam westward

across the Hudson's great ice, a growling  
from the blades below, something like His voice

in our wind-whipped ears, each hoof beat  
bearing news of grace under a bird-

bereft and brightening sky. The children  
on the shore opposite, to be lettered, catechized

and kept, for a bit, from the mills, do they  
hear it in the small bell's summons? Some days

I hear nothing at all, or the wind  
is only mother's final gasp that never

was the voice of God. I was no wee foundling  
then, but a great girl alone who made her way

here. To this cold and crackling place. To do,  
they say, His bidding. His work. But the work,

I say, is mine. My rising in coldness, my going forth into it,  
crossing coldness to more cold,

more of mine, the little ones, coughing, fevered  
and sent to learn the Word for which they never

asked. And I must give it, supposing. What  
wisdom? To say His hand keeps even the hake

and eel below? His breath lifts bell song  
through dark pine? Yet his children trudge to vat and

stamp, and starve. What of the Word,  
its doing then? Soon the ice will thunder open

under a still timid sun. Kingfishers and sturgeon  
will return to feed and spawn, and boats will go.

And I in one of them beneath the morning star.  
Providence. Portion. A canticle all my own

on the wind-blown waves.

~ Leslie LaChance

## Nature as Muse

The muse is fickle as the weather.  
She inspires on a whim, turns a deaf ear.  
She touches when she pleases, calls the words.  
She leaves without a rhyme, a metaphor.

She inspires on a whim, turns a deaf ear.  
Stare at the blank page. Listen for wind in trees.  
She leaves without a rhyme, a metaphor.  
Blue jays mock from distant woods.

Stare at the blank page. Listen for wind in trees,  
She touches when she pleases, calls the words.  
Blue jays mock from distant woods.  
The muse is fickle as the weather.

~ Ray Zimmerman



# Azalea Cascade

Water passes limestone;  
bubbles past pink blossoms;  
obeys gravity's command;  
gathers in pools below.

Pink Lady's-Slipper Orchids  
bloom in warming season,  
in turn with trillium,  
precede summer's glory.

Picnic on the boardwalk.  
Admire white flowered  
mountain laurel and  
pale Rhododendron.

Hikers rest their feet  
in cool clear shallows,  
as lovers share a kiss,  
bubble past pink blossoms

Gather warm thin sun.  
Reflect upon shadows  
as hopes and sorrows  
gather in pools below.

~ Ray Zimmerman



## **Autumn Mist: Linked Haiku**

Crows have followed me  
Mob the tree outside my door  
Winds of change arrive

Chickadees flit to feeder seeds  
Titmice know winter awaits

Hickories turn yellow  
Mountain lies in smoky gold  
Fog rests on the ridge

White flakes like eyelashes fall  
On warm ground they melt away

Squirrel gathers nuts  
Mice store grass in small haystacks  
Orion rises

We dance among wither stars  
Sun sets sooner with each day

Shiver in the dark  
Find sweater, boots, and hat  
Red dawn crosses snow

~ Ray Zimmerman

## After She Died

My mother's ashtray  
a turquoise and russet  
high-glazed rectangle  
thrown from coppery clay  
fired in Pewabic's home kiln  
somewhere in Hamtramck  
stayed close to every place  
my mother ever sat.

Of all the things  
I could have taken  
I wanted what she held in her left hand  
elbow propped on the arm of the chair  
she cradled that pottery like a nest  
against her heart  
to let what she  
kissed  
time and time again  
each day  
rest there.

~ Patricia Albrecht

# Unexpurgated

~ A Cento from the Article: “No Women Writers, My  
Introduction to Anais Nin” by Janet Fitch Vol. 1, 2003 in *A Cafe  
In Space, The Anais Nin Literary Journal*

picture the house  
inside is a room  
you never knew was there

*painted very well  
lacquer red for vehemence  
pale turquoise for reveries  
peach for gentleness  
green for repose  
gray for work at the typewriter*

*I often dream  
about the room  
which does not exist  
beyond the closed shutter  
painted for mood*

in this living room  
was the bed  
heroes slept in  
and took me  
interlinked,  
otherworldly,  
glittered.

[Italicized words are Anais’s referenced in the article: the rest are Janet’s.]

~ Patricia Albrecht

## Where the Moon Don't Shine

Our outhouse has no moon  
no peek or porthole.  
When you're inside  
leave the door wide open.  
Away from peepers  
you'll face the dense north woods  
the tar dark swamp  
the pine tree  
I fell out of.  
Inside hold your breath  
on either the pastel pink  
or mint green seat.  
You have to peer under  
the overhanging sticky fly strips,  
the moth-caught cobwebs netting  
across the yellow bug light,  
you have to ignore  
the wolf spider who hides  
in the well of the toilet paper roll,  
then train your eyes  
to follow the sandy path strewn  
with broken acorn shells past  
the fringing birch bark trunks  
to spot the obscure oriole  
that lands on the old white pine  
the way it did when I was nine  
and followed it up  
towards the crescent moon  
before I learned  
how flimsy needled  
life is at the top.

~ Patricia Albrecht

# The Duchess and the Painter

Portrait, 1795  
*The Duchess of Alba in White*  
Francisco de Goya

Wear virginal white, he requested,  
for your marriage at age twelve.  
She agreed and found a plain gown  
unlike her usual lavish dress.  
The painter wrapped a scarlet sash  
around her waist and tucked a bow  
into the nimbus of black hair to show  
her life of play and passion.

On one arm bracelets of gold  
call up great wealth she claimed.  
No drawing room is her background  
But behind her are the Spanish plains.  
At her feet a red ribboned dog  
sweetly echoes her bright palette  
and suggests the childless state  
of this woman in her fourth decade.

Some might think her high arched brows  
express disdain for those beneath her.  
Still, her eyes, so dark and drooping,  
have a sadness unconcealed.  
In all the portraits, even sketches  
Goya gives her a sober mien.  
Perhaps her pleasures begin to pale,  
and her lovers are found wanting.

Yet he may also depict a portent  
that they both can sense unspoken.  
For six years later flesh would fail  
and she died in mystery.  
Did the painter really love her  
and she him as rumors say,  
or had he served just to interpret  
with a prescience for all time?

~ Jeanne Irelan

# Love Beyond Pain

What Is Love?

A million and thirty poets and scholars  
Have written two million and sixty definitions.

A rose, a daffodil, the nectar for a bee,

Legs, tongues, thighs, and breasts,

A ring, tokens, an endless quest

Dragon flies, fireflies, *luciérnagas fantásticas*,

Spring rain, rainbows, the song of nightingales,

Emeralds, pearls, and diamond days,

Eros, Psyche, Apollo, and Aphrodite.

The moon, the sun, the universe,

Blinding light, celestial fire, the flames of Paradise,

Eyes like the sky, hearts, and many more clichés,

Stop!

Enough!

And yet I can add one more to the list.

Several times, when she has suffered a relapse,

As I hold her head in my hands

And stare intently through her eyes,

I have earnestly wished

That the anxiety and fear of her nightmare leave her

And move to me instead.

~ Jaime Sanchez



## The Country Mouse

Once upon a time, there was a mouse who lived in a beautiful countryside very far away from the city. His name was Juan, and he did not like to work. However, he had a big sack of corn that a farmer had abandoned when he went to the city looking for a better job.

Juan had many friends, so he spent most of the day chatting with them and eating corn. As time passed, however, the corn supply decreased and decreased until there was nothing left. At first, Juan thought about getting a job, but he then decided to borrow a small sack of corn from his friend Carlos Grasshopper.

Carlos was a handsome grasshopper who worked at a diner waiting tables. He jumped from table to table, so he was very efficient serving food and made his living getting good tips.

“Carlos, I am in a predicament. I ran out of corn and don’t have a job,” Juan said.

“There are always openings at the diner for dish washers and cleaners. I can give a good word for you.”

“Well, that is not my line of work, but you can help me by giving me a sack of corn. I will repay you in a few weeks after I get a job.”

Carlos brought the sack of corn and went his way. Juan relaxed and began to sing: *Squeak, squeak, la la lá, squeak, squeak, la lá.*

Juan usually wore a pair of old blue jeans, tennis shoes, and a T-shirt. This day, his T-shirt was white, and it had the following writing: “Yes, I love Minnie Mouse! SO WHAT?” Smiling after securing his sustenance for a while, he walked with a firm and elegant gait. Then, he lay down and watched the clouds cross the blue sky until he fell asleep.

A month later, Juan ran out of corn again. He couldn’t borrow a second time from Carlos Grasshopper, but he decided that he could ask Maricela Hen for a sack of corn. Maricela was a beautiful hen who made a living selling magic eggs, some of them of gold. She had a friendly personality and was very smart. She ran a very efficient business because she laid the eggs.

“Maricela, I have a serious problem. I ran out of corn and don’t have a job.”

“I need a salesman, and you could begin today. What do you say?” Maricela responded.

“Thank you, but that is not my line of work because I am very shy. You can help me by letting me borrow a sack of corn, though. I will repay you in a few weeks after I get a job.”

Maricela brought the sack of corn and went her way. Juan relaxed and began to sing: *Squeak, squeak, la la lá, squeak, squak, la lá.* Then, he lay down and watched the clouds crossing the blue sky. Some clouds looked like chickens, others like horses, and some like dragons and hawks. Juan remained thoughtful for a few minutes, and then he fell asleep.

A month passed, and Juan ran out of corn once more. He couldn’t borrow from Carlos Grasshopper or Maricela Hen. He began wandering in the fields and ran into Pedro Pig. Pedro was a very strong pig who worked as a car mechanic. He had a

goatee and wore blue long-sleeved coveralls. He didn't mind getting dirty fixing the cars and made a good living at it.

"Pedro, I am very upset because I ran out of corn and don't have a job," Juan said to his friend.

"You are too small to work as a mechanic, but the manager was looking for somebody to wash the cars. I can give a good word for you."

"That's very thoughtful of you, but that's not my line of work. If I get wet washing cars, I will catch a cold. However, you can help me by giving me a sack of corn. I will repay you as soon as I get a job," Juan responded.

Pedro brought a sack of corn and went his way. Juan thanked him and began to sing: *Squeak, squeak, la la lá, squeak, squak, la lá*. Then, he lay down and once more watched the clouds crossing the blue sky. A big cloud in the shape of a cat covered the sun momentarily. Juan shivered, but he then relaxed and fell asleep.

A month later, Juan ate the last grain of corn that he had in the sack. He was very upset because he couldn't get corn again from Carlos, Maricela, or Pedro. He began wandering in the fields looking for anybody who could let him borrow a sack of corn until Manuel Coyote crossed his way.

Manuel was a skinny coyote who hadn't eaten anything for days. He had a wife, Luisa, who had just had eight pups a few days before. Manuel had bright green eyes and a handlebar moustache. His blond hair was somewhat disheveled, and he wore a brown vest.

"Sir, I am sorry to bother you, but I have a serious problem. I ran out of corn and don't have a job. I will starve if nobody helps me. Could you please give me a sack of corn? I will repay you as soon as I get a job," Juan said.

"We coyotes don't eat corn, so I don't have any. I am a hunter, and I work very hard. I have been trotting up and down the fields for four days looking for a prey, but God finally answered my prayers when you crossed my way."

Not waiting for an answer, Manuel Coyote caught Juan Mouse and swallowed him whole with tennis shoes and all. Then, more energized, he continued his search for a prey to take to his big family.

*Moral: We all need to study hard and work to be self-sufficient. Otherwise, laziness and procrastination will be our downfall.*

~ Jaime Sanchez

# The Three Men and the Three Sorceresses

(A Fragment)

Once upon a time, in the land of the Mazahuas in Central Mexico, there lived three young men who were very close to each other. Their names were Iyotu, Moñi, and Merlo. Iyotu, whose name means to comfort, was a very hardworking, slender man. His eyebrows looked like two thick caterpillars over his eyes, and he always had words of kindness for everybody who crossed his way. Moñi, whose name means squirrel, was also very hardworking, but he was nervous all the time. He ate a lot and worked hard on the land. He had very long eyelashes and liked to talk to an excess. Merlo, whose name means money, was always uncertain as to what the future might bring, so he was frugal and saved as much money as he could. His eyes were small, and he had a Fu Manchu moustache.

One year, during the dry season in the wintertime, the three friends were out of work, so they decided to go to the big city to look for a job. Money hungry Merlo rode a gold champagne horse of great energy and speed, squirrel face Moñi rode a tame gray mare, and the compassionate Iyotu sat proudly astride a white donkey whose name was Cotton. The donkey was small and so white and hairy that he in fact looked like an enormous cotton ball with legs and a donkey head.

After riding a whole day, the three men arrived at a humble but clean inn where they decided to spend the night. The inn had a big barn in the back where the animals got water and hay. Cotton ate it in peace, oblivious to the ladybugs in his food. In the center of the inn, there was a large, open space with a tiled roof that functioned as resting place, dining room, and kitchen. Coming out of that area, there were rooms aligned to the right and the left, and their wooden doors faced a big yard where dogs of various colors and sizes snoozed while flies and mosquitoes seemed to enjoy waking them up.

The Mazahuans ate chicken with mole sauce and tortillas, mushrooms with a leafy vegetable called quelite, and black beans. They drank zende, a fermented beverage with a sweet and sour taste, and they toasted for a successful job search.

The innkeeper, a good-natured man in his fifties, overheard the conversations and told them, “Young men, if you need a job, I know of a nice hacendado who was looking for workers to help him prepare the land for the upcoming sowing.”

“How far away is this place?” Merlo asked.

“It’s midway between here and the big city, about a five-hour horse ride. It’s in the Valley of the Butterflies, just past the abandoned monastery. You can’t miss it. Just ask anybody about Don Julian. They all know him.”

“That’s great. We can leave first thing in the morning,” said Moñi.

“The only problem is that Don Julian will only use the services of two workers, not three. I know because he was here earlier today and hired almost all the people he needed,” the innkeeper added.

There was silence for a few seconds. Most patrons had left or gone to sleep. At the back of the room, two old women chatted and drank coffee with a type of sugar called piloncillo. They seemed to be very good friends. Outside, large grasshoppers known in those lands as chapulines played a very rhythmic song.

Finally, Iyotu broke the silence and said, “Dear friends, that’s not a problem at all. We can all go there tomorrow and let Don Julian decide. I propose that we go to sleep right now so we can leave before dawn.”

“I can show you to your rooms,” the innkeeper suggested.

“We will follow you shortly,” said money hungry Merlo while he grabbed Moñi’s arm, preventing him from getting up.

Iyotu simply smiled, and he proceeded to follow the innkeeper. Once they were out of the room, Merlo indicated, “I have a great idea that can’t fail.”

“What’s that?”

“You and I can leave for the hacienda as soon as the innkeeper comes back. At a slow pace, we should be there by dawn and nobody will get our jobs.”

“But what about Iyotu?” asked Moñi, shaking like a squirrel who faces a dog.

“He’ll understand that we need those jobs very badly, but just in case he decides to follow us, let’s take his donkey with us.”

=====

Very early the following day, Iyotu discovered that his friends had betrayed him. His only choice was to carry his few possessions on his back and walk back home. The distance was long, so he began the march immediately. It was mid-February, and a cold morning breeze created small whirlwinds of dust. Iyotu covered his face with a red, embroidered handkerchief that his mother had made. He strode with conviction, as if each step were the beginning of a new life. Finally, after many hours, the sun began to set. Iyotu was still very far away from his town, so he had to find a safe place to spend the night, but there were no signs of any houses nearby. Suddenly, he saw a majestic and luxuriant leafy tree. It looked like a gigantic fig tree, but the foliage was much denser, and the leaves were very bright. Iyotu had not seen anything like it before, and he decided to climb it. He thought that it would be a good idea to tie himself to one of the thick branches and try to sleep there, safe from coyotes or wolves. He proceeded with his plan, and when he was beginning to doze off, he made out three lights in the distance. Suddenly, the lights became brighter and began to advance towards the tree at unimaginable speed. One light was green-blue like the waters of the Caribbean Sea, another light was green like jade, and the third one was bright and translucent like emeralds. Iyotu began to shake with fear, but he could do nothing other than remain silent.

The three blinding lights got to the base of the tree, and they turned out to be three sorceresses from a forest nearby. Iyotu held his lower jaw with both hands to prevent his teeth from shattering. He shivered so strongly that he was afraid the whole tree would begin shaking and disclose his presence.

“I witnessed something very sad today,” said one of the sorceresses.

“What was that?”

“The king of the Mazahuas is very ill, and he will die within three days unless somebody helps him. Many witch doctors have tried to cure him, but they don’t know that the cause of his illness is a poisonous toad that hides under his pillow.”

“That is terrible,” said another sorceress, “but there is nothing we can do. I also saw something very sad today. People in the nearby town of Atlacomulco are desperate because of the lack of water. They don’t know that the small river that provided their water went underground and they can get easy access to it by removing a big rock in the shape of a woman’s head by the oldest ahuehuate tree of town.”

“That is horrible,” said the third sorceress, “and I also have a sad story to tell you. Coyotes and wolves are raiding the farms of Temascalcingo almost daily, and they kill the livestock and fowl. People of the town are preparing to poison the predators, our friends, and that will destroy the balance of Nature in our land.”

Then, the three sorceresses began chanting in a strange language and dancing around the tree. After a few minutes, they departed as unexpectedly as they had arrived. Iyotu watched the three lights disappearing in the distance, and he immediately climbed down. He began walking at a fast pace, but not in the direction of his hometown. Instead, he decided to pay a visit to the king of the Mazahuas.

~ Jaime Sanchez

## Whisper of a Beautiful Mother

Remember your own sorrow to understand others' pain  
Walk freely upon life's spacious path,  
show your love, generosity and kindness.  
Seek, strive, and safeguard the earth's natural beauty.  
Be graceful,  
don't injure the life of any living being.  
Don't choose the path of silence as you walk.  
Be an advocate,  
speak your mind for the welfare of all living beings.  
On your path, turn your attention outward to the state of the earth.  
Be determined.  
Show your compassion.  
Seek, strive for transformation.  
The earth is warming, creatures are dying.  
Join with others -- reveal the humans' injustice.

Don't let yourself be in love with an empty mirror  
there is more to life than just the love of the self.  
Open your heart to another source of attention:  
Nurture the seed of compassion and understanding,  
discover humanity in the hearts and minds of all living beings.  
Open your wings  
be a soul to this earth,  
show generosity and giving to all its beings.  
Nature is the master,  
cherish its wisdom for giving life to all beings.  
In our essence we are all unique and the same.  
The precious gift we have is our lives.  
Do justice,  
respect the inherent rights nature has given.  
Be thoughtful of the emotion and feelings of all living beings.  
In the garden of humanity and good reason,  
bend your heart, be a guardian of their rights and well-being.

Our earth is a beautiful mother  
In her arms she carries for us fields of flowers,  
trees, mountains and oceans.  
She gives us lives,  
nourishes our bodies, nurtures our hearts,  
and inspires our minds.  
Kneel down gently. Touch her,  
show gratitude to your beautiful mother.

~ Amin Azimi

## A Fox in the Garden

Sun shining, birds singing, poke sallet in the fencerow. Garden-planting time. But how could Dinah plant a garden? She ached all over. Every joint in her body stiff. The old rheumatiz would be the death of her. It about killed her to move, but she couldn't depend on neighbors to feed her summer and winter. They was good to help, but they couldn't always come. What if the creek flooded? Or snow was knee deep or ice covered the earth? She found her hoe in the shed and started digging. When she stopped to wipe sweat and rest a minute, she heard a strange sound, not exactly a growl, but an animal noise. She turned and there was a fox, a sick fox, oh! he was mad. She hollered and threw clods, but he kept coming. She didn't have the strength to fight him, but there was nobody else. She flailed him with the hoe, over and over, fighting for her very life. She cried out, "Oh God, help this old black woman. Give me strength." She whacked the fox as hard as she could and he fell. She chopped him with the hoe until he was lifeless, a bloody, furry mess. She fell and lay there in the dirt, every inch of her body aching. "Bless God," she said. She breathed deep, trying to relax and catch her breath. With great effort, she heaved herself up and looked at the fox. What would she do with him? What could she do? She couldn't move him. She'd have to bury him where he was. Maybe life would grow from him. Oh my! a bumper crop of taters sprouting from a fox's belly.

~ Elizabeth Howard



# Betsy Bell and the Witch

daughter of John and Lucy Bell  
our home a plantation on the Red River  
my life was a dream  
until a doglike creature came  
Papa fired a shot  
and it vanished in a puff of smoke  
that night the tormenting began  
noises that kept us awake  
knocking, wings flapping, dogs fighting  
chains dragging, rats gnawing  
a mouse sent me screaming for Mama  
imagine my terror at a rat

the witch (we had to acknowledge it)  
pinched me, slapped me, pulled my hair  
I had fainting spells night and day  
Papa also her victim  
she cursed and tormented him  
till he took to his sick bed  
during the night she gave him a potion  
a smoky blue poison  
and he died the next day  
the witch at his funeral outsinging the choir  
her songs drinking songs, harsh and bawdy

gradually the hauntings eased off  
and life seemed to settle down  
I married my former teacher and moved away  
free of the witch forever, I thought  
but dreams, oh! the dreams  
a pinch in the night and I lay frozen  
a kaleidoscope of sounds and images  
racing through my head  
chains crawling across the floor  
a monster rat gnawing  
the fireplace puffing blue smoke  
the witch singing drinking songs  
Death came like a dear friend



## Bureau for Sale

Marcell, an old college friend who bought and sold antiques, asked me to join her on a buying trip through New Orleans's plantation country. After visiting a couple of splendid mansions, we came to one faded and unkempt, a tree by the driveway loaded with blue bottles. I'd seen them before, knew they were to ward off evil spirits. Marcell knocked and an old lady came to the door. Marcell mentioned a bureau, and the lady pointed to the bureau in the hall. I noticed a picture under the bureau, face down on the floor, and reached for it. The lady grabbed my arm. "Just leave that there. That's my man's picture. His flatboat swamped on the river. I happened along just then and pulled him out. Guess I felt sorry for him, a half-drowned river rat. Guess I was too young to know better. Anyways, we run off and married the next week. Lived together here in this old house for fifty-two years. Had seven chillern. When he died, I taken his picture off the bureau and laid it face down, there on the floor, against the wallboard. Covered the mirrors, too. Don't never want to see his face again." Marcell touched my arm and pointed to a figure made of moss and sticks. I'd been so intent on the lady's story I'd missed the voodoo doll. "We'd better be going," Marcell said. "Thanks for showing me the bureau." As we left, we got a strong whiff of garlic and heard the old lady muttering in a strange language. Marcell started the car and sped past the tree of blue bottles. "No sale!" she said. "That lady and her bureau give me the creeps."

~ Elizabeth Howard

## Rachel Jackson: A Figure on Horseback

*the figure of a woman on horseback,  
riding across the fields alone at night*

Irving Stone

Disconsolate, Rachel sat by Lyncoya's bedside, wiping sweat from his forehead, begging him to eat. The teenage Creek boy was dying of consumption. Poor Lyncoya, not only physically sick, but forever homesick for the mother he could scarcely remember. After his parents were killed in battle, the Jacksons adopted him and raised him as their son. Sick herself, struggling with shortness of breath after a severe heart attack, his illness kept Rachel going. She knew how to tend the sick. She had been doing it most of her life.

Her marriage to Lewis Robards at age 17 was a disaster, but believing they were divorced, she married Andrew Jackson, only to learn too late that she was still married to Robards. Even after the matter was settled and she and Andrew were legally married, society scorned her. In despair over the gossip, she avoided most social events, preferring church services and Bible study.

She and Andrew wanted children, but since none was ever born to them, she became nursemaid to her family, assisting in births and caring for nieces and nephews, adopting two and providing for others. She also cared for the sick, neighbors and slaves alike. When illness, such as influenza epidemics, struck, she ignored concern for her own health, riding about on horseback, delivering food and medicine, often sitting by the bedside of the dying. Neighbors also sought her nursing skills in childbirth, even waking her in the middle of the night. Rachel and her slave George would set out with bedding, towels, candles, soap, and food. Once she delivered a baby that was breech, using the technique she had learned watching a midwife deliver a breech baby for her sister.

It's fitting that Rachel ended her life caring for others. Later the same year as Lyncoy's death, 1828, she died, just prior to her husband's inauguration as President. Andrew buried her in the flower garden at the Hermitage. He had a tomb constructed, similar to the Greek tomb in the wallpaper Rachel had chosen for the Hermitage's entry hall. He joined her there in 1845.

~ Elizabeth Howard

## No Turning Back

good morning, banty  
tired of setting on your eggs?  
think they'll never hatch?  
be glad you got eggs to set on  
not carrying a bundle inside like me

you was born to lay eggs  
to set on them till they hatch  
have little biddies following you about  
I was born to learn  
to tend the sick  
to marry a man I love--  
but papa died and mama married J. D.  
he said he'd take good care of us  
but weren't no time till we knowed better  
he made a deal  
me collateral for a gambling debt  
didn't give me any say  
said I'd marry Garth Mossbeck  
if I knew what was good for my mama  
my poor mama  
already broken, body and spirit  
by the devil she married  
the one who promised to love us  
and care for us  
promised good with his mouth  
but his heart speaks only evil

I don't know what J. D. will do to mama  
makes me sick to think about it  
but I know what Garth will do to me  
one night when he staggers home blind drunk  
he'll beat me to death  
I have to get away before the baby comes  
she must be born free  
Aunt Cassie sent me a bus ticket to Cincinnati  
I'm going now while I can still run  
good-by, forever, pretty bird

~ Elizabeth Howard

## Exile

In the pocket of time he has  
between the graveyard where  
he laid his boutonniere on her casket  
and the long drive and flight  
to California, he stops at the house,  
empty now these four years,  
where she cooked cabbage  
his tongue hasn't otherwise known.  
He stands on the porch, where paint peels,  
to peer into the darkened den,  
furniture gone, but oak and pine  
the way they were thirty years since.  
The willow oak drops twigs  
and sometimes limbs on the roof,  
where they stay for weeks. This  
is the house his papaw built,  
each brick, each shingle passed  
through the biggest hands  
he's ever held. He remembers  
the time the truck burned down,  
the trips to Mint Hill dress shop,  
Sunday mornings at Hopewell Baptist  
Church. He's not reconciled  
to the weeds in her flowerbeds,  
or the semi-trailers that roar  
past what used to be sanctuary.  
He circles like a dog, trying to make  
a nest, knowing nothing can put  
it right, wondering why he answered  
the call to come back home.

~ Jane Sasser

## Reading the Stars with Della

It is 1910.  
The girl who will be my grandmother  
is fifteen years old.  
Five years from now,  
the *Titanic* will have sunk,  
the world will be at war,  
she'll have become a wife,  
then a mother, and then  
she will be dead.  
But right now she is a girl  
on the front steps  
in the dusk. She braids  
her hair, inhales night smells  
of honeysuckle and hay,  
watches as stars  
wink awake in the sky.  
She must have dreams, this Della,  
this girl on the cusp  
of womanhood. Reading the stars,  
does she yearn for Paris,  
for wisdom, for her name  
on strangers' tongues? Does she see  
her own star flicker, or its streak  
into the lonesome dark?  
Breathe, Della. Bask in gloaming.  
Count the stars and claim  
your longing, before  
your name is set in stone.

~ Jane Sasser



# Foundations

*for my mother*

Belly to belly with earth,  
she lies beneath the house,  
below galaxies of web,  
each one a Milky Way draped  
from the oak beams' dark sky.  
Safe from summer's sun,  
from brothers flaunting worms  
and jokes meant to break  
the walls of her quiet,  
she nestles and reads,  
a secret she shouldn't know  
but does. She steals  
her sisters' books,  
stashes them in a stack  
behind chimney stones.  
They won't complain.  
In this house, filled  
to the brim with squabbling  
life, everything gets lost, even  
the youngest girl. Now  
she rolls onto her back,  
probes with her toes  
the underside of floors  
she's walked for seven years,  
waiting for her chance  
to go to school,  
to probe undersides  
of worlds she's never glimpsed,  
winking like stars she sees  
from the porch steps at dusk.

~ Jane Sasser

## October Hike

*Red Rock Canyon, Colorado*

After a summer of unexpected rain,  
we find a pond where before  
there were only trees and grasses.  
On this morning of first snow,  
bare trees rise through water  
so still it holds the sky, perfect  
other world, like negative  
and photograph joined along  
this glassy winter's seam.  
We hold our breath, dazzled  
by unexpected grace and gleam,  
then turn our faces up, where  
the soft foof, foof of feathered  
wings carries the mallards  
down, down to this earth  
made new by water's weight,  
by fall of rain and snow,  
to the lonely splash, splash  
of their landing feet.

~ Jane Sasser

## In a Gym Filled with 192 Students Taking the ACT

The coughing begins.  
It's allergy season,  
but that's not relevant  
to our data collection.  
We offer tissues.  
They can't bring theirs,  
because someone might possibly  
sneak in the answer  
to the meaning of life  
on a Kleenex, and then  
he'd get into Harvard,  
and that wouldn't be fair.  
I check IDs to be sure  
no dead ringers show up.  
Some are sleeping by now,  
their drool smearing DNA  
on their number 2 marks.  
Others stare with a blankness  
that says, *I realize now  
how dumb I must be.*  
We teeter here between  
boredom and despair.  
*Nothing but facts*, said Gradgrind,  
and the irony is lost on us.

~ Jane Sasser



## Charlie

This car is so beautiful, it rides like a dream. You would love it, Charlie. It's jet black and shiny as glass. I think it's a new Lincoln Continental, but you know me and cars—it could be a Ford Focus for all I know. That's your thing, not mine. But I can tell you that the seats are upholstered in really nice, expensive leather. I slide my hand across the seat and can't help but smile thinking about how much you would love the way it feels. Of course it is weird sitting back here alone while someone else is driving, but I guess that's part of the deal.

The smell of the dark grey upholstery is wonderful, like the leather briefcase you carried to work after your second promotion, even after Caroline carved her initials and the image of her pet turtle on the side with Tommy's pocket knife. You never got mad; you boasted that it made it an original and one day it would be worth millions. Oh, how she loved that. Caroline, our little artist even at six.

Charlie, I want you to know that I forgive you. I forgave you for everything years ago. And even with all of the bad stuff that happened, we had a pretty good life together, didn't we? Especially the early years right after we were married.

We were a damn good team, there is no denying that. Hard to believe we started out with nothing. Who would have thought that we could make it on my salary as a teller at the bank while you went back to school? You know, I never regretted a minute of it. I knew that you could do it. I mean, I knew we could do it together.

And look at our kids. They are all doing so well, Tommy just made partner at the firm and Genevieve has opened her third store. Caroline is living in New York City of all places, and she has an opening at that fancy gallery in two months. I'd say we did a pretty good job.

The early years were a lot fun, that is not a lie. I know that you worked really hard to give us a good life. I don't want you to think that I ever took that for granted. I know how much you sacrificed for the kids. They do too.

Then the later years were harder, but you know what? I don't blame you for sleeping around. I wasn't the wife you needed; I know that I didn't love you the way you needed to be loved. I know that there was something missing. I was hurt at first, but then I stopped feeling sorry for myself and let it go.

You weren't the only one with secrets you know. I've had a secret of my own, one I need to tell you.

You know that summer when Morgan and I took the kids to the beach house when you went on your golf trip? The one when you stayed two weeks longer than you said you were going to, and you were afraid that I was going to be mad at you? Well, I knew about Tara. Everyone did. I wasn't mad because Morgan was there with me and we had a wonderful time. A wonderful vacation with the kids and ocean and the house. That was my favorite time there if I'm completely honest.

Something happened that summer. I didn't plan it—she didn't either. It just happened.

Well, after that summer she moved to Oregon, remember? I didn't see her for five years, but I never quit thinking about her. So when you had your affair with Tara, and then later Stephanie, not to mention the girls at the Clubhouse and the dancer from that ridiculous off-Broadway play, I couldn't blame you. I knew then I wasn't what you needed.

I didn't know what I needed.

But I do now.

I thought this would be harder than it is. I thought that seeing my finger without the gold band on it would be odd, feel wrong, but it doesn't. Do you know I haven't taken that ring off in over thirty years? I hadn't planned on taking it off today. I just slipped it off at the last minute and watched it fall with the handful of dirt and the white calla lilies that you always loved so much. One second it was there; the next second it was gone.

I wonder how long it will be before the sun erases the white mark around my finger and I don't even think about it at all.

When Morgan moved back ten years ago, I realized what I had been missing. I was so happy. It was good to have my friend back, my best friend.

I never wanted to hurt you. What good would that have done anyway? For you, the kids or me? I know you weren't as strong as you always wanted everyone to think you were. Remember, we spent damn near thirty-six years in the house together. You may not have known me, but I knew you. And Charlie, I did love you. You were my life for the first fifteen years of our marriage. I was your better half, you always said so yourself.

I hope wherever it is that you are now, that you are happy and not in any more pain, and I hope that you felt loved and appreciated while you were here. Anyway, I just wanted to tell you thank you. Thank you for everything, even the bad times because without those, I might not cherish the good times. I might take them for granted. I would have never wanted that, nor do I now.

You know better than me that we aren't meant to live forever and it's time I started living. You told me that yourself just a week ago.

Maybe my secret wasn't a secret after all.

Thank you for three wonderful children and for leaving like you did, with dignity and grace.

But most of all, Charlie, thank you for setting me free.

~ Mandy Haynes

# Sanctify

“Sanc-tify!” he shouted, the muscles in his neck pushing against the starched, white collar buttoned tightly around his throat. A throat that would be more comfortable in a shirt with a larger-sized collar, but he refused to believe that. He took a deep breath and leaned over the pulpit for effect.

“SANC-tify!” Spit flew from his mouth as he shouted once more. He was a big man made bigger by the bible he held in his hand.

The people of the congregation were caught up in his spirit, his passion in the word, in his zeal to save them from the other side. Each one convinced that he was talking to them personally.

“Amen, brother!”

“Testify!”

“Hallelujah!”

“SANCTIFY yourself in the Lord!” He thrust his finger at the crowd, towards the only person he was looking at, the only person he had even noticed since he had started the sermon. A thin, weary-looking woman in the front row.

His wife.

There were two boys at her side. He wanted a third.

“You’ve got to be sanctified and show it!” He leaned back and wedged his finger between the collar of his shirt and his neck, trying to loosen its grip on his Adam’s apple. He could feel himself getting worked up, the bile rising in his throat, and swallowed hard to put an end to it. It felt like he was about to pitch a hissy. What his mama used to call it when he got himself so worked up he would make himself sick. He had to get a handle on it before he went too far in front of his audience. He grit his teeth as sweat ran from behind his ears into the fabric.

He took a deep breath and firmly proclaimed, “Let us pray.”

Everyone bowed their heads and closed their eyes. Everyone that is, but him. He never took his off of her.

\*\*\*\*\*

She sat in the front row in a dress she had sewn herself from a pattern someone had given her years ago. It was a simple design, she had five dresses in the same style, all made from different shades of the same cheap material. She shifted slightly, wincing as she pressed against the hard oak pew, the small of her back aching from the fresh bruises she’d received that morning.

“Sanc-tify!” her husband bellowed.

She would have never imagined that those soft leather shoes could feel the same as his steel-toed work boots, but they did. They weren’t even broken in. He had just picked them up yesterday, special order. Buttery Italian leather loafers with the prettiest tassels she had ever seen.

“SANC-tify!” her husband yelled again.

She knew he was talking to her and knew better than to look away, but she had learned a trick a long time ago that made his sermons a little more sufferable. She

would look at his chin not his eyes. It was a lot better that way. The look in his eyes when he was like this, especially when he was waving his bible around; scared the shit out of her.

She found herself using that trick more often and at the oddest times, like when she was serving him his coffee in the mornings. Some days she wasn't sure if she had actually opened the box of rat poison she kept under the kitchen sink, or if she was only dreaming. In her dreams she was much stronger than in the real world; in the real world she had lost all hope of escape.

So on those mornings when the rat poison was sitting by the kitchen sink, instead of under it, she couldn't look him in the eye, afraid that he could tell if something was different.

She guessed time would tell if her husband couldn't.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw her oldest son pull a piece of candy out of his pocket. She had seen him take it out of Ms. Hattie's purse from her spot on the end of the aisle when they were making their way to their seat on the first pew. He hadn't even flinched when Ms. Hattie turned to smile at him, even though his hand had been in her purse just a second before that, the arrogant look on his face just like his father's. He had stolen from the elderly lady before and lied about it.

She reached over slowly and put her hand on his arm, but before she could give it a pat—just to let him know that she saw him, not that she was ever going to do anything—he reached out and pinched her arm between his finger and thumbnail, twisting it hard enough to break the skin. She forced herself not to flinch as she pulled her hand away, trying not to make any quick movements that might set her husband off; she didn't want to be accused of not paying attention to his sermon. She knew that he was talking to her and her only.

This particular Sunday her punishable crime was that his shirts weren't ironed to his satisfaction. He accused her of using too much starch which caused them to cut into the soft skin at his throat. He blamed her overuse of starch for making his neck look fat, making his skin look like an old man's skin. She had foolishly pointed out that the buttons were straining against his mid-section and suggested that he should buy some new shirts in a bigger size.

The next thing she remembered she was on the floor, feeling the new loafers pounding into the small of her back.

She was just grateful he hadn't picked up the iron.

Once again, she had caused her husband to lose his temper. She was not following his plan; she was not taking her oath as his wife, a good God fearing Christian wife, seriously. Because of these failings her husband intended to free her from sin.

She wondered which of them would be set free first.

"SANCTIFY yourself in the Lord!" he shouted again, pointing at her.

She listened to the boys chuckling under their breath beside her. Her two sons were just like their daddy. The little one this morning refused to eat his breakfast and called her a stupid, old sow because she had overcooked the bacon. He liked it crispy, not crisp.



She knew her husband was declaring the word *sanctify*. She had heard the sermon more than once in the eleven long years they had been married.

But truth be told, all she heard was the word sacrifice.

Sac-ri-fice!

SAC-ri-fice!

Sacrifice yourself.

~ Mandy Haynes

# The Surgeon's Room

Learning of an illness

Running ahead of the inevitable train,  
twisted in a beam of horrors,  
feet hung in the tracks,  
the nightmare will not end...

Tough decisions mangle in the aftermath  
of my sudden distemper.

Thirsty, tired, weak...bad health pummels my body,  
plummets me toward some tragic event.  
Etherized, floating like gossamer,  
black and white clouds drift across my horizon.

The surgeon's room is bleak, cold,  
moonlight is in the ceiling.  
Vincent Price drills a hole in my head,  
punches my brain with a hot iron,  
leaves a needle like a drain pipe.  
Someone collects a basket of waste,  
and blood soaked towels.

Am I better or worse? Will I survive?  
The surgeon's face, bloated with doubt,  
smiles obeisantly, mutters out the door:  
*see what happens in your next calamity.*

Walking in my garden, in a dream,  
elevator music resonates from trees,  
flowers hum Gregorian tunes and a goblet drum  
pounds the beat in my aching head.  
Black and white clouds bank along  
eastern mountains,  
Not angry, more like blustery adversaries.

*Today, I am like the sky, I am alive.*

~ Bruce Majors

## Faded Light

Light is what I always sought, emeralds of grace  
to shield my soul's dark countenance.

A promised covenant.

To be illuminated in the awesome presence of light,  
to accomplish some incredible feat  
above the great mundane.

And now, near the end, lost in a reverie  
of failing intention, it seems I have not  
lived at all.

Promised days are passed.

The militant crocus refuses spring.  
The heart becomes fireproof with age.  
Quick eyes grow somnolent.

What can blaze my soul again?

It's not in the summing up of memories,  
not wistful dreams,  
and certainly counting the cost of love  
does not summon the fire.

But it may be in precise moments of light  
found in ordinary days.  
Perhaps that is what stirs the youthful flames;  
re-kindles passion...

Light found in a penny's worth of time.

~ Bruce Majors

## Return of Winter Cranes

My bones already turning cold  
toward the petulant days of winter.

I sleep in sullen twilight, waiting  
for the addictive song.

You save me sometimes, as I emerge  
from darkness onto the back porch  
expecting only another darkness.  
Scuttling clatter brings me awake again,  
returns me to the sun.

A faint smile at crows' sudden panic,  
scrambling from the dormant yard,  
not knowing what joy I take from their  
vigilant presence.

The barren yard before, the empty lake,  
the lake where you will spend many days  
preparing me for life again.

Brisk walks between rain showers  
on the curvy road to the dry boat dock,  
westerly wind cool on my neck.  
The good feeling of light.

How long will you stay, faithless lovers?  
You treat happiness so carelessly.

~ Bruce Majors

## Beige

Light opens hospital beige walls,  
how windows almost charm  
a room where a sick friend  
will shed his last breath.  
You don't know this yet,  
the man you were  
inside his head.

The friend coughs, you rise  
to wipe spittle from chin,  
mop fever from face. His hands  
reach up, not for you, maybe  
for a door knob that opens  
a nether world.

The memory of the friend, real,  
but the self you were, nebulous,  
growing in a cloud of recognition.  
And when he opened his eyes once,  
twice, you didn't hear them say let go.

Today is an anniversary, I'm  
in another beige room with windows,  
another sick friend. And I am  
reborn, to watch pigeons fly from  
roof over traffic, to recognize  
the scent, the posture, to know,  
when he opens his eyes,  
the darkness light can bring.

~ Bill Brown

## Morning Thoughts on Purpose

In my study early revisions  
lie on the floor beside my desk  
waiting for recycling.

Children wait for a school bus,  
dreaming of Saturday when  
purpose suspends for play.

Dogs know the schedule, wait  
for scratched ears as buzzards  
hop around a road kill—squabble

over a bowel string. I'd like  
to hit my computer backspace,  
delete *ands*, *buts*, *even so's*,

stop paying rent on existence.  
But this morning, blinking  
lights of school bus come,

children file in as dogs  
horse around then  
return to porches.

I return to revisions,  
Sisyphus of the written word,  
hoping experience carries

more meaning when shaped,  
that buzzards clean the road  
for the county, and blood stains

on pavement, as red as mine,  
diminish and disappear  
in time.

~ Bill Brown

## Cloud Shadow

This morning darkness crosses the field  
toward the wood-line.

News: a child swept away  
in a local flood.

Did birch leaves by the creek  
hear his cries drown in water rush,

tree roots reach out  
to grasp at his fingers

until he became another tatter  
in this world of tatters:

*who he was, who he thought  
he might become?*

June eases into fields  
with Queen Anne's lace

and butterfly weed,  
as gold finches feed on thistle

and dandelion seeds. Bright feathers  
and shrill cries enough

to make our sun jealous,  
and a sad old man

porch-swing thankful  
to just exist.

~ Bill Brown

## Mid-August Rain

Mid-August, thunder mumbling  
a cloud-dark sky, as if morning

could be late afternoon. Every  
farmer, gardener on our ridge

too fearful to pray —news  
filled with murder, disease

and faces of children we can't  
save. Finches at the feeder

don't seem to feel the tension  
rising from houses and barns,

drifting among browning corn,  
and dust-caked gardens.

Yet, a drizzle starts, coffee pours  
and porches populate with quiet

neighbors who breathe the scent,  
an aroma Jung's archetypes

would claim, found in the blood  
of a late summer rain—a choir

in dry oak leaves, a tapping  
on tin roofs, nature's glossolalia,

the call and response of crows  
and migratory doves.

~ Bill Brown



## A Moment

In the moment,  
a circle of starlings  
make a corkscrew  
against the sky.  
I close one eye  
and know a miracle  
of birds opened  
October blue.

I think of you  
circling fiber  
in a vat  
to make paper,  
how the art  
you shape  
prove water  
and sky are one.

Then  
I hear the rain-crow's  
tock tock tock,  
smell perfume—  
a new plowed field,  
rain and soil.

Simple wonders  
in morning air  
happen anywhere,  
interpretation  
a choice  
a moment makes,  
too many  
to contemplate  
one life might  
give.

~Bill Brown

## The Athlete and Sportscaster Marty Glickman in His Second Life

Jewish, he was barred from competing  
in the Hitler Olympics when Jesse Owens  
tried to cede his spot on the 4 x 100 relay,  
saying, "I've got enough medals."

"Nein!" Hitler screamed, his games  
already defiled by African Americans  
speeding past his Aryan sprinters  
as if they were chained to the starting blocks.  
Adolph wasn't about to have his games  
poisoned forever by a dirty Jew,  
who, if he'd won, would've wadded up  
his papier mache Master Race,  
and choked the Nazi with it.

As a kid, I loved to hear Marty--  
as we in Brooklyn always called him--  
announce Giants' football games  
and the high school game of the week.  
He'd turn a routine three yard gain  
into Spartacus battling for his freedom,  
us kids gasping at the epic, tragic drama.

For his second life, I'd send him back  
to the Old West as a dime novelist,  
making up tales of gunslingers and sheriffs,  
his prose polished-river-stone colorful.

Of course, he'd meet a good woman,  
who'd stage-coached West to save souls,  
but had the sense to put down her Bible,  
too enthralled by Marty's tales.

~Robert Cooperman

# Harmless

I'm about to pull out  
of the Safeway parking lot,  
when a young woman knocks  
on my side window.  
I've got the buck I keep  
in the otherwise unused ashtray,  
to hand her in her need.

"Can you give me a lift?" she asks  
in a British-Hindu accent.  
"I'm just a few streets away,"  
then shows me her shopping bags.

"Sure," I smile. Sighing  
from no longer having to lug  
her groceries, she collapses  
into the shotgun seat.

"You're very brave," I tell her,  
"to trust a stranger," and recall  
a friend who hippie-thumbed  
cross-country, and was raped twice.

"You looked harmless," she smiles,  
then quickly amends that to,  
"Kind, you're most kind."

At my age, I'll take any compliment  
I can get from a Bollywood-attractive  
young woman; when we arrive,  
she thanks me, and for a second I fear  
she'll kiss me on the cheek: payment  
to a harmless uncle or grandpa.

~Robert Cooperman

## Stories and Prayers

“I prefer a story to a prayer”— Hannah Kent, *Burial Rites*

In Hebrew School, we recited prayers  
countless as the Israelites’ desert sands.  
Whoever mosquito-droned them fastest  
by the end of the year received a mahzor—  
a prayer book, for a prize.

None of the rabbis tried to teach us Hebrew  
after a week or two of banging their heads  
against our sullen stupidity: our revenge  
at our afternoons stolen by more school,  
in a language foreign as Klingon.

Saturday mornings, more prayers  
in the basement children’s synagogue  
we were bribed to attend with candy bars  
afterwards, before we tore off clip-on ties  
and ran to play punchball and stickball,  
the clear narrative of sports  
far more understandable than prayers:  
nothing more than sniveling for favors.

Had our rabbis known the hearts of boys  
in love with violent cowboy movies,  
they’d have had us read tales of heroes  
from the Bible, from Jewish history: Deborah,  
Joshua, the Maccabis, Masada’s martyrs,  
and as many others as they could find or invent.

None of us would’ve rolled our eyes in boredom  
and despair that our childhood was being robbed  
by men who thought they alone knew Hashem,  
the biggest, baddest, fastest gunslinger of all.

~Robert Cooperman

# Three Years of Wednesdays

*In honor of Dr. John Caldwell Guilds, Jr.  
1924-2014*

I signed up to have lunch with him because one of my classmates had, and I couldn't stand the thought of him taking that blank sheet of paper back to the assisted living facility where he was recovering from a broken hip. He was well enough to come to campus to teach my Hawthorne and James seminar once a week as long as the university provided transportation and released him from the normally required office hours. These conditions were readily met, for what administration would deny the requests of the former Dean of Arts and Sciences and a Distinguished Professor of Humanities?

It didn't hurt that the university was experiencing a dearth of American literature scholars to teach in the doctoral program, and there was no doubt he was qualified for the job—in spite of a host of health issues beyond his limited mobility. The bulky machine he set on the table in front of him, for example, as big as an old-fashioned cassette recorder, was designed to supplement his failing cochlear implants. And then there was his voice, ragged gravels in a throat worn out from years of lectures in auditoriums too large for his southern warble to fill. Even deafened and slightly hushed, however, he was every bit the commanding presence in the room, and the university had been right to defer to him.

I was under no such obligation to the man, esteemed though he was, and yet from our first meeting I was compelled to indulge him. Advanced age was my initial motivator; he was eighty-four-years-old, and he looked it. His thinning white hair, rimmed glasses, lined face, and thick square dentures nourished a longing for my grandfather, who had passed a decade before. It wasn't difficult to call up my feelings for the gentle old man who had raised my mother and place them onto the tweed shoulders of my wizened professor.

So I wrote my name on the empty white page. I wasn't being sentimental, I told myself; I was getting a free meal and the goodwill of the man who assigned my grade at the end of the semester. It wasn't kind, and I wasn't proud of it, but privileging the practical aspects of my decision allowed me to ignore the loneliness—my need for a friend and the circumstances that made finding one nearly impossible—that had really decided me.

He was waiting for me in the foyer of the sprawling one-story building made to look like a hotel that first Wednesday. I had to take small steps to match his pace as he led me to the facility's dining room. We sat on opposite sides of a long, narrow table set with real china, and a staff member presented our meal with comical formality. I pulled at the thread in my napkin; I hadn't thought far enough ahead to worry about making conversation, and there we were, separated by a slab of oak and more than a half-century of living.

"How do you like Arkansas?" he began, and suddenly I was speaking, my tongue and lips turned loose upon revelation, my own nerves and his empathetic smile urging me on. I told him of the loss I was running from, the hopes I'd placed on the one I'd run to, and the fear that I'd made a terrible mistake in both. He listened intently as our food grew cold, a well-timed nod here and there to let me know it was alright to continue.

When I was finished, my jaw aching because at least I'd held back the emotions from my words, he smiled and patted my hand. "It's not always easy to be a person upon whom nothing is lost, is it?" he smiled.

It was a bibliophile's pardon; with one line from James, he not only forgave me for my rude and untimely confessions, but also assured me that I could not have answered his simple question in any other way.

Three hours and a barely lukewarm chicken cordon bleu later, I'd agreed to another Wednesday lunch. After that next meeting, there was no doubt that we had made an arrangement, as fellow scholars, naturally, but also as something more. It is possible that he needed the friendship as much as I, and I choose to believe that his recovery was due in small measure to my visits and the promise of an escape from the facility and lunches around town when he was able to give up the walker.

Whatever the reason, he had progressed to a cane by the end of the semester, and the marks of extended illness had left his face. "I've grown so youthful that people will think I'm only your grandfather now," he chuckled, delighted by his returning strength.

I learned some discretion during our first months of friendship, and I never divulged as much personal detail in one sitting as I had at the first, but he occasionally referenced my concerns, always subtly. Sometimes my replies were optimistic, sometimes they were not, but he never failed to remind me that there was no other way for a person compelled to observe all to respond.

I preferred listening to him. He was far more Hawthorne than James as he drew pictures of the furious battle in which he'd earned a Purple Heart and Bronze Star. I saw him as a young man, head bowed over heavy volumes as the attractions of Ireland, Syria, and Egypt beckoned beyond his door, perpetually waiting for him to finish one more page. Then there he was at Duke, Clemson, Texas Tech, USC, and finally the University of Arkansas, always researching, always writing, composing love notes to his fellow men of letters, especially the controversial William Gilmore Simms, and dreaming of the South Carolina shore they'd both called home.

My final assignment in his course was a paper on *The Americans*, but he only made a few comments before suggesting that we work together on another project, a novel he'd already titled. He would write from the perspective of the protagonist, a tenured academic, of course, and I would flesh out the lesser characters, colleagues and students and a department chair intent on ruining the hero's career. I completed my sections dutifully, knowing we'd never be published but enjoying the collaboration nonetheless. A few chapters in, I began to imagine our book as an old movie, scenes played out in black-and-white over a full orchestra. He was so pleased by the image that he changed the setting, going back fifty years and leaving me to make substantial revisions. His enthusiasm was worth the effort, although it kept me busy; for months I lived in a world of Van Dykes and automats.

I chose to stay in town the following summer. I was reluctant to go home—there was still so much pain there—but I still felt the occasional ache for the long-familiar. He didn't know it—at least I never told him—but our weekly excursions were the strongest balm for my grief. We took his car, a convertible Mercedes that had sat unused in a storage park for nearly a year, to every pseudo-upscale restaurant a small college town that fancied itself cosmopolitan had to offer. I always drove, not because I didn't trust him behind the wheel—although I didn't—but because I'd heard all about his driving history,

and I didn't know how many more speeding tickets his World War II veteran license plate could get him out of. The less attention he had to give to the road, the more freely he could speak, anyway.

Over salmon tartare and chocolate mousse, roasted loin and bananas foster, and myriad names and concoctions I've forgotten, we shared worlds and theories and men and women from printed pages, as real to us as the sweet cinnamon glaze on roasted carrots or the bitter aroma of the black coffee he insisted upon after every meal. With each conversation, we revived the dead, made relevant the anachronism, and celebrated the forgotten.

He was a real Southern gentleman, a holdover from an era I'd never witnessed, a poet of sea and palmetto, and he was my mentor, advisor, and friend for three years—not so long for me, as I could see many more on the horizon, but a greater and yet infinitely shorter time for him.

We did not finish our novel. He was loathe to interfere with my studies, to impede my progress toward the academic career to which I aspired—but he knew my scholarship had not suffered, for he had been there through it all. The only book I have bearing both our names is his foremost work—a biography of Simms, of course; the inside cover is signed “To April—a person upon whom nothing is lost.” It is fitting that the deceptively simple line bookends our time together—and it points to the real reason we could not complete our collaboration: there was just too much to say.

~ April Young

## Counting Backwards

You moved from a house on 84 acres in the middle of almost nowhere to three rooms with the luxury of a one-car garage and a yard the size of your former carport. “What will you have for dinner tonight?” I ask. “Oh, I might open a can of soup.” Might? Once you walked the open field at the top of the hill at night. In the dark now when you wake up you turn the wrong way and bump into the wall that doesn’t lead to the bathroom. You watch TV, baseball, proclaiming, “My reward for all those years of no TV.” Well, you’re exaggerating—in the middle of almost nowhere you could tune in to one channel.

Now, once a month you drive to bridge club, an event you no longer host in your too small home proclaiming, “Gee, I’m so glad I don’t have to clean the house for all those old babes.” Instead, you reciprocate by driving “the old babes” to the card game. “Shirley has Alzheimer’s,” you say, “it’s sort of a drag when she’s your partner.” *Strike three, you’re out* the TV blares from the corner of the dark room where only light from the screen illuminates your face. I want you to want more, to be dissatisfied with having less, greedy wanting like the child outside the candy store window without a penny in her pocket who sees her reflection and I see how afraid I am one day I’ll be as grateful as you.

~ Leslie Lytle



## Wanting to Be the Soup

My mother is dying. She is not happy about living. “Where’s Dr. Kevorkian when you need him?” she asks with her giant Betty Boop eyes shining like plates of soup grease, asks her doctor this and cackles. The three witches chanting *Bubble, bubble, toil and* etcetera would pant with green envy at her gift for turning frog spit into bay leaves laughing about the frog drowning in the soup. The doctor, the wrong doctor (not the doctor whose name begins with K who knows clever spells for cooking frogs) gives her a *coo, coo* fake wrong doctor pretending to be a dove herb, his dime-store magic. She wants to be the soup.

~ Leslie Lytle

# Kind

The mother the child me remembers hurried  
articulately attending to me or dishes stacked in the sink  
with equal on a mission purposefulness inserting  
a glass thermometer between my lips blushed with fever  
and racing off to scrub the black burned crust from a pan—  
“I’ll be right back,” and she was  
right back or what seemed like “right back” when counting  
time was a feverish daze of organizing sofa cushion flower petals  
into a design that made sense.

We are of a kind,  
my mother and I, *kind*, kin, alike  
—I mothered my children the same, my mothering  
years a hurried blur of haste.

My mother returned  
with a shot glass of whiskey, lemon juice, and sugar,  
“Drink this,” to calm my cough and I dared not  
disobey, not out of fear, but trust because trust  
was the only choice I had—her brisk commands  
ordered the world into joined puzzle pieces that made me  
less afraid. Making sense  
had nothing to do with it. She was  
my mother—of a kind  
equaled unafraid.

Whether two things are similar  
depends on the rules we use to define them

but now she’s changed the rules,  
in her age my mother has become  
the other kind of *kind*

from 500 miles away asks  
about the infant great granddaughter she's never seen,  
"Poor baby. Rock her. Motion distracts her from the colic pain,"  
and about my dog who loves to roam who she's  
never seen, "She'll get hit by a car. Get an invisible  
fence—I'll pay for it." Or maybe the rules are the same  
and I've finally slowed down enough to see what kind  
of mother she always was—my children think my name  
is *Mom*, too. *Kind*, the generosity you show  
your kind who when they see you hurry purposefully past  
quickly forget they saw you at all.

~ Leslie Lytle



## The Rescue

(Excerpt from the novel *The Evolution of Wanting*)

1961. Niles, Ohio.

All Zander could see of the baby robin was its head poking up from inside the nest. The mommy robin dropped a worm in the baby bird's mouth. The baby bird closed its mouth and swallowed then opened it again. Except when it was swallowing worms, the baby bird's mouth was always open like it was screaming the way baby sister Biz used to scream when his mommy and daddy first brought her home.

Zander sat on the front porch steps, with his blanket scrunched up into a ball hugged to his chest. He wasn't supposed to bring the blanket outside. His thumb slipped into his mouth. The mommy bird came back with another worm. The nest was on the side of the forsythia bush that was partly under the cover of the porch. The mommy bird flew away and was back again so quick with another worm Zander decided she must be magic. He rubbed the satin border of the blue blanket against his cheek. The mommy bird's fat reddish-orange belly glistened when she darted through the sunbeam at the edge of the porch shadow. In his mind, he nuzzled his cheek against the soft feathers of her belly. He hoped for her to hurry, hoped she found another worm fast.

He looked back at the nest. The baby robin had climbed up to the edge. It was colored like the mommy bird, but not so bright, the way old people's skin had less color like Grandma Susanne and Tante Yenny. Tante Yenny's skin looked almost like you could see through it. It must be backwards with birds from people. People got less bright and birds got more bright. Except for the almost orange on its belly, the baby bird looked like a wad of gray fluff, like the dust monsters that hid in the back corner under his bed. The baby robin opened its mouth and stretched out its neck, wobbling on the edge of the nest, rocking back and forth.

And then the baby robin fell.

"NO!"

Zander jumped down to the sidewalk, dropping his blanket on the step. He crawled under the bush on his hands and knees. The broken twig pieces scratching his hands hurt, and he felt the damp dirt making brown stains on the knees of his pants. His mommy would be mad. He cupped the baby robin in the palms of his hands. It was so tiny. It didn't weigh anything. Like a maple leaf. The big leaves from the tree in the front yard could fly because they were so light. That's what his sister Cyn said. When the baby bird was falling, bouncing off forsythia bush branches, it flapped its little stubs of wing fluff like it was trying to fly. It felt light enough to fly, but it couldn't. He leaned close with his nose, thinking the soft gray feathers would smell like his blanket. The baby bird opened its mouth and made the silent scream.

"I don't have any worms, baby bird."

Carefully balancing the weightless bundle in his cupped hands, Zander backed out from under the bush, scooting on his knees, the scratchy twigs and dead leaf pieces working up under his cuffs and poking his shins. Out in the yard, he stood up. The shadow under the big tree was mottled with patches of light. Where was the mommy bird? He couldn't reach to put the baby bird back in the nest.

“Mommy bird. Mommmmyyy birrrrd,” Zander sang, passing from the shadow into the sunny side yard. He needed to find the mommy bird. Carrying the baby bird before him like a court page delivering the crown to the king, he started down the narrow side yard where there were no bushes or trees and decided maybe the mommy bird was in back digging up worms under the cherry tree.

Then behind him Zander heard a tweet followed by six loud whistles coming from the front yard, high up in the maple tree.

“Hey, mommy bird, I’m over here.” He turned back toward the tree.

A bird wing shadow darted out from the big shadow under the tree and raced across the grass. He started to run chasing the shadow, but he stumbled and almost dropped the baby bird, and he stopped. The baby bird closed its mouth and looked up at him and scolded him with its shiny black eyes.

“I’m sorry,” Zander whimpered, lifting the baby bird up close to his face. He would have kissed the baby bird on the top of the head, but the baby bird opened its mouth and made the silent scream again.

“*Mommy bird, I’m over here,*” he called, walking as fast as he could in the direction the shadow had gone, watching the ground so he didn’t fall and drop the baby bird. Another bird wing shadow that seemed to come from the roof of the house flitted into the sunny side yard just in front of him, and he felt something brush against the top of his head. He’d been holding the baby bird with both hands but he shifted it into his left hand and with his other hand patted his head to see if anything was tangled in his hair which was like a nest of curls on top.

“Oh my God, Zander has a bird.” His mommy’s voice came from a window looking out into the side yard from the house.

Zander heard the tweet followed by six whistles again. “Mommy bird, I’m over here.”

The mommy bird voice seemed like it was coming from the maple tree in front and from somewhere above him both. He saw another bird wing shadow dart into the sunny side yard from the shadow under the neighbor’s carport. He felt something brush against his hair again and crouched reflexively.

“Jesus, Cyndy, they’re dive bombing him. Zander, put the bird down.” His mommy yelled from the window.

He turned back toward the front yard, squinted up into the leafy maple tree trying to see the bird making the tweet and six whistles he heard in front of him and behind him, both, confirming his opinion that the mommy bird really was magic.

Cyndy raced down the porch steps and tripped on his blanket, landing sprawled out on the sidewalk. Zander waited for her to start crying. His mommy pushed through the screen door onto the porch, holding Biz balanced on her hip.

“Zander, drop the bird,” his mommy shrieked.

He could almost not hear her. Biz’s mouth gaped open wailing. Cyn pushed herself up and rubbed the bloody scrape on her knee.

Zander felt something brush against his hair again and then a tug. Cyn waved her arms in the air and rushed over to him where he was standing next to the trunk of the big maple tree, in a huddled crouch shielding the baby bird with his body.

“It fell.” He pointed to the forsythia bush. Cyn knew about the nest. She sneaked and put pieces of cornflakes on the porch rail, but the birds wouldn’t eat them. They liked worms. Their mommy had yelled at Cyn about the cornflakes.

“Zanny, give it to me. I think I can get it back in the nest.”

From the sidewalk, his balled up blanket hugged to his chest, Zander watched his sister hoist herself up onto the porch rail with one hand. Hugged in her other hand, the baby bird stretched out its neck with its open mouth making the silent scream for more worms.

“Don’t squish it, Cyn.” Zander took quick anxious breaths, about to cry. The baby bird was so little. You could crunch up its feathers into a ball and there would be nothing left of it.

His mommy had ducked back inside when she saw Cyn coming up the steps with the baby bird. His mommy was afraid of birds. She hollered through the screen door for Cyn to “Put that thing down. It’s dirty. You’ll get diseases.”

“Waahhhh.” Biz wailed and rubbed her eyes with her balled up fists.

Cyn reached for a twiggy branch of the forsythia bush and pulled the branch towards her. The nest on the branch was almost close enough for her to reach if she had another hand, but the baby bird was in her other hand.

“Get down from there, Cyn. You’re going to fall and break your neck,” their mommy called from inside the house, half mad and half sounding like she was going to cry. “Kippy, I need you to be home,” she said to their daddy who wasn’t there.

Zander could see the back side of the nest now. There was a tiny piece of blue string woven into the crush of pale brown grasses. The baby bird rolled out of his sister’s hand into the nest and for a second disappeared, then the head with the open mouth poked up from the inside.

Biz clapped.

~ Leslie Lytle

## Fourteen Lines to Dolor

Grief will walk with me, slow  
Steps that circle her yard.  
Perfect companion  
Noting quietly flowers  
Now defeated by frost;  
November being right  
For such contemplation.  
I bid grief reluctant  
Farewell for the long months  
That culminate in spring.  
When buds pierce April soil;  
A rebirth of something  
So like forgotten grief.  
Very like old sorrow.

~ Steve West



# A Summer Idyll

To Daddy, dead since 1975

We could always catch carp.  
They'd suck in our worms  
Or doughballs any time, even  
In the muddy sloughs of summer.

We'd eat them, but I didn't like  
The strong dirty taste and the bones,  
Bones, bones. Daddy would can  
Them in the pressure cooker,  
And we'd have fishcakes all winter.  
(We didn't know about croquettes  
Or gefiltefish.)

I enjoyed the catching; they were more  
Sport than bass, and much bigger than bream.  
The mealy, weak mouth and the sulfurous  
Scales were ugly, ugly, ugly.  
I fancied myself a great carp expert,  
Even landing a few on my fly rod.  
(I could never understand the fascination  
Of trout about six inches long and anglers  
In Montana or Alaska grinning like they  
Were great trophies when I had landed  
Ten pound carp by the dozens.)

One day, our neighbor Floyd said,  
"Steve (talking to my dad, not me), next time  
You go fishing, bring me a mess of crap."  
Daddy smiled, said, "I'll do it. I'll bring you  
A great big mess of crap."

We laughed at that all day, pulling carp  
After carp from the brown, still water,  
Thinking of Floyd making his supper  
On nice fried crap.

~ Steve West

## Poems with the Word *Susurrus*

*"You begin as a connoisseur of whispers."*

*Kim Stafford*

1.

I ignore that gush of sound—  
The confused rush of leaf  
Detaching from a poplar.  
It's too strident. Wait  
For the aspiration  
Of coldest midnight.  
An insinuation of morning;  
Susurrus of infinite possibility.

2.

Again I discover silence  
Waiting like a shy friend.  
Under a sweet gum tree,  
Silence whispers, susurrus  
Of early morning mist  
With an aroma of leaf.  
    "Doesn't it smell good?"  
    I nod, not sure I quite heard  
    But certainly I agree  
With that assessment of day  
Slowly soughing  
    As a breeze awakes.

3.  
Silence often thinks  
It's a musician.  
Creating nocturnes,  
Susurrant notes  
Of almost morning,  
A star for a metronome,  
A cedar branch for a baton.

4.  
It's not exactly quiet  
Here right now. Sounds  
Like odors on the wind  
Slip past posing as animals  
Scurrying, birds flying, susurrant.  
I smell the rattle of pine cones,  
The rasp of walnuts falling.  
The subtle realignment  
Of senses that compensates  
For a life lived inside.

~ Steve West

## The Disillusioned Scholar Speaks Volumes

I'm really sorry, but I did not read a lot of the great books. Plus, I didn't get too far into a lot of other great books. I never finished *The Dubliner*, or *Love in the Time of Cholera*, or *The Mayor of Castor*. I only got a few pages into *Satanic Verses* before the devil made me put it down, but I did nearly finish *Nostalgia*; just a little more, and I would have done it. I developed a prejudice against boring so I quit reading *Pride and Prejudice*. And you can have four cents change for *Nicholas Nickleby*.

I fizzled out on *This Side of Paradise*. I never did get *Across the River and Into the Trees*. I'm still on this side of the river wondering why Hemingway wanted to cross the river. *War and Peace* was more like the *Hundred Years' War*. I'm afraid one Absalom was enough for me; I couldn't handle two, and I agree *The Sound and the Fury* was a tale signifying nothing.

I was ambitious once and started *Remembrances of Things* but didn't get past a few thousand words. To heck with madelaines; make mine Fig Newtons. I got mad at *Far from the Madding Crowd*; heck, Hardy can't even spell maddening.

I also failed with some of the great poems. I read for what seemed like a month on *Fairie Queene* and decided to go pricking on a plain instead. I gave back *The Ring and the Book*; I don't want either one of them. I said Good Night to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* one after a few thousand lines. I found paradise when I lost my copy of Milton. And one day of *The Decameron* was quite enough for me. I thought I was in purgatory and burning in the inferno trying to finish *The Divine Comedy*. I didn't find a thing funny about it. I wished Empedocles had killed himself a few thousand lines earlier. I could have pushed him off into Etna a lot sooner, and saved Matthew Arnold, and me, a lot of time and trouble.

~ Steve West

## We Do These Things

Without warning the ground gives way and  
we free fall into panic, gasping from aches,  
spiraling into the inconceivable void,  
knowing that the flesh of foot will never  
touch ground again, the chill of nothing  
stopping our hearts even as we keep on grasping,  
and so we do these things.

We assemble the memories and dress the body,  
and select the sounds and stories, the poems and  
banalities that build the distractions against which  
we're defenseless, and, foolish we are, we think  
ourselves comforted creating an angel from one  
who was with us until the ground gave way and  
we spiraled into this inconceivable void.

~ Julie Davis

## Haleakala

They race to beat the dawn.  
Heater fans warm the car's dark  
interior against the cold Hawaii morn,  
providing the only sound  
for they are too tired to talk,  
having left their tourist condo  
earlier than any vacation day should start.

Their breathing is shallow as they  
think of the landscape they cannot see.  
They recall pictures of lunar landscapes and  
rarified plants, while headlights reveal only  
asphalt ribbon switching its way, back and forth  
up the mountain's side, up ten thousand feet,  
up the ancient path on this, the House of the Sun.

For two hours they ascend the sleeping volcano  
with an urgency they don't think to question.  
Why do they dizzily wind themselves around  
thirty-seven miles of narrow, dark desolation?  
What hole is in their hearts that they so urgently  
seek to experience what is, after all, only legend,  
the spiritual moment of dawn at the top of the world?

Of course they are not alone.  
Engine switched off at the summit,  
they crunch across gravel to join the  
reverent, hushed crowd whispering about  
ancient chants of the volcano goddess  
in epic battle with her sibling, right here  
at the base of this enormous crater,

and chants about the trickster Maui, a mama's boy,  
whose scheming stopped the sun in its path  
across the summit so now we have fifteen extra  
minutes of light here at the top each precious day  
arising from the daily miracle of sunrise.  
Oh, and they whisper about missing gloves and  
coffee cups still slightly warm against the pre-dawn chill.

There seem to be two kinds of observers here  
at this volcano that merely sleeps (it is said),  
here where earth meets sky, here at this  
powerful energy point bridging two planes.  
Some will snap a shot and be on their way,  
another site accomplished, a good story to tell,  
their thoughts already turned from lava beds to lanais.

But at this moment, when Haleakala -  
so high above the world - is kissed by the sun,  
blessed by the gods, at this very moment,  
some can feel the eruption within and  
know again the joy of their love, the hollowness  
of their loss, the kindnesses that defined them,  
and cleansing tears will flow like ancient lava.

\*\*\*

With the sun now bright overhead  
they smile at the view, one hundred miles  
of moving clouds and sea and the road back  
down curving around and around a crater that  
could hold a city, a Martian crater of red stone  
and ash, a crater you would hardly think could  
ever rumble or shake or spit or moan again.

As they descend through clouds and changing  
climate zones, they wonder if they dare to chance  
a souvenir of silversword or a talisman of  
rock and ash. Some awakening within informs  
their choice in ways more profound than just  
a fear of being observed, and they stay on the road and  
are rewarded with a rainbow, which they think is only fair.

Leaving the grounds of Haleakala Park,  
they pause for a last look up, and try to recall how many  
feet high it was that they had driven. When the ranger  
pulls up alongside, they ask, "What is it, about?"  
The ranger pauses. "What is it about?" he thinks they asked.  
And he wonders if he can ever explain that it's about  
nothing less than how we live and when we die.

~ Julie Davis

## First Love, in Color

Yellow – my color  
Piquant tart and tangy  
It feels like first love

There's a buoyancy  
A bubbly effervescence  
A sound of wind chimes

A rich softness like down  
The hue of a duckling  
A crisp scent of spring

I watch the girl in the square  
Walking across from me –  
The cool tint of her hair

It makes my heart jump  
And those lovely legs  
Prancing along so doe-like

Ah, yellow, lemony sweet  
Smooth and custardy  
With its luscious meringue

It puffs me up on air  
And I follow along, wondering  
What's her name?

~ J.E. Bennett



## On the Road Blues

Once more, in a mad rush  
I seem like everyone else  
but I bite my tongue and squirm  
in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

Whether coming or going  
I'm often stymied  
forced to a standstill  
in a mile-long traffic-jam  
somewhere on the Interstate.

The truck's got no air conditioning  
no radio to listen to  
and I wonder if I'm going crazy.

Stressed depressed  
and cursing in a blue rage  
I scratch at my heat rash  
and admit I'm half-insane.

Evenings the bars are packed  
and everyone, in my absence  
is half-drunk, blabbering  
about their Post-Mod miseries.  
I just sit at home  
amid TV dreams, anticipating  
another night's insomnia.

I know the American Dream by the lie  
it is on every politician's lips –  
it was put there by a crooked  
capitalist, who now sits  
grinning, counting our chips.

Ah, another day on the road  
and I still want to rage and shout  
like men who frequent stadium games,  
living their vicarious schemes  
but now I'm too jumpy  
(and dithery) with my wobbly knees.

~ J.E. Bennett

# Thoughts on a Snowflake

She stood at a window  
of her bedroom  
looking out into the dark  
her thoughts of him  
and the river's rippling  
merged into autumn hues

Her hand on the sill  
bathed in lunar light  
she was so absorbed  
in the past, yellow leaves  
floated at the river's edge  
before her very eyes

She was so young then  
she recalled tugging  
her coat collar up  
to stave off a chill –  
even in her excitement

While he talked  
he took her hand  
and turned it up  
his tone so earnest  
as he studied her palm

But then a beat –  
and she was enthralled  
by his intense blue eyes

She stared at the moon  
through the bare trees  
so full and large  
illumining time's wrinkles  
since that long ago day

But for a snowflake  
that nudged an eyelash –  
ah, but she'd blinked  
and pulled her hand away.

~ J.E. Bennett

## Boston

My Damascus cabbie scorns our “historic” city,  
only four centuries old. His *City of Jasmines*  
stretches back four thousand years,  
countless reigns of merchants, butchers,  
sultans, slaves, caliphates, conquerors striding  
through a plentitude of gnarled gates:  
Bab Tuma, Bab a-Faradis, *gate of orchards*,  
Bab Kisan, St. Paul’s *gate of escape*,  
City of blood mortar, flung fire, crusaders  
thronging the River Barada,  
the Mausoleum of Saladin.

My driver steers through “old” Boston, city  
of pavement, city  
of dogs barking behind  
Beacon Hill doors, city  
of dog waste frozen  
under soot-crusteD snow heaps,  
thawing out all at once on springtime’s  
fragrant cobbles of Charlestown.

As my driver turns onto State Street,  
I say, Damascus is far away. At Old  
North Church, I pay him and  
step out onto an historic marker  
in the pavement. I want to say

we are born warm, we spend our lives  
palming our quiet flames  
against ill winds; seasons

flow through us all in  
long and longer strands, braid  
our faint heat into  
lianas of history --  
ancient and new.

~ Cynthia Wyatt

## Atlantic City

One junior high summer  
in Asbury Park for a week,  
a stout woman befriended me.  
She too was a New Yorker,  
she said, and commented  
on my charm bracelet with  
the prized golden harp.  
“I’d like to send you a charm,” she said.  
We would sit out on the hotel’s  
patio-wide boardwalk steps  
leading to the ocean, where chairs  
grouped around umbrella’d tables  
for guests with iced drinks.

“My name is Mrs. Gould.”  
I thought she said “Ghoul,”  
and twitched, thinking  
of the host of a local station  
that showed Dracula  
and *The Mummy’s Curse*.  
He noised about how ghouls  
eat brains and dug his teeth into  
a cauliflower, it turned out, fresh  
from a skull. As he gnawed and blustered,  
bits of white stuff fell on his  
black coffin suit.

Weeks later back in Queens,  
a package arrived with  
a fly-sized gold trumpet from  
Mrs. Ghoul. Then  
the trouble began. “Write  
her a thank-you note,”  
my mother commanded.

A child receives something  
she didn't ask for, doesn't  
even like, and sits fuming,  
with an empty *Thank You* card.

*Thank you for the trumpet.  
It will look nice on my bracelet.  
Thank you again. Sincerely –*

Children fathom gratitude  
when their wishes are granted.  
I longed for a shop-window baby-doll  
we passed walking home  
from the subway, was grateful  
my grandmother noticed at Christmas.

So we slowly learn the glad part—  
—offer tiny, ephemeral tokens  
back and forth through empty air—  
belong, for a moment, to each other  
in our thoughts. Enough.

~ Cynthia Wyatt



# Mindfulness

—for Betty M.

The delightful teacher says “breathe”  
and we begin. In through the nostrils,  
count to four, out through the mouth,  
count to four again to keep  
the brain busy with a bone,  
not straying into nearby yards  
of incessant mindless thoughts.

My belly breathing seems to work,  
a new skill, she says, to focus  
on here and now, not there, then,  
where we are not. Plant your feet,  
she says, show your presence here,  
rest those busy fingers lapward.  
We teach body to observe,  
brain to embrace being, place.

Next time, she says, in jammed traffic  
breathe, exhale the aggravation,  
breathe, inhale the expectation—  
we’ve all arrived, judgment-free,  
are on our way, aware. Alive.

~ Cynthia Wyatt

## Ghost, Gone\*

Scary night noises stop.  
The dog squeezes from beneath  
the bed and rejoins her mother  
for a snuggle. Hello, little girl,  
the woman says aloud, and turns.  
It's going to be a hot day. She needs  
to get up if she intends to tend  
the garden, to walk the girl  
to the creek, its water so high  
this month it's a small, angry river.  
I miss my man!, she announces  
to the room, her eyes closed.  
On a morning like this, his soft shirt,  
she can almost sense him next to her,  
hear his breath, feel his heat.  
I forgive you, she says, chokes it back.  
Lord, puppy, he loved to travel.  
Ha. But he always came back  
to us. The dog tightens against her,  
and she rubs the plush tuft of neck.  
Sometimes, she says, if I keep my  
eyes shut just like this and try  
not to wish it too much, I'll feel your arm  
across my pillow, the signal for me  
to roll into your body and be held.  
So there! And it's all like it was  
and you promise to never go away again.  
Okay, enough. Wipe your eyes, girl.  
Open them. The roses overcome.  
Lily bed out of control. Another  
day. But I'll lie here one more  
minute, first. And let you hold me.

~ Gaylord Brewer

\*Excerpt from *Country of Ghost*, published by Red Hen Press, 2015.  
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# On *Country of Ghost* and the Creative Process: A Conversation with Gaylord Brewer

Cynthia Wyatt with Gaylord Brewer

Gaylord Brewer is a professor at Middle Tennessee State University, where he teaches creative writing and until 2014 edited the journal *Poems & Plays*. He is a prolific writer and has published 900 poems in journals and anthologies, including *Best American Poetry* and the *Bedford Introduction to Literature*. His most recent work, *A Poet's Guide to Food, Drink, & Desire*, is a generous compendium of culinary memoir and recipes colored by his extensive travels abroad. Each chapter is a series of narratives in which the experience of eating wonderful food goes hand in hand with chatty, often casual instructions for the cook. Brewer's approaches to cooking assume that gustatory pleasure is one goal and ease of preparation (often earned by experience) the other. Reading *A Poet's Guide* is like spending time with the companionable author, glass of wine in hand, being enthralled by all there is to know about Peking Duck or Mascarpone-Stuffed Figs with Caramel Sauce. Yum.

Brewer's collection of poetry *Country of Ghost*—the main focus of this interview—is a book of linked poems that feature his encounters with Ghost in Spain, Finland, and France over a period of four years while on summer residencies. (Our readers will recall several Ghost poems in last year's *Number One*.) Brewer is coy about whether we are to take his sightings of Ghost literally, but we become attached to the character, mysterious and humorous, at large in the world. We know who he is in our imagination—each reader finds his own Ghost—and what he ultimately represents about the human spirit, the human condition, the human arc. Last fall, Brewer visited Volunteer State Community College, promoting *Country of Ghost*, and his reading included Ghost poems and new poems as well.

We interviewed Brewer in the spring as he was making preparations to travel again this summer. Our questions were mostly based on specific poems in *Country of Ghost* but also explored his theories and practices concerning the creative process—Brewer is a highly respected creative writing teacher at MTSU—and his advice for young writers

**CW:** *Your work has a strong sense of place, and you travel a good deal. Much of the setting in the Country of Ghost poems feels “old world,” and you say the poems were written at summer residencies in Spain, Finland, and France. What was especially evocative about each of these settings for you?*

**GB:** I was never privy in advance to Ghost's comings and goings. In retrospect, I'm not overly surprised that he first appeared to me in Spain, since as Lorca noted—and I've often cribbed—“In Spain, the dead are more alive than the dead in any other country in the world.” In my experience, there's something to that. Your “old world” comment picks up on a curiosity: Ghost hounded me across Europe for three out of four summers—I was teaching in Prague during the fourth and not writing—but

he never once showed at my home, a log house in the woods in Tennessee. So, your comment I feel is intuitively correct, although I'm not sure I want to overly analyze it now. Before we go any further discussing my boy Ghost, perhaps I should include the joke I've routinely used at readings to deflect the inevitable question: Am I being literal about his appearance? Yes. No. Or perhaps, "Ghost's appearance to me initially came as a great surprise ... [beat] ... especially since I don't believe in ghosts." I've gotten used to sounding a little loopy when I talk about him.

**CW:** *Most of the poems address Ghost directly, commenting and even offering advice, as if Ghost is lost. The speaker in the poems finds Ghost to be a sympathetic character, doesn't he?*

**GB:** Well, I'm again impressed with your intuition here, as you've hit on something that interests me but I've seldom been asked about. I've quipped about being forced to be Ghost's Boswell, but the fact is it's pretty clear the voice in the poems—when Ghost isn't speaking himself—isn't me. Might I share the sympathies and preoccupations of the speaker and his spectral muse? Sometimes. Sometimes not. But I wanted to keep the point of view ambiguous and not press too hard. I wouldn't say that Ghost is lost, just that he's on a journey the itinerary and coordinates of which are to be determined. A passage. Remember the punch line concerning Daniel Boone? When asked if he'd ever been lost in the wilderness, Boone was reported to have paused, then replied, "I've never been lost, but I will admit to being confused for several weeks." There were some pretty deep woods during those darkless nights in Finland. I would agree that the speaker is sympathetic to Ghost, his peccadilloes and his wounds.

**CW:** *The strong images of ruins we find in poems like "Ghost Visits the Burial Cairns of Sammallhadenmäki" suggest an ancient, lost, forgotten human presence that is revealed only through following Ghost's days and nights. Is Ghost a form of consciousness, showing us how to see the world?*

**GB:** I appreciate the careful thought and attention you've given these poems. I've finished another book since *Country of Ghost* was published, a sequence of bestiaries tentatively called *Bird, Beast, & Flower* that Negative Capability Press will bring out in 2017. That's a scoop for *Number One*! So you're challenging me to think back over some of this. That poem at the burial cairns is a little piece I like that no one has ever mentioned to me before. It's a good enough example of how I kept trying to return to ... what should I say, "elemental" concerns? Considering the book's subject, it seemed to me that lots of otherwise common events had the opportunity for resonance: swimming echoes baptism, sleep the funereal corpse, caves descent, sauna the temperatures of hell, etc., to list a few obvious conceits. By the way, it was a great and recurring relief not to be writing about myself, my exquisite suffering and such tediousness. I suppose it's safe to suggest Ghost is "a form of consciousness," although I'd resist that he's intentionally showing the reader anything about the world. He's just trying to get through the day, maybe the next century or so. Like the rest of us.

**CW:** *Nostalgia is a word the writer Sherman Alexie writes with a sneer in “War Dances.” Do you have a kindred suspicion of this human propensity to wish for colorized, candy-coated “old days?” This cynicism has a muscular presence in many of the poems, doesn’t it?*

**GB:** We’d need to agree on how we’re defining “nostalgia” before I’d feel comfortable sneering or otherwise. In the context of our discussion, I don’t think that Ghost or the speaker is trying to sentimentalize anything, but it’s possible the past is indeed preferable to where one finds oneself now—i.e., drifting alone and rudderless through the night ruins. Anyway, a bleak depiction of life and getting older is that it’s an aggregation of loss, no? Time delivers hard blows to everyone, apparently or even especially the dead, and memory may be a boon or curse. Sweet blessing of life, inevitable bitterness of passing. A bittersweetness, then. Would you rather not have been here at all, to have not been a part of it? Mostly, though, I just want to sit here for a moment reflecting warmly on the “muscular presence” in my poems. Um.

**CW:** *A strong thread of Christianity—references to Christ, to Mary, to old candle-lit churches—runs through the Ghost poems, another aspect of their “old world” auras. I too have been drawn to the rich images and stories that both Judaism and Christianity have preserved over the years. Through them, you lure “new world” readers, your contemporaries, to the pathos of old mysteries? Is that correct?*

**GB:** I’d refer back to an answer above, about the context of the Ghost poems enriching certain elements and making them relevant. I like sitting in old churches, but I’m not a believer, and ordinarily the iconography of Mary wouldn’t mean a lot to me. Maybe the frame of reference in your own work, Cindy, is more personally rooted? But Ghost needed a little company, and the Virgin kept popping up as a supporting player, someone he could talk to and maybe debate some issues with. But if an author told me he wanted to “lure me to the pathos of the old mysteries,” I’d run hard in the other direction.

**CW:** *Then there’s “Ghost as Housekeeper,” which is very funny in its domesticity but ends with endearing tenderness: Frieda, the black cat, rubs Ghost’s leg, and we have the pillow of “Ghost’s pat on the head,” allowing us to see Ghost as the one patted as well as the cat. Talk about how such nuance emerges in your poems. This is also the poem that brings us Ghost’s “sponsor, The Great-God-of / Everything-Nobody-Gives-A-Shit-About,” the sort of irreverent zingers that keep the poems lively and the reader off-balance. Do you find reverence to be fading in our society? Or is irreverence a Buddhist form of open-mindedness?*

**GB:** Those are heady concerns for what’s intended as a lighter moment in the collection. But maybe you’ve unearthed some weight here I wasn’t fully conscious of, so thank you for that. I know Ghost could get disgusted with the carelessness, the fecklessness, of the living, which I think he saw as a lack of awareness and gratitude. “Reverence” fits nicely with my feeling here. So, he cleans up the mess a bit, with no hope of appreciation from the living. The human living, anyway. Cats can see him and

generally feel his pain. I'm happy that you like that "zinger" line. It's conspicuously placed to blow up the poem's self-righteous tone. As to nuances, I'll have to hope they speak for themselves.

**CW:** *The final poem, "Ghost, Gone," is incredibly moving. It is in third-person. We see Ghost's wife, who misses him, and we see how the dead continue to be part of the living, achingly so. Can you tell us what inspired you to write this beautiful poem?*

**GB:** Thank you. I had some ideas about how to close the book. One was for Ghost to continue further and further north into isolation, a sort of riff on *Frankenstein*. Another involved integrating the scripture of *Revelation*. Ghost refused these. Too obvious? Too cornball? I don't know. So I (we?) opted for a more open ending. In the third triptych of poems, Ghost moves in a certain direction. He seems more resigned, increasingly withdrawn. The final poem you mention is anticipated by the one before, "Ghost, Haunted by the Usual Tropes, Enters the Village Church at Midnight." Something new happens there, with the suggestion that the bond between speaker and wraith has broken. "Ghost, Gone" is different from anything else in the book, and the piece worried me. The poem risks a lot of feeling, and it needed to work. I'm pleased that you think it does. If memory serves, it was the only poem I wrote in the US. I thought it out on the plane home and typed it up here in Tennessee. Which might make some strange logic to anyone who's read the book.

**CW:** *When you read at Vol State last spring, you told the assembled to write daily. You said we don't get a keeper poem every day, but when you do, it's really strong. Is this still a discipline you observe? Can you tell us about times when writing every day is difficult?*

**GB:** Oh, no. I'm a fraud and a hypocrite. In recent years, I write in furious little intervals, more and more infrequent, usually during international residencies. At the house, I tend to do home repair, antagonize the dog, and drink martinis. Some of that may have to do with getting older. Yeah, let's blame it on the clock. And no, I've never had trouble writing daily when I choose to do so. It's a self-generating process. I don't remember pontificating to your students. Sorry. It was early in the day for me. But they should do it. It's good advice, if you like advice. Ass in the seat and write every day. Absolutely.

**CW:** *As editor of Poems & Plays, what were your criteria for publishing work? Many of our readers will be interested to know what you are looking for when you read submissions.*

**GB:** Be patient. Be cool. Be professional. Don't pester. Editors want to be stunned and delighted. Stun and delight. And the best way to armor yourself against inevitable rejection is to keep writing. Get the submissions in the mail and forget about them. Then write something new, something better or worse. Otherwise, you're Charlie Brown at the mailbox looking for that valentine.

**CW:** *At the reading, several creative writing students raised questions about the writer's life. You surprised them when you said writers have opportunities to travel, to work in foreign countries, to learn about other cultures. This seems to have been true for you. Tell us about what your summer residencies consist of?*

**GB:** Well, if you're implying that another option would be waiting tables at Appleby's, that is correct. I've been lucky and pampered. Your question hits a sore spot, however, because even as we engage I'm supposed to be in Morocco, but the circumstances changed in such a way that I decided last-minute to stay home. I've months yawning out in front of me, which is unprecedented. I'm going to strip and stain the garage, the front porch, and the back deck. Whether this results in any poems only the days and weeks will reveal. But I can tell you right now that Ghost won't want any part of it. He hates that sweaty domestic stuff. Bourgeois.

**CW:** *One last question for a writer who has worked and published for many years: How has the literary scene changed in your writing lifetime?*

**GB:** I'm sure the intent of this question has a good and sincere heart, but I'm cautious of a trap. I don't want to be accused on cynicism, nor—worse—of optimism. Lots more journals. Lots more MFA programs. The internet. Amazon. The AWP Conference grown from 1,000 attendees to 10,000. Some trends that leave me cold, and perhaps too much self-importance and too little humility across the board, but also loads of great new poetry—forceful, challenging, more than I can possibly keep up with. It's all good fun. Evasive enough?

**CW:** *Just perfect. Thank you so much for spending time with and sharing your insights with us. We look forward to Bird, Beast, & Flower next year.*







## Contributors

**Patricia Albrecht's** fiction and poetry has appeared in the literary anthology, *Wind Eyes, A Woman's Reader and Writing Source, The Chrono Chronicles, Rattle, 360 Degrees-Art and Literary Review, Chest, A Magazine for Thoracic Surgeons, Calliope, Still*, as well as chapbooks. A CD of poetry, *A Touch of Pizzazz* was recorded for fans of the internationally syndicated cartoon series, *Jem & The Holograms* in which she voiced the antagonist, Pizzazz. Currently she is co-producer of *Domestic Disguises*, a cd of original poetry from the Line Break Collective of poets at the Global Education Center of Nashville. Workshops, teaching, and mentoring opportunities include leading writers at the Tennessee Prison for Women, Poverty and the Arts, AKIVA School, In-Service Program for teachers in Nashville and at the Willow Oak Center for Arts & Learning, in Springfield, Tennessee.

**Amin Azimi**, a licensed psychologist, grew up in Kabul, Afghanistan. Dr. Azimi has practiced as a psychologist for more than thirty years. He is a published poet and avid gardener. He has published a collection of his poems in Dari and English, entitled *Memory of a View*. Dr. Azimi works as a consulting psychologist at Vanderbilt Stallworth hospital.

**J.E. Bennett** taught writing and literature at West Virginia University and the University of Delaware. He works as a freelance writer. His work is published in: *Paris/Atlantic* (Fr.), *Orbis, Perspectives, Upstairs at Duroc* (Fr.), *The Cape Rock, Descant, Yemassee*, and *Litspeak* (Ger.). He received *Descant's* Frank O'Conner Prize for fiction. His poetry chapbooks include: *Strange Voices, Other Tongues in 2004*. His latest work has appeared in *Blue Unicorn, The Deronda Review, The Distillery, Plainsongs* and *Straylight*. He is a frequent contributor to *Number One*.

**Gaylord Brewer** is a professor at Middle Tennessee State University, where he founded and for twenty years has edited the journal *Poems & Plays*. His ninth book of poetry is *Country of Ghost* (Red Hen Press, 2015).

**Bill Brown** is the author of three chapbooks, five collections of poetry, and a textbook. His most recent titles are *The News Inside* (Iris Press 2010), *Late Winter* (Iris Press 2008), and *Tatters* (March Street Press 2007). In 2011 he won the Writer of the Year Award from Tennessee Writers Alliance. His poems have been anthologized numerous times and have appeared in journals such as *Prairie Schooner, North American Review, The Literary Review, Westbranch, Southern Poetry Review, Tar River Poetry, Asheville Poetry Review, Asheville Poetry Review, Atlanta Review, Connecticut Review, Southern Humanities Review, and Smartish Pace*.

**Sandy Coomer** completed The Writer's Loft program, a creative writing certificate program from Middle Tennessee State University. A licensed Medical Technologist, she has a degree of Microbiology from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and has worked in clinical labs and hospitals in the Middle Tennessee area. She lives in Brentwood, Tennessee with her husband and four children.

**Robert Cooperman's** latest collection is *Just Drive* (Brick Road Poetry Press). His work has appeared in *The Sewanee Review*, *Slant*, and previously in *Number One*.

**Julie Davis** has lived in Nashville since 1996 and enjoys the opportunity to contribute to local life in meaningful ways.

**Elizabeth Howard** lives in Crossville, Tennessee. Her work has appeared in *Comstock Review*, *Big Muddy*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Mobius*, *Poem*, *Motif*, *Now & Then*, *Slant*, and other journals.

**Jeanne Irelan** is retired from Volunteer State Community College where she served as Director of the Writing Center and taught English. She has published several novels now available on Kindle and Nook and was honored to receive *Number One* 2013 Poetry Award.

**Brad King** was an army veteran and former student at Volunteer State Community College, where he studied art and covered sports for *The Settler*, the student run newspaper. He has contributed to *Squatters' Rites*, Volunteer State Community College's student journal of art and literature, and his work has appeared in previous issues of *Number One* and in *The Chiron Review* and other publications. He enjoyed sports and the outdoors, and almost anything associated with the arts in and around the Nashville community.

**Leslie LaChance** grew up in the Hudson Valley of upstate New York and now makes her home in Nashville, Tennessee. Her work has appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies. She is the founding editor of *Mixitini Matrix: A Journal of Creative Collaboration*, and she teaches writing and literature courses at Volunteer State Community College.

**Leslie Lytle's** poems have appeared in several previous issues of *Number One* and in many other literary magazines, including *The Georgia Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, and *The Literary Review*. Her nonfiction book, *Execution's Doorstep*, was released in November 2008 by the University Press of New England.

**Bruce Majors** graduated from Tennessee Technological University with a BS in Education with an emphasis on Music and Psychology. He worked for TVA Nuclear and V12 Oak Ridge. His work has been published or is forthcoming in *Arts & Letters*, *Distillery*, *Feed Your Brain*, *Back Road Travels*, and several other magazines. He has

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**Deb Moore** is an Assistant Professor of English and Chair of the English Department at Volunteer State Community College. She periodically fancies herself a creative writer, though the vast bulk of her writing is only published as grading commentary on student papers. She also tinkers with a guitar or piano on occasion, though her true musical genius lies in the area of air conducting.

**Jaime Sanchez** is a professor of English at Volunteer State Community College. His work has appeared in previous issues of *Number One* and in *Mixitini Matrix: A Journal of Creative Collaboration*.

**Jane Sasser** is a two-time winner of the Tennessee Writers Alliance poetry contest, and a four-time winner of first place in the Tennessee Mountain Writers' Conference poetry contest. Her work has been published in *North American Review*, *Lullwater Review*, *The Atlanta Review*, *The National Forum*, *Sow's Ear*, *Re: AI*, *Byline*, *Medicinal Purposes*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *the North Carolina Literary Review*, and others. Her chapbook, *Recollecting the Snow*, was published in 2008 by March Street Press. She teaches English literature and creative writing at Oak Ridge High School.

**Steve West** teaches at Martin Methodist College in Pulaski, Tennessee. His work has appeared in *Clockhouse Review*, *Avocet*, and *Green Hills Literary Lantern*. His poetry collection, *Almost Home*, is available from March Street Press.

**Cynthia Wyatt** is an Associate Professor of English at Volunteer State Community College. Her work has appeared in *The Nebraska Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Number One*, *Sow's Ear*, and other literary publications, and has been awarded prizes from *The Nebraska Review*, *River Oak Review*, and *Oberon*.

**April Young** is an Assistant Professor of English at Vol State. Her work has appeared in previous issues of *Number One*.

**Ray Zimmerman** has performed his poems and served as master of ceremonies at events in Chattanooga, Tennessee and the surrounding region. He is author of the chapbook *First Days* and editor of *Southern Light: Twelve Contemporary Southern Poets*. His poems have appeared in *2nd and Church Magazine*, *Sound Track not Included*, *A Tapestry of Voices*, and *The Southern Poetry Anthology* published by the University of Texas Press.





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*Number One* is published annually each fall. Submission Deadline for the 2017 issue is March 15th.





