

# RED WOLF JOURNAL

Summer 2014

Issue 2



*The River: Within Us and Without Us*

Nicole Nicholson and Tawnya Smith, editors

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Issue 2, Summer 2014

*Red Wolf Journal is a quarterly periodic publication of Red Wolf Poems (formerly known as We Write Poems. Please visit our website at: <http://redwolfjournal.wordpress.com/>.*

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Each issue is themed. For information about upcoming issue themes, please visit the website.

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# INTRODUCTION

Humanity and rivers have long dwelt side-by-side, in complex and changing relationships—nurturing then destructive, flowing then stagnant. Just as there are many kinds of people, so too are there a myriad of types of rivers. Our fascination with the ever-changing connections between them is what prompted us to choose the theme for this issue.

The poems chosen for this issue explore various facets of our connections to rivers of many different kinds—place, family, life, death, rebirth, myth, time, story and change. You will find the personal and the cosmic. You will view death from the shore, and perhaps reel it into view. There rivers here which are rooted into place and others which flow free of barriers.

With delight we also present to you the cover artwork by artist Angela (Alex) Weddle. His digital art piece, “Into the Mystic,” captured our theme and us. The artist’s page features one of his poems and includes information about him and where his artwork can be found.

So, we invite you to find a stretch of grass by the bank. Spread out a blanket and read these poems of rivers and our ties to them. Reflect on your own rivers, in the light that glints off the surface of these writings. We are very proud of this collection and hope that you enjoy it as well.

Sincerely,

Nicole Nicholson and Tawnya Smith  
Editors, Issue 2

## ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

**A**ngela Weddle is a transgender poet and internationally exhibiting visual artist, who prefers to be called Alex, and who works in multiple mediums. Weddle has Asperger's Syndrome, Non-Verbal Learning Disability, and Cerebral Palsy. Weddle is originally from New Orleans, Louisiana and currently resides in San Antonio, TX. Weddle's primary special interest is art, and also autism advocacy, and stand-up comedy. Alex also loves Legos, Action Figures, Nerf Guns, Bubbles, Bells, and Animals.

Alex's artwork can be found online on DeviantART (<http://drawing-blue.deviantart.com/>) and Flickr ([https://www.flickr.com/photos/drawing\\_blue](https://www.flickr.com/photos/drawing_blue)).

Along with his cover art, we also present one of his poems, "Waiting in the Desert", on the next page.

# ANGELA WEDDLE

## WAITING IN THE DESERT

I am from a dry land. A land of not knowing. This is paradoxical, because I was born by the river. Ferry rides and tugboats. Paddle wheels and the horns of barges. The lush greenery, the sweet scent of honeysuckle. And yet, I am from a dry land. A land of not knowing.

A black face in a white dress twirls by on the fringe of a meticulously beaded umbrella. The jubilant staccato of the tuba, knees bent and back up again, pause and then dip, to the bouncy, jazz rhythm. The river flows through these people, so naturally enjoying themselves. My people...I thirst for rhythm of the river, always finding myself on the fringe of a note, a half step off beat. I cannot dance to this music. I don't know how. Maybe I am not really one of them.

Far from the tugboats of my youth, I have wandered. I see the flowering cactus. And my mind has grown weary. It's hope, falling through my hands as grains of sand. The sun rises high above me, oppressive in its illumination of my oppression. I decide that I will wait. I will wait. I will wait, until the fullness of waiting becomes the dust of memory. Until I cannot remember the dryness. Until desert and river are but both mist in the in the winds of my shifting thought.

There are cumulonimbus clouds on the horizon. I wait for rain. The desert flower is in full bloom. And perhaps this is a mirage, a dream. I prepare for flooding. The winds shift: I burrow into these caverns of my own making.

I hear a voice. Faint. Singing. I follow it like a memory. I follow it like my conscience. I follow it to the future. I follow it to here. I follow it to you, my desert rose blooming under high sun.

I am from a dry land. A land of not knowing. Not knowing the well from which I drank never left me. I carry the river with me, wherever I am. I somehow know the rhythm better than I remember. You bloom as Hope. Hope in what was a dry land. I hear music. I follow it like a memory. I follow it like the river. I follow your footsteps to the rhythm of my heart.

# JOHN MICHAEL FLYNN

## CHASING A RIVER'S SHADOW PLAY

I'm going to take you, River, as you took Kelly in Cummington. Go ahead, laugh all you want. I know Whitman, Lorca and Ginsburg were here first and you devoured them. I don't care. I carry the Wandering O'Hara gene. I have my lyrical impulses to prove and my mother to honor into sainthood. If the city is mine it's because the city is this moment and I'll die if I don't roar about it in your wake.

Faces rush past me, ripping off my ears. I stop to sniff for you as I study a poster for a revival of *Godot* in Chelsea. Sex toys for sale in a window. Lube by the gallon. This isn't you. I walk west down 22nd Street and I see myself as a kitten with its saucer of milk on a fire escape. Innocence and the sordid collides. Dildo rhymes with meadow. Wordplay, River, won't dance my soul away from seizing you.

I see myself again inside the last of the 20th in a diner window on Tenth Avenue. You and I both know this diner is soon to be museum piece, a modernist installation. Art. What a laugh. I can't afford art. Neither can you. Yet it remains our luxurious guilty pleasure.

Nor can I afford this yearning toward your currents and all the profundity I uncover in the average person's daily and gritty resistance to failure. There's a realist and a dreamer in me, River, and they both say that poverty and work aren't crimes. They can't be helped. They're as necessary as you are. You knew this. You saw so much of yourself in me.

I hunt your ghosts, River, in the shallows of each alley I venture to penetrate. I stumble across your old friends Hubert Selby and Kenneth Fearing. How they roared back when men wore prideful Stetsons, pumped gas for a living, fought wars in Germany and lived to eat sandwiches from an Automat. Nobody listened much then, either.

Flynn, you tell me, keep one step ahead of the pricks out there.

River, you're a lion, a shadow within shadows and you knew this city as a stickball yard, choice of peep shows, joyrides with a beer on the ferry to Staten Island. You knew a Jewish intellectual formalist mentor in Shapiro, the two of you a pair of chummy vets together making the Village scene back when it mattered that a River could not only sing but count scansion.

You wandered, River, before Eisenhower built the highways. Penned that Whitmanesque love song to America and your crossing, thumb out, to find your buddy Eberhardt and flood with him a hill above the Puget Sound.



Me and Richard, you say, we wrote our poems while we watched them build Seattle.

I see your cherubic face in the dank windows of an Irish tap and I wonder how long before this bar disappears and all of your riverfront life from dockwollopers to Eugene O'Neill becomes gentrified, clean and respectable.

I drift east and uptown to see you in the leer of a big-bellied vendor in apron at a magazine stand, in the hot steam that fogs the neon above a sizzling sausage grill, and in the fumes that leak from a manhole seam.

River, little has changed when it comes to the frothing discontent of the straphangers chasing their dimes. One glance after another, I see them busted, bent and zapped – their bodies speeded along through grim blocks scented with a python's treacherous ambition.

Life remains a subway ride to nowhere on a Saturday afternoon in the rain. The Beast, Number One, north to south and back again. I'm on it. I'm riding. I'll find you, River. I'll better you. I'll devour you. I've an exploding cigar in my pocket. A craving that defies gravity.

I'm open to it all and dwarfed.

**Process Notes:** "This poem grew out of a need to honor specific mentors, a city bordered by rivers, the inexorable passing of time, a passion for the mid-century era, and the ephemeral nature of existence that so intrigues and frustrates me."

**John Michael Flynn's** newest book, *Keeper Meet Questing Eyes*, is due out in early summer, 2014, from Leaf Garden Press ([www.leafgardenpress.com](http://www.leafgardenpress.com)). He lives in Virginia. He can be found on the web at: [www.basilrosa.com](http://www.basilrosa.com).

# UMA GOWRISHANKAR



*“Mujer Luna 2”, by Sophia Buchuck*

## RIVER OF STORIES

*When they set in motion the first beginning of speech, giving names,  
their most pure and perfectly guarded secret was revealed through love.*

*The Rig Veda , 10.71*

*(translated by Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty)*

Vastness of the sky  
expands her heart and  
clears the fear  
pooled in silence there.

Cradled alongside  
are doubts,

hundred muted questions -

is fire born in lightning  
as lightning in a cloud

is cloud born in water  
as water in fire

is earth born in water  
as a golden embryo in deep ocean

is speech born out of thought  
as action out of desire ?

Between fire and water,  
earth and ocean

                    flow a river of stories,  
like love that marries speech to thought.

## THE RIVER

My separation from the river  
began, even before I was born,  
in my mother's womb.

Silence shaped the room,  
the aperture sculpted my mind  
parenthesizing time into slots.

I accessed meaning downward  
by dropping a pebble  
in the water that filled her.

The river flowed, limb of a dead child  
careened in the current.  
My lungs dilated in a loud howl.

**Uma Gowrishankar** is a poet and artist from Chennai, South India. Her poems have been published in *Qarrtsiluni*, *Whale Sound*, *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Carcinogenic Poetry*, *Catapult Magazine*, and *Curio Poetry*. She blogs at <http://umagowrishankar.wordpress.com/>.

**Sofia Buchuck** is one of London's most respected Peruvian artists. A musician, poet and painter, Sofia came to the UK at an early age and dedicated herself to training in her craft. She has won numerous awards, including best Latin artist in 2006 and best poet in a foreign language from *Farrago Poetry* in 2011. She has also recorded many albums and has published her poems in Mexico and the UK.

# DAH HELMER

## URGENCY

Buried beneath the roots,  
the nether-region is a river  
of dust, glass shards,  
seashell pieces, aged minerals.

I hold a handful of soil  
and hear the dead, like cattle  
herded together. They walk  
barefoot through the dust.

Having forgotten the lilt  
of their voices, I place my ear  
to the earth, to the past, my heart  
pounds like a wet mallet.

Death stands before us, behind us,  
collecting the flying embers  
of each life, and the days become  
shut down by spent time.

At the end of every season  
is an urgency: the harvesting  
of old age, the dehydration  
of gods, miracles, twilight.

**Dah Helmer** is the author of two collections of poetry from Stillpoint Books. Dah's third collection is due for publication in 2014, also from Stillpoint Books. Dah lives in Berkeley, California, where he is currently working on the manuscript for his fourth book.

# ANN HOWELLS

## NOR'EASTER

Trees crack, take out our lines,  
leave us blinded and mute,  
feeling on Grandpa's rolltop desk  
for kerosene lamps—  
a company of reserves called up  
in times of barometric unrest—  
when the needle falls,  
and our unease is measured  
in inches of mercury.

Growling northeast wind  
pushes tide, drives whitecaps,  
nips heels, herds them inland,  
onto the beach and into yards.

We are in a waterglobe  
shaken by an angry child;  
horizontal sheets of water—  
blend of sea and sky—close over us,  
deep water engulfs the road,  
divides our island.

During brief lulls we discern,  
through grey-green troughs,  
the pale profile of our boat  
and naked pilings—  
sentinels derelict in duty,  
for the pier is gone, lifted,  
ripped away, dashed against rock,  
debris to be gathered from sand—  
a weed and driftwood edging  
that will diagram a high water line  
six feet from our door.

**Process Notes:** “Nor’easter’ is a repeated childhood memory, as storms roared up the river and we hunkered down. Being as rural as we were, every storm knocked out both phone and power. Our house was on one of the highest points of the island. We never had the river inside the house, but it came awfully close sometimes.”

**Ann Howells'** poetry has appeared in *Calyx*, *Crannog* (Ire), *Little Patuxent Review*, *Magma* (UK), *Sentence*, and *Spillway*, among others. She serves on the board of Dallas Poets Community, 501-c-3 non-profit and has edited their journal, *Illya's Honey*, since 1999, recently taking it from print to digital ([www.IllyasHoney.com](http://www.IllyasHoney.com)). One chapbook, *Black Crow in Flight*, was published by Main Street Rag Publishing (2007) and another, the *Rosebud Diaries*, was published by Willet Press (2012).

## KRISTINA JENSEN

### LOW TIDE MEANS HIGH RISE

an irresistible urge to defy gravity  
presents itself where water meets earth  
low tide means high rise for these little guys  
in their hard round black suits

spiral doors shut tight until  
the salty sea inches up the river  
the common cat's eye slithers its way up  
and above, wanting to be, it seems,  
the highest of them all

on TV, I see people in Asia climb  
a mountain of stairs into buildings that stack  
children's blocks against the night sky  
it a fine thing to be living highest of them all  
but what will happen when the tide comes in?

**Process Notes:** “‘low tide means high rise’ was inspired by two observations coming together at once: first, I saw these wee shellfish (called pupu in the Maori language) piling up on top of each other when the tide went out one day. Then later, on the same day, I saw a program that showed row upon row of very tall apartment buildings, in particular, one couple who were so happy to be able to live on the top floor. Climbing social ladders of sorts.”

**Kristina Jensen** is a ‘poet afloat’, freelance writer, musician and home school parent living a life of voluntary simplicity on a boat in New Zealand. She is an enthusiastic advocate of spending as much time in nature as possible. Her poems, articles, essays and stories have been published in New Zealand, Australia and the UK.



# JOAN LEOTTA

## DREAMING ACROSS THE STYX

My father walks into my room  
wearing his long tan trench coat.  
A finely blocked felt hat  
tops his jet black wavy hair.  
He tamps down the tobacco  
in his pipe, then turns  
to me, his brown eyes twinkling,  
his lips curling up in a smile around the pipe.

He steps back into  
a poorly lit hallway I do not know,  
removes his coat and  
sits in an orange plastic chair.  
Coat on his lap,  
he draws softly on the pipe  
and nods at me.  
Cherry tobacco smoke wafts toward me.  
He's waiting for me,  
as always.  
Through theatre classes  
piano lessons  
dance lessons  
patiently enmeshed in his own thoughts  
waiting  
without complaint.

Suddenly I wake.  
I am at home. No hallway. No chair.  
No cherry tobacco.  
No trench coat or hug.  
Only the smell of coffee.  
My father smiles from his photo.

Some say dreaming across the Styx means  
Charon will soon come for you.  
I chuckle as I prepare  
to face my day.  
No fears.  
Instead of Charon,  
my own beloved father  
waits patiently to

ferry me across the Styx  
in his white 1960 Thunderbird.

**Process Notes:** “This poem was actually inspired by a dream about my father who crossed the Styx himself in 1988. I began to think about the old saying that if you dream about someone dead it means you are going to die soon and decided I did not agree with that, nor did I think I needed to fear death, so I wrote this poem.”

**Joan Leotta’s** artistic goal is always to show the beauty of the ordinary and encourage the audience. She now lives in Calabash, North Carolina with her husband and has published several books (fiction and non-fiction) and many short stories and articles. Her blog on writing and performing is at [joanleotta.wordpress.com](http://joanleotta.wordpress.com).

# CHRISTOPHER OAK REINIER

## OCTOBER MORNING ON THE RIVER

They've taken down  
the summer dams.  
Over-night the river  
has returned to its  
drained and naked self.

In a dreamscape of loss,  
the river's bed has been  
abandoned by water hurrying  
away to the ocean,  
leaving the dregs of a  
false lover's lust.

It is a bed of muddy stones.

Far out on the bereft channel  
a silhouetted man bends,  
picking up things,  
examining them.

I step out across the slippery rocks,  
and ask, "What are you finding?"

"Pretty stones," he says, "Indian beads...  
This river's been running for thousands of years."

"You're finding Indian beads?"

"Ah, sure," he says,  
digging in his frayed pant's pocket,  
extracting a bent nail, a penny,  
a paper clip, a common stone...  
"Guess they're in my knapsack", he shrugs,  
gesturing at the pack on his back.

"Okay," I say, sensing it time to wander away.

As I step back across the rocky sludge,  
he calls, "I found a diamond once..."

"All right!" I respond,  
and look at the muck  
of the river bed,

morning sun glistening off  
the dying river weeds...

**Christopher Oak Reinier** lives near the Russian River in Northern California, a river that inspires many of his poems and songs.

# MARIAN VEVERKA

## YOU PADDLE YOUR OWN CANOE

Tiny leaves have appeared  
on the branches of the willows  
A haze of green now decorates  
the muddy river bank.

We speak few words as we paddle  
through the narrow channel-  
we do not mention cancer  
or the beading of new cells.

You had asked to be kept  
informed though you could not  
cheat the beastly cells, so  
relentless in their onslaught.

Our small canoe keeps pressing  
onward. The waters parting before  
us as if they could deliver  
your release.

**Marian Veverka** worked part time at the Port Clinton, OH public library for over thirty years. Her poems have appeared in many literary journals and magazines. She lives near Marblehead, OH, on the shores of Lake Erie.

## ROBERT WALTON

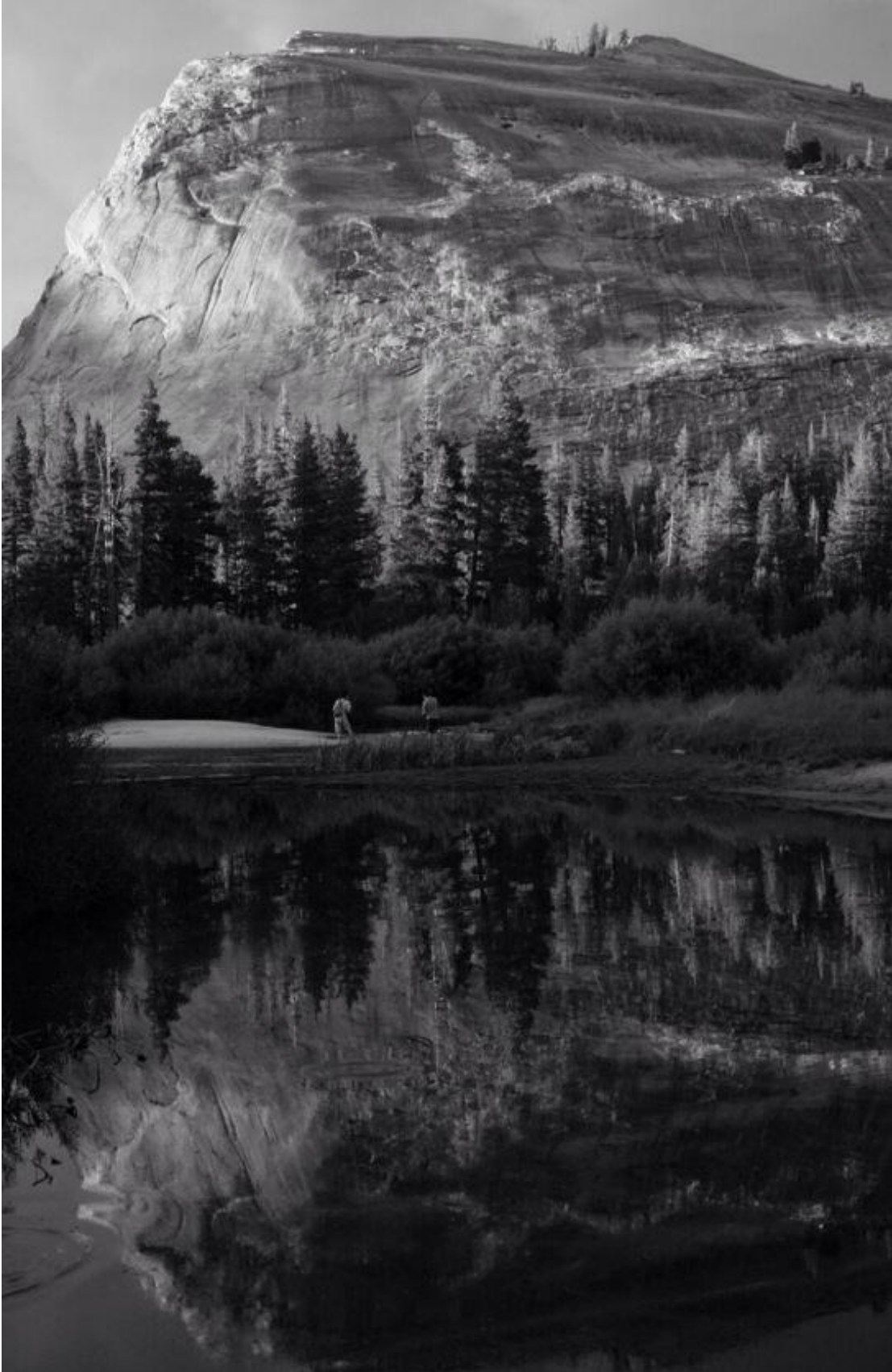


### TUOLUMNE SOLITAIRE

This river slips slantwise  
Over snowy granite,  
Flows smooth as smoke  
Over hidden edges.  
Ripples at my feet  
Wear capricious jewels,  
Mischievous in moonlight,  
Like you.

The current's curves  
And star-polished boulders  
Blend with the ease  
Of long acquaintance –  
So our friendship  
Has flowed years long,

Though you are a girl to me,  
Still a girl.



## TUOLUMNE DAWN

Breeze off morning rapids  
Is a gift trailing scents  
Of pine, of lupine,  
Of sweet woodsmoke,  
But its first touch  
Is a blue blade  
Pulled by dawn from its sheath of  
Ice.

**Robert Walton** is a retired public school teacher and lifelong mountaineer. His poems and stories have appeared in numerous journals, including the Sierra Club's "Ascent". Most recently, his historical novel Dawn Drums (<http://dawndrums.wordpress.com/>) was published by Moonlight Mesa Associates.

*Photographs by Jonathan Walton. Used with permission.*



# WILL WELLS

## KEEPING AN EYE OUT

Once we're under way, the river guide remarks,  
*It's been a banner year for bodies. I found  
two boozed-up college boys who flunked the test  
on hypothermia, then a rookie  
kayaker wrapped around a boulder, neat  
as a Christmas bow. If we spot another,  
I'll put it in tow, unless you object....*  
He brandishes an extra coil of rope,  
Eagle Scout of fresh disaster. Though we  
came separately, our shudders school like fish.

A blue heron arrows in ahead of us,  
skimming the water like an Egyptian god  
trolling for souls. The Colorado crooks  
a finger and beckons us around a bend.  
And there, a doe and her two fawns wade in,  
untroubled as we fumble for snapshots.  
Relief unfolds like the float between rapids.

But I can't help asking, *What happens if  
we find someone?* And so, we earn badges  
in no nonsense. It should be beached on high  
ground and moored to a tree or boulder.  
Triangulate landmarks and phone it in.  
A shirt can mark the spot, and brush cover  
lends modesty and keeps the buzzards off.

After bobbing up in a dead-man float,  
the Boston fireman who went for a swim  
climbs back on board, cracks a beer, and reflects,  
*If a fire victim has been charred, it smells  
like a cook-out.* Droplets on his pale skin  
prism into burn the rest of us neglect  
to mention. Each calm stretch, we scan the banks.

Alone at the stern, one passenger trails  
her cupped hand under the surface, opens it  
and jerks it back as if the water stings.  
The river slips a finger through her ring  
which will tumble until rushing current  
slows, then find a bed in sediment.

Past the next meander, a sandbar splits  
the flow. Posted like a semaphore,  
the waiting heron poses all our grief.  
We raft on by, married to the moment,  
trying to see just what we came to see.

**Process Notes:** “As described in the poem, the poem describes an actual rafting trip I took on the Colorado, with as much accuracy as possible. I wrote the poem six months after having the experience. Some of the river guide’s quoted comments had lodged so firmly in my memory that I had to write the poem to attempt to exorcise them. Essentially, it struck me as odd that some thoughtless comments by the river guide could warp the entire purpose of the day-long river rafting experience from an intended outdoors idyll to a reflection on personal mortality and the limits of human compassion. The poem has been tinkered with subsequently, to improve individual lines, but is essentially intact from how it originally emerged. It is also faithful to the experience with the exception of the lost wedding ring, which occurred on a different rafting trip.”

**Will Wells’** most recent volume of poems won the 2009 Hollis Summers Poetry Prize and was published by Ohio University/Swallow Press in 2010. His latest manuscript, *Odd Lots, Scraps and Second-hand, Like New* is seeking a publisher. Will has been a fellow at various writers’ conferences including Sewanee, Bread Loaf, Wesleyan and West Chester, and a previous book-length collection won the Anhinga Prize.

## MARTIN WILLITTS, JR.

### AQUAMARINE

This light blue-green gemstone of calm waters  
before a ship sails out troweling for fish  
will pick up your spirits. Wear it while meditating,  
until you hear buoys where there isn't any.

This morning, I drop my net of worries  
into the stillness like stones.

**Process Notes:** "Aquamarine is both a color as well as a name of a gemstone. One of the many things I do is called "gemstone readings" in which each gemstone has their own properties. Also, each gemstone has a connection to astrology and to psychic readings. Furthermore, the gemstones can affect a person's chakras. I combine this information in my readings. In this meditative poem, I focus on the psychic attributes of the stone and connect it to water."

**Martin Willitts Jr.** is a Quaker and organic gardener. He has 6 full-length poetry collections including contest winner *Searching for What Is Not There* (Hearth Press, 2013) and over 20 chapbooks including contest winner *William Blake, Not Blessed Angel But Restless Man* (Red Ochre Press, 2014).

# BARBARA YOUNG

## AT THE MOUTH OF BIRDSONG

Water boils cold and clear through gravel sand  
somewhere in eastern Kentucky, becomes more,  
becomes a river. At the first dam, pools back, fills  
the steep round valleys with fish. And sky. Steps down  
from corps-created lake to lake, will meet  
the bigger Ohio near the navel of waters.  
We are in Tennessee; river's turning into lake, summer into fall.  
Sonar could display, below us tied to a snub red buoy,  
the bed of Birdsong Creek. There'd have been a bank  
here near where it joined the Tennessee, maybe limestone  
it had worn smooth, maybe mud.

We're in a small aluminum boat.  
Welded seams a tactile evidence of construction.  
It used to be green. A kid painted a name on it  
"Green Star" with red paint. Some red remains.  
Water, from this and that—spray of passage,  
minnow bucket, dripping anchor and knotted rope—  
settled in the downward, upward curve  
smells algal, minnowish. The rim of the boat,  
the gunnel, shines hot in the sun, below the water line  
the metal is cool.

In the shallows a heron is fishing. A flock of yellow  
like wild canaries. Jets leave contrails. Barges,  
yoked in pairs—two, two, two, two, a football field afloat—  
are pushed upstream or down and throw a wake wave  
that lifts us, crumbs and the tablecloth, goes, slaps  
the mudbank island top of a drowned hill. The buoy rocks,  
the next up the creek rocks less.

We have lines in the water. We are fishing.

## WHAT CAN'T BE FORGIVEN

*“Father forgive us for what we must do.  
You forgive us, and we’ll forgive you.  
We’ll forgive each other til we both turn blue  
then we’ll whistle and go fishing in heaven”*  
John Prine, Fish and Whistle

What can't be forgotten  
while faint vibrations communicate  
by way of steel, monofilament, and braid  
by fingerprint and wrist, eye and lash  
from twenty feet down deep and murky  
the fan of a fishtail

will the leaves turn next October  
will the clock chime ten or stop at nine  
will the pain return  
what can't be forgotten, forgiven, fishing  
oh, fortuna, whirling wheel  
is too small.

**Process Notes:** "What Can't Be Forgiven" and "At the Mouth of Birdsong" are part of a series in progress: Footnotes to a Photograph of My Father, Fishing."

**Barbara Young** is from Nashville, Tennessee. She prefers fishing with minnows, not worms. She likes writing from prompts, and still mourns the website RWP which opened her eyes.





