

Song of myself

Red Wolf Journal

Spring/Summer 2016 Issue 9

Irene Toh & Tawnya Smith,
Editors

Red Wolf Journal
Spring/Summer 2016 Issue 9

Song Of Myself

Irene Toh and Tawnya Smith, Editors



Copyright © 2016 by Red Wolf Journal. Contributors retain copyright on their own poems.

Cover artwork: George Tooker, *Bathers*

No part of this publication may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in articles and reviews giving due credit to the authors.

Song Of Myself

Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2016 issue.

What is this singing which poets do? In Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", he sings of "fountains, meadows, hills, and groves" invoking spring/summer with the joyous singing of birds. But it is with a "philosophic mind" that he did it. His song is the way poetry lies against time and nature. So poems function as a mirror and as a dreamscape both. You sing of these things. Therefore they exist. Or they exist, therefore you sing of these things. Either is subjectively true. After all, it is the nature of poetry to be metaphorical. Death, on the other hand, is literal.

As a poet, or someone who writes poetry, I don't stop singing. Sometimes I wonder if I'll eventually wear myself out and stop. Because poetry is visionary, it keeps wanting to keep going in a perpetual task of witnessing and remaking. As long as you live to see the sunrise, you have something to sing about. In our cover picture—George Tooker's *The Bathers*—I see a curious glance backward by one of the bathers. It struck me that curiosity is what keeps us interested. That glance at what engages us is rather personal. The subject of interest brings us out of ourselves, and it also brings us back into ourselves. What is the world that engages your interest? A world that will ultimately pass you by.

Mark Strand in *Dark Harbor* seems to talk on point:

Farewell no matter what. And the palms as they lean
Over the green, bright lagoon, and the pelicans
Diving, and the glistening bodies of bathers resting,

Are stages in an ultimate stillness, and the movement
Of sand, and of wind, and the secret moves of the body
Are part of the same, a simplicity that turns being

Into an occasion for mourning, or into an occasion
Worth celebrating, for what else does one do.

(Canto XVI)

The title of our issue borrows from the title of Walt Whitman's famous poem. It is a poem that celebrates the present ("There was never any more inception than there is now,/Nor any more youth or age than there is now,/And will never be any more perfection than there is now,/Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now."), is optimistic about life and death both ("All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,/And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier."), believes in the divinity of self ("Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch'd from,/The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer,/This head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds."), is multitudinous ("I am large, I contain multitudes") and channels many voices ("Through me many long dumb voices").

What is his song about? It is his poetic bid for immortality, like that of Wordsworth's, but done in an inclusive, capacious manner, sensory, visceral, philosophic, written in free verse. It is, of course, a self-elegy. Such an elegy seeks to preserve the meaning of one's life as something of positive value when that life itself has ceased. It does this by much cataloguing and weaving of different strands into one ("And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.")

So that is to be the theme of our issue. The self, I shall leave to you to interpret in your own unique ways. What would the self say? Say over and over again. Say differently and the same. What stories? What thoughts? Is there more than one self, so you could possibly be many selves? What are these other selves? Is it a self that will help channel other voices? Does self exist only in the text? What, indeed, is the self? Does your poem carry a clear sense of identity? Does it reflect and celebrate many selves or your true self? Does the self become transcendent? Does it aspire to the mythic?

Perhaps, after you've pinned it down, you'd think, like Mark Strand in *The Monument*:

First silence, then some humming,
then more silence, then nothing
then more nothing, then silence,
then more silence, then nothing.

Song of My Other Self: There is no other self.
The Wind's Song: Get out of my way.
The Sky's Song: You're less than a cloud.
The Tree's Song: You're less than a leaf.
The Sea's Song: You're a wave, less than a wave.
The Sun's Song: You're the moon's child.
The Moon's Song: You're no child of mine.

(Section 35)

That's so funny. What would you sing about?

I'll leave you with W S Merwin's excellent poem, "The Laughing Thrush":

O nameless joy of the morning

tumbling upward note by note out of the night
and the hush of the dark valley
and out of whatever has not been there

song unquestioning and unbounded
yes this is the place and the one time
in the whole of before and after
with all of memory waking into it
and the lost visages that hover
around the edge of sleep
constant and clear

and the words that lately have fallen silent
to surface among the phrases of some future
if there is a future

here is where they all sing the first daylight
whether or not there is anyone listening

Irene Toh and Tawnya Smith, Editors
Red Wolf Journal
<http://redwolfjournal.wordpress.com/>

In memory of Vivienne Blake

CONTENTS

- Pat Anthony, Chance 10
- Pat Anthony, Outside The City Limits 11
- Pat Anthony, Voices 12
- Vivienne Blake, Red Shoes 13
- Vivienne Blake, The Cream Of The Garden 15
- Marilyn Braendeholm, The Last Move 16
- Edilson Afonso Ferreira, A Poet's Life 17
- Edilson Afonso Ferreira, Pilgrims From The East 18
- Edilson Afonso Ferreira, Inward Nobility 19
- Grace Harriman, Pressing Forward 20
- Christopher Hileman, The Lamp 21
- Christopher Hileman, Rivera Remarks Ekphrastically 22
- Christopher Hileman, In Mid Voyage 23
- Christopher Hileman, Disturbing The Dead 24
- Christopher Hileman, Waiting For Berry Pie 25
- Christopher Hileman, Edgar Degas Speaks His Mind 26

A.J. Huffman, The Man With The Pierced Tongue 27

A.J. Huffman, I Am Fingers 28

A.J. Huffman, I Dream In Fragments 29

Kathleen Kimball-Baker, Bad Days 30

Ron. Lavalette, Critique 32

Ron. Lavalette, Metamorphosis 33

Patricia McGoldrick, Urban Upcycling 34

Sanjeev Sethi, Episodes 35

Sanjeev Sethi, Me 36

Sanjeev Sethi, Loss And Other Lessons 38

Sanjeev Sethi, Discovery 39

Debi Swim, The Butterfly Under Glass Is No Longer Interesting 40

Debi Swim, She Has A Farm In WV 41

Debi Swim, Urban Decay 42

Debi Swim, Phone Etiquette 43

Debi Swim, Fireflies In The Summer 44

Debi Swim, Soul Portal 45

Debi Swim, Song In Minor Key 46

Robert Walton, Was it a breeze 48

Robert Walton, Laoshi 49

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

–Walt Whitman, “The Song Of Myself”

Chance

by Pat Anthony

You gamble on good days,
throw the dice at a five o'clock
moon on the off chance that the
sixty minute drive northbound
will be free of the antlered ones,
their belly heavy mates swaying
from late beds to early breakfasts.

You wager on having just enough to get by,
the low side of fierce when you drag
armor and its weight drags at your very being.

Like seeing the hulk of the 1906 piano
minus keys, minus its damper assembly,
minus the music and you miss your soul.

You wonder about the slick fixer in the art
city by the river who will rewrap each hammer
and has conned you into believing that the
songs lie deep within the mahogany and not
the curling scraps around his feet.

After the day's dealers go home, you gather
your take and the bag is heavy: the moon long
down, the fox settled into her den in the middle
pasture below the massive cedar. You listen
to the wind through its blue berried arms and
know for sure that what you hear tonight is true
music, the souging notes all you need.

Process notes: Exploring whether to rebuild the old piano and being without it
drove this poem, needing to search out the music that surrounds us.

Outside The City Limits

by Pat Anthony

Hollyhocks grew at the end
of the clotheslines. Rocketed past
silver posts to sway above singing
steel ribbons and lure the risk taker
with saucer shaped blooms, stamens
laden with pollen and swollen
bumble bees. Escaping the steamy
house, she came and watched
them tumbling around like laundry
in the old Maytag. Looked for an
opening and slowly cupped
her hand behind a bloom,
steadied her breath, slid her fingers
forward and shut the glistening blossom,
deftly twisted the petals, snapped the
stem and launched the tiny missile
skyward. Like pastel parachutes they
fluttered open, bees winging toward
the eastern meadows, spent flowers
like deflated balloons. No one ever
questioned how she spent her time,
and bees don't tell.

Process notes: Childhood experience. Besides my brothers, no one ever knew about his game, nor did it occur to me I might get stung. It was a celebration of morning sun, busy bees, and possibility.

Voices

by Pat Anthony

Friday, and she calls from a dark place,
says how she fears weekends with their
various demands, two days without the
structure of nine to five. I listen but

notice how in the far distance the black
silhouette of what surely must be a
swallowtail butterfly departs from the
Rose of Sharon, how dark things lift off

and take wing if we let them go about
their business. I ask if she's making any
more scarves for the homeless camp and
she says yes, she's finally sorted it out,

those tangled skeins, yarn. Thinks
she may have an idea or two. In her
silence I see the tortoiseshell cat by
the cantaloupe flats making her own fun.

Let the querulous voice inside my head go
still, yield to our mutual goodbyes and decide
to count butterflies on the sweet spire, rush
to save the garter snake from the kitten.

Process notes: As a writer living with bipolar disorder, I find life presents with multiple choices. This was a concrete example.

Pat Anthony is a just retired Special Education teacher, writing from the heartland where she lives in the country. A lifelong poet, she writes daily, tries to edit faithfully, but enjoys the process of painting with words above all.
middlecreekcurrents.com

Red Shoes

by Vivienne Blake

You're not having red shoes.
In the shop Mum was cross.
Please, Mum, they're gorgeous
Red shoes no knickers, Mum's mantra
Look, the heels aren't that high,
I could dance all night in those
Oh, no you won't – you'll be back by ten.
Does that mean you'll buy them then?
We'll see. Try them on.

Comes next Friday, excited
twirling this way and that
in front of the mirror.
First bra, first nylons
sticky-out petticoat
swirly circular skirt
frilly blouse, waspie belt all the rage.
And those shoes ...

Dad takes one look and hits the roof.
What were you thinking?
She's only fourteen
Out of the question to go out like that.
But Daaaad ...
For once on my side, Mum sticks it out.
She's only young once
let her go.

So I did,
at the school Christmas hop
had a breathtaking time
as I danced with a prefect
the new cricket captain,

red shoes danced all the way home
on cloud nine.

Note: In response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 137.

The Cream Of The Garden

by Vivienne Blake

The bank, left wild for birds, insects,
and January primroses,
before violets, bluebells, nettles,
cow parsley and foxgloves.
The hedge, murdered every few years
for winter logs and kindling – a motley thing
of alder, hazel, chestnut, ash,
wild cherry and baby hedgerow oaks;
there's a hollow stump sprouting hazel hair,
where a blackbird raises a brood in Spring,
becoming hideaway for summer children.
Its brambles give us jelly and crumbles,
sweetness from undergrowth.
Sweetness, too, behind the shed
where grass cuttings, weeds and waste,
moulder undisturbed into compost,
loved by vegetables, flowers, fruit, and me.

Vivienne Blake makes quilts and poems and stories in her small village home in Normandy. Her slow and wobbly rambles often appear in the poetry. Finding the sublime in the mundane is her aim. Her work has been published in *Curio Poetry*, *Mouse Tales*, *Red Wolf Journal*, *Long Story Short*, *The Book of Love and Loss* and other anthologies.

The Last Move

by Marilyn Braendeholm

My mother had a weightless ease about her;
my father well grounded.

He was wordlessly quiet, a revolution
of important thoughts.

Strategy being his favorite, chess
by choice, and he always won.

Mom said games were for bullies –
I never understood until Dad lost.

He lost his quiet to an unshaven man
with a hole in his shoe.

Dad never played chess again, but Mom
remained weightless as any breeze.

Marilyn (Misky) Braendeholm lives in the UK surrounded by flowers, grapevines, bubbling pots of sourdough starter, and always keeps dog biscuits in her pocket for her blind Springer Spaniel. She never buys clothing without pockets. Her work is widely published.

A Poet's Life

by Edilson Afonso Ferreira

Poets are made by mode of enchantment,
and mine has been an exquisite one.
It comes from our common ground,
sometimes from dark underground,
even from sparkling highs of heaven.
Some days, somewhere, untied to myself,
world loses the poet and gains the autist,
till a good soul recognizes me,
reconnecting the mode,
like an out of order gadget.

Pilgrims From The East

by Edilson Afonso Ferreira

Sometime, somewhere in the East Lands,
there was a spot relieved by four rivers,
right place to settle shadowed a garden.
A traveling Potentate loved the scenery,
took possession of it, there building
magnificent a manor house.
Having not a hermit's heart and His will
for creation unsatisfied,
and applying unsuspected powers,
He created, to Him and His peers' likeness,
the beginning of a new nation, what he named
the humans.
Love and the desire to create, the bequest
we were awarded from our Lord
has leading us to populate and stretch out
the once Garden of Eden.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 158.

Inward Nobility

by Edilson Afonso Ferreira

I cannot accept the sacred and solemn
as private of the Popes and Bishops,
Kings and Judges.

On the various facets of daily life,
in the streets, avenues and alleys,
houses and hovels, by

 hugging a friend long not seen,
 returning an unexpected smile,
 giving a hand to the child and
 listening to an elderly,
 stopping to hear the birds
 and the buzzing of the bees,
 admiring the beauty of the horizons
 and the flowers of the gardens, and,
 for the exasperation of all the demons,
 making love, not war;

there is genuine a solemnity,
also grandeur and nobility, as
at the cathedrals, palaces and courts.

And so we go easily moving
heavy and hard wheels of time,
towards uncertain and unknown days.

Mr. Ferreira is a Brazilian poet who writes in English rather than Portuguese. Recent works have appeared in *Red Wolf Journal*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Whispers*, *Indiana Voice Journal*, *The Lake*, *Young Ravens*, *Synesthesia*, *Every Day Poems*, *Dead Snakes*, *The Literary Nest*, *Mocking Heart Review*, among others. He lives in a small town with wife, three sons and a granddaughter and, unhurried, is collecting his works for a forthcoming book. See some of his poems at <http://www.edilsonmeloferreira.wordpress.com>.

Pressing Forward

by Grace Harriman

If I could just
move, or even push, my way
(like a spectator edging up
to the front of the crowd,)
then perhaps the lungs could open
the eyes clear of memory,
the hands begin to build
something, anything,
that is fresh, colorful,
full of textures
beautiful to leave behind.

Grace Carley Harriman spent her life in Cambridge, Mass., teaching English and Chinese History to Middle Schoolers. She self published two anthologies of a wide variety of poems with creative writing assignments for each entry. She has traveled to China 14 times, to tour and volunteer teach in the Pangliu Village School and the Dandelion School outside Beijing. She retired to Bath, Maine where she writes poetry, gardens and walks her dogs.

The Lamp

by Christopher Hileman

Where is one thing,
One thought
One feeling
When I look in the mirror?

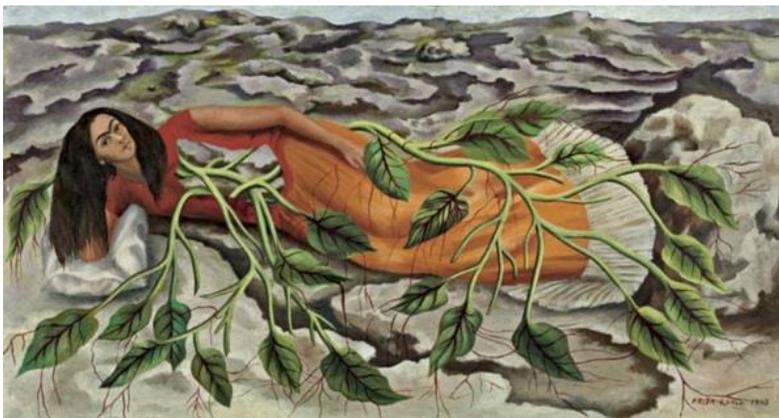
Asking this at once
I enter my purpose.
I look and discover
Who I am.

Rivera Remarks Ekphrastically

by Christopher Hileman

Oh Frida, dear, again
you have cut yourself, this time
breast high squarely on
and down your torso,
a rectangular gash we
can see through to one
of all the three breasts
emerging from sand and sea
and rock and so to
the vine and your brow
and your darkness worn like hair
as you lie staring
like a toppled rock
never would but, hey, this is
expressionism, no?

Maybe you're naive
but as you say, you are not
ever surreal.



Frida Kahlo, *Roots*

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 120.

In Mid-Voyage

by Christopher Hileman

On the far islands
under cirulean skies,
beneath the northern
stars in the later
hours of my dusty chapped heart,
I trudge square onto
the wall of ancient
stones left each on top aligned
with others grinding
beneath summer's wind
storms and rain sheets all sideways
to the lay of souls.
This place fares much worse
in the deep of winter's ice
and its servitude.

Note: Written in response to mention of Faroe Islands in Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 122.

Disturbing The Dead

by Christopher Hileman

You have asked of me
an utterly frank discourse
about the small ghosts
who clutter my curd.

What am I most afraid of?
you ask, punching holes
in my skin, bloodless
and swollen like insect bites.

Staring you down won't
work. I know because
I tried that aeons before
now in burial
grounds so ancient rhyme
was not yet an invention
and men did not write.

Waiting For Berry Pie

by Christopher Hileman

You said, "Let us pray."
I said, "Can't you see the past -
the shade of this day?"

It's true the garden
is filled with noon's bright green light.
Here my cat twitches.

Meanwhile, the berry
arbor grows green slender spines
and threatens to fruit.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 157.

Edgar Degas Speaks His Mind

by Christopher Hileman

My friends drop away
but I prefer solitude
and I so complain
and help them depart.

I have too much work to do.

And besides that, Jews,
they keep secrets so
I cannot tell who is who.

You call me to head
your movement... they write
in the stupid magazines.
Impressionistic
they call my art – No!
I resist this bastard word!
To Hell with you all!

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 164.

Christopher Hileman moved to Oregon in 1973. He has retired to live on the volcanic bluff overlooking Willamette Falls in Oregon City, Oregon. He ascends the stairs from his basement digs to improvise on his Yamaha keyboard or the house Playel grand when the calico cat releases him from below. The part-Irish Wolfhound here likes him.

The Man With The Pierced Tongue

by A.J. Huffman

and receding hairline fixed my car, and I suddenly felt more secure in my decision to dye the ends of my hair aqua. At 42, iterating such intentions draws caustic *tsks* from friends and family who do not understand my lack of connection with that number or my outright refusal to let it sway me from my desire to do things that, however strange, make me feel more like me.

I Am Fingers

by A.J. Huffman

crossed, symbolic
motion of desperation,
of a hand in need
of something, anything
real(ly). I am empty
prayer, hollow words
spoken with little hope
and even less belief.
I am bare(ly) going
through the ritualistic motions
that promise nothing but
another waking into another
desperate tomorrow.

I Dream In Fragments

by A.J. Huffman

of broken
mirrors
that never showed
anyone any type
of chance.
I weave myself
around their edges,
too carefully.
I cut myself every time.
Pieces of me
mingle with their jagged air
until I am breathing
nothing
but my own
dissolution.

A.J. Huffman has published thirteen full-length poetry collections, fourteen solo poetry chapbooks and one joint poetry chapbook through various small presses. Her most recent releases, *Degeneration* (Pink Girl Ink), *A Bizarre Burning of Bees* (Transcendent Zero Press), and *Familiar Illusions* (Flutter Press) are now available from their respective publishers. She is a five-time Pushcart Prize nominee, a two-time Best of Net nominee, and has published over 2500 poems in various national and international journals, including *Labletter*, *The James Dickey Review*, *The Bookends Review*, *Bone Orchard*, *Corvus Review*, *EgoPHobia*, and *Kritya*. She is also the founding editor of Kind of a Hurricane Press. <http://www.kindofahurricane.com>.

Bad Days

by Kathleen Kimball-Baker

When I open my mouth to speak
I talk in tears, so I'd rather
not talk much these days.

When I try to think how
to solve a problem, my head
cracks into pain, so I try not to think.

What has replaced thinking
is feeling. I have Feelings.
Big ones that suck all the air
out of a room, that want to
go on parade and slam cymbals,
wave pom-poms, and step high.

Between the tears, the headaches,
and the Big Feelings, the me
I like is buried and can't dig out.

So I leave the words alone,
let the tears tantrum
into exhaustion, scoop away
all thought, and set the whole
wretched lot outside my
bedroom while I sleep the
base sleep of a concussive.

And here's the hope that trills
in my heart: that all this
nastiness
will get bored
and slink away into the shadows.

Process notes: July 2016 marks 6 months since my head crash-landed on an icy sidewalk while walking my dogs. It's been a roller-coaster recovery, moments of feeling almost normal, followed by deep lows where my usual sunniness abandons me. I started reading a book yesterday called *The Ghost in My Brain: How A Concussion Stole My Life And How The New Science of Brain Plasticity Helped Me Get It Back* by Clark Elliott, PhD, an artificial intelligence researcher. It brought back a lot of the awful horrible fragile vulnerable feelings, so I think I'll skip his story and go straight to plasticity! And then maybe I can write something not quite so dark.

Kathleen Kimball-Baker is a writer, editor, and public health analyst in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is a three-time finalist in the Loft Literary Mentorship Competition, twice for fiction, and once for creative nonfiction; in 2012, her essay about becoming a dog sledder won an honorary mention from the Loft for creative nonfiction. Although she found poetry baffling for decades, something finally clicked and it is now her lens on life. Her poetry blog: In Linden Hills.

Critique

by Ron. Lavalette

The mirror these days
winces
when it sees me.

Metamorphosis

by Ron. Lavalette

Call me Looneyman Coffeeslut.
When you find me in the morning
long before the sun comes up,
(as if there's likely to be sun)
when you find me at the keyboard,
half a man half asleep, call me
Fingerdreams Hopeful, call me
Renovated Crashburn.
Yesterday I was Flabbergast
Downheart , but all my friends
(as if I'd had a friend)
loved me as I was, called me
Sameold Goodold when they
met me on the street, gave me
everything, I guess, they thought
a man like Hankernot Renunciation
might ever need. Still, though, need
followed me everywhere, hunger
dogged me secretly. Tomorrow
(as if there's any other day)
is another day. Tomorrow
you can call me Smiley Nirvana;
tomorrow I'll be Karmic Bailout.

Ron. Lavalette (Barton VT) has been widely published, both in print and online. A reasonable sample of his published work can be found at Eggs Over Tokyo. Ron. blogs at: Scrambled, Not Fried. <http://about.me/rlavalette>

Urban Upcycling

by Patricia McGoldrick

In 1870

Irish ancestors

Milked, by hand, two Jersey cows

Today

On my cedar deck

shamrock blooms

in stainless steel milking pail

Heritage lives on

Patricia McGoldrick is a Kitchener, ON, Canada poet writer, inspired by the everyday. Patricia is a member of The Ontario Poetry Society and the League of Canadian Poets. Poems found in anthologies and posted online. Check out words at PM27's blog. New year, new blog forthcoming at patriciamcgoldrick.com.

Discovery

by Sanjeev Sethi

As a child when I witnessed
marriage cavalcades
on overwrought passages,
strings of sorrow trussed me.
As though my cells were encoding
jiggers I wasn't conscious of.
Later it crawled:
Parturition had hierarchized another set.
Ordinariness of happiness wasn't for me.
Quiddity was itching to be ciphered.

Loss and Other Lessons

by Sanjeev Sethi

Ma was in hospital
with a heart condition.
We: sister and I
were at a friend's place.
Pa was at *daddy's funeral.

I remember, sister and me,
sitting on the parapet.
Sun was about to set.
That is when first essence
of loss filtered in.
This was not like losing
a pouch of picayunes.
This was big time loss.
As though someone had
punched my solar plexus.
The heart felt hard.
I wasn't even a teenager.

I remember her, my sister,
just about a teen, sitting
next to me. She seemed
much older, wiser, calmer.
I remember, looking at
her chocolate brown eyes,
looking at them for direction.
Her silence was palpable.
Finally she spoke:
"Don't feel bad. Daddy is with God."

Suddenly...
I was allayed of ache.

That sunset...
I learnt my first big lesson:
Trust.

*Daddy: Mother's father.

Me

by Sanjeev Sethi

I sit calmly in my cubbyhole,
so no one chucks
at me a crag.
I fear the hit –
as I bleed easy
and heal slow.

Episodes

by Sanjeev Sethi

(1)

"I beg of you to forgive me," you howled
with hands folded like the heroine
of a two-hankie film.

"Don't plead. I'm not God." I hollered.

My inner voice:

" your volume, the velocity
of word... in this relationship
at least you think you're god."

(2)

"Lying will get you nothing."

you squealed.

"Sometimes, telling the truth too."

I lisped and we laughed.

That was our truth.

Or lie?

Hindsight answers

such things.

Sanjeev Sethi has authored three books of poetry which includes *This Summer and That Summer* (Bloomsbury, 2015), widely published in several countries. He was recently in *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, *Futures Trading*, *The Aerogram*, *Revolution John*, *Chronogram*, *Duane's Poe Tree*, *Sentinel Literary Quarterly*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *New English Review*, *The Galway Review*, *In Between Hangovers*, *Otoliths*, and elsewhere. He lives in Mumbai, India.

The Butterfly Under Glass Is No Longer Interesting

by Debi Swim

Know thyself
someone said
I wonder
is it possible
or necessary
or a selfish conceit
this looking inward, searching
who I am, what I am, Why I am
while picking lint from
my belly button and marveling
at lines on my palms
and bumps on my head
getting to know the id
of me.
I'm just me ... a conglomerate
of experiences, reactions,
feelings, assumptions,
beliefs, evidences of the senses,
superstition, make believe, desire,
envy, imitation, a chowder of
sweet innocence and carnal thoughts,
a collage of mixed art media,
a farraginous collection
of aggregated
deceit and truth
I'm simply not so simple
to understand, dissect, explain,
sort, file, label, or pin down.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 116.

She Has A Farm In WV

by Debi Swim

She is an earth child
lover of green growing things
her hands trowels
to furrow a row
to plant the seeds
to nurture with
love and sweat.
She is loved in return
with bounty
of vine and root.
Industrious as the ant
in spring and summer
and autumn's scarcity,
she can fiddle by the fire
in winter's paucity.



Note: Written for my friend, Farmer, Educator, Activist, Librarian, Wendy Johnston, who also fights for the earth she loves and tills.

In response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 120.

Urban Decay

by Debi Swim

After a while the dewy finish is dull,
cracks, crevices, sagging, dark spots
mar the once youthful facade and
rather than maintaining what is there
you slather stucco and smooth it out
sometimes in garish colors and tints
but I hope you know that underneath
is the real worth and history of you.

Note: The title “Urban Decay” is a play on American cosmetics brand
and the extremes women (and men) go to appear ageless.

Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 121. That is Writer’s Digest Day
Day 7 prompt as part of National Poetry Month every April.

Phone Etiquette

by Debi Swim

Ring.

The sound

sharp as a saber's tooth

I cringe in guilt, ill at ease,

but I answer

my voice flat, unemotional

no gaudy sentiment

escapes my mouth

a vessel of banalities and half-

truths I've lavished on you

for years.

My resolve is paper thin

by this time

but my heart

has you on a black-

list because you love

my best friend.

"I'm fine. How are you?"

Yes, she's in...."

Note: Written to a word list: flat, ring, gaudy, tooth, paper, vessel, lavish, blacklist.
See Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 129.

Fireflies in the Summer

by Debi Swim

Stars dot the evening sky above, combust
In fiery, swirling, clouds of gas and dust,
Twinkling carelessly in heartless beauty
(And invite our fondest wishes come true)
But never yet I think made a child laugh
Like fireflies in the summer always do.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 135. Debi's poem communicates with Robert Frost's "Fireflies In The Garden".

Soul Portal

by Debi Swim

If this is all there is
and then nothing
if my sole looking forward to
is fertilizer for the growing things
or back to starry debris across the
sea of sky... I have to ask why?
Why do we gasp with awe
at the miracle of babies' birth
calf, kitten, pup, whelp, infant,
nebulae, souls, love, poems, art
where is the wonder in finite?
We want things to live on.
We want to be remembered.
Why is it that we can't just let go?
Obscurity is an obscene word,
Pauper's graves a silent shame.
Why is the want to live forever
so strong in the human heart?
Is it planted there and meant to be
or just another human fallacy?

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poem, Prompt 150.

Song in Minor Key

by Debi Swim

You ask for a song to sum up a life,
song of me, as though I should know
these words and melody not writ down
nor scored on staff paper.
I do not know myself.
Are there those
who can proclaim with assurance
This is me. I am *thus* and *thus*, page by page
I can account the totality of I am?

Some days I'm nice, some days I'm not
I've been unsure, sure, cocksure
brilliant, stupid, average
and if I say
I am a Christian
born under Cancer
a female

what does that explain
about the me you want me
to sing about?
You've waited too late
to ask for my song.
There was a time I loved to talk of me
now it is a most boring thing
to dwell on, and I am tired
of the subject.
But, if you'd like we could
talk all night of William Carlos Williams
or Emily Dickinson or Billy Collins
or Billy the Kid.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 191.

Debi Swim writes primarily to prompts. She is a wife, mother, grandmother and happy WV poet.

Was it a breeze

by Robert Walton

That nudged my study door,
Or a kitten
Busy making things its own,
Or my imagination's
Ghosts
All pushing together
To remind me that you died
Last April,
Leaving me with creaks and whispers
Only old houses make?
Was it a kitten,
Or a breeze?

Laoshi

by Robert Walton

Nameless stream,
Smooth and ancient
As a master's tomb,
Your black jade whispers
Fall too quickly into rapids' laughter
For me to catch the
Jest.
But cliffs above,
Robed
In Confucian silks of alpenglow
Glimmer
Like an old man's smile.
The day's last light on snow
Must be Li.

Note:

'Laoshi' means 'teacher' in Mandarin.

'Li' – Li is both a concept and a process in Confucian philosophy. It begins with proper social behavior, especially good manners and respect for elders. If practiced, it leads to wider perceptions of nature and harmony with the universe.

Robert Walton is a retired teacher and a lifelong mountaineer. His Civil War novel, *Dawn Drums*, was honored by two awards: first place in the 2014 Arizona Authors Association's literary contest and the New Mexico Book Awards Tony Hillerman Prize for best fiction. His poetry has been published in *Avocet* and other journals.

Then we,
As we beheld her striding there alone,
Knew that there never was a world for her
Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

—Wallace Stevens, “The Idea of Order at Key West”