



Sweet
SORROW

Red Wolf Journal

Spring/Summer 2017 Issue 11

Irene Toh & Tawnya Smith

Editors

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Sweet Sorrow

Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2017 issue.

What? Sweetness in sorrow? In heartbreak? In saying “goodbye”?

Do we see poems as *memento mori*? We attempt to immortalize what is already lost, or passing. What emotions well up when memory brings us back to the people and events that have filled our lives with richness, and our soul with a kind of spirituality? In retrieving them through memory, in our poems, we filter everything into universal truths through the impersonality of art; we invent fiction in order to see truths.

Fellow sojourners, there is sorrow in the parting, as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* says, but sweetness too. There is a difference, whether the parting is temporary or lasting. When Juliet says, “Parting is such sweet sorrow”, she had meant it in the first sense. Parting is only sweet if her lover departs but is expected to return, thus filling her heart with joyful anticipation. The French says it well, *au revoir* (till we meet again). Imagine if one is at all times with one’s lover, wouldn’t the law of diminishing returns set in at some point? Aha. Perhaps we are creatures who need melodrama, because there is intrinsic duality in our nature. We are ruled by the principle of opposites. How complicated we are, waxing and waning, goodness commingling with bad stuff. And if the lover never shall return? If your heart still pulses with love, a sweetness would have gone out of life, wouldn’t it? Depending on the degree, it could even drive one to suicide, as Romeo did, in the end, and Juliet too, in her turn. In the words of Emily Dickinson, “Parting is all we know of heaven,/And all we need of hell.”

This life is a paradox. We don’t know what joy is, till we’ve known sadness. We do not see light without shadow. We cherish life because there is death. Is it possible to experience pleasure and pain at the same time? Yes. This can come in whatever form. Our time together is pleasurable, deepened, heightened by the knowledge that we will ultimately part. Death comes to us all. So the deep abiding human experience is grief. We do not know what comes beyond. Like birth, death is a mystery. Because of this, we move between the poles of hope and despair. Human consciousness elevates us

and also besieges us with a sense of loss and uncertainty. From our abyss we have found religion, philosophy, spirituality, art. What art does, it survives us. Remember that one time when Meryl Streep quoted Carrie Fisher, “Take your broken heart, make it into art”? Bittersweet.

The sweetness in the memory, not in the sense of anticipation, alas, the second time round. Also in the sense of accepting the deep mystery of existence, by finding a peaceable way of being.

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

–Wendell Berry

It is ultimately up to us to find sweetness in sorrow, if only to bear that sorrow.

Au revoir!

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

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...your face, small, blurred in something almost sorrow, peers between them.

–Jane Hirshfield, “Envy: An Assay”

Keeping Company

by Ed Ahern

A woman I love
too much to hide from
has incurable cancer
flowing through her veins.

I offer what I can,
touch and presence,
while she begins to shed
what had seemed important

We talk of others loved
and of shared absurdities
so we can avoid broaching
in harsh certainty.

She cries sometimes
to an audience of one,
not because she's dying,
but because of loss of living

Ed Ahern resumed writing after 40 odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He's had 150 stories and poems published so far. His collected fairy and folk tales, *The Witch Made Me Do It*, was published by Gypsy Shadow Press. His novella, *The Witches' Bane*, was published by World Castle Publishing, and his collected fantasy and horror stories, *Capricious Visions*, was published by Gnome on Pig Press. Ed's currently working on a paranormal/thriller novel tentatively titled *The Rule of Chaos*. He works the other side of writing at *Bewildering Stories*, where he sits on the review board and manages a posse of five review editors.

Old Sorrows, New Poppies

by Iris J. Arenson-Fuller

Who doesn't want springtime?
Whose bones are not in a state
of perpetual cold stiffness, yet moving
because we hold an imaginary whip
to make them creak or groan aloud?

Who doesn't need brightness and warmth
to seduce us slowly, till we stretch
and sigh with almost-forgotten pleasure?
I know I want springtime, but maybe
you're not ready to make the old sorrows
drip with the syrup of new life.

We watch through swirly window designs
painted by the black dog's wet nose.
How soon will we spot the poppies
gone for decades after grief slammed us,
but that now revisit us in spring?

Grief covered our house, dark slimy algae.
We hostages looked out over barren yard,
scanned it with our eyes, mildly hopeful
in spite of it all, but no poppies chose
to fight a path out of earth to find the sun.

During sleep, some of you may dream
of red corn poppies, faces tipped up
to sultry afternoon sun, red balloons
of hope, symbols of new life emerging,
of abundance, and scary second chances.

Some people have dreams of black poppies,
opium poppies, symbols of death and doom.
I can tell you, though, that genus papaver,
much like us, returns only when ready

and not sooner, with an array of colors
and ways of showing up in the world.

If too many trees darken poppy potential,
they may hide their unrealized brightness
within the cold ground till nature signals
the all-clear, removing any obstacles.
and like us, they are resilient, even
when they don't seem to know it.

If you're not ready for spring,
won't allow your bitter sorrows
to sweeten even one puny drop,
poppies may sprout unseen by you.

You must want to heal, want springtime,
want pain to leave without goodbyes.
You have to want all bare trees left behind,
with frozen door locks, slippery ice patches,
and with those cold, weary bones.
I know I want springtime, but maybe
you're not ready to make the old sorrows
drip with the syrup of new life.

Choking Out the Present

by Iris J. Arenson-Fuller

In the City, where space
is a sought-after treasure
all living things seek out
corners or cracks to fill up
with prized possessions
or worthless clutter.

even the sidewalk cracks that were
once jumped over while singing rhymes,
have found their spaces filled with
migrant weeds escaping from
harsh confinement elsewhere.

their scraggly green heads pop up
to greet your beautiful feet as you
tiptoe around the dog mess, dodging
bold pigeons that scamper for bits
of stale New York pizza crust left by
Hansel and Gretel or a homeless dude.

now the rain teases our heads, foreplay
for the deluge that soon pours like
sorrows from my overflowing heart
as we kiss, then run for shelter, nodding
to the lions in front of the library who watch
me shake off the wet from my red shawl.

in my dreams, these memories pack tightly
into dusty old rooms I never knew existed,
soaking up tears, expanding like soggy bread,
they swell, they choke me into corners
where I crouch, crying the old grief away till
a new day wakes me again to reality.

your ghost still shows up after all these years,
spinning in white circles around my old body,
that you once loved, laughing, crunching leaves,
dancing me into a golden trance with your
hazel eyes and their subtle orange flecks,
that send me stumbling through the groundfog.

I wake and glue together the blurry pictures,
the far-away hum of ancient words that make
new mornings sticky with honeyed confusion,
wondering which memories are worthless clutter
in dusty frames, weeds choking out the present
without mercy.

Iris J. Arenson-Fuller is a poet, mom, grandmother, credentialed life coach, and founder and former director of Thursday's Child Adoption Agency for about 30 years. She has written poetry since the age of three, has been published in a variety of on line and print publications and a couple of anthologies. She gives poetry readings in her home State of CT. Her life and loss transformation coaching website's here.

I Climbed The Steep Embankment

by Salvatore Buttaci

That one time I could have turned away.
I could have set my feet toward safer ground;
instead, I hesitated and was found.
Demon-free I climbed the steep embankment
Where high above I saw inviting light
That flickered come-on fingers at its height.

Like all those years before I could have turned away.
I could have held more tightly to false gold
And missed the treasures a loving God could hold;
instead, I grasped the stones and climbed away
with God's Name on my labored breath I prayed.

Yes, that one time I could have turned away
like all the other times I shut my ears
to the One Who could put to rest my fears.
He stretched His hand. He touched my heart and mind.
Content was I to leave the world behind.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 269.

Papa Called It Polka

by Salvatore Buttaci

In his Italian accent
Papa called it “polka,”
and when he found a deck
hidden in my dresser
he’d toss it in the garbage.
“We don’t need no gamblers here,”
he’d say. “It’s the devil’s game.
“Stay away from polka.”

At weddings Papa danced
the polka like Astaire.
He’d have his nieces puffing
out of breath (Mama didn’t dance)
then when one polka ended,
Papa was ready for the next.
He refused to let
his nieces sit one out.

Years later Sharon taught me
how to shuffle, deal,
hold and fold my poker hand.
She showed me how to wear
the inscrutable poker stare
unlike the happy beaming face
Papa wore when he danced the night away.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 271.

She Hardly Remembers Anymore

by Salvatore Buttaci

Hiding in the wine cellar,
she presses her grapes against
the clear glass that offers proof
it can help her forget the toasts
of years so distant in the past
she hardly remembers anymore.

When the darkness settles in,
she gratefully accepts it,
takes it in her upturned palms,
a gift she wants to deserve,
clasps her hands as if in prayer
so darkness cannot escape.

But once more dawn slithers
another new sun
between her closed fingers,
pries them open
while she pretends the wine,
possessively demanding,

is instead a red knight
who saves her,
not the enemy, a friend,
helming in a carmine sea
to sail her free
on the placid Waters of Death,

that last red wound
to whisk her away to abstinence.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 272.

Remembering

by Salvatore Buttaci

In youth, I said in my superiority,
“I have forgotten more than you will ever know.”
Pompously I stood so tall on the pedestal
of my own making, arrogant know-it-all
at the ready to make claims beyond the unseen
territory of my life. I stomped through the years,
teeth bared, fist clenched, convinced I would live forever,
the face reflected in the mirror set in stone.
I laughed when Papa said, “We’re machines. We break down.”

Now in my declining years, I beg apologies.
The sure step of younger days is gone. I stumble.
The pedestal was swept away in the torrents
of my life. The mirror is a friend of mine no more.
And the highlight of this old man’s confession?
I have forgotten more than you or I have known.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 273.

Happinella

by Salvatore Buttaci

It was the task of Happinella to stir joy into the Cauldron of Dissatisfactions. Eons ago the Senior Crowned Heads had designated her worthy of such a role. Add to that, her persistent badgering of these Seniors to award her the magic stick.

“Allow me to rid Arondor of sadness and pain,” Happinella begged them.

After much hawing, they relented; after all, she was resolute in her request and, perhaps more important, she was the only offspring of the now deceased Senior of Seniors, Yezzerai.

The pandemic plague of evil infested nearly all Arondorians. While they slept, the flying squadrons of wasponias descended, strafing them with venomous transformations. The good morphed into evil; the content into malcontents. Victims of these attacks were defenseless. Someone had to once again stir the Cauldron that had for too long remained untouched.

The consensus? In the daughter of Yezzerai, they rested their hope. Since the recent wasponian invasion of Arondor, most of the afflicted, carriers of the evil strain, waged war against the good.

Happinella spent her lonely days and perilous nights stirring the Cauldron, convinced she could save the subjects of Arondor by destroying the giant stinging wasponias that threatened to conquer them.

Then one morning, on her way to her stirring after a brief rest, Happinella saw a child climbing out of the Cauldron into which he had tumbled. The aromatic waters, the sweetness of harvest time, a temptation too alluring for a young boy to avoid.

Happinella said aloud, “Out of a bad thing will come a good thing,” for it dawned on her that when the boy stood drenched beside the Cauldron, he sparkled like a river sprite, gold as the flowered fields, and smiling like one who had discovered joy.

“Drink from the Cauldron!” cried Happinella to all the land. “Drink joy and gladness. Fill yourselves with goodness.”

The following night, the wasponias dropped down from the black sky and found their prey, not cowering in their beds, but peacefully asleep.

The whirr of their stingers rotated, barely piercing their skin.

Happinella left her stirring long enough to command the sweepers to gather up and burn the dead scaly wasponias and toss them into the fiery pits of the Ire River.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 276.

Find The Courage

by Salvatore Buttaci

It can happen that one,
confronted with joy,
can wince as if in pain.
Accustomed to sorrow,
steeled for sudden jolts,
she can mistake festoons
of scented spring flowers
for requiem wreaths,
tramp instead of ramble
through nature's delights,
sidestep the pavement cracks
to avoid the pest of misfortune.
Joy is everywhere!

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 282.

May Again

by Salvatore Buttaci

In floral finery
these petaled debutantes
come alive in spring,
bursting from beds of seeds
in May's post-winter sleep.
The garden celebrates!

Teeming rains of April?
the capricious madness
of March? All gone at last.
The warm winds, once brutal,
Now lead flowers to dance.
The garden celebrates!

This be their season's joy:
To delight in the waft
of their fragrance carried
by the breeze and divided
among lonely lovers.
The garden celebrates!

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 286.

Lorca

by Salvatore Buttaci

after his murder in the courtyard
his body was sent to the cellar morgue
where men of science dissected his flesh
in search of those seditious words unsaid
that waited for the right poem
in the depths of him from which
they might one day metrically sail free

all they found were not unlike discoveries
made in the battlefield autopsies of heroes
who lie gut-wrenched, organs exposed
to the elements of snow and ice and time
while their filmed eyes like cameras
indelibly capture life's passing
which the souls of them carry away

he wrote poems in his Spanish tongue
danced them down paper roads like village songs
meant to be sung if only to rally the listless
but those unversed in the art of sweet language
those whose iron hands wield iron guns
can only rattle destructive syllables of fire
can only murder the poet but never the poem

can never hear the language that trilled within him
those sweet birds with so many stories to tell
about sharing the expanse of land and sky

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 296.

The Muldoon

by Salvatore Buttaci

Worst place you can drop a melancholic boozier
Is some dew drop inn or Cliff's Hangout or Saloon.
The muldoon can go from sober to fried-to-the-gills
quicker then you can say, "Make mine Bud," and he often
does, socking steins away like a brewery fills
barrels. Don't expect him to try something new.
St.Pauli's Girl, Tuborg, even Miller. He's a muldoon,
meaning he's staunchly opposed to changing his mind.
The hour doesn't matter. He's got a lifetime to spit at time.
When the beer level suds up behind bloodshot eyes,
he starts singing old songs like "Heart of Gold,"
not that he has one, or "Maggy May" he never knew,
or "Hotel California" he couldn't afford.
Besides, he hates the beach, those pesky flies, sand grains
in his sandwich or weighing down the foam
in his canned beer. "Last one," says the bartender.
We're closing up." The Muldoon can hardly stand
but he orders two Buds, one for now,
the other for the road.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 298.

No Regrets

by Salvatore Buttaci

Naysayers insisted I'd rue the day
I married a woman much younger than I,
but time has vindicated me of their folly
because not once have I ever regretted
taking Sharon for my loved and loving wife.
Love demands courage, a risking of the heart,
a deep plunge into unknown waters.

To not take the chance invites the pain of
loneliness, unshared light and darkness,
a heart crusted with sadness, an emptiness.
The only day we shall rue will be the closing
of our together life, but even then,
in our sorrow we'll keep the faith alive:
Love never dies. We are forever.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 302.

Closed Circle

by Salvatore Buttaci

The bargains I made with life were games played
without rules or prior preparation.

I aimed for what greed dictated, fudged efforts
to reach goals, trying hard to climb each rung,
patted myself on the shoulder when I won;
kicked myself in the rear when I lost.

Life was a game of seasons. I watched flowers
grow, bargained with the wind, then sadly
watched them die in autumn. I marveled
at the floral cycle of life,
but never wondered about my own,
how the flight of time hardened the soft face

of youth, bent the bones, clouded the mind
and blurred the advent of my winter.
Like the drooping rose, I wait the clank
of shovel, the pings of clumped dirt,
a new spring, a new life, a circle closed.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 304.

Waiting For Shelley

by Salvatore Buttaci

My dear brother in poetry,
I waited for your prompt return
from the Gulf of Spezia where
you sailed the Italian waters
with two friends who likewise loved
to sail the Ligurian Sea.
Only the month before, we cheered
your thirtieth birthday. Mary
prepared your favorite supper.
We toasted goblets filled with wine.
We cheered your poem "When Soft Voices
Die." Now July gallops away
with you in tow. Percy, silent
the lyrical lines you will not write,
unheard laughter at *Casa Magni!*
How deep the sorrow, how great the loss!
I spend my hours now reading
your poetry, your timeless sonnet
of the colossus: "...boundless and bare
the lone and level sands stretch far away."

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 310.

Salvatore Buttaci won the \$500 Cyber-wit Poetry Award in 2007. His story collections, *Flashing My Shorts* and *200 Shorts*, were published by All Things That Matter Press. His work has appeared in such publications as *The New York Times* and *The Writer*. He and his wife Sharon reside in West Virginia.

A Voice Within

by Marilyn Braendeholm

And there's the sun. Climbing
the horizon. Drifting. Light
strung through trees. It sings
with a foggy voice, joining
impatient birds. And, I see

the birdbath needs refilling;
blackbirds drum their wings,
spilling water from their
tasselled tails. And, there
in the corner by the fence,

the roses are full heads
of bloom. I'll cut a pillar
of fired-orange, a bouquet
for the table. A displayed
feast for lunch. And after,

I'll re-oil the cutting board –
the teak one. I love it, and
my affection for it's showing.
It's old. Honorable. Sturdy.
Worn. Like my sensible shoes.

So I take on tasks by minutes.
Each day an epithet at sunset.

Marilyn 'Misky' Braendeholm lives in the UK surrounded by flowers, grapevines, and the rolling hills of West Sussex. She never buys clothing without pockets. Her work is widely published.

a child walks in the dark

by Darren Demaree

[what pleasure]

i told my children what pleasure is to you will dictate how much flesh of the bloom you pull out of your teeth what if i can swallow it whole what if i can swallow it whole what if i can swallow it whole they asked and i told them both that was boring and fascist but good for them i suppose

*

[an orange fruit bowl]

i told my daughter an orange fruit bowl is useless if there is no fruit in the bowl and she told me that was exactly what was wrong with boys

*

[drinking where the animals drink]

i told my son drinking where the animals drink is a lovely picture but once you're with the deer you're with the deer forever i know this as i am with the deer

Darren C. Demaree is the author of six poetry collections, most recently *Many Full Hands Applauding Inelegantly* (2016, 8th House Publishing). He is the Managing Editor of the Best of the Net Anthology and Ovenbird Poetry. He is currently living and writing in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.

Unplanned Feelings

by Edilson Afonso Ferreira

The world did not know, nor did we,
until today, of our relatedness,
soul mates by birth, although unknown
to each other, so long separated by fate.
Our eyes betraying us, shining by an announced
and foreshadowed sin, our hearts beating loudly,
strange emotion reddening our faces.
We know it is presage of love,
Lord of all of us humans.
Presage also for unhappy days of sorrow,
for a man cannot betray his best friend
and a woman must honor her husband.
Story that recalls old prohibited affairs
suddenly reborn in unsuspected parties
to incautious people like me and you,
quite unable to hide their feelings,
letting go so late found a love.

Sweet Heritage

by Edilson Afonso Ferreira

I surely know they are lost on the brumes
of a magic almost surreal past time, but
we are always, mainly at longing nights,
pushing away the mists and remembering
so sterling old days, when we did not know
how happy we were.

Surrounded at home by family,
guests commonly stared at us
admiration and ecstasy glances,
yet envious and jealous ones.

People cannot ever dream all the joy we have
on remembering those glorious unique days,
for so little affordable.

Although sorrowful we feel,
doubtful of current and coming times,
the bliss of our past still shines, being
proud pledge for the rest of our lives.

Your Earthly Days

by Edilson Afonso Ferreira

At your birth, you frightened people
by loud and harsh a cry, clamoring
by the loss of the motherly warmth
and arriving, without prior consent
at strange, indeed bright new world.
Since then, immutable fate, which
always writes the history of our days,
has given you, besides your family,
your friends, lovers, also enemies.
This, with little of hard a toil and
unfailing faith, fatally will bring you
the lot awarded for all of us: doubts
and fears, defeats, and, sometimes,
some triumphs and glories.
Expect usual and pitiless pain, but
never abdicate to pursue happiness,
although always hidden and furtive.
Prior to all, remember Eternity remains
on the Lost Paradise, far beyond from us.
Valorize your earthly days, never denying
those dark and dull ones, they are as a fee
to be alive; they are our Star of David, that
we must not refuse to carry.
Blend them with the happy ones, smiling
and going ahead, fearless and audacious,
just as must be a man.

Mr. Ferreira, 73, is a Brazilian poet who writes in English rather than Portuguese, having been published in venues like *Right Hand Pointing*, *The Lake*, *Spirit Fire Review*, *The Provo Canyon*, *Red Wolf Journal*, *Whispers*, *Indiana Voice Journal*, *Synesthesia*, *Algebra of Owls* and some others. Ferreira lives in a small town (Formiga (MG) with wife, three sons and a granddaughter and is trying to publish his first poetry book by this year of 2017. He began to write at age 67, after retirement as a Bank Manager. Has been nominated for The Pushcart Prize 2016.

Keeping Warm
by Christopher Hileman

It turns out after
all the pleading and squirming
that I have partners
in robbing the store.

It turns out after vespers
I have a halo
of sorts and nubbins
where either pimples or wings
might erupt and soon
reveal how to hold
my tangled life. I hope to
keep it warm with love.

Thank the Goddess please –
and all the trueheart bastards
who sing near Her throne.

Do Not Go Dark...

by Christopher Hileman

I sat for days in the shade
hoping for a vision of love
or some story I could share.
My cat rubbed me up,
leapt to the bough behind me
and settled in to wait for God.

When the rain began,
we went back in the house.
The cat wandered off.
I cooked my tea, then sat,
looking out the window.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 278.

Old Wood

by Christopher Hileman

I am the old wood
receiving you as the rain
in all its aspects,
as mist, as the splash
or the roar of a tempest,
with the black of night
or the sun peeking
and the arc doubled sometimes,
receiving your moods
and the feel of you
whether you are cold or warm
and you strip me down.

Foggy Dawn

by Christopher Hileman

She said there's room for
some kind of flash in the pan,
some flare up of hope,
some change in the shape
of slithery things to come
once the sun rises...

if the sun rises
on this latest weird damn day
of all the long days

that trail behind us
and are still rolling over
our crushed and shattered
arrangements and poise

(we had no right to them all)

as we lay them down
with the feathers shed
in our summer's latest molt,

We call as swans do.
our bodies newly pink
and utterly bare.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 299.

Taking The Chance

by Christopher Hileman

“Marry me,” I say,
casting all wisdom aside.

You look like a cat
looks to an entrapped
mouse and I change my whistle
from tenor to shrill
in that sudden squall
from a flensed and open heart.

I stand by my words.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 305.

The Gale

by Christopher Hileman

I've had to change out
the ropes that hold the willow
upright despite rain
and wind, gale sized stones
that fall at the shallowest
slant and bounce along
our path through the brush.

You told me this was my job.

Not that I ever
refused you a thing –
I have never refused you.
You know this is true.
and yet you doubt my
purity of heart and soul,
love and devotion.

The gale is winning.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 308.

Not This Time

by Christopher Hileman

I showed up, opened
the program and hoped for sauce
to squeeze out my heart
with my red red blood
that my words might mean a thing
for once, and maybe
appear soaring with
the flock of full fledged word birds.

Maybe I will get
it right this one time...

Then my head just exploded
and the heat of me
dispersed like day fog
on a summer coast morning
and I fluttered by –
a boy of all boys
in my dreamy escapades
from stumblebum shores.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 309.

Feeling Distant

by Christopher Hileman

I took a wrong turn
on the way to Pluto's moon.
I forget the name
of the place I've been
searching for in all this time
circuiting the edge
where the sun is just
a bright, largish star.

It's cold
out here, as you know.
I hoped to find signs
and I still might at a guess
but it feels remote
and getting more so
as the oxygen runs low
and the windows freeze.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 314.

A Lonely Man

by Christopher Hileman

A sense of the end
dogs me all around the slope
behind my log house
as I pull slivers
out my dad-blamed body parts
and hear the rooster
crow in his cage built
by Jose for him last spring.
A fine black fellow
is Leo, with eyes
that pierce the hen perfumed air
and his hens stay close.
I have no hen, me.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 320.

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.

Goodbye and Hello

by John Huey

That was no way to leave me,
at the start of a year, with heartless
fortitude undressing, dressing and
heading out the door.

Within the disquiet you remain a composite,
more than one person but just one as
only you could have ever been.

In the car, close by you, in the dark, in
January, we took our break and headed
West across the divide that I drove but
once but have never, ever driven again
as even now, as an older man, over the
trips West in the hundreds, yes, hundreds,
sometimes in the air, in my astonishment,
is a remembrance of you.

Flying over the interstates still sometimes
seeing you sleeping next to me on the back
seat all the way out, your breath on my ear
but in separate rooms, intimate but fleeting
as you, for a while, could never
stray far from me.

A presence, you even came to the mountains
when your father died and I tried to empathize
but you, an orphan twice, were inconsolable
and there threw yourself, like we all did, to
hedonism as a diversion and made my
life hell for a while.

But beast that I am I recovered and made it
down to Boston and the student nurses and
ran a rampant mile or two up one end of
Boylston and down the other until we found

ourselves meeting at your sisters' place, she
your twin but more sensible, and there,
finally reconciling your opacity and
determined self-rule, I told myself
I was rid of you.

Though there, in recollection, was that last
leg of our only road trip, up on the borderline
near the park in San Francisco on the
good end of Balboa Street where I was
broken again, dreaming of being with
you forever in some damaged fantasy
that involved a passion that was an
impossible rub for the misaligned as,
out of all proportion and with all due
warning, I persisted which was a pattern
of sorts of long standing only broken
decades later when it just timed out.

Despite seeming bewilderment, the absent
memory abates but the wheels keep turning
on the asphalt ribbon through Texas and
New Mexico, across Arizona and beyond, up
the Coast Highway, the elephant seals on the
rocks still calling from below, their fresh
cries resonant always though far from
audible, a long way from that
course in miracles.

John Huey's student work of the 60's-70's was influenced by teachers in Vermont such as John Irving at Windham College and William Meredith at Bread Loaf. After many years he returned to writing poetry in 2011. He has had poems presented in *Poetry Quarterly* and in the *Temptation* anthology published in London by Lost Tower Publications. Work has also appeared in *Leannan Magazine*, *Sein und Werde*, at *In Between Hangovers*, *Bourgeon*, *The Lost River Review* and *Perfume River Poetry Review*. His full-length book, *The Moscow Poetry File*, will be out on Finishing Line Press on October 13, 2017.

between

by Diane Jackman

at the water's edge I see him skim
a stone across the waves
it bounces four five times
sinks into the ebb tide
waves roll in break on the shingle
there is no seventh wave

grey sky and grey sea
I see him bend to choose again
draw back his arm familiar
the stone flies against the sand-cliffs
the wandering dog's pale coat
lost in the half-light

a bell tolls on the evening air
at my feet a square
of sea-glass thumbnail small
through a glass darkly
I see him move into the sea
strike out and swim away

Process note: An other-worldly incident walking my late husband's dog along his favorite beach.

Diane Jackman's poetry has appeared in small press magazines and many anthologies, and has won several competitions. Starting out as a children's writer she now concentrates on poetry. Her writing draws heavily on the past, and often reflects elements of magic realism.

I Edit My Life

By Michael Lee Johnson

I edit my life
clothesline pins & clips
hang to dry,
dirty laundry,
I turn poetic hedonistic
in my early 70's
reviewing the joys
and the sorrows
of my journey.
I find myself wanting
a new review, a new product,
a new time machine,
a new internet space,
a new planet where
we small, wee creative
creatures can grow.

Michael Lee Johnson lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era. He is a Canadian and USA citizen. Today he is a poet, editor, publisher, freelance writer, amateur photographer, small business owner in Itasca, Illinois. He has been nominated for 2 Pushcart Prize awards for poetry 2015, nominated Best of the Net 2016. Poetry published in 33 countries, 130 YouTube poetry videos: <https://www.youtube.com/user/poetrymanusa/videos>. He is Editor-in-Chief of 2 poetry anthologies, *Moonlight Dreamers of Yellow Haze*, and *Dandelion In A Vase of Roses*. He is administrator of a Facebook poetry group over 12,500 members: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/807679459328998>. He is editor of 10 poetry sites.

Snow Drops

by LindaAnn LoSchiavo

We planted snow drops right before Leigh died,
His way of coming out next spring, the first
Who'd muscle through tough ground, out-stripping Lent—
Hard-packed with Christ and crocuses each place
You looked, as gaudy gay as Mardi Gras.

Leigh never lived white life out loud, his name
Changing like Easter bonnets, pegged to who
Was listening. He took me to a church,
Cried at my cousin's wedding. Someone told
Me, "You're *next*." We suspected Leigh, best man
To spoil my soul, help me rehearse my loss,
Try out my strength. Love showed me hard things, Leigh,
Last snowfall your sworn downfall. Snow drops, Leigh,
White-stamped your final passport—just renewed.

Process notes: Recently, there was a death in my family; my favorite aunt died Jan. 28, 2017. Also on June 15th, 2017 there will be a memorial concert for poet-violinist Kate Light, who died of cancer at age 56. Talking to the organizers about the event and Kate's last days bring back memories of all the times I featured her at my long-running NYC poetry series. The people in the poem are not Kate nor my aunt—but I have been in a "funeral state of mind" lately.

The Wake

by Linda Ann LoSchiavo

The funeral's assemblage—standing room
Full—humid honeycomb of black-winged veils
Amid a lone queen bee who, rumors say,
Is now quite wealthy, stared as the young priest
Recalled the life of the deceased, a man
He never met. In air arranged by gnats,
This widow might feel the scourge of jealousy
Of wasp-waisted blonde mistresses who sought
The secret bin of sweetness avidly
But dreamt a better end to this affair.

Anonymous bouquets surround his bier.
All roses have been shorn of thorns as if
Transgressive floral displays might cause tears
Throughout the endless swarm from honey-house.

An accidental overdose occurred
Before her husband could file for divorce
As planned. Conspicuously, her eyes close
While mourners pray or check their buzzing phones.

Her mind is cataloguing shameful stings
Of infidelity. Son of a b.

Native New Yorker **Linda Ann LoSchiavo** is completing her 2nd documentary film on Texas Guinan [1884-1933] and dodging gun-molls in Shubert Alley and in decommissioned speakeasies. To revive her spirits, she puts pen to paper. *101 Fiction, Hawaii Review, Ink & Letters, Metamorphose, Measure, Mused, Peacock Journal, Windhover,* and *Nous* are recent credits.

Discovery!

by Patricia McGoldrick

Music of ancestors and Irish descendants—
That's what I learned in grade 3
When Mrs. G. taught us to sing *I'se the bye*.

So many years later
on a summer family vacation
I met the people who sang these songs
From the west coast to the northern tip

I discovered
Newfoundland's
Wildflowers and whales
Melt-in-your-mouth pastry
Partridge berries
Bakeapple jars of jam
Seafood chowder
Catfish and codfish
Kitchen parties
Viking settlements
Magma on Gros Morne Mountain
Former fjords at Western Brook Pond.

It is all digitized now on the machine* but in that summer
We learned about the loss of the cod fishery from a son who showed us
The lobster traps and the nets and the old shacks
We saw and felt and touched the artifacts of days gone by
Near green mountains with spots of snow
Rippling waters
Misty hazy foggy weather over bogs
nestling practically perfect pitcher plants,
Growing there, in the rich peat soil of Newfoundland,
With not so purple flowers, in the real.

*machine—Newfoundland slang for a computer

Patricia McGoldrick is a Kitchener, ON, Canada poet writer who is inspired by the everyday. Patricia is a member of The Ontario Poetry Society and the League of Canadian Poets. Visit her blog at patriciamcgoldrickdotcom or on Twitter @[pmcgoldrick27](https://twitter.com/pmcgoldrick27).

Picking Time

by Josh Medsker

Hands purple with blackberries,
staining the rubber handles
on my primer blue Redline. We go

tearing down the hill, plumes fanning out
behind us in distant gravel.

Calves aching,
we find the new jumping place
behind Gladys Wood,
and spend the afternoon flying
and failing and flying higher
than we could have hoped,
groaning at dusk,
on the trudge back up home.

I feel the purple on my hands again
in my backyard garden
crushing the years between my worn knuckles
sending sweet fruit and memory to the wind.

Josh Medsker is a New Jersey poet, originally from Alaska. His work has appeared in many publications in the U.S. and abroad. For a full biography of Mr. Medsker, please visit his website <http://www.joshmedsker.com>

another birthday

by Sergio A. Ortiz

bundled up
with the sweat of your body

free of doctrine
i touched myself

with natural softness
the years crumbled

in the twinkling of an eye
born-again naked

at sixty-seven

Sergio A. Ortiz is a two-time Pushcart nominee, a four-time Best of the Web nominee, and 2016 Best of the Net nominee. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Algebra Of Owls*, *Free State Review*, and *The Paragon Journal*. He is currently working on his first full-length collection of poems, *Elephant Graveyard*.

Reflected

by Roslyn Ross

Reflected, in the mirror
of your eyes, remembering
in that dream of who you

were, who I was, or might
have been, if things had
been different, if the depths
of your being, had, like the

lake, flung back the truth
of who you were, who I
was, or might be; and yet
even if it had, I would only
ever have been a reflection.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 245.

Crack

by Roslyn Ross

Crack the moment magical,
ramble through the past,
find the pest of sorrow;
wince in memory's grasp.

Hiccup through the thoughts,
try to catch your breath,
let regrets be banished;
festoon in face of death.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 282.

Roslyn Ross is a former journalist, who has worked in newspapers and magazines around Australia. In recent years she has worked as a freelance manuscript editor. Born in Adelaide, she has spent much of her time living overseas, including Antwerp, Belgium; Bombay, India; Luanda, Angola; Cape Town, South Africa; Johannesburg, South Africa; Lusaka, Zambia; Vancouver, Canada; London, United Kingdom and Lilongwe, Malawi. She has also spent extended periods in Russia, Portugal and the United States, as well as living across Australia, including Adelaide, Port Pirie, Wagga Wagga, Melbourne, Perth and Brisbane, and is now settled in the Adelaide Hills. She began writing poetry at the age of twelve and has had work published in a number of anthologies, mainly in the US, but also more recently, in *When Anzac Day Comes Around, 100 Years from Gallipoli Poetry Project*, edited by Graeme Lindsay.

My Heart Is A Crucible Of Light
by Elena Sands

Blue twilight frames your face
from the window above your bed.
My fingers trace contours,
weaving spells of sleep.
My heart is a crucible of light,
a maelstrom of surrender.
We poor devils in love,
how we spin.
We are storms of joy
in teacups and coffee mugs.

I catch raindrop seconds and die
over and over,
lying here watching you sleep,
sirens sing me stupid and blind
I don't mind,
I never mind.

Maybe that's what love is,
an extreme focus,
tunneled everything.
We wanderers in the dark
finally see the path.

I've found my home.
You are my home.

Originally from Texas, **Elena Sands** is currently a math teacher in Ohio.
She's been writing poems since first grade.

Reflections On Love

by Debi Swim

Who can understand love?
It is a tarnished mirror distorting
images, little chinks of
silver missing, reflecting poorly.

It is algebra, quantum physics,
a nursery rhyme of counting
one, two buckle my shoe.
It is a recipe with vague measures...
a sprinkle of salt, a pound of butter,
enough flour to make wet dough,
sweeten to taste and bake in a hot
oven. We never seemed to get the
ingredients just right, the measure
near enough. Must we throw it out?

Let's try something new like chicken
tikka masala or the old math, with no
division, only the multiplication table
at which to eat our fill of love.
Let us get rid of this ancient mirror
and gaze into each other's eyes.
Let's be clear in our reflections.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 245.

Coming And Going Colors Of Life by Debi Swim

I began in righteous redness
knitted like yarn into a
recognizable thing. I grew
in darkness, inky onyx,
warm and snug in my fleshy bed.
I came wailing and kicking
purple-tinged, red-faced,
mottled mess of blood and vernix
into the afterbirth of turbulence...
and still I struggle to become,
probably always will, and yet
I've made a little progress
toward the coming end when
in hues of blue and parchment,
I'll close my eyes against the bloody,
mottled mess I leave behind,
and snuggle into the inky onyx darkness
of my alabaster marble rest.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 246.

Picturing You

by Debi Swim

Old photographs and 8mm home movies
boxed and stored away waiting for a
rainy day of perusal and the usual
smiles, embarrassed grins, tears and yens
for those old days, gone days, nevermore days.

Christmases, birthdays, picnics, family reunions,
graduations, weddings, babies, toddlers and teens,
the years fly by like a dream, a stream of poignant
memories and faces no longer seen. Alive then,
long time gone now, just a hiccup, an interrupt

in the continuum of life. And the rain pours down,
peters out, the sun comes blaring through the clouds
and the seconds fly by and here am I wondering
who'll be next. Someday, on another rainy day,
who will be looking for my face?

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 247.

The Voice In My Head

by Debi Swim

This poem doesn't want to be written.
Its voice taunts me that I don't know
enough. It shouts that I am not a poet,
for goodness sakes, who do I think I am?
Well, obviously, I'm not a Poet with a
capital P but I do write something I call
poetry and what does it matter if I'm
not published or well known or whatever,
my voice trails off softer and softer.

The voice snickers.
All the great poems, she says, have been
penned, all the great topics taken. All the
glorious words, lissome phrases, perfect
forms used. You, she sneered, are too late
to this hallowed task. Just a want to be.

Well, but we can't all be a Dickinson, a Heany,
an Oliver, or a Pardlo. Besides when they first
got those itchy fingers and those emotions
clamoring to be thrown up like yellow bile,
and hurt that throbbed like an abscessed tooth,
well, did it all come out ready for publication
or did it all come out in a rush of whooooo
I needed that. I needed to say that. I NEEDED
to hear myself say that.

Okay, so answer me that, voice. But, voice had
left. Voice had no more sneer or snuff left. And
I thought, humph, well, and so. I am going to
write me some words. I'm going to let these
words speak for themselves and if, if, IF, they want
to tumble into a poem, well, okay, then. Like, I
have anything to do with it. When the words want
to come, when they are ready to be born, when that
head crowns, baby, you got yourself a lusty cry of life.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 248.

Collateral Damage

by Debi Swim

grief did not ask if it could come.
nor beg my leave. nor was civil
in any respect of civility...barged
in, she did and changed my life
again. Beside the thin ghostly
lines marked in rows over my heart
she, with surgeon's precision, scalpel's
keenness cut the wound with one swift
straight slice removed another part
of my heart, daubed the blood, and sewed
with the finest measure and skilled hand
the daintiest seam that would in time
leave the faintest trace of white. But, I
disappear one small piece at a time
leave behind the rasp of withering husk.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 250.

No Degree of Separation

by Debi Swim

Ah, sweet sorrow that accompanies me
in waking hours and in night's sad dreams.
That you should give such pleasure and such pain
is a curious thing to me, burden
and yet, a comfort. You show me all the
places we have been, point out a stranger's
shy smile and how it dimples just as his
and in my dreams that feel so tangible
I'd swear I felt the weight of his tender
touch, exquisite sweetness, exquisite sting.
Mind and body so entwined that thoughts, thoughts
could make the heart ache, the eyes tear, torture
the lungs with air withheld. Oh, sweet sorrow
that transcends transient time to weave her
paths from mind to the very core of life.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 254.

Mew Muse
by Debi Swim

The morning dawns, becomes a familiar thing,
after the night's forgetting. I sit at my laptop
waiting for the words to come, a direction to
point the way. I feel your presence out in the

hall, you are stalking the light that speckles
the floor. Stealthy, slyly, you reach out a paw
and pounce. I will you to come into my room,
to twine between my feet, rub against my shins,

jump in my lap and mew music into my thoughts.
But, no, I hear you out on the sunny side
of the patio. You sit on regal haunches,
looking out over the dewy lawn, completely

ignoring me. At first, I am merely impatient, a
little huffy at your attitude but as the moments
draw a long line on the day I become afraid...
wonder if this time you've gone for good.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 255.

Copper Mettle

by Debi Swim

Beginnings are copper, newly minted pennies
promises dropped into the piggy bank for
a rainy day, the value in the collecting, saving,
looking forward. Hope squirreled away in a
fragile thing to be broken in the end. For all
things end with a verdigris coating, blue-
green from sweat, tears and the rust of time.
And for every ending there is a new beginning
with a blue-green patina promise at the end.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 258 and Prompt 259.

Dark Forest Of The Soul

by Debi Swim

It smells like fear
acid, sharp, razor sharp
after the safety of knowing,
not questioning, having faith.
I don't like this part of the woods
I'm finding myself in. It's lonely
here. Quiet. Every snap of a twig
sounds like a gunshot. I flinch.

It smells like disease. Unhealthy,
musty, rank cheese, beginnings
of rot. Yet, if truth is true then
perhaps this isn't the end though
it must seem that way to a tadpole,
a caterpillar, polyps. Metamorphosis.
Not death. Development. Growth.
Transformation. Transmutation. Change.

It smells like petrichor. Rain after a long
dry spell. Refreshing. Healing. A tinge of
newness, beginnings, hope, something
more than before. Deeper than. A quenching.
I can't go back. I'm too far in. I'll follow
this path to its end. I'll trust that this path
brings me to the light and I'll blink my eyes
at its glory after the darkness of the forest. Amen.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 281.

Cycles Of Life

by Debi Swim

Hi, Dad, It's me again
Do you have time to talk?
(Oh, here's a pretty vase of
flowers from my garden.
The roses are from the bushes
you used to prune for me.)
I wanted to catch you up
about what's been going on.
Seems like things happen so fast,
then, sometimes they just drag.
Same old, same old... I guess,
School, work, soccer games.
Braces for Billy, Julie into dance,
Aunt Millie, she's in the nursing home.
Ellen had a little girl, finally.
She and Bob are so excited
after waiting so long.
Oh, Stan died. Heart attack.
But maybe you knew that already?
Are you here, Dad?
Can you even hear me?
I wanted to ask. I need to know.
Is there more than this
endless cycle of
living and dying?

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 296.

I Am A Poem

by Debi Swim

I am a poem who doesn't want
to be understood. I don't want
a reason to be, I just want to be.
To be swished around the mouth
like the first sip of wine. Savored.
To be heard as a whole then
separated into instruments
lyrics, impressions and emotion.

I am a starting place, off ramp,
corollary route, tertiary road and
little gravel lane where memories,
experience, longing reside restlessly.
I am of the many and yet individual.
I sing. I dance. I cry, rage, laugh.
I speak plainly and in riddles.
I am a poem. A song. A voice.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 295.

Alone Not Lonely

by Debi Swim

I didn't choose solitude;
solitude chose me.
Hurry, bustle, noise
of the world bruised
my soul till I could not
hear the song of the lark,
the music of the wind,
the wisdom of the clouds,
the slow, steady pulse
of the earth's heart
so I began to withdraw
to the subtle call of quiet.
She soothes my spirit
with whispers, calm,
colors of rich, luscious
hues of marigold sun
and turquoise skies
goose grey of storms
that toss the static and
spark of strife away.
Even this room from which
I write is so quiet I can hear
a faint hum, a strum of OM
nothing distracts. Solitude
chose me.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 294.

A Line In The Sand

by Debi Swim

I look at earth, sea, air and all things therein. The detail, design, intricacy, variety, purpose, how things work together and it is a sign to me of something supernatural... other than. I see in all peoples a bent toward worship, service, and some acknowledgement of God that interprets itself into a religion. The very few who eschew the concept of a creator have rejected one God for another. They become their own god living for their own ends, gratified in their ability to shape their own lives, and answer to no one but their own conscience. It is all a choice. That I choose one over the other doesn't make me more enlightened – or less so. I speak for myself, not for you. I've drawn a line between what I believe and what I can't believe and those things I will take on shaky faith.

In this universe
immense and mysterious
there's room for magic.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 289.

Shadows of Memory
by Debi Swim

We dwell in
a river of time
of eddies and currents
sharp rock and soft silt
beneath our feet
and the water flows,
trickles, rushes, floods
passing behind
as we stand in this moment
watching the water
flowing toward us
an eternity,
we hope, of spill.
Then that moment is gone
yet it is still now.
Soon you'll be gone.
Soon, I'll be gone.
Then we'll just be
shadows of memory
wavering in the stream.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 300.

Broody Hen
by Debi Swim

I sit before my computer keying thoughts.
They came smooth and swift, a bird soaring,
once. Now they perch on a limb, refusing
even to sing. I pretend this bird is nesting,
warming eggs and I wait for them to hatch.

How long does it take? Days? Weeks? Months?
I wait and wait like a broody hen. Impatient.
Anxious. Despairing at the lifelessness.
But, still I sit and wait hoping for the day
when something new comes into the world.
I wait for the sounds of breaking free.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 309.

The Pleasure Of Your Words

by Debi Swim

You will forgive me, I hope, for crashing your party.
I'll just sit here on the fringe and only breathe.
You probably won't even notice my presence for
I'm so totally in awe that I could not utter a word,
in fact it would be a kind of heresy even to speak.
I'll be inebriated with the elixir of conversation,
the excerpts of your writing, the praises, the critique,
the literary acumen, the laughter, the jokes,
the comradery of good friends. I will silently raise
a toast to my good fortune to be in the presence
of giants though I'll have little inkling of what I hear.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 310.

The Smell Of Death

by Debi Swim

They urged me forward, “Go say hello”
they said, but he was asleep... I hoped,
sleeping behind the wrinkles of pain.
I tried to remember him tall and gentle,
a shy smile lighting his eyes, toting the black
bag he carried to doctor sick animals.
He took us kids on calls sometimes
in his 1940s Chrysler Sedan.
By that time he was retired,
just doctoring as a favor and passing time.
But now walking into this quiet room, shades pulled,
the sounds of shallow puffs through thin lips,
an occasional quiet moan, sheet drawn over
yellowed parchment skin and sharp bones
frightened me. My first face to face
with the ancient foe, and I’ll always recall
the smell of death not quite disguised
beneath the medicinal scent of Lysol.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 315.

Like Bourbon It's Best Aged

by Debi Swim

Can it be possible
you look at me and see
something I don't see?
You fell in love,
I can understand that,
cause love is blind they say.
What puzzles me is that you stay –
not stay with me, you're a faithful man,
but stay in love with this old crone
of loose flesh and thinning bone.

Can it be possible
after all this time
of plodding forward arm in arm
you forgive the passing years
and gravity for the damage
to sweet young flesh?
Can overlook reality
and view instead
with eyes that gently see
beyond this shell
to the very soul of me.

Can it be possible?
Oh, yes.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 319.

Debi Swim is a wife, mother, grandmother and happy WV poet.

Restoration

by Alan Toltzis

Did I wear you out?
Did I leave you spent,
tattered, cut, bruised?

And when,
O weary, weary soul,
you left me again last night,

barely able to fill
and empty my lungs,
I waited for morning,

my body
and my heart
awash with you again.

Today will be different.
Today will be pure.

Today will be
a waxing crescent
moon at dawn.

Coffee

by Alan Toltzis

On this exceptional
cream and sugar day—

not black
not bitter

nor some sorrowful residue
settling to the bottom of the pot

reducing
thickening

until the last drop of hope
evaporates and scalds itself

leaving a stain of
pungent neglect—

drink endlessly
of joy unchained.

Alan Toltzis, the author of *The Last Commandment*, grew up in Philadelphia and now lives and writes in Bucks County. Recent work has appeared in print and online publications including *Right Hand Pointing*, *Provo Canyon Review*, *IthacaLit*, *Hummingbird*, *r.k.v.r.y. Quarterly*, and *Burningword Literary Journal*. Find him online at alantoltzis.com.

Nine Minutes

by Walter J. Wojtanik

You come and stay for hours,
amidst the psychedelic flowers
and impossible scenarios.
Running past streets and barrios
with Joses and Marios, looking
for solace in a nightful of frightful
turns and plot twists. You've wished you
can finish a complete thought,
but your REM cycle keeps running out of gas.
In the foggy distance, a wail. It never fails.
It seems just when you get
to the good part of your dreams you have to depart,
trying to restart every nine minutes for an hour
until your snooze alarm comes back to call.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 253.

Homesick Blues

by Walter J Wojtanik

A hard rain's gonna fall, and all I can think of
is my sad eyed lady of the lowlands.
A rainy day woman, she stands
down in the flood watching
the river flow. The current is strong
and I've been gone far too long;
bound with cold irons. I miss home.
And if I gotta serve somebody, it may as well
be her. I'd been stuck inside of Mobile
with the Memphis blues again.
I shall be released and I'll be knocking
on heaven's door; her blue nightgown
tangled at our feet. No longer love sick.
Memories thick and windblown, she's shown
she can love just like a woman. Lay lady.
Lay with the pent up passion of the
hurricane within. Don't have second thoughts.
It's alright. It's a changing time and
I have resurfaced; have a purpose.
Your rolling stone has come home.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 295.

Walter J. Wojtanik is a poet, composer, playwright, story teller, and carpenter. Yes, he is adept at woods and words. He had been named the Poet Laureate of the Writer's Digest.com/Poetic Asides 2010 April Poem-A-Day Challenge. Somewhat of a poetic nomad, his work can be found all over this great big world wide web! His poetry collection in three parts, his *Dead Poet Once Removed* trilogy is his happiest achievement as of now. He continues to work at his craft with so much more to learn.

What gains traction in time rhymes and echoes.
The halcyonic flight of sea gulls pulls us near
secret waves. So boundless loss is it flies
to sky from ground.

You see this when you've grown. You wear this crown
—it defines you. Why, it's beautiful as seaweed.
Or brocade. As you step into fog it occludes then
discerns slow shapes.

Irene Toh, "Sapphic"

To understand that it's always there
like a pocket where every so often
my hand feels for change my penknife my comb
the tireless hand of some dark memory
counting its dead.

–Julio Cortazar, “Milonga”, from *Save Twilight*