



Memento Mori

Poems

Red Wolf Journal Issue 12
Fall/Winter 2017/2018

Irene Toh & Tawnya Smith,
Editors

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Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

–Robert Frost, “Nothing Gold Can Stay”

Memento Mori

Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song;
–Andrew Marvell, “To His Coy Mistress”

Welcome to the Fall/Winter 2017/2018 issue.

Memento mori—you know what it means. Transitory things. Perishable people. When you are in transit you seem to fit into some kind of plan but then find yourself in an empty space. In a parking lot. Sitting on a staircase in the middle of a social event. On a park bench under a chestnut tree. There're really lots of empty spaces in between when you seem to be waiting for something or someone. Forever waiting.

On a mortal note, you've noticed too, “the body's decrease/Of power and repair as these begin/The ultimate indications of old age.” (A D Hope, “Memento Mori”). When I was thirty I wrote about my mother's ageing lament, noticing her slower gait, graying hair, spots and all. And tried to mythologize. Well now I am the exact same age that my mother was at the time of writing. Time's winged chariot, kiss my ass!

Where did all the time go?

All the more then, shouldn't it be that, as Andrew Marvell said, “the last age should show your heart”? We are bound to our hearts. That is truth. Back to Marvell's famous first line.

“Had we but world enough and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.”

Time enough to love. We still have time, and if we cared not for Marvell's conceit, then even to be coy, awaiting love to ripen.

By all means write about love. Write about happiness in the living. Because existence is predicated on life and death. What is life if we've not loved? What is life's meaning if we do not die? What is death if not the end of living? And the end of writing, if I may boldly add. If you're entranced by an author's work, and had secretly read all her work, you'd weep when the said author has died. I know I did, read a postage stamp size of her obituary, and wept. Isn't it by reading that we kind of enter another person's soul? Pray, let me enter your soul.

Love, it would appear, is the ageless thing. If love is redemption where does it come from? Are there different kinds of adulthood other than the standard romance/sex/happily ever after? Why is that the main narrative? Surely there are other sorts of narratives, romantic or otherwise, that are equally true. Are you even going to surface them? Write about places where people find solace. What about the lack of solace, the limits of love?

And then there's God, to whom most will eternally cling to. How do you deal with the concept of God, and are there other ways of godliness? Write about the mystery that is at the heart of human existence.

And then there's eternity itself. Surely it's not a "desert" as Marvell put it? What is eternity, dear poets? Can eternity exist if there's no concept of mortality? Or the converse, what is mortality without the concept of eternity? Are these purely rhetorical questions, like a blast of hot air?

On that mighty dubious note, let the poets in this issue begin their mythologizing.

Irene Toh & Tawnya Smith
Fall/Winter 2017/2018 Editors
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For Bob Borchard
by John Aylesworth

In Guysville, the old hotel he converted
into a house frowned and shuddered
and I hope he haunts it, with laughter
and music and sketches of the hills around.
He taught art, celebrated the world each Spring
when the country bloomed and the birds came home,
opened his studio to anyone.

A painting he made of a ship
in a storm crashing outside Buffalo
reminds me of 1969
when we lived there, not knowing each other,
and I found poetry and dance classes
and a woman who never believed in me.

Thirty years later, I met Bob
when we were waltzing with other women
in a place where memories like shipwrecks
are sunk in the mud and sand of the past
but tonight are as near as an old house
with fields and a river and Spring beside it.

Process notes: The poem was prompted by the death of a man I knew more through friends than personally, although we had more experiences in common than I knew. He was always kind and generous when we saw each other in recent years: perhaps because we did have much in common.

John Aylesworth teaches kids who can't go to public school for reasons such as severe handicaps or for punching the principal. When he graduated from Ohio University with an M.A. in Creative Writing and a Ph.D. in Comparative Arts, he stayed in Southeast Ohio and raised a family. He's had poems and stories published a number of journals in the U.S., the U.K., and Australia.

Besieged in Winter
by Gershon Ben-Avraham

We should have grown old together, you and I,
and seated by a winter fire told over and over yet again
spring and summer tales of a life lived together.

But in autumn, as it sometimes does,
a sudden change in weather took one ill-equipped for it
and left behind the other.

Now, seated alone, besieged in winter by so many unfinished tales
that will not let me rest, I begin again one of them,
then turn to you to sound your part.

Hearing nothing save the soft ticking of an old kitchen clock,
I stammer into silence. I've only half the tale and stop where I did start—
yearning for you to tell my ending.

Gershon Ben-Avraham holds an MA in Philosophy (Aesthetics) from Temple University where he studied with the American philosopher Monroe Beardsley. His poetry and short stories have appeared in both online and print journals including *Bolts of Silk*, *Numinous: Spiritual Poetry*, *Poetica Magazine: Contemporary Jewish Writing*, *Psalter & Lyre*, and *The Jewish Literary Journal*. He lives with his wife Beth and Kulfi, the family collie, in Be'er Sheva, Israel.

all this
by Wendy Bourke

on a whim: I had treated myself to
the purchase of a fat buttercup yellow candle,
that smells more citrus than floral,
as it turns out – and yet –
often, when I light it, in early evening glow,
I think of him, and of a wonderful ramble we'd taken
... not so many short years ago

we had tromped, for some time,
in the direction of a far off horizon
that we didn't have a hope of reaching
– in the last, full-gleam of the afternoon idyll –
and had come to a pleasant pair
of commodious flat-topped boulders –
ringed with golden buttercups:
a peaceful place to sit and rest a bit
and admire the rolling hills unrolling
as we, wordlessly, picked a perch
and began to unpack the hastily-gathered snack,
we had brought with us

'kalamata olives and lemon jelly beans, yum' –
he remarked, arching a quizzical eyebrow
that vanished a dozen or more years ...
'and buttercups blooming at our tired, old feet',
he concluded, cheerfully

'all this', I added, opening my arms wide

sweet breezes were turning chilly – fast –
and flapped at the saran enfolded repast
so tenaciously that nibbling gave way
to running after and retrieving the silver sails
launching into the pacific yonder ...
signalling the end of a lovely day – and though,
I ached to say something, the words never came

instead, I placed a single buttercup
in a buttonhole on his shirt
and looking into the beautiful face of
the one I had journeyed with for half a century,
I whispered: 'all this'

clouds and alstromeria
by Wendy Bourke

the window had been left open
and the room was cold, although,
as fresh as a flower ...

I felt light headed and lay down
on the half-made bed, where
the fragrance of laundered cotton
stirred to mind a slumbering memory,
of the sheets that mother and I
would hang on the clothesline ...

in winter, they were so stiff
we would fold them like cardboard
when we took them down ...
she'd iron them completely dry
and perfectly pressed,

smelling – so clean –
the way, I imagined,
fluffy clouds would smell
if you could bury your face in them ...

and then, today, as I rested quietly,
it came back to me and fell
in delicate heart-shaped petals
flecked with crimson drops in icy mists:
white alstroemeria – delivered – unsigned,
in flurries of snow and billowing sheet sails ...

I remember carrying the little bouquet
to my mother as she lay, on her bed
– silent and tear-stained –

I felt closer to her, in that moment,
than I ever had or would, again

though, to this day, I don't know why she cried
– it would forever remain, for me –
a mystery, she took with her to her grave

where the phantoms gather (in tanka sequence)
by Wendy Bourke

walking with memories
in forest solitude ...
everywhere I pass
twigs beneath my feet
snap like holiday crackers

ghosts of those
who have gone before me
haunt the trail – so real –
I come upon apple cores ...
perhaps some seeds will take root

atop the hill
I look down on the picnic spot –
lake scent and bird song
on whiffle winds ... a spirit place
where the phantoms gather

Wendy Bourke lives in Vancouver, Canada where she writes, goes on long rambling walks gathering photos and inspiration – and hangs out with her family (especially her two young grandsons). After a life loving words and scribbling poetry lines on pizza boxes and used envelopes, Wendy finally got down to writing “in earnest” six years ago. She received first prize in the Ontario Poetry Society’s Sparkle and Shine contest in 2014 and her poems have appeared in dozens of anthologies, journals and chapbooks.

Summer Blue

by Marilyn Braendeholm

The garden gate is slamming —
the wind's picked up, and August
is disappearing into drizzle;
sets petunias on their weary way.

A march toward mould and mess.
Odd how a slick of rain melts
purple blossoms into streaks
that stick to your fingers and

stain you like a typesetter
in a print shop — summer stains,
permanently blue. Blue, yes,
it's the end of summer blue.

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

Those Grey Layers
by Marilyn Braendeholm

The thing about long-term memory, it feels like it just happened. Yesterday. Like when I remember my grandmother who passed-on more than 30-years ago. I can see her now. Grandma sitting in a straight-back wooden spindle chair. She sits where the sun breaks through the window but she still feels icy. And it's just Grandma now; Grandpa's recently dead. He went out fishing on the 3rd Tuesday of January last year. He threaded a nightcrawler on his hook, dropped the line over the side of the boat, and then had a heart attack. Out there alone on the lake. He floated around for 3-days in a January mist before anyone questioned why a row boat was out there. He froze board-stiff in that rowboat. Someone said he was the coldest shade of grey they'd ever seen. Greyer than winter, the policeman said. Winter's a widow-maker, Grandma claimed. She looks out the window, sips her Earl Grey tea, and asks for another lap blanket. Her voice is shallow as lapping water. She's not long for the next world. Asleep or awake, sometimes we can't tell which when she closes her eyes. Those soft eyelids that disregard the lines between day and night. Sometimes she pretends to be deaf. I suspect that she hears everything that she can't see. But as I said, it all seems like yesterday. Plus and or minus those intervening years.

like old grey stone,
that blue-eyed cat on her lap,
alas, there she ends

Marilyn Braendeholm, aka 'Misky, lives in England surrounded by flowers in the summer, jars of sourdough starter in the winter, and old pots and pans when she's testing recipes in the kitchen. Her poetry is regularly published by the literary magazine, *Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream*.

They Could Be Crows
by Dah

It's when the voices start and
divide against one another with
outbursts of anger

returning, like hunters dragging
a dead boar
pretending to be heroes

the boar staining the dry earth
red with
its spirit leaking from

its heart

You ask:

'How many voices will it take

before I'm defeated before
evil is 'The Enlightenment?'

It's almost Autumn

this early chill jingles
like rappers beating words
into clever rhymes

Unraveled threads of rain loom
in the distance
voices muttering in despair

I answer:

'Maybe it's crows in the trees,
chattering, chattering

I clap my hands
the trees clear
the voices flying off

Say This In A Whisper
by Dah

Like an anxious bird I come
again to those days,
the pale winter's
billowing winds

In this cold place, I ache for
the mingling of our lips
in this empty place
the only place left

Let me conjure you naked
o beautiful demon
to wet my thirst
o trembling flame

o rapture's gift
lover, stimulus
you gave yourself to me
our bodies, goblets

filling, again, again
spilling over
a bloom, a fragrance,
petals falling

sweltering heat
rising, swimming
mouth to body
luscious inlets

O fragrant demon, paramour
nothing is left
but this aching current
this drowning in my sighs

Pulsar
by Dah

'We can only be
as close as we can touch
until the Eye
stares, until the Eye
finds us, again'

I look through the grille
of bare trees
through the mineshafts
of shadows

then you say:
'The Eye finds its way
when the sun sets its mouth
to earth'

I am motionless
like a broken shell

You continue:
'I believe that
we are at the beginning and
in this deadly universe
we are nothing sacred nothing
more than matter caught
in a surge of light

Then you whisper:
'You can make me happy
but it won't change the way I feel'

I finish another night
without tears or repentance
without promises or sleep
watching stars traveling south
your black hair
bobbing and bending

like the weight of crows
on thin branches

your twin nipples glowing, expanding
pulsing, like dark radiation,
the morning-milk of kisses
flooding my mouth

Dah's forthcoming fifth poetry book is due in late-spring 2018 from Transcendent Zero Press. His poems have been published in the US, UK, Ireland, Canada, China, Spain, Australia, Africa, Philippines and India. Dah is a Pushcart nominee and the lead editor of The Lounge (a poetry critique group).

<https://dahlusion.wordpress.com/category/about-dah/>

Kneeling at the Grave Stone
by Tony Daly

It's raining,
Not outside, but inside.
It's actually quite nice out, if
A person can see that sort of thing,
The world, outside of oneself.
I can't. I'm clouded and overcast.
Have been for over forty years, today.

There was a time when everyday was shining.
Then the lake effect snow came, buried me.
For years I tried digging out.
Now, many days are bright,
but never this day.
The memory crushes me, every time.

You were light in my arms,
The shining star at the center of my universe,
The tiniest creature I could imagine.
You cooed and gurgled, and just
Absorbed me with those yellow-blue eyes.

I held you tight against exposed skin, and
Will never forget the feel of your warmth,
Your wet tears, your talon-like nails,
Your screams of hunger and agony.
I started crying when the nurse came in with
Empty arms apologetically outstretched
– and haven't stopped.

I knew your light for 20 hours, but
only touched you for one.
You've held me ever since.

These carnations, are for you.
I bring them every year.
I like to think they would be your favorite, but
Mainly they became a tradition.
Couldn't afford better the first years, and

I've imagined pinning them to your chest at
Proms, graduations, wedding.

Instead, I kneel here, like every year,
Until after the sun goes down,
With your father's hand on my back, and
Fill you in on your brothers' lives.
You'd love them, and they you,
If they'd meet you, and you them,

But you didn't and they didn't.
They know you through my suffering, and
Are the reasons I've not yet joined you.
My three wondrous lights,
Illuminating my darkness.

But clouds return, darkness endures.
How many nights have I smelled your newborn hair,
Felt your loving arms around my neck, only
To be pulled back by those who need me in life?

One of these days, when my work is done,
My storm will finally subside,
I will lay down beside you, my child,
And hold you once more, everyday.
Together, we will illuminate our darkness.

Process notes: My older brother lived for only a day. My mother leaves flowers on his gravestone every year. This poem is my attempt at exploring her emotions, and takes it a few steps further.

Tony Daly is a DC/Metro Area creative writer. His work is forthcoming in anthologies from Wolfsinger Publications and Fantasia Divinity Magazine, as well as online at *Pilcrow & Dagger*, *Boned-A Collection of Skeletal Writing*, and *The HorrorZine*. He serves as an Associate Editor with *Military Experience* and the Arts. For links to his published work, visit <https://aldaly13.wixsite.com/website>

Time Passes
by Holly Day

There are people I once saw young on TV
that are now old on TV. I refuse to admit
that this means I've grown old as well
that the passage of time has split to bypass me
like the river that split to pass around Moses
in that movie I saw
with that guy who's now dead.

My children keep getting older
even though I tell them
they don't have to. I show them how time
has forgotten me in its wake
that I'm the same person I was
before they were born they
don't believe me.

The Morning After a Funeral We Didn't Attend
by Holly Day

I found her the next morning, feeding stacks of old birthday cards
handwritten letters into the paper shredder. "He never loved me," she said
by way of explanation, calmly feeding the first of a pile of faded photographs
into the shredder as I watched. "There's bacon in the kitchen."

I tried to reach out to stop her hand from pushing more and more
of my grandfather into the metal shears that were snipping him down to nothing
but it was her father first, my grandfather second, what right did I have?
"He loved you," I said, watching helpless
as a picture of a blond-haired girl in pigtails
holding onto the outstretched darker hand of a man
fell into the metal waste basket in irretrievable strips.
She laughed and waved a thick handful of bills at me

justification for erasing her father so completely.

"How do you write someone you love out of your will?" she asked.

"Why is my stepsister getting everything? He even forgot about you!"

I almost said something about

how she hadn't visited her father for years, while her stepmother's family
had been a constant in his life up to the end,

how maybe there wasn't anything left

after the nursing home and the hospice, but I don't, because
that's my father's job.

The Flood
by Holly Day

The coffins float to the surface
like rebellious architecture, buoyed by the floodwaters
that have shaken everything loose. We pass sandbags
hand over hand to build a wall between us and the river
shouting panicked instructions to the trucks to bring more.

The water pouring in from the river is frigid and cold
numbing ankles and hands, but the water
running off of the bloated cemetery is warm, as though the water
is carrying the last breath and embrace of the dead
across the grounds to keep us from freezing.

In Wait
by Holly Day

I wrap my thoughts around the egg inside me
tie my nest with hopes and dreams
will my body full of feathers
fluff and bubblewrap.

Each step leads me to disaster. I
could trip and fall and lose it all.

I wrap myself in blankets and pills
cradle my stomach in warmth
close windows against drafts and rain
barricade the door against wolves outside.

Holly Day has taught writing classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, since 2000. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Big Muddy*, *The Cape Rock*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Gargoyle*, and her published books include *Walking Twin Cities*, *Music Theory for Dummies*, *Ugly Girl*, and *The Yellow Dot of a Daisy*. She has been a featured presenter at Write On, Door County (WI), North Coast Redwoods Writers' Conference (CA), and the Spirit Lake Poetry Series (MN). Her newest poetry collections, *A Perfect Day for Semaphore* (Finishing Line Press) and *I'm in a Place Where Reason Went Missing* (Main Street Rag Publishing Co.) will be out late 2018.

As Father Lay Dying
by Milton P. Ehrlich

As Father lay dying
restrained in bed,
he wanted to go home,
but he clung to a phone
grunting orders to his broker
about trades of puts and calls.
Family maintained a vigil,
reading Barons, Business Week
and the Wall Street Journal
to keep him alive.
His quivering voice, a pinhole
of light in the emerging darkness.
Clinging to the last of his breath
he was determined to secure
a vault of safety for Mother.
While the forces of Darkness
tugged at his soul, relentless
in his sense of responsibility,
his withered body focused on
tallying up the numbers
like a good accountant should.
Father taught me to be responsible.
When I lay dying, I'll revise my poems,
making sure the alliteration,
enjambment and internal rhymes
work well enough for publication.
I'll keep reading what old Ez taught me
at Eziversity about how to write poetry
until my eyes give out and I disappear.
Entwined by blood of my blood,
a strike price of love endures.
Father will always be my King
even though we walk divergent roads.

Perrin's Marine Villa
by Milton P. Ehrlich

Mabel is sequestered
in a well vacuumed room.
There's not even a handful of mirth
in this house.

A whiff of flatulent air greets her guests.

Her glittering faux diamond earrings
make her look like a frumpy old woman
holding court as she sits on a stuffed chair
with her swollen feet elevated
on a Moroccan hassock.

She wants to go home,
not play any more bingo,
but forgot where she lives,
though an aerial photo of her house
hangs on the wall.

Neighbors who visit, still tease her
for being "from away".

A young Nova Scotia soldier,
once a fine mate
peers down from her dresser in a resolute gaze.

Jesus hangs nearby rising
from the dead
behind rolling white-caps in a turquoise sea.

No one wants a one-way ticket
for the parting of flesh,
waiting for your name
to be written in stone.

Sent to their rooms
like misbehaving children,
they wait for an announcement

for their hour of departure,
a journey to the world beyond.

I'll Eat When I'm Dead
by Milton P. Ehrlich

Who has time to eat?
Ravenous for feeling alive,
I leap out of bed
at the first ray of light
to catch the rising sun—
see as many falling stars,
Northern Lights
and rainbow omens
that I can see,
and delight
in toddler's laughter—
let alone all the books
I haven't yet read.
And don't forget
the touches and caresses—
the magnificence
of creative lovemaking—
there's still positions
in the Kama Sutra
I want to try,
and countries to visit,
seas to sail,
bubbly prosecco sips,
honeysuckle sniffs,
and music—
don't get me started—
I'll be blowing my trumpet
instead of ringing the bell
when I reach the locked door
to the world beyond.

I Practice Dying
by Milton P. Ehrlich

Every time I suffer a bout of pneumonia,
I begin to count my last breaths.
In the army I cooled my feverish head
on the cold iron bar of the infirmary bed.

Since most of my friends
are dying, dead or demented,
I figure it will soon be time
for me to be getting cemented.

My family nags me to consult doctors,
but I'm a follower of Voltaire,
who proclaimed: The art of medicine
is to amuse the patient while nature
cures the disease and the Doctor collects the fee.

I knock on the door of Mother Nature's home.
A neatly-dressed guard from the penguin corp
informs me Mother Nature is tired and worried.
She wears a secondhand housedress
revealing two warm moons of breasts.

She warns me:
Swarming stars have been squawking all night:
OUR EARTH IS FOR SALE!

If she's anything like my mother,
I can charm her with a pair of chocolate eclairs
and a montage of all whoever loved me.
I rhapsodize her with my best poems.

Since there's no way to get out of here alive,
I carry a lifetime supply of plasma for my soul.
My plan is to never be fully dead after I die.

As Father wrestled with a lymphoma-ravaged body,
I remember how cold his hands became
as soon as he breathed his final breath.

I monitor the declining temperature of my hands.

HOW I FEEL ABOUT MY LIFE
COMING TO AN END
WHEN IT'S COMING TO AN END

by Milton P. Ehrlich

At the age of 85,
it feels like my life is over.
The rest is just gravy—
nothing but an encore.
My audience can't stop
yelling Bravo!, Bravissimo!
I've taken my final bows,
saunter off stage to take
a peek and catch a glimpse
of those who still
remain standing and
can't stop applauding.

Milton P. Ehrlich, Ph.D. is an 86-year-old psychologist. He is also a Korean War veteran who has published many poems in periodicals such as *the Wisconsin Review*, *Descant*, *Toronto Quarterly Review*, *Chariton Review*, *Vox Poetica*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Huffington Post*, and *The New York Times*.

C'est la meme chose
by Joseph M. Felser

No sun
turns moon
I forget
to remember
your face
rueful
grin
laugh
to tears
sulky
pout
your fire
warms me
still
breath
less
frozen
in time

Process notes: One of my chief inspirations (apart from personal experience) is the philosophical theme of the unity or dynamic complementarity of opposites. Apart from Lao Tzu and the Taoist view of Yin and Yang, quantum physics etc., two of my sources in particular are Heraclitus and Hermann Hesse. In one of my favorite Hesse novels, *Narcissus and Goldmund*, in a key passage, Narcissus tells Goldmund: "We are sun and moon, dear friend: we are sea and land . . . each the other's opposite and complement." In Heraclitus this is the concept of enantiodromia: "It is one and the same thing to be living or dead, awake or asleep, young or old. The former aspect I each case becomes the latter, and the latter again the former, by sudden unexpected reversal." (logion 113)

Reparations
by Joseph Felser

With each
smile
frown
pout
burning question
passionate opinion
you sabotaged
my defenses
ancient walls
crumbled
to dust
and I
surrendered
to your
entreaties
you conquered
me
you entered
victorious
the lost
citadel
of my
heart
then
only then
you looted
the treasury
stole the
crown jewels
made off
with the
golden fleece
sacked and
burned
the city

to the
ground
where I
wait
covered
in dust
and ashes
to hear
from you
a hint
of regret

Choke, hold
by Joseph Felser

I wrestle
with you
angel
bless me
please
last time
you left
me
for dead
laid out
on a
stone cold
slab
of cruel
lies
this time
I won't
let go
until
you
smile

I, flounder
by Joseph Felser

Flat fish
I drift
aimlessly
floating in
turbid blues
carried by cross
currents
you left
in your
wake

I sink
to bottom
holy abyss
gaze fixed
eyes locked
upward
scanning
blind to
golden treasure
buried deep
in wet black
sand
beneath me

the world
is flat
one sided
all over
even if
everything
tries to be
round
my hoop
is broken

The Reality Of Intangibles
by Joseph Felser

Did you come
to me
last night
as I lay
asleep
whispering
of things
long past?
I remember
everything
the sly smiling
delicate curve
of your words
the musky perfume
of your mind
hunting ideas
asking questions
poking holes
in musty theories
forging links
with me
astonished
by the
boldfaced
signature
of your
soul

Flame Out
by Joseph M. Felser

Eternal flame
burns out
gives heat
and light
to none
save your
self
Marley's jest
sixty candles
on a dead
man's chest
blown out
no more
wishes
for her
code blue
he's gone

Nicht diese töne
by Joseph M. Felser

Nine daughters
of joy please
pour me
a double
life is short
art eternal
he said
if the deaf
can hear
music
why couldn't
you hear
mine?
not a long
time
not everlasting
but no time
like the
present
past
or future
that dimension
of here
and now
that you
cut out
when you
left me
time less
this is your
eternal
life!
he said
no life
after death

—or before,
either,
if it comes
to that

Falling

by Joseph M. Felser

Snow falls

gently

on her

shoulder

frozen crystal

tears

reflecting

light

lost

in time

close to

him

Lost Track
by Joseph M. Felser

Stood on
platform
waiting
for you
until you
kicked it
out
from
under
me

Émile Coué Sings The Blues
by Joseph M. Felser

Every day
in every way
things are getting
worse and worse
greedy shadows
grow fat and rich
eating light
sparrows sing dirges
the postman snarls
and you never
call me
anymore

I've Stopped Looking
by Joseph M. Felser

I listen to music
read some books
halfway through
forgotten tomes
gathering dust
on my shelves
feed hungry birds
in my backyard
eat dinner
with an old friend
in the Mexican place
write poems
like this
all just distractions
I stopped looking
for you
a long time ago
all I see now
are scratches
on my lenses
sinuous spots
floating before
my eyes
twisted snakes
hissing about some
forbidden fruit
I no longer
seek

Joseph M. Felser, Ph.D. received his doctorate from The University of Chicago and teaches philosophy in Brooklyn, New York. The author of numerous articles and two books on philosophy, religion, myth, and parapsychology, he recently began writing poetry, which has appeared in both print and online journals.

Waking in Buenos Aires
(and remembering Carver)
by Jared M. Gadsby

Only after a week
do I remember
that this city
was one of the last places
that Carver called home.

It seems he loved it here –
even thought about writing a novel
before his Chekhovian sensibilities
sounded too strongly.

Or – perhaps – he simply ran
out of time.
Whatever the reason,
he had his.

The strangeness of life
really pressed upon him here,
which does not surprise me.
This feeling has pressed
against me like the warmth
of a beloved dog still remembered.

I wonder, did Ray
ever wake before Tess,
pad into the living room
to put on yesterday's pants,
and just sigh with gratitude?

I am sure that
at least once he awoke by himself,
brewed a pot of coffee and lit a cigarette,
and watched as the sun
rose over this strange city.

Jared M. Gadsby lives in Lima, Peru and teaches writing and literature courses at a local university for one of Broward College's international centers. He holds an MA from SUNY Oswego and finds time to write the occasional poem between teaching responsibilities and travel opportunities.

What to Eat When Someone Dies
by Howie Good

I'm really having a hard time understanding today right now. None of us even tried to step outside. Dave put a shotgun to his chest so we could study his brain. I didn't like him staring at me. He often talked to himself. Now we're kind of like: How do we know if he was telling the truth or not? I'm not a big fan of dialogue. What I fill it with will only be known when it comes spilling out. People are left wondering if it's going to be a disaster. There will be others out there who will make connections we haven't seen. To be honest, we just cook bacon and eggs. But sometimes you need bacon and eggs.

The Detritus of Dreams
by Howie Good

You probably won't look like the real you.
Chances are you'll be in somewhat of a panic.
That's why you must educate your nerves.
You won't know what you're breathing.
You won't know what's in your house.
Check that the doors and windows are locked.
Start naming the things in the room.
Think, "Hahaha that's so funny!"
and then hope something like the thought
"OMFG what am I laughing at?" occurs to you.

Theater Of The Void
by Howie Good

There was a lot of screaming and praying to Jesus. I guess I'm very confused about why this scene. What might make sense in one place might not be recommended in another. It was all night of slam, bang, boom. It bubbled up from the doors, seeped in from the windows. People always want to know is it climate change or is it not? You just look around and see things are totally gone. I'm composing, if not music, sounds like waves on the beach or perhaps wind in the forest.

*

At one point I couldn't see for about five minutes. It was the first time that I've lost everything. I just let everything go. We don't know where we are going to sleep tonight. We don't know anything. The only thing we all cared about was the sun, the moon, and the sky. These are the things that we need to make sure we have in place. I dream of standing ovations. First thing Monday morning, I want to find out why.

*

All the shops are empty. What's disappearing in front of our eyes is the history of this terrible war. It's like a tornado went in and swept everything up. I was shocked. I didn't think it would happen. Even birds and animals have nowhere to drink water. I saw blood coming out of the seal. People started yelling "Shark!" They told us to keep inside, to be ready for anything. It's had me spooked for years. Now we're also worried about our houses blowing up. You know how they say you hear the train noise? I heard it.

The Really Bad Stuff
by Howie Good

I've seen the really bad stuff on television. But actually experience it? No. Never. I'm not used to this. Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. Everything is thrown everywhere. We don't have anything to stop it. I just feel so sad and empty. She was brought to the hospital in the bed of a dump truck, soaking wet. You press a button, an alarm goes off. A lot of laughter, crying, yelling, tears. So few seem to pay any attention. I don't care what they do as long as fire doesn't start coming out the windows.

Sex Without Love Is Just Exercise
by Howie Good

There was
an explosion
so loud
that it shook
our insides
and all
the windows
burst out.

Beautiful,
isn't it?

But unless
the island
is sinking
into the ocean,
I think
I've made
my point.

Howie Good, a journalism professor at SUNY New Paltz, is the author of *The Loser's Guide to Street Fighting*, winner of the 2017 Lorien Prize for Poetry from Thoughtcrime Press. He co-edits White Knuckle Press with Dale Wisely.

Stadium

by Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois

On the top floor of the art museum
I look through a low window slit
medieval in its narrowness

Directly across the street
the county jail is full
of performance artists
whose performance is crime

My body is not a performance
My body is a crime
a situation
a dilemma

I haul it from place to place
in this wheelchair
I am a dump truck of self

Without eagerness
without dread
my kidneys wait to fail

They are as bleak and friendless
as the slushy parking lots nearby
at Sports Authority Stadium

KH

by Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois

KH's nine-year-old
backed the tractor
over his six-year-old

The next day KH was quoted in the paper:

I won't mourn him

He's in a better place

He's out of this strife

He's with Jesus

That was eight years ago

I ran into him the other day
in the bank

My wife was there to argue with the vice-president

The vice-president said that my wife never closed
her mother's safe deposit box
after she died
and she owes the bank money

This bank's slogan is "The Curious Bank"

They're damn curious, alright, said my wife as we parked

It had been raining
and the parking lot was streaked with downed leaves

My wife said: Listen: *I'm going to follow your advice*

I'm not gonna tell the VP to fuck herself

but I may come close

I waited out in the lobby
watching them through the corner office glass
I hadn't seen KH since his son's funeral

I don't believe in Jesus
and all the other stuff he believes in
but I was a neighbor
so I went

I went up to him and said:

KH. I ain't seen you in a dog's age

He didn't remember me

which didn't surprise

I asked him how he was doing

He said his oldest son fell off a roof

constructing a log home

and broke his back

He's going to be alright, he said

but the hospital bills

are two-hundred grand

and I don't have insurance

You don't believe in insurance, I said

No, he said, I don't

Laundry

by Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois

I returned home to find
two Amish boys floating in my pond
They were blue
The water was
turning to ice
They were fully clothed
down to their hobnail boots

I dialed 911
but made an error
As soon as I did it
I realized I'd dialed
991

The recorded voice said:
*If you want to dial 911
hang up and dial again*

I followed her instructions
I dialed more slowly
put my full attention on the task
It felt like it took an hour to make the call
but I'm sure it was only seconds

As I put down the receiver
my wife came through the kitchen
with some dirty laundry
and said: *What are you doing?*

Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois has had over twelve-hundred of his poems and fictions appear in literary magazines in the U.S. and abroad. He has been nominated for numerous prizes. His novel, *Two-Headed Dog*, based on his work as a clinical psychologist in a state hospital, is available for Kindle and Nook, or as a print edition. To see more of his work, google Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois. He lives in Denver.

Frog in Throat
by Miriam Green

There's a frog in my throat,
I tell her. She believes me.
I should have predicted this,
the way she understands literally
or doesn't understand at all.
I wanted to humor her
but she's asking how it got there
and do I need her help to get it out.

We sing the song she taught me for Passover,
frogs jumping on Pharaoh's bed and head,
on his toes and nose.

Then she tells me, I found my nose.
I have noses.
I have husbands with noses.

I clear my throat,
that sound like a revving engine
or a strangled cry for help.
I'm writing a new song
for the two of us
filled with sparkling laughter
and an uncommon love
for the mother as child,
for the daughter she no longer recognizes.

Miriam Green writes a weekly blog at <http://www.thelostkichen.org>, featuring anecdotes about her mother's Alzheimer's, and related recipes. Her book, *The Lost Kitchen: Reflections and Recipes from an Alzheimer's Caregiver*, will be published next year by Black Opal Books. Her poetry has appeared in several journals, including *Poet Lore*, *the Prose Poem Project*, *Ilanot Review*, *The Barefoot Review*, and *Poetica Magazine*.

Motivation

by Christopher Hileman

I'm certainly not
one who gives two fucks about
who likes poetry
and who doesn't or
even care much who might read
some scrawl of my heart.

Very few acknowledge
passing through my collections
and that's fine with me.

I write because there's
no freaking choice. My heart aches
if I don't write some
most days and my brain
starts spilling out my damn ears,
staining my tee shirts
on my left shoulder
above the hole where my heart
used to lurk before.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 329.

Life After

by Christopher Hileman

If my heart then died
I would be free to lift off
and take the angel's
flight, along the lines
laid down in clear air long time
past the start of things.
Immune now, standing
in the wind fully drenched, light
bathed, I radiate
immortality.

Getting Away
by Christopher Hileman

Things evolve, she said.
Makes me want to peek under
rocks and seek causes.
Or else get away
quickly, ducking low and tight.

I hoped to head out
by now – on the asphalt road
only so long as
is necessary –
then across the ripe wheat fields
to the south of town.
But I keep going
back for stuff I think I want
knowing all the while
I'll dump half of it
in the heat of the damn day
and the wheaten dust.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Prompt 330.

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.

Dying Is Not The Time For Crackpot Theories
by Diane Jackman

In the last week, her friend's husband said,
Mind over matter. Mind over matter.

This man also believed
in the giant cabbages of Findhorn,
though he had never seen them;
the triumph of his mind (blind belief)
over matter
(the actual size of the cabbages)
definitely not proven.

He went home satisfied
he had delivered a word in season.

In the bed my mother stared at the ceiling.
How? she said,
she who knew so well
the rampage of rogue cells,
the fresh waves of pain
as another organ was attacked.
How to stem the onslaught
by exercise of brain and will?
If we knew how, I said
we would live in an overcrowded world.

That was no comfort either.

Sudden Death
by Diane Jackman

Yesterday a faint rumble of thunder,
passed over now, disregarded.
Next, a sudden electrical storm,
a lightning strike from an empty sky.
One heart-stopping moment
and the family is shattered.

Shattered and scattered they lie,
the heart silent, absent,
until the ropes of love
heave and tug them to their feet.
Together they stumble forward
into a different future.

Two Years On
by Diane Jackman

When I switch off the noise
cross out the lists
abandon the detail
of daily living,
no words come
to take root,
flourish and grow.
Anguish sweeps in,
a spring tide
of memory and pain
spreading, flooding,
ebbing, leaving
sour and stagnant pools
in the jagged runnels.

Would you have been the same?
Robbed of notes?
Or would you have worked out
your loss in healing music?

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.

Predecessor
by Laurinda Lind

There is so much I don't know
about my father's first marriage,
how they met, what she was like,

though last year I saw their wedding
photo. I'd been shielded as if this
would somehow shame me. My
whole family shone out around

them, all my aunts and uncles
who were hers first, and she held
onto my father's hand in the center
of them with both of hers, her sailor
she anchored to her out from a war

that couldn't have him anymore
and now her life could start,
the next eight years before she
learned she was someone else

and before she let me know
him next. At least the half
I have had after her.

Process notes: People rarely talked about my father's first wife, whom I never met while she was alive; now that both are gone, trying to get to know her is like getting another piece of him back, and poetry opens the door for that.

Snapshot

by Laurinda Lind

A neighbor boy came over every night
so we could throw grass at each other
on the cement steps that led to the road
& after a few weeks we went out into
boats on the lake while he told me I
was pretty when I wasn't & I told him
he wasn't fat but he was. Once he lost
one hundred thirty pounds, the whole
weight of the woman he later married
& he looked so good I was glad we'd
had those twenty years as friends

without lust to screw it up. The spring
before his heart sprung him, when he
was in & out of the bariatric ward &
able to get there only in the bed of
their truck, he saw me take my camera
out & looked into it with such informed
intelligence after our long skeins of
shared secrets that I think he knew
it was what he would leave me with.
& that nothing else would ever ease
the weight of him off my world.

Process notes: It has been such a shock to lose a friend I was close with since the beginning of our teen years that it was inevitable he would come storming into a poem like the force of nature he was, and try to get me to figure out how I am going to go the rest of the way without him.

Laurinda Lind is waiting out the weather in New York's North Country. She is not any good at alcohol. Some poetry acceptances/publications were in *Anima*, *Comstock Review*, *The Cortland Review*, *Liminality*, *Main Street Rag*, *Metaphor*, *Paterson Literary Review*, and *Timeless Tales*.

Lover's Tale

by Arthur Lamar Mitchell

Early evening in the town
A light rain falls
On boulevards renown,
Famous sights, painted dolls.

Lovers stroll hand in hand,
And under a leafy tree
Hear distant strains of a band,
They pause and kiss,
To hold this moment
Uncomplicated bliss.

On winding streets,
music begins to fade
The evening star appears
But no false promise made
Before the dawn, growing fears:
Together in victory,
Alone in defeat.

As lovers often torn apart,
A memory of love, though fleet
Despite passions that rule the heart.
All the glories dimmed by years,
When a little tune resurrects buried tears.

Arthur Lamar Mitchell's poems have been set to music for voice, and by several composers, and performed by small groups to orchestra. He composed all lyrics for an environmental concept album – Garden of Eden. Recent poems have been published in *Remembered Arts*, *Winterwolf*, and *Nature Writing*.

Chakra Tuning
by Felicia Mitchell

After a long freeze,
I wait for the fire of the sun
to thaw my yard.
And then I go outside.
Today, I stood there,
my bare feet planted like saplings
in the wet earth.
From the porch, wind chimes
tuned to all the chakras chimed
until my spirit chimed too.
After a few minutes,
mindful of the call of walls,
and how cold feet can get,
I had to go back inside
but my chakras were tuned.

Chemo Brainstorm
by Felicia Mitchell

Until you have no hair,
you will never know
how it feels to feel the wind
that used to blow through your hair
as you hiked across a mountain.
Once, hair got in your face.
Once, hair got as tangled as life can.
Even then, it was your glory.

In death, a life without its spirit,
goes back to earth,
ashes to ashes and dust to dust.
In life, a body is as alive as it can be,
even facing the fire that will consume it
when all is said and done.
The wind blows and blows,
hair or no hair, and you learn to feel
how it feels to feel the wind
in all the ways it is possible to feel
when you know you are mortal
and can still hike across that mountain.

Fire

by Felicia Mitchell

It is what I fear, fire,
the random wire fraying in a wall
where a mouse prefers to nest
or an electronic stove with digital dial—
turning itself on sometimes,
as if a spirit haunts the kitchen.
You cannot fight fire with water.
Outside, when I need a flame,
I never worry about the wind
the way I worry about wires.
I am as cautious as an electrician.
I know too I am in safe there,
outside, the earth no cauldron
that will ever boil over—
except when it does.
I know natural disasters happen,
the way electrical fires happen,
and I have seen houses burn
and floods consume neighborhoods
and wind topple homes like toys.
Just not in my home.
Not today, a mouse as surprising as a god
deciding what comes next.

Process notes: “Fire” shows how I feel sometimes my life is in the hands of a mouse (truly, one once did nibble a wire that could have burned the house down); that fear is juxtaposed by the natural fears that come with surviving cancer, losing a brother, etc.

Felicia Mitchell, a native of South Carolina, has made her home in the mountains of Virginia since 1987. She writes poetry and essays, and a recent poetry collection is *Waltzing with Horses* (Press 53, 2014). Mitchell teaches at Emory & Henry College. <http://www.feliciamitchell.net/>

Drumming Up Blood
by Keith Moul

A church group sings sweetly at the bandstand,
drumming business in souls, without percussions,
but with gentle faith. It's Sunday. The wide plain
expands and enlarges in summer heat, animals still,
few signs of habitation save cars nearing for music.

One thinks of the old awakenings, comings to Christ
in the flower, in the leaf, in caressing breeze on cheeks;
or remembered spirit now coursing through the blood
as people lift arms in praise and jubilation. Some lives
have endured deceptions and miseries until the moment;
others see their children submit to mystery long adhered.

No single voice provokes their vision or font of peace.

Wind carries song out beneath sun's beneficence; fowl
still at rest take notice by their eyes, but do not stir.
They have witnessed God's presence many times before.

Keith Moul's poems and photos are published widely. Finishing Line Press released a chap called *The Future as a Picnic Lunch* in 2015. Aldrich Press published *Naked Among Possibilities* in 2016; Finishing Line Press has just released (1/17) *Investment in Idolatry*. In August, 2017, Aldrich Press released *Not on Any Map*, a collection of earlier poems. These poems are from a new work about prairie life through U.S. history, including regional trials, character, and attachment to the land.

wise audiences
by Sergio A. Ortiz

when you're inside me
i don't know if you laugh

or if you come from boredom
if your tongue freshens

or arrives from fever
i don't know

if what you search for
on weekends exists inside me

i know life stretched out
beneath your abs

is the same as snakes
and concurrent solitudes

that correspond to the twinkling
light where I can see you

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*.

Computer Chess
by Jared Pearce

I keep clicking undo
to trace my losing
streak, to find out

All my mistakes.
If I go another way,
if I had allowed my brother

To tag along more often,
or if I had not lied to my friends
to protect my embarrassment,

Or if I had been more subtle
or more striking, would the children
be happy then? And with her,

What could I have done
better to love? I'm not sure
I can find my way past those bishops

Of self-deceit or the surprising leap
from revelatory knights
to hold that Queen

So she'll see me and want me.
I'm always back at the game's beginning,
fretting over the pawns of diet

And so many hours slept, holding
dear to my rooks for the endgame—
the end that comes no matter

How far back I go or how
much I can erase of where
I started or how I got here.

Cutting

by Jared Pearce

One would have her leg
hacked off, another an arm—
such appendages seem easy
to divide. But others went
for fashion: buttocks
and trim the thighs, or my head
must be ten percent my body
mass. And some for bits to cheat
loss by removing every other toe,
one ear, the incisors, hair.

Until she said her
too big breasts, worthless
lobes, too in-the-way,
too defining, the two great balls
chaining me to womanhood,
making me a sex—these stones
strapping me in a drowning
when what I want is to be held
with a light grace, apart
from what I am or am not.

Portals

by Jared Pearce

The contractor came to see about
where I wanted a hole punched
in the back brick wall to make
a closet and keep the pantry.

We measured, we bartered,
we shook hands, until on the front path
he told me both his parents died
within a month of each other:

He hadn't shed a tear, he said,
though his pastor encouraged his grief;
He's been having trouble getting back
to work, he said, he can't handle

The somewhere revving saw
to cut into a lighted room from
a darkened passage, a blueprint
showing where the load and stress

Should be anchored to rest.
There's no point in crying,
he said; now that they're gone,
what tears could cut like diamonds?

Skeleton

by Jared Pearce

How could it have happened,
toad, you dead and left a perfect
skeleton on the campus walk?

How could the hungry birds
or hustling student feed have passed
your crunchy morsel, mistaken

For a scrunched cupcake wrapper?
And how could I have found you,
complete, except your eyes,

The skinny leather of your hide
tanning itself on your brittle frame,
a frame perfect inside its sack

sucked dry, a series of sticks that shift
our gears upon the planet, a bundle
like a lodge, a lever that lets us roll the Earth.

That's all the machinery we've got:
what good is a scrambled-egg brain
or spider-nest nerves against

The arm's hatchet or quarterstaff
swung of the hip. You were right,
toad, we're built for valor

And making grace before
our long rest where we hand it back
in its dustcloth, worn and happy.

Endangered
by Jared Pearce

Tiny frog, remnant
of your dying race,
enjoy this garden,
this cricket feast,
where those weeds
that began their war
last year have invaded
most areas, holding
no prisoners, never
counting their populace
or hassling with birth
control or stopping
the kids from eating
too much.

Frog, learn
from these weeds:
we can all thrive
if we've got someone
to care for and
someone to kill.

Process: I look at something, it looks at me, and as I wonder about it, a poem shows up.

Some of **Jared Pearce's** poems have recently been or will soon be shared in *Marathon*, *Peacock*, *Poetic Diversity*, *DIAGRAM*, and *Red Fez*. His first collection is forthcoming from Aubade Press next year. He lives in Iowa.

Language Of Lies
by Roslyn Ross

It was the first lie which led the way,
like an orange beacon on the hill of
deceit, beginning that march into evil,
which left love hanging on the broken
gate of betrayal, where more lies stood
as statues, carved in sad facts of denial,
and right, kneeled, whimpering in the
skirts of yesterday; adultery's hood had
defined my truth, hidden your face in such
blackness, that no amount of torches could
ever bring enough light to bear upon what
now was an impossible, searing, darkness.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 321.

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.

Untitled

by Margarita Serafimova

The plenitude of sunset seas
was forever you.

Who was time to speak of an ending?

*

I was seeing the sunset through tall waves, lucent, golden.

My love was letting me go.

I was going East.

*

Donousa stood in its seas, its white cape –

frozen in light as their reflections.

You were there.

Margarita Serafimova has published two poetry collections in the Bulgarian, *Animals and Other Gods* (2016) and *Demons and World* (2017). In English, her work is forthcoming in *Agenda*, *Trafika Europe*, *The Journal*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *Futures Trading*, *Poetic Diversity*, *TAYO Literary Magazine*, *The Punch Magazine*, *Aaduna*, *Three Drops from a Cauldron*, *SurVision*, and appears in *London Grip New Poetry*, *A-Minor Magazine*, *Minor Literatures*, *Noble/ Gas Quarterly*, *The Birds We Piled Loosely*, *Obra/ Artifact*, *Ginosko Literary Journal*, *Dark Matter Journal*, *Window Quarterly/ Patient Sounds*, *Peacock Journal*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *In Between Hangovers*, *MockingHeart Review*, *Renegade Rant and Rave*, *Tales From The Forest*, *Misty Mountain Review*, *Outsider Poetry*, *Heavy Athletics*, *The Voices Project*, *Cent Magazine*. Some of her work: https://www.facebook.com/MargaritaISerafimova/?ref=aymt_homepage_panel.

The Ash Borer
by Debi Swim

Insidiously, silently, they worked in darkness
Burrowing, eating, until there was no hope
Still it took a long time until the damage
revealed itself in bare limbs and stripped bark
twigs and branches scattered on the ground
at the whim of every passing breath of wind.

The tree was felled, cut into logs, loaded into
the back of a pick-up for fire wood this winter
and so in the dying it fed and in death warmed.
So life goes on. And should I curse the ash-borer
for doing what comes naturally? I pretend that
before the first bite a prayer was offered asking
the gods' forgiveness for taking the tree's life.
And I thank the tree for its sacrifice of warmth
a provision of God's forethought.

Is this maybe just to curb the queasiness
at our survival at another's expense? And yet
it seems right in the end to be aware that
life is life and never take it for granted.

There is a hole, a void where the ash tree stood
and generations of birds, squirrels, will never
know the safety of its arms. I'll never feel again
the comfort of its shade or the pleasure of
watching its swaying leaves in the breeze.
And its roots remain embedded in the soil
and the stump rises like a headstone. Here
stood a living thing. Be thankful.

Process notes: Our Ash tree was cut down this past weekend. It stood close to the road and could have been a danger to passing cars. It was here before we build our house 36 years ago and so its death is like that of an old friend. How can an inanimate

thing seem alive, have a personality and induce feelings of wonder and emotion in me? I don't know, but it did.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 312.

Count Down
by Debi Swim

Grandpa got it at the green stamp store.
He built a small shelf on the wall
in the living room and placed upon it
the black and faux gold clock. I would
watch the pendulum swing back and forth
unaware of time ticking away, unaware
that this moment wouldn't last,
nor Grandpa, nor my youth.

A clock sits on the bookshelf
in my reading room.
I listen to its steady beat,
faint, droning under the din of life.
Its rhythm keeps me grounded
with its steady tic-tic- tic
setting the pace, reminding me
with every second-hand lurch
I live one second at a time,
until the last ...
tic-tic toc.

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

Flat Line
by Debi Swim

The cursor blinks
 patiently
steadily
 impartially
between words, between thoughts
waiting. for words. to appear.
waiting.
Sometimes, I get up. Walk around.
hoping for inspiration, direction,
not even considering that it blinks.
like a heart, like a pulse, keeping
me alive. I take it for granted, like
my heart. How many beats left
before the end? How many blinks
till it is over? No more poems?
 No more inspiration?
That will be a kind of death.
 Breathless. Wordless.
 Straight line.
 Scream.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Prompt 338.

Mementos Of Love
by Debi Swim

Two short bits of rough wood
nailed together and presented
to me with love and pride, works
of art on my fridge in crayon or
finger paints, thank you cards
printed in huge letters that
course in downward slants,
nose and fingerprints on windows,
hazard lights flashing, wipers flapping,
radio blaring, heater cranked to the
highest speed when I start the car
after you have pretended to drive.
These things speak to me of the past
and of the future. They bring a smile
even when I pack them away or wash
them off or reset things to normal.
Oh, my disheveled grandmotherly life
I love each slobbery, messy, riotous
moment between the passages of
sedate and pristine clean.
Relief when you leave and
exhilaration at your coming.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Prompt 342.

Blessed Are the Peacemakers
by Debi Swim

Praise to the mild mannered ones
who don't succumb to fits of ire
who plod through the fray of
rainy days, delays, missteps, upsets
and suffer the fools of the world
with lips upcurled. Praise to the ones
who are slow to wrath, pick a path
of peace, throw a fleece of agreeability
over the shoulders of the rabble-rouser
and be a douser of incivility. Praise,
oh, praise the mild mannered ones.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Prompt 341.

Oh World
by Debi Swim

Have I seen enough sunsets,
enough pale dawns, ample
waves rushing to shore?
Have I listened to sufficient
hoots, trills, sweet melodies
and followed the flight of
hawks and geese and stars?
Oh, world, tell me true will
I rue these days of visits with you
or will I more regret those times
I bent dutifully to my tasks not noting
the honeysuckled scent of summer breezes,
the way it teases butterflies and bees.

Then, at the day of reckoning
will I, sated, sigh that I
have lived to full balance
of work and rest, blessed
with memories for eternity
of all creation's glories?
Will I, world? Will I?

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Prompt 343.

Burden Of Life
by Debi Swim

How much does it weigh
that uncertainty
as it settles around your shoulders
like a puma?
You carry it gingerly
trying to sooth the underlying growl
into a purr of contentment.
There is no way to know
when the claws will come out
(if there are any claws at all)
when the teeth honed on bone
(if they're not worn to a nub)
will sink into the jugular.

Uncertainty has heft.
Everything is uncertain.
We live with it like gravity
balance it like scales
and keep on hoping
to tame the beast.

Note: "I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in
uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."

Keats

Written in response to Red Wolf Prompt 353.

Holy Night
by Debi Swim

Let your words
be few
fevered pitched
with awe
with woe
with hope
borne aloft
into the ether
scattered
across the vast
plains of the sea
swelled in a symphony
of swallow-tailed
butterfly wafts.
Oh, God, hear
these ignoble
squeaks
of piteous man
pleas of mercy
crush the clank
and clamor of
hubris
let the silence
of the downy
eve peal
like a Christmas
bell. Toll
for me.

“In the midst of a world of light and love, of song and feast and dance, Lucifer could find nothing to think of more interesting than his own prestige.”

–C.S. Lewis

Written in response to Red Wolf Prompt 354.

Intertwined
by Debi Swim

There have been times...
when the mountains push against the sky
when milky mist crowns its proud head
when the sun shines forth to shrivel the fog
and the mountains gleam in golden liquid light...
(Oh, my soul soars in wondrous delight)
and I think I can never leave such a world.

There have been times...
when love seemed beyond repair
when fearful dread abducted my peace
when a casket sank into the ground
and I turned from that empty space
(Oh, my soul became a chill and lonesome place)
and I think I don't want to live in such a world.

Death at times is a heavy weight
at times a great release
I have prayed for both
to live, to die
and yet there is a time for each.
(Oh, my soul these twin twigs you pleach)
and I think what a lovely arbor to walk beneath.

Saying Goodbye
by Debi Swim

And someone will come and do my hair
one final time, make-up my face, clothe
my body in a favorite outfit and fold my
hands one over the other and I'll repose
as though I've just closed my eyes for a
moment. I'll even wear my glasses which
is ironic but I guess after all this time I
wouldn't look natural without them.

That's what the old people say as they
pass by the coffin trying to look like
they've just dropped by for a short visit,
Oh, doesn't she look natural. No, I want
to shout, I look waxy and my smile is
a Mona Lisa smile of let's get this over
with. A millimeter short of a smirk. Finally,
they close the lid.

I know there is music and the preacher will
say all the right things. You'll say I was a good
wife and my sister and brother will tell the
funny stories of our childhood. I imagine the
children and grandchildren wiping their eyes
as tears spill but I am alone in this ornate box
smiling my tight little smile, immune to grief,
keeping a stiff upper lip.

Note: Written in response to Prompt 364.

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

Red-Tail
by Alan Toltzis

1.
Hungry again,
hawk spreads its feathers
ascending
aloft invisible updrafts

to choose
the unsuspecting
in the stubble
of last summer's cornfield.

2.
Sharp squeals, like laughter,
ripple through squalls and drifts.
Atop a pole,
hawk ruffles its tail

abiding.

3.
Earth's shadow
creeps across the moon.
Snow-light, bright as washed bone,
eclipses its glow.

Hawk tucks its head
into its shoulder
comforting itself
as a green comet sizzles
invisibly far away.

Process Note: While the poem started with the hawk, celestial events often work their way into my work. This one has two from February— the Snow Moon Penumbra Eclipses on Friday night February 10 and the green Comet 45P/Honda-Mrkos-Pajdušáková, which made its closest approach early Saturday morning (Feb. 11) at about 3 a.m. EST passing within 7.4 million miles of Earth. There was also a snowstorm that week that worked its way into section 2.

New Year Omens
by Alan Toltzis

1.

The tangled crown
of bare wisteria emerges,
woven and frozen against the spreading sky.

In all these years, I only remember
a few blooms under the joists
or at the edges of the pergola.

You remember heavy clusters in late spring,
if the pruning was done right.
Next May will tell us.

2.

Up ahead,
metal scraps, like twisted light,
glance the right lane,
a lone hubcap rocking,
the broken white line, its fulcrum,
while a man in shirtsleeves,
with hands in jeans pockets
that force him into a shrug,
slouches down the road from his stalled car
towards the doe,
her paralyzed body heavy and calm
but still able to raise her head
the moist nose twitching,
air steaming from her nostrils
inhaling familiar scents
—field and winter. . . some dormant grass—
now tinged with purple smears of sorrow and shame
as he approaches like a compulsion urging him forward,
when only waiting will bring an answer.

Process Note: An early draft of the poem had a reference to the highway (Route 95),
but I didn't know until later that day that the highway would become a distinct section
of the poem because of the incident with the deer.

Ringling Rocks Park
by Alan Toltzis

Uprooted,
the underside of a tree steams,
its unsightly crawl
of dirt and decay clinging
to a hairy mesh of roots.

By all rights,
these displaced things,
unused to autumn light
yellowing in early afternoon,
should flee.
But this unseemly ganglion
continues to seethe and twist.

In the bright sun
of the adjacent boulder field,
the live rocks sing
their muted requiem,
each striking its own clear tone.

Process Note: I live outside of Philadelphia, close to Ringling Rocks State Park, but had never heard of it until last year when it made a list of top 10 spookiest places in the country. So my wife and I set out to explore. The park earns its name because of its 8-acre boulder field of “live rocks” that ring like a bell when they are hit with a hammer. Only a few places in the world have rocks like this. Take a listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5cJbcoWaH8> The music starts around 1:13 and while the rocks ring for anyone, most people can’t make music like this!

Cicada Serenade
by Alan Toltzis

A halo of summer-weary sycamore leaves
curl and wither under the scrutiny of noon.

The sun burns white as moonlight.
Earth's abuzz with fresh decline

heralded by cicadas
chanting ancient emergent death rattles.

Strewn around them, hollow,
iridescent cinders, of some born earlier,

their nymphs underground,
awaiting resurrection.

Process Note: This was a big year for cicadas and I started noticing their beautiful iridescent bodies as they died. That, more than their music was where this poem started for me.

Alan Toltzis, is the author of *The Last Commandment*. Recent work has appeared in print and online publications including *Hummingbird*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Once Sentence Poems*, *IthacaLit*, and *r.k.v.r.y. Quarterly*. Find him online at alantoltzis.com.

Med Flight

Madison, Wisconsin

by Candelin Wahl

Badger-red metal dragonfly
zeroes into sight
tail up in descent
big white 2 painted on its belly
eggbeater wings tread thin air
vast hospital roof a shimmering
pond below the hover bug.
It's not for me to see from this angle
what trauma they treat
blocked heartery
or crash victim
please no overdose.
A New Englander passing through
I whisper a Samaritan's prayer
into the arms of white lilacs.
They crowd the sidewalk
in gaudy dress like southern girls
whose only worry is Friday night,
which leaves me – one woman speck
to inhale the breath of life
respire
repeat

Crapshoot
for Bill Ainsworth
by Candelin Wahl

Buttoned into his white pharmacy coat
he didn't notice the switch broom
in the corner by the back door
ready to sweep his brain under the knife
retire him like a spent racehorse

He wears a baseball cap at breakfast
not to shock friends, his scalp
a desert of scars, dry rivulets
sagebrush tufts of hair
same twinkle eyes under the brim.

After omelets and a mountain of pills
he grips the table edge. We watch him
shuffle the hardwood abyss
determined to stay upright
every step a roll of the dice.

Riding a hot streak
he pours a second cup of coffee
not asking his wife for help
too aware of the long odds
in this crapshoot.

The New Oz
by Candelin Wahl

Mighty Lake Erie maker of millionaires
did you weep when they bulldozed
your canal a century ago, scarring
the hem of the Buffalo skyline

did you sing from your great blue cradle
when town fathers undid their mistake
history excavated rebuilt as Canalside
festivals! farmer's markets! kayaks!

no sign of child-led mules
pull of barges lock to lock
no acrid smell of engine oil,
damp bales of wheat bound
for millers in Albany

Mighty Lake Erie – bestower of bounty
I swear I hear you chuckle at the pop-up spires
as yellow-slickered yeomen raise tents
weekend white castles in a new Oz
its armies of blue portalets braced for waste

Candelin Wahl is an emerging poet who recently shed her business attire. She is Poetry Co-Editor of the *Mud Season Review* and has been published in the 2017 Best of the Burlington Writer's Workshop. She lives with her husband in St. Albans, Vermont.

Milkweed Is the Only Thing Monarchs Eat
by Martin Willitts Jr

long yellow-tan fingers
of milkweed open in fall
fixed light

seeds explode into wind
to see where they will go next
scuttling across acres to anchor

they are not frightened to let go
or the randomness of survival or
who they accompany into the next world

We Only Know Longing
by Martin Willitts Jr

*

In the heart, there is a forest
where leaves fold into comas.

Rain is somber on an old woman's face.
She has to stop bringing baskets of pain
with shrewd eyes of needles.

*

Heat wavers hypnotically and rhythmically.
Flowers are indecisive whether it is safe to open
when the breeze is less than from a dragonfly.
Two ponds have emptied betraying the fields.
Now a farmer must tap his well-water.

Months went silent of rain,
then, one fifteen second micro-burst,
and dry before landing.

Surely, God is joking.

The dry spell punishes the just
and unjust equally.

The World Looks Different
by Martin Willitts Jr

from a hay wagon
the world looks slower

different
and bouncy
as the wheels find
every rut
not missing any

my bones jump inside

I can pitchfork this truth
the Amish way
and find hundreds of silences

I can name the variations

I can guide them
with these horse reins
getting nowhere fast
arriving where I want to be

it will be years
before I move to the city
and learn
how to become a blur

Midnight Rain

by Martin Willitts Jr

The separation of silence from noise
is chilling and trying to ripen the flowers into plums.

Its white flowers are in disarray,
not ready yet to complete the transformation,

not ready to have its purple fruit
smeared by rain,

not ready to face the hidden moon
behind the latticed branches.

And when are any of us truly ready?
Rain stops briefly to catch its breath,

Later, the rain returns
like a lover for another session, urging.

Process notes: I grew up in a city, but every summer I would work on my grandparent's Amish-Mennonite farm. I would go from fast to very slow. The slow way taught me to look closely at nature, to do things "the hard way."

February Thaw
by Martin Willitts Jr

inside me
is an interior river
wanting to find
what survives
what renews
what did not make it
to another dawn

just now
the bushes tremble
with hidden sparrows
giving them away

light snow
flutters from branches
slow as a funeral procession

melting snow uncovers everything

my hands shake
like tree branches
after birds fly off

The World Is Alert In Its Silence
by Martin Willitts Jr

in their quiet ways
small creatures disappear
under shadows
building silence
unseen
too busy to make noise
except the crickets who stir things up
disturbing the heat

there are some people who serve in silence
there are others who whistle
like a cardinal with a red song

there are some who tremble like a fern in wind
there are others who are glimpses of life

which are you

I am alert to what makes the silence
silent

Irises

by Martin Willitts Jr

There is a rush of irises across the field.

Love is always yearning.

Sometimes, I feel like I have been away
for twenty years and the world has changed.

I have only a reminder of what I had.

Suddenly, I am back, the door opens —

there she is, my wife, patching my tapestry of loss.

Each stitch is my body sighing.

When Geese Leave
by Martin Willitts Jr

When geese leave, I ask them,
please take me with you.

I'm convinced they are going elsewhere —
a place of many secrets.

I want that out-of-body experience;
not to be earthbound,
left behind.

Departure
by Martin Willitts Jr

What seems like departure
is really a movement to another place:
whether to a city
or beyond the invisible horizon.
It is the next arrival.
Does a person head towards the elusive
or the predetermined?
Will there be a better obtainment of light?
Or abundant darkness?

I have been on the move
like a nomad for a long time,
putting up temporary camps,
taking out stakes, rubbing my hands
barely on the surface — just enough
so memory never adheres to them.
I know about disquieting places
in the head, in the body, in the toss
of dreams shaken loose from nowhere.

I have observed the Eros of destructiveness.
I have seen war
and how bodies can spool out while dying
like wrens. Their blood hangs like fruit
of wracked trees, yet still
countries are drawn into war
like it was a cesspool.

Today, a train pulled away
carrying people to their appointments
with tragedy. The heavy engine of grief
took a while to gain speed, then it left
behind schedule, trying to make up time
and distance. A person on the platform
waved goodbye, although the train
was further away than memory.

The passenger inside could see only ahead
where the future came near, then sped into the past.
The middle is always present and changing,
fixed and unhinged like wing beats.

Music

by Martin Willitts Jr

Leaves fall out of silence
into the unknown,
depending on essentials
of sound, touch, sight
to discover them
crinkling underfoot.

They were once firmly attached,
then let go, as light as an eyelash,
heading into the understood
end of life, fearless,
unburdened.

In death, we all make our own unique music.

Separation

by Martin Willitts Jr

Decidedly, the body enters a coma,
and it will not come back.

The heart-blood walks down a long corridor
away from its source. The brain
keeps firing a few tentative sparks,
enough to be considered alive.

The respirator forces air into the lungs,
but for all intents and purposes,
the body is dying, clinically dead.
Parts are splintering off
like decayed branches from a tree.

The relatives hover, however, discussing options:
pulling the plug; or maintaining a false premise
of life, hoping for a resurrection.

They hope for a report from the *beyond*
where the dead enter, and some, reportedly,
return with profound messages and memory
or what it is like *beyond*.

This spirit wants to leave.
It wants the rendering to end.
It wants the watchers to allow it
to go into the light, begging,
Please, let me go, I'm tired, I want to rest.

The departing spirit wants to tell them
there is no turning back.
Those were all false reports.

But the body cannot speak. It is pulling apart.
The body is transforming
into an empty shell like snake skin.

Already, parts flutter off, loose brittle fragments.

Slowing Down

by Martin Willitts Jr

In April, a stream is swollen by snow melt.
Every year the river surges,
greedy for another day, another discovery.
I am running out of time.

I want to slow down to a certain stillness.
But water lunges as it speeds up, time shortens.
Someday, I will be taken to that better place.

Martin Willitts Jr is a retired Librarian. He has over 20 chapbooks including the winner of the Turtle Island Quarterly Editor's Choice Award, *The Wire Fence Holding Back the World* (Flowstone Press), plus 11 full-length collections including *How to Be Silent* (FutureCycle Press, 2016) and *Dylan Thomas and the Writing Shed* (FutureCycle Press, 2017).

Offerings for the Dead
by Alan Walowitz

Second thoughts sometimes detract
from who you figured you might be
in the distillery of your dreams—
you'd help those in need, comfort the afflicted,
mourn the dead, or at least offer compassion
to those who had been much closer
and in words they could easily take in at a time like this.
A sincere "I don't know what to say" often turns out
to be better receiving-line chatter
than "My condolences, Ma'am, though
I don't have the faintest notion who you are."
Such expressions are often distracting,
and you end up in a handshake that knows no end,
or, God forbid, you hug a stranger
for much too long, and in this dance you have nothing more to say,
and instead begin to babble tidbits from the past—
memories that might just as well be inventions—
and before long you're blubbering when
all you wanted was a little silent weeping in a corner,
far from the sight of the deceased, who you really liked,
your voice cracking at the seams and any thing
real you were planning to say jumbled and fumbled
like your own worst vision of yourself,
a kid whose mother dragged him to a wake—
where he might at least have learned something useful
for later in life when his mother is gone.

Process notes: I was recently informed that a well-loved poetry teacher, Colette Inez, had passed away, and I just started writing. I didn't know what the poem would turn out to be. My guess is she would have approved of a poem that doesn't know where it's headed at first. It's certainly not meant to be a memorial for her; she would deserve much better, much richer; it's much more a memento mori for myself.
alanwalowitz.com

Alan Walowitz has been published in various places on the web—and off. He’s a Contributing Editor at *Verse-Virtual*, an online journal, and teaches at Manhattanville College in Purchase, NY and St. John’s University in Queens. Alan’s chapbook, *Exactly Like Love*, was published by Osedax Press in 2016 and is now in its second printing.

It's Been A Slow Summer, She Said
by Barbara Young

Something's unlocked the gate.
But am I a husband good enough

for the strays I've lured
with promises. Caramel apples!

I have popcorn! Northwest window
overlooking squirrel-depredated tomatoes

and the previous owner's privacy
forest, ever green and two trunks deep!

And the goldenrods are in bloom. Is it wrong
to wish for ironweed deep purple, too?

Or wish the baby fig twig-with-leaves
mature and heavy. To wish apple trees

and pears
like the rich women in Marx movies.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 321.

Barbara E. Young was born in October, in Nashville Tennessee, in 1947. She doesn't remember learning to read. Her first poetic love was Ogden Nash. She is grateful to 30-Day writing challenges for teaching her to write. Habitually. She's learning that slow periods are very good times for revision.

There Is A Cleft In Me
by Janet Youngdahl

Even filled in with earth
It's visible.
Clefts do that.
They begin a simple parting,
A tear, a mere rip
Sorting your body into before and after.
And when not finished,
The cleft becomes unbearable
Lack of separation,
Unconsummated parting
Leaving me here,
feet on the grass without you.

I never intended this branched divide,
this obvious wake in my water
marking me as one who was
taken fully by love, candled and glowing
without need for air.

Is the cleft an absence or an opening?
I only know I cannot rid myself of its geometry.
I remain shredded by the exhuming
chisel of devotion, carefully hewn in
symmetrical slices of transparent soul
somehow invisible to others.

I may appear whole. I am not.
I am a thatching
of grief's beams,
a weak ceiling over the
craggy angles
trying to remember
that my cleft,
like broken honeycomb
given enough sweet rain,

might again inhale
fragrance.

Process note: The poem was inspired by the death of my father.

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My graves went undecorated and my churches
abandoned. This wasn't planned, but practice.

–C. D. Wright, “Our Dust”