

RED WOLF FALL 2022 ISSUE 21



A CHANGE OF WORLD

IRENE TOH, EDITOR

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A Change of World

It occurred to me that the editorial for the Spring Edition of the same title is too high falutin. It's like something that flew over my head. Oh what is that? A bird? A plane? An asteroid?

So I would like to have a reiteration of the same theme, so as you may continue to think about changes and shifts. Tiny shifts that eventually make a huge difference. Imagine drawing a straight line, but tilt it in a tiny shift of the pencil and it's no longer a straight line but is now a new trajectory above the original straight line. The original line is a flat horizon and you're walking slowly and seeing no end to the trudge over the same desert terrain. But your feet suddenly starts walking up a small mound of land and as you crossed over you see...a revelation! An oasis of some kind. If this desert is filled with people walking all in different directions, they will each stumble into different endings. Same starting point, different endings. Different experiences.

We like stories. We tell a story in our poems, don't we, or create some kind of world? For example:

Strange Weather in Tokyo

Life is austere, my friend,
so we ducked inside a bar
to drink sake, eat edamame
and tofu and cod, sometimes
smoked oysters.

It was a way of being alive,
you know. That's how she got
into the orbit of Mr Matsumoto,
her old schoolteacher, bereaved,
and went mushroom hunting.

She asked every so often,
what on earth am I doing.
When he said, you're such a
lovely girl, she was content;
time had stopped for them.

I wrote it after reading a novel of the same title. As said, with poetry, we can perhaps practice the zen that Jane Hirschfield speaks of: "Zen pretty much comes down to three things – everything changes; everything is connected; pay attention." Perhaps you'd like to write it down. Pin down what happened after walking the desert. You pay attention, perhaps to tell a story. What we notice in stories are the changes, or how a poem pivots, so by the time the reader finishes to read, something has changed. A mood, a thought, a knowing, whatever.

In Rembrandt's drawing, a young woman stands at a doorway, with an intriguing face. A thinking look? What is she thinking? What happened to her? What will happen to her? Is there a story behind her beaded necklace? We, as reader, await a story. In any story, there is change. What situation is she in? What happens when she steps out of the door, or step back inside? What's her story? I guess at the very least we look forward to a change of scenery. What's her mood before and after? A change of the narrator's view of the world affects us, as reader. That's why we read the poem, right? The poem needs to bring us somewhere. It needs to transcend or shift in some way. So it's a portal, to our souls, I think. What's our truth? Change comes from any

kind of portal. As doors are portals, to a different world, so are books, and nature, anything I suppose. So are people. You change your people, you change your world. Who you met, who you left, who left you, who you keep. One of the big truths in life, I think. Nothing is forever. Yet you still believe in forever, do you? The other big truth? When you happen onto something, or meet someone, by chance, it isn't really. And when you chance onto something, or someone, that gives you joy, you must feel the presence of God. That's a bit like poetry for me.

I think of Spring 2022 Edition as Part One and the Fall 2022 Edition as Part Two. Let us see the same as well as new footsteps in the sand. Time is change. We'll see what changes. After all, change takes time. In art, as in life, everything is process. Process matters. Process takes time, and for us humans, however slow it seems, it is never at the speed at which a tree grows, measured in hundreds of years. Then anyhow, comes the big change. Big change can happen in a day, or in other words, in one day everything can change. Change, like taxes and death, is certain. That's why we hang onto the threads, because life is full of change, even when we think things are the same, and poetry helps us navigate, to find our own truth, amidst terrible uncertainty. Where art meets life (isn't that the place you and I have been?)—that's a journey of change. So here's to change and a final collaboration, our collective effort.

Here's my take on the cover painting. May you find your own response to it. Like trees who photosynthesize, we make our own stories. Someone said, "Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here."

The sun streamed into my heart
as the tiger year dawns.
For a while it's been dark
but maybe the minute changes
undetected, unknown.

My son listened rapt to stories
I tell him, of my youth,
as to tarot readings.
A girl stood at a patio door
and listened too.

Her thatched roof house wouldn't be
anything I imagined.
An old farmhouse out in the Cotswolds,
she standing there, clutching
her neck, that glistened with red pearls.

Ahh, change! I leave you with these words,

How can I sing? Time tells me what I am.
I change and I am the same.
I empty myself of my life and my life remains.

—Mark Strand, "The Remains"

Irene Toh
Editor
Fall 2022

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Each moment is a place you've never been.

—Mark Strand

It's A Warm Evening Before April
by B. L. Bruce

It's a warm evening before April and I'm planting wildflowers at the base of the peach tree: zinnia, cosmos, aster. I think of my mother, slender hands moving through the earth. This is why she never paints her nails. Earlier, we walked through the narrow rows of the nursery. Every so often she'd reach out to touch the soft leaf of a plant, recite its name. *Salvia leucantha*. *Mexican sage brush*. *Hot lips*. Now, I think of how, in a few months, bright colors will appear here from the soil. And again, I will think of her.

B. L. Bruce is an award-winning poet and Pushcart Prize nominee living and writing along California's Central Coast. Her creative work has appeared in dozens of anthologies, magazines, and literary publications, including most recently *Frogpond Journal*, *La Merle Poetry Journal*, *Visitant*, *Blood Moon Poetry*, and *Feral*, among many others. Bruce is the author of four books, *The Weight of Snow*, *28 Days of Solitude*, *The Starling's Song*, and *Measures*, and is the editor-in-chief of the nature-centric literary magazine *Humana Obscura*.

Honoring Harry Chapin
by Jeff Burt

It wouldn't keep, this impulse.
I had to make the long transit
in the oak forest, moonlight
choked by a rare cloud
eleven miles to walk, car
broken down on County N,
moon swung in my face like an amulet,
the frosted ground like lit glass,
lugging a pack full of pamphlets
to distribute by six A.M.
in October darkness on my college campus,
calling for cans of food
for the first World Hunger Day,
for starving Biafrans,
malnourished seniors in Milwaukee,
to give from our excess
not confined by jurisdiction of town,
as much to feed as to honor
Harry Chapin, his songs on replay
in my head, his melodies making the hairs
on my arms bristle, I so alive,
and yes people were hungry,
I was hungry, impoverished.
I had so much to give.

Sources: When I was in college I played his music (on vinyl!) often, and found his devotion to people and charities enthralling. I organized a World Hunger Day on campus, the first, and wept when he died a few years later.

Little Popple River
by Jeff Burt

One road led to the cabin on Little Popple River
and ahead it looked like an old man, wrinkled, buckled, sunken.
I drove at times with clenched teeth and hands,
at other times loose, as if my bones
had slid from my body and were seated
on the passenger's side, a few times
with a hollow gut turned childish
when the ride made the low swales
of asphalt vanish or the high rises pitched
the truck such that I could see sky
and nothing else. That made me think of Tubman,
who at night said all she could see was the Drinking Gourd,
the prescient Dipper in the northern sky—
the rhythm of walking in the forested dark
not unlike the passage at sea,
one step a sudden swallowing in the furrow
and the next riding the tower of a wave
launched into nowhere.
At the speed the road forced me to travel
I knew I would not make the cabin
and the comforts of friendship that night.

That day I had visited a safe house
on the Underground Railway, a humble
almost claustrophobic home with a secret passage
where I had to bow at doorways to fit
and the steps were shorter than my shoes.
I had imagined the house would be large,
enlarging, a place where a freed person could relax
and stretch and feel the full length of freedom,
not have to tuck, shrink, and curl again.

I stayed in my car overnight. The seat
not long enough for my frame, I tried to sleep
sitting aslant, but Tubman's pull kept me awake,
and quietly rose, hushed the closing of the door
and stood out in the woods with the pines sighing
and the stars vivid without a moon.
The Dipper poured. I drank.
I drank an unbound freedom and cried
and laughed and felt the wounds of misery
if not healed then dulled. When done, I shrank,
I hung my shoulders and drew them forward
and with head bowed returned to the car
with my watch ticking and feet cold.
Salvation occurs often and triumphantly alone,
but between people it is seldom.
That historic stretch that Tubman made,
that far travel on foot, that long reach

of her dream, that recapturing of the soul's expansion,
it has seldom ended. For many,
the doors remain a smaller size.
Even with freedom they must stay hunched to enter in.

When I reached the cabin in the morning
at Little Popple River my friend apologized
for the road, but no, I told him, no,
but I had no way to tell him then
I had encountered a fleeting joy
bound by a continuing sorrow,
and, returning late that night, would again.

Sources: The poem is a true story of a visit I made to a friend's cabin in Wisconsin after having toured a stop in the Underground Railway. For living in a northern state, I was fortunate to have a father introduce me to Martin Luther King, Jr., the marches, and demonstrations at a young age.

Jeff Burt lives in Santa Cruz County, California, with his wife. He has contributed previously to *Red Wolf Journal*, to *Williwaw Journal*, *Heartwood*, *Willows Wept Review*, and *Farmer-ish*.

Illusion Colors
by Joe Cottonwood

A watercolor, twilight over weedy water
purchased from an artsy shop, way back,
the first painting I ever bought
though it took my last penny.

The shop owner said
“Oh you want the one with the illusion colors.”
Huh?
Just now after half a century I googled
but still I don’t understand
illusions we can see and touch.

This painting I so loved
I immediately gave away
because love gets mixed up that way,
gave to my sister who was having a rough time.

That swamp sunset casting colorful peace
still hangs in her home
above umpteen grandchildren so
Thank you, forgotten artist
for how sky celebrates or mourns,
for the invisible forces of family,
for colors so lasting and real.

Message To A Womb
by Joe Cottonwood

I lay my head on her belly and listen
All communication seems two-way, within
It's so quiet out here

She feels your hiccups
She knows when you're sleeping
She says you move toward me
when I place hands over womb

In a belly-bare contest
she wins on convexity and stretchity
I win on hairity

In a breast-bare contest
she wins on utility
and again, on beauty
I, on muscularity

In a time-keeping contest
I win on wrist-watchity
She, on moon-cyclity

In a baby-making contest,
no contest. We win.

I'm just the outsider DNA-supply
can't nourish, can't caress
the curly fingers twitching legs
the lips mouthing baby lyrics
when I sing to the navel call-response

Me: *Oh you can't get to heaven*
You: *bup lup, bup lup*
Me: *—in my old car*
You: *bup lup, bup lup*
but we both know you're in heaven on earth

What I'm trying to say is
you touch my spirit
and when you bust out
you'll call, I'll respond

Joe Cottonwood has repaired hundreds of houses to support his writing habit in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California. His latest book of poetry is *Random Saints*.

On Leaving Home
by Debbie Cutler

When I left Alaska I glanced back
at 29 years of life
in the arms of a state
I love, cherish.

Everything about the Great Land
captivates
the mountains I climbed
stun, enchant
despite treacherous trails
that overlook vistas of green
trees and shrubs of various hues
and dark oceans that roar
with angry glacial waves
showing might and strength.

Summers plentiful with berries
and bears
adventures everywhere
danger never more than a second away
or not
you never know until it is upon you.

The winters dark
still, magical and silent
snow crystals glisten everywhere
deep cold—powerful enough to kill
frostbitten toes blacken
and hypothermia fuels false warmth
so people undress
die alone in the wilds
frozen, half-naked.

Alaska beats with nature
despite harsh or beautiful outcomes
it calls your name
lures you in
like the arms of a siren.

When I left Alaska
my pride, my heart
after 29 years
I moved to Missouri
enjoying a different, safer world
for the older me.

Summer's scents of flowers wild
mowed grass and the fresh rain that follows

outdoor barbecues in months
beyond the three of my former home.

Humidity curls my hair
and smooths skin
I have a cool drink in hand
while warmth that heals
comforts, calms
summers in Missouri
feel like vacation
tropical and soothing.

Outdoor concerts on a summer's eve
swims in pools, warm and uplifting
relaxation on the porch
with my daughter's dog, Fiona
drives through the countryside
with old growth and farmland
corn, soybeans, tomatoes.

Seeking, searching
town to town, city to city
for wineries, fairs, outdoor venues
all unique and quaint
houses with wrap-around porches
and antique grace.

Even winters provide
peace and solitude
Missouri's cold is milder
snow decorating landscapes
like white frosting
in an enchanted world
that offers everything
I need.

Debbie Cutler, a writer of more than 30 years, has been published in numerous mainstream and literary magazines, including *Cirque*, *Wingless Dreamer*, *Journal of Expressive Writing*, *The Dewdrop*, *Pure Slush*, *Shanti Arts (Still Point Arts Quarterly)*, *Sweetycat Press*, *The MockingOwl Roost*, *Prime*, *Of Rust and Glass*, *Paddler Press*. *Columbia Business Times*, *Editor and Publisher*, *Independent Living*, *Wanderlust*, among others. She most recently worked at the University of Missouri, writing for seven departments in the College of Arts and Science. She was the former managing editor of *Alaska Business* and former editor of *Alaska* magazine. She is now retired and lives in Columbia, Missouri.

While Tending In My Garden (After Tu Fu)
by George Freek

Clouds float in the air.
You'd hardly know
they were there. The sun
grows warm. In my garden
bees begin to swarm.
They'll be angry when I
steal their honey. People
move down my street,
but what life once
moved beneath their feet?
It was there for millions
of years. Life is a mystery.
I look to the stars. I
stare at the sun.
While tending my roses,
the riddle will remain,
and when I'm done, I'm
no closer to an answer
than when I first begun.

A Simple Poem (After Ou Yang Hsiu)
by George Freek

As apple blossoms fall
like grains of rice,
I see in the murky water
fish, swimming near
the surface. There's purpose
in their meanderings,
but I can't say what it is.
Spring will stir the hearts
of fish and men alike.
But my hair is now white,
And some things are best
forgotten. I recall
the fragrance of lilies
and their color,
against a lowering sky
like the purest cotton.
But I can't tell you why.

During An Evening Walk (After Lu Yu)
by George Freek

After a warm rain the grass
stretches to the horizon.
It meets the infinite sky.
The gardens are as brilliant
as a Persian rug.
I enjoy it while I can.
Storm clouds loom ahead.
Suddenly clouds are boulders.
The sky becomes blood red.
Turning away, with eyes
locked firmly on my feet,
I avoid a black weed bed,
And the leaves which hung
like lanterns from the branches
fall on my hatless head.

A Cat's Life (After Liu Young)

By George Freek

The clouds are dissolved
by the sun, which rises
like a man stumbling
out of bed.

In my willow tree
a young squirrel screams
at my elderly cat,
stretching languidly
in the grass.

The squirrel's rage
is impotent.

Every cat should
have his day.

But for my old cat,
the night will come
and will last forever,
and it's not too far away.

George Freek's poetry has appeared in numerous Journals and Reviews. His poem "Written At Blue Lake" was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Dream And Ecstasy
By John Grey

Here, where art gets out from under,
truths bleed
the aspects of this changing world
make us think about states
of animal passion,
what nature wants,
what it attempts,
winter abstract,
spring emboldened,
a summer of the purest type,
then, half brown, half-naked,
fall's imperfect sketches,

To the Dionysian spirit
more artistic audacity,
more chaos reaching out to form,
and here I am,
in my best procreating smock,
up to my old autobiography,
splashing paint on a mirror.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Sheepshead Review*, *Stand*, *Poetry Salzburg Review* and *Hollins Critic*. Latest books, *Leaves On Pages*, *Memory Outside The Head* and *Guest Of Myself* are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Ellipsis*, *Blueline* and *International Poetry Review*.

Beyond All Counting
by Mary Anna Scenga Kruch

Unease perforated edges of my awareness in dreams: Ukrainian women forced to watch husbands shot, lose sons in battle, take shelter in shadowed remains of homes, grow cold with approaching winter. As my own fireplace had cooled to blinking embers, I added wood and lit candles to mark remembered comfort that I longed to somehow send, contemplated a sky that stretched across oceans, past burned out buildings and blackened tanks—to where moonlight invited views of a cloudless sky splashed with stars beyond all counting.

Mary Anna Scenga Kruch, a former middle school teacher and university professor, is now a full-time writer. She has published a chapbook, *We Draw Breath from the same Sky* and a full-length hybrid memoir, *Grace Notes*. Recent poetry can be found in *Wayne Literary Review* and *The Wild Word* and is forthcoming in *Blue Heron Review* and *Panoplyzine*.

Tonight I Wish Of
By Karla Linn Merrifield

the taste of that hurricane season
of the ten-thousand thoughts
of wishful thinking that is
of thee
of thy brain and
of leaning over in this poem welcoming you
of salt from your fluid body on my lips
of electrolytes delivered to my tongue
of Beaufort-12 velocity
of lashing me vigorously limp
of humbled pose in the eye—
of deceptive calm—then you, you
of, oh, tumultuous thrashing
of muscles
of my well-toned pelvic floor, but also
of my heart as organ, also fit, and
of my heart, love's metaphor, imperiled

then of warbler song lovely and lilting,
whistling again and again:
you, insistent for me to listen—
sing to me as you pass through me, all
of me, my ten-thousand thoughts
of wishful thinking
we could be anything

Holding Patterns
by Karla Linn Merrifield

1.

I hold you safely
by a tanka's tight confines—
deliciously—
for we can come together
on the spicy here and now.

2.

I
hold
you yet
bodily
in Fibonacci
safety, perfectly boundaried.

3.

Encore! Encore! Unexpected encore
of holding you again, a kiss's fleshy surprise
within the slinky five-lined skink
of a playful poem, on my flicking tongue:
you holding me again, how kiss of flesh surprises.

4.

Trust me, I'm containering your hold
to a scherzo.

5.

Holding you?
What?
Just
fuckin' happily
in bondage of a piem.
Tight? Right!

6.

This:
the box
I cast us in
together, not
so much a looser hold
as one more expansive.

In an ethere I wrap
thigh-lengths of measured lines—heartbeats.
En fin, this exuberance is skin-deep.

7.

All I gotta do
is hold on, hold on—let go
till who fuckin' knows.

Triptych: On Cinematic Waves
by Karla Linn Merrifield

I.

This is the voyage
of movie songs
of jigs and reels
—oh, and of waltzes
of blues and bar stools
of parallel soundtracks
of Bach and Brubeck—
of your tempo's desire.

II.

This is of North Atlantic voyaging
of USA and Canada
of international waters betwixt
of British Empire born to independence
of Boston port, 4th of July
of an entire movie plot walking by
of 1st Lt. O'Malley, his "breast salad"
of four wars: WWII to Desert I.

III.

This is to be a voyageur again
of meta-documentary subject matter
of chart and shoal in minute/second parts
of another longitude of longing
of northern latitudes
of surprise and wonder
of the quintessential video du jour
of this truth: *I* am the movie.

Karla Linn Merrifield has had 1000+ poems appear in dozens of journals and anthologies. She has 15 books to her credit. Following her 2018 *Psyche's Scroll* (Poetry Box Select) is the full-length book *Athabaskan Fractal: Poems of the Far North* from Cirque Press. Her newest poetry collection, *My Body the Guitar*, recently nominated for the National Book Award, was inspired by famous guitarists and their guitars and published in December 2021 by Before Your Quiet Eyes Publications Holograph Series (Rochester, NY). She is a frequent contributor to The Songs of Eretz Poetry Review. Web site: <https://www.karlalinnmerrifield.org/>; blog at <https://karlalinnmerrifield.wordpress.com/>; Tweet @LinnMerrifield; <https://www.facebook.com/karlalinn.merrifield>.

Jersey City
by Mitchel Montagna

The city is empty, except for the bars
that nurture the lost and burn up like stars

With rubble and ruin and Eden so near
it's hard to believe that we once lived here

But I still see the soft dimming blue of her eyes
and the shape of her smile, once wistful and wise

And the form of her body, collapsed to its knees
on the field where we played, in the shadow of trees.

I dreamed I returned, bone-chilled in the rain
to the ground where she withered, grieving in pain

She still kissed my scar with a slow lover's trace
while tears of compassion fell from her face

Such memories flicker as every heart beats
like neon lights dimming above city streets.

Lost Girl
by Mitchel Montagna

I touched my hand to your waist as you came to the door
I'd never seen those stellar blue eyes before.

Like dark shades of twilight stirring the skies
Like tunnels of mood aimed to hypnotize.

Then, when you smiled, I knew I could cast
every damn bit of business of shame from my past.

But I couldn't compete with your immaculate whole:
The malice I hid or your generous soul.

So I closed down my heart, and left you betrayed
Certain with time that your jeweled eyes would fade.

But you hung with me close, like a hovering dream
And you cradled my soul, then the air turned to steam.

You are missing, I'm haunted and needing to know
of the footprints you left all those long years ago.

I swear I must follow; for nothing is right
They've torn me apart through indifference and spite.

When I find you, I'll quietly huddle outside
and peek through your window with eyes opened wide.

I'll dig through my conscience and find me a prayer
that your life's full of wonder and people who care.

That you triumph in dreams and in those whom you love
That your spirit feels watched and blessed from above.

Then, I'll retreat and move on with my load
Like a tired wind drifts down a long dusty road.

I'll wander alone through each canyon and curve
Convinced that we both got the end we deserve.

A Farewell to Sleep
by Mitchel Montagna

Peace came upon me after midnight
It settled like the pale mist in a dream
Outside the moon glow was shedding light
Stars rippled on a silvery stream.

On shore we found glossy and snaking vines
They glowed ever-softly in the dark
Nearby were traces of shadowy pines
Dawn lit up their leaves like a spark.

I dreamt of highways and sonic booms
I awoke as wind teased out our names
All exits ahead were sealed off like tombs
A bank of clouds burst into flames.

I pressed for sleep but nothing would yield
Bathed in twilight she pulled back her hair
I knelt in the smoky ash of the field
I saw her shadow dissolve in the air.

Catskills, Late 1970s
by Mitchel Montagna

I thought I saw Val near the bus station, beneath sparkling leaves
in sleek summer clothes, dazzling as the morning light
Treetops split the radiance around her; I know if she smiles, she
will fuse those fiery shards together
But I don't wait to see. I turn away, looking for the 10:05, because
she probably doesn't know me at all.

On 17 north near the mountains, cotton-blue sky, bluffs and
meadows like shimmering gardens
If you doze, you feel the tingling of haunted canyons; graffiti
carved by those who have become ghosts
After a steep climb the Grossingers sign looms, overlooking a world
at end, as our bus slips cautiously by.

Riding through Liberty, pale granite and dust, gasping old stores; strutting
unemployed, pretending to own the streets
I settle into a small cabin, then walk outside, purple twilight
descending on the woods nearby
A sparrow chants; a young woman sits cross-legged at a picnic
table and asks who I am.

Her dark eyes mirror the changing sky; a breeze carries a pine-needle scent;
her smile is clever and makes me smile
I'm here for a new beginning, I admit. She points to the moon, impeccably round
just above the horizon
Stars seem to creep out as if from behind a curtain. She brushes hair from
her cheek, and thanks me for a gorgeous night.

Mitchel Montagna has worked as a special education teacher, radio news reporter, and corporate communicator. He is married and lives in New Jersey.

Hearts Keep Us Green
by Frederick Pollack

An uncle or a parent's cousin,
his status like his name forgotten,
is revived and asked, apologetically,
for information—
some files have been lost or decayed, need
updating.
He accepts with good grace
(remembers bureaucratic housekeeping);
and the coffee is good, the interview room
airy. My name comes up. He can't place it—
recalls the nickname I escaped;
fills in details about my childhood;
is unsurprised to learn
how little I earn.

He begins to fade as he leaves the building
but without awareness or anguish;
eternity is in fact an easy,
even sensuous dissolve.
The towers soar benignly, their angles
manly, linked
(as in my earliest art) by arching walkways,
attended by flying cars.
Sky blazons needs. Street level
is all distinctive stores asserting
mothers and fathers;
and youths, never discomposed
except by enthusiasm, enter them
to find themselves.

Author of two book-length narrative poems, *The Adventure and Happiness*, both Story Line Press; the former to be reissued 2022 by Red Hen Press. Two collections of shorter poems, *A Poverty of Words*, (Prolific Press, 2015) and *Landscape with Mutant* (Smokestack Books, UK, 2018). **Frederick Pollack** has appeared in *Salmagundi*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Fish Anthology* (Ireland), *Magma* (UK), *Bateau*, *Fulcrum*, *Chiron Review*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, etc. Online, poems have appeared in *Big Bridge*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *BlazeVox*, *The New Hampshire Review*, *Mudlark*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Faircloth Review*, *Triggerfish*, etc.

Becoming Birders
By Emalisa Rose

We became birders.

Through the curfew of Covid, those
initial few weeks, wings at the window,
representative of what had forsaken us.

With our “Backyard Birds,” bible, we
watched and identified, that which was
formerly background noise, become
center stage.

We became bakers.

I always loved sourdough; Hector, the
strudel. he’d bake with his grandmother.

With jam jars and mixing bowls, yeasts
oils, etc., we were passing the time doing
something productive.

We became birders. We became bakers.
We became close, again.

Some progress notes:

Being home together, during Covid’s initial few weeks, a husband and wife are faced
with hours of downtime in addition to the time spent doing their individual job duties.
now from home. Both have worked for decades but now there is a new dynamic to their
relationship. They are hesitant at first, sometimes in their own individual spaces, but they take
the opportunity to find some mutual interests which leads to an unexpected, yet positive change
in their marriage.

When not writing, **Emalisa Rose** enjoys crafting and birding. She volunteers in animal rescue. She
lives by the beach, which provides much of the inspiration for her art. Some of her work has
appeared in *Mad Swirl*, *Literary Veganism*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice* and other wonderful
places. Her latest collection is *On the whims of the cross currents*, published by Red Wolf Editions.

Another Gin
by Emil Sinclair

Are you afraid to die
she says
no I say
I ain't afraid
second-rate play
never make Broadway
too long a run
already
have to know when
to fold 'em
held 'em too long
over and over
same old dialogue
I know all the words
we had
blocking moves
almost lovers once
upon a time
goes round and round
can't get free
of your gaze
makes me what
I'm not
now pour me
another gin
me up
please

Ad Astra (To the Stars)
by Emil Sinclair

I want to hitch a ride on the starship
Enterprise
to escape this demon-haunted world
of lies and hate.
I'll explore strange new worlds
of peace and kindness;
dematerialize
in the transporter room
of lost souls;
and join a landing party
on a planet of understanding.
I can abide these wars
no more.
The ghosts of history
live to rattle their noisy chains
and wrap them
tightly
around our necks.
But my own ghost
has soft, gentle hands
and a voice like music;
her accent does lilt.
Her green eyes bore through
sham illusions
like the morning sun
burns off fog.
Truth is her medicine.
Come with me,
my love;
let us go together
alone
to the stars.

This, Dream
by Emil Sinclair

This dream, this dream.
“The clouds all over
are one-sided,”
said the kingbird.
Wake up
and die
to be wise;
for in her green eyes
is the great light
that shines from within.
“I will miss you
in a good way,”
she said,
closing the door
behind me
as it opened
onto blue stars
spinning fiercely
into wavy particles
that do not
stand still.
But I still see her face
in thunder
and hear her voice
in a pink sky
at night.
This world is a koan;
become what you dream.

Resurrection
by Emil Sinclair

The cavernous hall
was dead silent,
except
for the echo
of my footsteps
on the cold marble floor.
Slowly I traversed
its considerable length,
until at last,
before the throne
of the Great Lion,
I prostrated myself
as an homage
to His Majesty.
“Arise!”
commanded a voice
booming like thunder
over the lake.
I stood myself up
and beheld His gaze,
as expressionless
and impassive
as the Sphinx.
He looked straight
through me,
as if I wasn't there.

No, the voice was Hers—
the Great Phoenix,
perched upon His left
shoulder.
Her steely blue eyes,
the color
of star sapphires,
bore into my mind—
indeed, into my soul.
“What is your question?”
She demanded.
I could barely speak,
yet managed to squeak:
“What is death?”
I implored her.
Her eyes blazed
a blue fire,
as a shriek of laughter,
so loud and sharp,
escaped her gullet,
it shattered to shards
the great crystal egg

from which it is said
she herself had been born.
My mouth agape,
I watched in astonishment
the Great Lion,
sitting motionless
upon His throne
not moving a whisker,
even as the raptor
spread her enormous wings,
which grew and grew,
until they touched
the very ceiling.
Her body now
was the width of the hall,
and began to pulsate,
turning as red
as a hot poker
in a furnace fire.

Suddenly, there was
an explosion
that rocked the hall
and knocked me flat
on my back.
As I roused myself,
I saw that there was
smoke and ash
everywhere,
covering the floor
where the crystal egg
had been shattered.
In the center of the debris
I saw a tiny form
wriggling and writhing,
and heard it softly peep;
it was featherless and naked,
helpless and hungry,
crying for food
and warmth.
“Take her!”
bellowed the Great Lion,
rousing Himself
at last
from His torpor.
“She is yours now.”

And so it was.
I removed my wool mantle,
and ever so gently
placed the baby bird
in the folds

of the cloth,
to keep her warm
and safe.
She has grown now
in size and strength,
and always sits upon
my left shoulder,
where she shall remain
forever.

Emil Sinclair is the pseudonym of a sometime poet and long-time philosophy professor in New York City.

Time-Out
by Adrienne Stevenson

this existential pause
this gap in relentless motion
this hiatus in what we accept
as normalcy

made us feel like guilty children
sent to our rooms to stop making strange
learning a lesson the world renders futile
in its push for ever more action

after two years of physical distance
friends mainly seen dimly through a screen
I took stock of my emotional well-being
and found it much improved

I took time to reacquaint myself
with things I know to be true
that there are limits to growth
that acting in haste results

in repenting at leisure
that we are all still children inside
and need the occasional time-out
to bring us back in touch with reality

Papaver Somniferum
by Adrienne Stevenson

once just a bump on a tall sage-green stalk
the cocoon swells, grows pale, bursts
with delicate colour
near transparent pink petals
single outer, frilly inner
but the bloom only lasts a day
glacial in development
evanescent in display

fading blossoms leave behind
innocuous-seeming seed pods
still green and tender
but, if nicked, capable of weeping
tears that promise relief
from the never-ending grief
of a dying planet

Adrienne Stevenson lives in Ottawa, Ontario. A retired forensic scientist and Pushcart-nominated poet, she writes in many genres. Her poetry has appeared in more than forty print and online journals and anthologies in Canada, the USA, the UK, and Australia. When not writing, Adrienne tends a large garden, reads voraciously, and procrastinates playing several musical instruments.

Raindrops
by Søren Sørensen

Raindrops are drumming the roof of my car
The road is covered with sleet
The air is foggy, and I can't see afar
But I'm not worried a bit

My brain is shuffling things left far behind
My thoughts are vague and obscure
The nature is muddled, and so is my mind
Something makes me feel insecure

It's not the weather, nor the frosty, drab sky
Not the niggling, dull rain
My dreams appear to have gone awry
Just thrown down the drain

Snapshots of my life revive in my head
Like a disarrayed pack
My car is stingily drifting ahead
My ponderings are whizzing aback

All my strivings have crumbled and failed
The past is a dreary black hole
The future is veiled with a nebulous shade
Unwelcoming for a leisurely stroll

The present is just a dimensionless dot
I don't know if it even exists
I am left to hide myself in a tiny slot
Submerge into a cloudy mist

Who am I after all, and why am I here?
Does my life make any sense?
All is a spectacle meant to soon disappear
Vanish into empty space

Raindrops are tediously beating my car
All I can see is muddy sleet
The air is foggy, and I can't see afar
But I'm not worried a bit

Søren Sørensen is a physics professor at the University of Central Florida.

A Bounded Space
By Ralph Stevens

starts at the end,
at the beach, say, or
the island dock,
edgy places where
the unknown begins.
You turn back,
from waves running calmly
up the sand or thrashing
against the rocks, knowing you have
reached a boundary of sorts.
You could break loose in your inflatable,
perhaps slide out of harbor
on a jet ski but you know you're
only ignoring the border,
the line between loneliness and intimacy
with all the enclosures
of community.

And that's what this is about,
enclosure, and what it creates, an attachment
as of atomic particles or the attraction
between stars. We can't go out today,
we say at breakfast, meaning
off this island to go shopping;
the seas are too big, the ferry
cannot dock, the fishermen
won't go out to traps.
The border is closed.

In a bounded space,
you go abroad only when
conditions allow.
The alternative is intimacy, such as now,
in a friend's kitchen with coffee
and fresh biscuits,
a space where folks live enclosed,
not trapped but gathered
into one.

Source: The prompt for this poem was a remark in a sermon by The Reverend Tom Powell, in April, 2021.

For a Few Months
By Ralph Stevens

perhaps a year,
I knew her name,
the girl in pink tights,
walking splay-footed from the post office,
a lollypop in her mouth.
It was September,
a few weeks into school, a few
vestiges of summer hovering
the way vestiges do, reminders
of things past, the heat of August,
cries from the soccer field, slow
conversation on the porches
at sunset. It must have been
lunchtime at the school. She took a few
minutes to check the family mail or
perhaps just to get that lollypop
from the candy master
at the post office window.
I said hello, as I would now and then,
when we passed on the road, perhaps
made a bit of conversation. After all
they were new to our island town, she
and her family, and we pride ourselves
on welcoming newcomers, making them
feel at home. I did my part
and can still see her,
meandering toward me, her feet
pointing at nothing in particular,
face pointed at nothing
in particular so why,
a few years later,
long after they left
as quietly as they'd come,
have I forgotten her name?

Beaufort Scale
By Ralph Stevens

The Beaufort Scale of windspeed ranges from Force 0, "Calm, smoke rises vertically" to Force 12, "Hurricane, violent destruction."

November. A calm morning.
Chimney smoke rises
straight as a young poplar,
the weather vane next door
motionless, the lake still sleeping.
Some days the wind
is a breath on my face and I
walk quietly to hear
the leaves rustle, watch
the lake form glassy wavelets,
the trees, how the small
twigs move, how the schoolhouse flag
stretches itself. And now
branches sway, dust and loose
paper scatter at my feet,
while the lake gallops
like white horses. At the ocean
waves take a long form,
release puffs of spray
grow larger, grow
white foam crests, send spray
against my face.
The sea heaps up, the wind pushes me,
Walking is difficult, foam streaks
the waves and the sea rolls.
I think of shingles blown off roofs,
trees blown down, uprooted.
Waves crest, hang snarling,
hide the small ship
that struggles to windward.
It's time to seek shelter and
I do, praying for protection
of a world now invisible
behind the foam and spray.

Source: Descriptions, in the Beaufort Scale, of sea and land conditions of wind are common. The language used in this poem can be found at the National Weather Service site, <https://www.weather.gov/mfl/beaufort>

A Congregation of Gulls
By Ralph Stevens

They don't know me but
I watch while first one,
a herring gull, glides slowly down
lands on the lake near
the shore opposite. She
just sits there the way
gulls do, floating with the
peace that wild things
seem to have at times like these,
a cool November morning,
quiet between the noise of
summer, long gone now, and
winter's hammer.
But she's not alone for long.
A second gull lands gracefully nearby,
and suddenly there are more,
in groups of two or three,
arriving now and then,
like guests at a party until
there's a congregation of gulls,
a flotilla out there in the lake,
sitting still or rising, one
after the other, wings flapping,
a few inches above the water,
then resting again.
Now two take off together,
fly around the party,
and return, having gone
perhaps into a corner to talk
seeing they had some private
business with each other.
I'm not a guest, of course, being
far away and other,
just observing, although—
such being the world's intimacies—
our unacknowledged,
unseen connection is nonetheless
a connection, a different sort
of congregation.

Ralph Stevens is the author of the poetry collections *At Bunker Cove* (Moon Pie Press), *Things Haven't Been the Same* (Finishing Line Press), and *Water under Snow* (Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers). Individual poems have appeared in a variety of publications. He lives with his wife Sally Rowan in Ellsworth, Maine. Ralph's most recent book, *Water under Snow*, is now available from Wipf and Stock Publishers at:

<https://wipfandstock.com/9781666730845/water-under-snow/>

And from Amazon at:

https://smile.amazon.com/Water-under-Snow-Ralph-Stevens/dp/166673084X/ref=sr_1_1?crid=27GCCLJ3OM8FE&keywords=Ralph+Stevens+Water+under+Snow&qid=1640886858&prefix=ralph+stevens+water+under+snow%2Caps%2C104&sr=8-1

Earth Will Abide
by Debi Swim

“The measure of intelligence is the ability to change.” —Albert Einstein

We’ve grown used to the man with the sign
“The end of the world is near.” He hangs out
on the street corner and we sneer, two thousand
years and more, yet we are still here.
It won’t matter in the long run whether or not
we change, earth will remain and heal herself
though people may be in short supply. Still, I
have no faith that man will change if he survives.
Most are too greedy, lusting for power and fun.
Consumers who buy and buy then toss it out
to make room for more. Politicians, movie stars,
sports idols, you don’t do what you preach.

Process notes: Has anyone else noticed how many more storage units are being built?

“Earth Abides”, written by George R. Stewart

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

It Feels Like 1955

by Mark Tulin

We all meet again next week,
with frowns on our faces,
a pair of baggy sweats,
an overflowing laundry basket
poured into the churning vortex.

It seems like 1955,
outdated calendars on the walls,
a black-and-white TV with a fuzzy screen,
and dingy tile floors, mid-century.

We are like sloths in the launderette,
everyone appears resigned
to miss out on life,
as our clothes take priority,
watching them do the Maytag dance.

There is never enough change
in the malfunctioning coin machine;
no excitement in pushing a cart;
our clothes, like old ideas
have just enough detergent to spare.

I wait patiently to be renewed,
leaf through an old People Magazine,
study each spin-dry cycle,
believing my life will change
once the buzzer goes off.

Venice Beach Mermaid
by Mark Tulin

The homeless man on the beach
sculpts the woman of his dreams
with gnarled hands and a kid's shovel.
He may be destitute and hungry,
but he has the passion of Michelangelo.

He carved her sandy flesh
into smoothed edges,
serrated her fishtail,
and gave her life
by the shine of the sun.

A mermaid! He exclaimed—
sensual and slender,
able to provide hours of friendship,
to share stories by the sea,
easing his loneliness.

Her quiet presence, he enjoyed
until the tide was high
and his only faithful companion
melted by a wave,
along with his heart.

Evolution of Time
by Mark Tulin

The crimson sky of daybreak
rises during prehistoric times,
when the dinosaurs roamed the earth—
alpha-beasts trampling on jungle weeds,
undisturbed by humans
when nature had its way.

Until man invented the wheel,
a gun, and the need to control
the land, sky, and ocean
to suit his desires.

Turn back the time
when the Stegosaurus
walked on too big feet,
when the Brontosaurus
could reach the top of a tree.

Does evolution spell extinction?
Is human progress destroying Mother Earth?
Do we need to bring back dinosaurs
to save us from ourselves?

Mark Tulin is a retired family therapist from California. Mark's books include *Magical Yogis*, *Awkward Grace*, *The Asthmatic Kid and Other Stories*, *Junkyard Souls*, and *Rain on Cabrillo*. He's featured in *Weeds and Wildflowers*, *Still Point Journal*, *The Mindful Word*, *The Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Amethyst Review*, *Vita Brevis Press*, *White Enso*, and others. He is also a Pushcart nominee and a Best of Drabble. Visit Mark at www.crowonthewire.com.

Balconies Belay
by Robert Walton

Blossoms leap
Up sunlight cascades
Like salmon returning home
To Machete's cliffs
As swallows swoop
Past our nest of ropes.
A falcon cries trespass
From the summit spire—
And we do,
And we'll leave,
Though it seems a shame
To climb away
From this blossom-drenched ledge.

Robert Walton retired from teaching after thirty-six years of service at San Lorenzo Middle School. Walton's novel, *Dawn Drums*, won the 2014 New Mexico Book Awards Tony Hillerman Prize for best fiction. "Sockdologizer", his dramatization of Abraham Lincoln's assassination, won the Saturday Writers 2020 Everything Children contest. His *Joaquin's Gold*, offering legends and stories about famed old West bandit Joaquin Murrieta, was published in January. Most recently, his "Mansa Musa's Wisdom" was published in Cricket Media's February, 2022 issue of *Spider* magazine . Website : <http://chaosgatebook.wordpress.com/>

At the end of my suffering /there was a door.

—Louise Gluck