

Bear River Review 2007

The reason the Bear River Writers' Conference exists is to encourage new writing. It only makes sense that we do what we can to help some of that work find an audience. Here we've created a space for people who have been a part of the conference to share their writing with their colleagues and with any other reader who may stumble across it. We hope people enjoy the work and find it helpful with their own projects. Enter and have some fun!!

~Keith Taylor, Director

We are delighted to bring you Issue 4 of the Bear River Review. We use this on-line format as a way of getting the work around to readers as near as Ann Arbor, Michigan and as far as Swaziland. For those of you new to this site, the review is for writing that resulted from attendance at the Bear River Writers' Conference. The writers began their work there—workshopped it there—were inspired there. And their writing inspires us. We thank you, our writers, for making Issue 4 possible and thank you, our readers, for entering this issue. Issues 1, 2, and 3 are also excellent and available for you to peruse. Welcome to the BRR. Enjoy!

~Chris Lord, Editor

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Table of Contents

Cezarija Abartis	Mardi Link
arwulf arwulf	Chris Lord
Sally Bjork	Sharon MacDonell
Simone Black	Vicki McMillan
Lee Brooks	Sarah Mkhonza
Chris Charland	Angel Nafis
William Corbett	Sue Marie Papajesk
Joan Donaldson	Judy Reid
Anne Doran	William Reid
Joy Gaines-Friedler	Bill Roorbach
Christopher Giroux	Kerry Rutherford
Leigh Grant	Lisa Rye
Linda Gregerson	Melissa Seitz
Don Hewlett	Susannah Sheffer
John Hildebidle	Julie Sommers
Zilka Joseph	Barbara Stark-Nemon
Jeff Kass	Jessie Stern
Diane Kimball	Ellen Stone
Elaine Kleiner	
Steve Koelsh	

Julie Stotz-Ghosh

Margret Catchick Sturvist

Keith Taylor

Richard Tillinghast

Barry Wallenstein

Cezarija Abartis

Cezarija Abartis began “Daphne” in Elizabeth Kostova’s 2007 workshop on using the visual arts in fiction. Cezarija teaches English at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota. A collection of her short stories, *Nice Girls and Other Stories*, won the Minnesota Voices Award and was published by New Rivers Press (2003) at Minnesota State University-Moorhead. In a review on *NewPages.com*, Sima Rabinowitz writes: “These stories are as good the second time through as they are the first. Always, for me, a measure of success.”

~ *Daphne* ~

Her name was Daphne, though she had little to do with plants and was an English teacher; and Dr. Byrd’s name was not Apollo, though he was a doctor and a musician. He reminded her of her father. They were in a visual arts workshop of a dozen students on Bear River in Michigan. Using acrylic crayons she was sketching the landscape outside the window, laying down color as Mr. Gaidas had instructed; Dr. Byrd was sketching the porch railing, its parallel vertical bars like a cage. Some of the class members?many of them art teachers themselves?had gone outside

with their drawing pads; there was light at almost nine because it was high summer.

What was art, she thought, but a witness, a memory of the times? Memory was the brain of the species, or maybe it was the heart. Her father would have joked that it was the bladder.

Of course she knew the story of Daphne’s transformation into a laurel tree as she fled the attentions of the sun god. She taught it in the myth class to her tenth-graders, but in Edith Hamilton’s sanitized version, not Ovid’s. Lately, she thought it was about being chased by your memo-

ries. Apollo was the Sun god. But he did shoot arrows of plague at the Greeks in the Iliad. Maybe he was death pursuing the nymph.

A friend's two-year-old daughter had been in a coma for seven weeks after a car accident and had finally died, relieving the family of making the decision to withdraw life support. Daphne herself felt released when the child died.

That's what she told people at the table in the café on the first night of the workshop. Her classmates offered soft murmurs of sympathy.

Dr. Lloyd Byrd had a daughter who shot herself. "Lillian told jokes and riddles when she was a child. 'Why did the kitty cross the road?' she asked me, giggling, proud that she made up a joke. 'To get to the chicken on the other side.' She was a happy child. In one photograph she has her hands on her cheeks holding in a laugh." Lloyd pressed his hands on either side of his face to show them. "Lillian had bipolar disorder. I prefer the old term, manic depres-

sion. That tells you what it is." He brought his hand flat down on the table emphatically. "Lillian thought she had cancer. A naturopath waved a wand over her and told her he sensed a tumor. She would not believe me or her own doctor. 'Physician, heal thyself,' she said. Imagine that? to her own father." He lowered his head, and Daphne wanted to console him in his grief. "I keep waiting for her accusatory phone calls. Even now, three years later."

"Sometimes holistic healing works," Melissa said. She was a young art teacher. Judith gave her a disapproving glance. George said, "I have no children, but that loss must be the worst pain."

Lloyd grimaced. "They say trigeminal neuralgia is the worst. What do they know?" His smile lengthened and disappeared.

The group walked to the dorm under the shining horns of the crescent moon. Daphne and Lloyd were at the back.

“You seem sad,” he said. “Let me tell you, it can only get worse.”

“That’s not very comforting.”

“If you wanted comfort, I would say that the world will not end, or that you will not die, or that you will be with your loved ones always.”

“My father passed away last month,” she said. “He was seventy-five.” She bowed her head as she walked under a low, spreading oak tree. Until then she had imagined her sadness would always be felt from a remove, but this breach was abrupt and intimate.

He bowed his head for the tree branch. “I’m sorry for your loss. I’m sorry for my condescension.”

“My father was old.”

“Not as old as some.”

They arrived at the dormitory. The streetlamp lit the front of the building and, in an optical illusion, made the textured, pocked facade look like the surface of the moon. “My mother’s alive yet.”

“Let her know you love her.” He patted her hand gently. “She needs that.”

He split off from the group, waved, and went to his room on the first floor of the dorm; Daphne took the steep stairs to the second floor. She sat on the lower bunk bed and hugged her knees.

The next day in the workshop Lloyd pointed at Daphne’s sketch. His surgeon’s hands seemed fluid.

“Well done,” he said to Daphne as if he were the teacher. “Those leaves . . . a person could get lost in them.”

Daphne had not intended to draw an occasion for loss. Mr. Gaidas came over and said, “Well done.” He picked up her acrylic crayon. “May I?”

“Yes.”

He made half a dozen quick lines, chose another crayon, and drew small circles?put clusters of green berries at the ends of the twigs.

“I like that,” she said. “The round berries contrast with the serrated leaves.”

Mr. Gaidas smiled and pointed outside. She followed his index finger and saw that there were berries outside the window. “Oh. Yes, good,” she said. “Thank you.”

On the lawn, a black cat froze in the grass, all horizontal concentration, then continued stalking, but it did not pounce. Perhaps the prey was imaginary and the cat was enjoying the movement. Mr. Gaidas glanced out and smiled. “Maybe you should include Tommy in your painting. He was hit by a car, but look at him now.”

Her lines were thick, sludgy, and did not do justice to the sleek, focused cat.

On the next-to-the-last day of the workshop, she thought she was getting better at drawing Tommy. Mr. Gaidas praised her sketch, then consulted his watch, and declared a short break.

The class agreed to stay later to finish up. An aching splinter of moon shone brilliant in the sky.

She admired Lloyd’s painting. In it a gray cat curled comfortably on the edge of an Oriental rug against the banister of a stairway. There were flecks of Matisse colors in the cat’s blue, orange, green.

“So you know the story of Daphne?” Lloyd asked. “Do you?”

She wanted to hear his version and made a noncommittal gesture.

“Apollo fell in love with her. It’s a sad story.” Behind him night was falling. “He pursued her, she fled him, but you can’t outrun the sun. She was turned into a laurel tree. Everything changes.”

“She prayed to her father the river god to be saved, but that transformation was the most he could manage.”

“You do know the story.” His face was that of a teacher proud of his student.

“Of course.”

“And you know Bernini’s sculpture?” He did not wait for her to say yes, but continued talking. “What I like best

is the feet that are already rooted to the ground, and the marble fingers that are sprouting leaves. She is already an alien creature, half transported to another world.” He sighed and opened his hands as if welcoming someone. “She never crosses back. And there’s that pleased, stupid serenity on his face.”

“Well, he is a god, and she’s only a nymph. He doesn’t understand.”

“You can’t outrun your memories, your past, your future. You’ll be paralyzed.”

She hoped, however, there was a way of running on the past, of being warmed by it but not subsumed. “He’s seen it all before—the pain of the world.”

“And will see it again and again in saecula saeculorum.” His voice drifted away.

“You’re Catholic?” she said.

“Born and raised Catholic. I am—sort of. In memory of our daughter. She was a strong believer.”

“Are you a believer?”

He shook his head wearily and looked out with a sad, even expression at the silhouette of bushes and trees against the deep of the sky, which was lighter than the dark land but was itself darkening. There were threads of blood swirling faintly in the west. He waved at the landscape with fingers like an artist’s—graceful and appraising. “The world is what it is.”

“When you go to church, what do you do?”

“I sit in the back. I sing the hymns. In my mind I correct the notes that the organist plays. I remember my daughter as she was in the world. Before she became a photograph, a packet of letters, a bundle of folded clothes.”

“Tomorrow is Sunday,” Daphne said. “There’s a church in town. They continue calling it Saint Christopher, but they’re arguing about changing the name, maybe to a woman saint now that they know he never existed.”

“I’d like to pray in a church named for a nonexistent saint.” He made a narrow smile. “It would show my superior faith.”

Daphne thought of how her friend who lost her child continued to go to Peace of the World Church.

He slanted his head toward his shoulder. The moon was a sideways curve of eyelid against the perfect dark. “Our Lillian had this cat she loved. She brought Esmerelda to us because she was leaving town for the weekend. Then she went to her parked car and shot herself. We still have her cat.” He looked up and searched the distance. “We still have her cat.”

arwulf arwulf

arwulf arwulf writes and edits for the online All Music Guide, works as a projectionist and media technician, and has been involved in experimental theatre, experiential poetics and alternative radio for more than thirty years. He hosts the Sunday Best traditional jazz program on WEMU 89.1 (Sundays 10 AM-1 PM) as well as the Face the Music show (Thursdays 7-8 PM) on WCBN 88.3 FM. "Reproductive Rights for All Women," his double CD of poetry and free jazz, was released in 1998 on the Nicht Schleppen record label. arwulf was in Bob Hicok's poetry workshop.

~ *Magnificat in D major BWV 243* ~

when he's having a manic episode
his ears i swear grow pointed
he laughs at everything
in a voice i do not recognize

he goes off his meds
and takes himself into a church
he's devoutly christian so he paints
his own concordance in thick
blobs of tempera across the walls

all the while hearing my voice
and the voice of someone else
calling to him from the pews
shouting encouragements
through our cupped hands

in time though happily married
to a woman as christian as himself

he becomes infatuated
with a woman we both know well
and who lives with a mutual friend

the opportunity to prove an impossible theory
arises one afternoon as he's driving into town
heading for one of the busiest intersections
he rationalizes that he can run a red light

and if she is meant for him nothing can
harm him but he broadsides somebody
then climbs out of the wreckage
removes his shoes and walks away
barefoot and snickering

~ *Sinfonia in D minor BWV 146* ~

at four eighteen in the morning
there's a train on the other end of town
blowing its horn at the moon

part of the blood is missing
it's been replaced with platinum
it's barbaric but it works

they've added a steroid
it has you bolt upright on the couch
grinning and savoring the voice of the locomotive

very like rahsaan roland kirk
blowing three saxophones at once
back there in the north part of the night

the freight train slowly raises its engine
rising off its tracks curling backwards
lifting slowly into the air

spinning its rivets grinning back
grinning back
arching its back in the night

Sally Bjork

Sally Bjork lives and works in Ann Arbor. She has published poetry in the Huron River Review. This recent venture into prose was inspired by Laura Kasischke's workshop at Bear River 2007.

~ *Weekend Trip (Excerpt)* ~ *Sunrise - Sunday*

The still water is black as I approach. Steam rises and dissipates, effortlessly. My eye is caught by a great blue heron, gliding silently across the landscape—the sole movement in front of silhouetted trees at dawn, legs trailing gracefully with glints of red as the sun peeks above the horizon. At the water's edge, I inhale deeply, fully. Crisp air rushes in, rejuvenating my lungs. I feel renewed with every inch, every cell of my being. A crow's caw in the distance calls me back to the present. I glance around to confirm that this solitude is not imagined, then look down, shocked to see my hands. With a sudden contraction of muscle and might, I fling the knife out over the water. It slips slightly upon release

and warbles through the air before shattering the stillness, piercing the water's surface.

Crouching, I slide my hands beneath the water's cool edge. The sight mesmerizes me—water lifting blood like chiffon ribbons as they fall away from a gift, twisting outward before fading from view. I rub my hands to see my skin emerge clean, rising from the crimson clouds as ripples from the center of the lake lap at my wrists.

Overwhelmed with gratitude, I fall to my knees filled with the relief of newfound freedom. I don't notice the flashing red lights reflecting off the trees, moving silently across the landscape like the blue heron at sunrise.

~ *Sunset – Friday* ~

I run to the edge of the bluff. Rain clouds, quickly moving off the horizon, reveal the darkening blues and reds of day's end—fully saturated at that thin line of infinity where sky meets water. From ten yards out, translucent turquoise waves break to white on the shoal. Water cascades off to shadow before breaking again on the rocky shore.

Tingling with excitement and awe, I rush down the stairs—a hundred blocks of wet wood terraced into sandy loam, surrounded by pines and needles. Thunderous waves crescendo as I descend to the deserted beach. I hadn't seen anyone else for hours, or miles for that matter—no cars, no one in sight on the stormy drive north. Despite this, a chill scurries down my spine with the feeling of being watched. I look back into the woods, now dark with the sun low on the horizon. I see nothing. Shaking the fear from my shoulders, I turn back toward the water and the incredible expanse of rocks—a phenom-

enon of this piece of land jutting out into the lake where there is nothing to obstruct nature's deposit of treasures on her shore, storm after storm.

For as far as the eye could see, there was a blanket of rocks and boulders, from the size of marbles to the size of a human curled in a child's pose. With the constant movement of curved surfaces underfoot, I steady myself as I walk out on the beach. I slip and turn slightly. My eye falls in line with a swell in the rocks—a pile, about two feet higher than anything surrounding it. I turn to walk over to it, but am sidetracked by a ring of rocks close to the water. Three layers of rocks step inward toward an opening in the sand. Atop the sand, lay a wet pile of ash, concentrated in the center but spattered up on the sides of the rock. What is this? I thought. A ritual? Or, an artist's study, perhaps, of rock and light. Or, just a mini campfire.

Remembering the swell of rocks to the south, I move on to investigate. My ears are filled with the clinking and grinding of rocks against one another

as I roll across them. Moving closer, I notice carnage strewn everywhere. Wet feathers plastered to the rocks. Dark, oily bulbous objects that I imagine to be bits of muscle and other disembodied animal parts are scattered about. A sense of doom washes over me as I move past these omens. But, the uniqueness of the rocks at the pile diverts my attention. Crystallized fossils glisten in the sun. Perfectly round balls of granite semi-polished by erosion balance on rough edges of newly broken rock. All special in some way, and placed there deliberately, carefully, in a pile about five or six feet in length.

I lean forward and pick up a rock. The second I lift it, an immense, rotund white spider, resembling a rock itself, scrambles away to a crevice of safety. Startled, I jump back and keep moving. I bend down again in a new spot, picking and digging through the rocks. Intrigued and seemingly compelled by a force outside of myself, I kneel down and start using both hands to set the rocks beside, then behind me. Finally I start flinging them until I reach the sand beneath?wet, tan, grainy?a minia-

ture rocky beach repeating the pattern from above.

Completely immersed, I grew unaware of the world outside of nature's sensory input?the sun cast its fire glow on the rocks, big and small. The thunderous, clapping waves create a deafening meditation, pounding all concern and tension that I carried at the start of my weekend journey out of my body and mind. The trip's purpose was fulfilled, and it was only Friday night.

I dig in and push some of the sand aside. My hands numbed quickly with the cold wet grit, polishing my skin. I couldn't feel anything from the wrist down until I hit something hard and sharp. "Ow!" I yank my hand back, cut and bleeding. I carefully smooth the sand aside with my other hand until I see a bent prong from a ring, followed by the glint of a diamond and the hand to which it belonged.

I could hear something moving quickly across the beach. I turn upward just in time to see the rough surface of a rock coming down from above.

Simone Black

Simone Black is a student at the City College of New York. She attended Barry Wallenstein's workshop at the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2007.

~ *Magisterial* ~

Raven textured
slight
Horn Man

Closes out this life when
the stage is mounted
a hunter poised
weapon in place
a gaze
a glance
a blink and
you're consumed into
your trumpet cosmos
your bronzed atmosphere
only once did I kiss your sable eye
before you hid
retreated in to
a place
a space
a point of
position where the sun dances
a round the guest of honor
a Blessing for me for

I have been invited
by a Melody

Shoulders nip at your earlobe
as you
hug and blow
your frame curves to allow
more Breath
than God granted mortals
breathe to give life
to that
wail that
cry that
Moan
soprano in sound under a
bed of Bass
covered with a tinkling
of ivory and butta smooth black.

Shine for me Horn Man
glaze my soul with
the breath of your melody
glean me then
breathe life into me
with
the pressing of your heart beat
pouring
flowing
raining
drenching us

rapping its refrain around
the drum beating in my ear

...Ashe'

~ *Migration* ~

I

Wafting

I dream of laughter

Rich

riding hiding sliding gliding abiding upon the bass

Sound

from within your cream textured throat.

In hunger I will

a nibble

upon the adam's apple

I bob and catch the flesh

as it beckons my name

in moans.

A place

A space...a moments mystery

I long to in~hab~it

May I?

May I catch a ride within the

tremors of your moustache as you

inhale

and~hail

my ear toward the softness of
your bottom lip a sweet supple lower invitation that widens
as you whisper a note.

Permission requested to reside
in the iris of your coal~rimmed
eye.

II

Ooooooh daddi your smile
gives way
to your sway

the swagger where rhythm is
NOT confined to dancin'
Move babi
Smooth babi
Dip dad~di
Dip ova here
hear my tinkle
as you sprinkle some
shakin' not stirred chocolate man martini
in my glass.

Oh how I long
to go
into the sublime divine of
the nestle of your frame.
Can you elevate

when you create
like my man col~
trane yo self
don't tame yo self
name yo self
In~fin~ite

Infinite are the possibilities
this rhythm plays.
No daddi no game
game got got a long time
ago
don't you know this
here is where
u stop time.
Move Easy Baby
That light~skinned brotha ova
there is bout' to take your shine.

Where?
Mr. 5 o'clock shadow bade the shade upon your
moment.
C u daddi
watch my swagger as I go
that jus' goes to show
movin' easy don't mean movin' slow..

III

deepest is the pool of ebony upon which I float
back ...I

dive...I

dip...in to the rivers of abundant rushes of rich dollops in notes...I
gasp for air to keep from sinking...

the finger tips of his gaze walks up my spine

n dances and calls upon my

my neck

traces a path

in fondles and

caress'

and I reply

his lashes beck

whispers

invitations to

openings

grand elegant

adorned with

honey coated skin

raw smooth

sweet

the texture of his

enraptured melody

consumes the beige warm folds

upon my canvas

ecstasy forms it's shape

in a translucent tear watering
the seeds immersed in fertile
diamonded earthbodied harmonies

floating

floating

floating

I rise in the iris of his

Ebon

I see myself

I see him reflected

in heat

upon my golden hue'd frame

he parts his lips

and simply speaks

my name

...Ashe'

Lee Warner Brooks

Lee Warner Brooks (A.B., University of Michigan; M.A., University of Pennsylvania; J.D., University of Michigan Law School) has been a Yellow Cab driver in Ann Arbor, an editor and writer for publishers in Pennsylvania and Maryland, an editor of the Michigan Law Review, a law clerk for a federal appellate judge, and a partner in the law firm of Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn in Detroit, Michigan. He has published sonnets in The Iowa Review, Passager, Light, Poetry in Performance, and The Legal Studies Forum. He has written several novels and kept a journal since May 1977. At the University of Michigan-Dearborn, he has taught composition, creative writing, fiction, and poetry. Lee wrote and read the first sonnet, "Running: June 2nd, 2007" in Linda Gregerson's workshop, describing a run he went on while at Bear River immediately after learning of Sarah Hannah's death. The 2nd sonnet was also in response to this same news. Lee was the featured writer in Bear River Review Issue 3.

~ *Running* ~

June 2nd, 2007

Hot sun this afternoon – almost too hot
To run. But I outran the hills, the heat,
And nearly fifty minutes in had not
Begun to walk when I first heard the beat

Of something heavy tapping on the trees
Beside the road, and only moments later
Scattered drops became cacophonies
Of maple leaf percussion colder, straighter

Drops that stung my face as hail rebounded
From my shoulders, puddles overflowed,

And stupidly, I thought the thunder sounded
Wondrous, misconstruing nature's code?

Which, if I had listened rightly, would
Have warned me something's happened, nothing good.

~ *We Don't Know What Death Is* ~

A bombing in the marketplace, some dozens
Dead and injured in today's ecstatic
Mayhem? Shiites kill their Sunni cousins,
Who retaliate? it's automatic?

We don't need to hear the details; we
Don't care to see the crater in the street
Or video of how survivors flee
With bleeding bundles trailing at their feet.

Frustration, yes; perhaps a letter to
A senator. But grief? Or tears? No one
Can cry this many tears. So? what to do
About this other death? One more death done,

But not to them? to you, by you? our fears
All manifest? our eyes too dry for tears.

Chris Charland

Chris Charland, Senior Class 2008, Beaver Island Lighthouse School. Chris is a gifted writer who dreams of becoming a sports star. He is gifted uniquely in basketball and writing. His dream is to attend the University of Michigan. He attended the 2007 Bear River Writers' Conference through nomination and scholarship.

~ *Had I Changed* ~

If I could have seen the night
running through the woods with unknown friends,
time passing my eyes
tripping over sticks and stones,
I'd get a feeling, a feeling of being watched.

I'd gaze over to a pond never touched,
a lonely frog sitting on a drifting pad
under a moony sky
seeking his one true love to sweep...

That frog was me. Who did you want me to be?
I'd choose a path I wanted to see.
Where are you? I miss you?
you call me but my phone is mute.
I miss hearing your voice.
I miss hearing your song.
If I could have changed sooner...
If I could have changed.
I have changed. Nothing.

William A. Corbett

The last writers' conference William A. Corbett attended prior to his experience at Bear River was in 1971, in remote Vermont, at a place called Breadloaf. Isaac Asimov was the featured author, and he brought his psychiatrist. One of the participants, a private pilot, was so upset after receiving harsh criticism, that he buzzed the conference with his Piper Cub not once, but twice. After the second flyover, coming within a hundred feet or so of the buildings, the State Police took pursuit. The pilot later revealed to Corbett?after weed and several shots of whiskey?that he landed on a country road and hid his plane in a farmer's barn. Figuring he wasn't as nuts as most of his fellow participants, the experience caused Corbett to abandon any ambition with regard to fiction or poetry and return to his roots and training. "The Icon" was written as an assignment and critiqued in Elizabeth Kostova's workshop on art as inspiration for fiction. "Mystery at Cathedral Bay" is an excerpt from Corbett's novel in progress, revised for the Sunday evening student reading at Bear River.

~ *The Icon* ~

I had been warned: Beware of modern day forgeries the Greeks liked to pawn off on gullible Americans as ancient icons, faces of the Black Madonna or Christ himself staring at you from beneath layers of thick yellow varnish. Yet, as I gazed at the unusual piece before me, it exuded an aura of authenticity. Fifty dollars seemed a bargain, even if it weren't

genuine. And from the moment it caught my eye, hanging on the back of the street merchant's table, it pulled me in, like iron to magnet.

As I picked it up, I felt the tug of my wife's hand on my sleeve.

"Come on, let's go," she said. "Just leave it. We don't need any more junk."

"But it's religious," I replied.

"It's junk for the tourists," she insisted. "Real art is in the galleries."

The icon's attraction grew stubbornly stronger, muting Barbara's continued insistence that I leave it. As I gazed at the object now in my hands, I found it curious that Christ himself was black. Of course, I reasoned, he was the son of a Black Madonna. And the artist's full bodied representation of the savior was quite unusual; most icons depicted only the face.

I turned it over and saw a note handwritten in light pencil glued on the back: "Pantocrator, 'Ruler of all.'"

The merchant explained: "It comes from an ancient Greek word, Pantokrator. Means Preserver of all."

I pondered the difference in meanings. "Preserver of all. Ruler of all." Which was it?

Christ stood looking at me, Bible in his left hand, closed, blessing me with his right. No white halo around his head. Instead, a black circle where a Renaissance painter might have used gold, or shades of white, to signify holiness and purity. The Ruler was mature in years, his

hair and beard carefully groomed. Perhaps the grooming is what attracted me, I thought, because in my mind's eye I usually saw Christ as a broken savior, hair askew, displaced by the crown of thorns and matted with blood and sweat and dirt as he hung limp on a cross.

But here was the Risen ruler, blessing me from behind layer upon layer of shiny yellowing varnish. And as I stared deeper into mirror finish, I could see my own face. Then, I sensed some unseen form of spiritual communication, some palpable message from the beyond.

Barbara tugged at my arm again, stronger this time.

"Just a minute!" A mild tone of anger crept into my reply.

Something was amiss, I thought. The icon was obviously old, or made to look so. The colors below the finish had faded. Shades of black and gold and grey and brown were not fresh and clear, but stained, as if by soot. The background was checkered and

cracked, and pieces of paint were missing, chipped away by ages of time.

Or, possibly?as Barbara later put it?bluntly?some skilled artisan had made it appear so, hoping to deceive the gullible buyer.

“You’re hopeless,” she shouted, dropping her grip on my arm and moving away, her arms folded in disgust. I had seen that look many times on our trip. She was impatient, wanting to do and see everything, keeping to the strict schedule. I preferred to meander through the streets, soak in the local atmosphere, handle the merchandise. Perhaps we were a mismatch. Or, perhaps our differing outlooks was the reason we were once attracted to each other and had stayed together for so long. Years ago I gave up trying to figure it out. We were together, forever. “Till death. Simple as that.

“Not made by hands,” the merchant said. “That’s the legend. No painter made this work; it was given by Christ himself. In the city of Edessa. To the Emperor, to be Upholder of the

World. In Greek: Kosmokrator.”

I noticed small letters painted on the bottom of the icon, written in a language I did not comprehend. After he said it, I pieced together the few Greek letters I had learned; kosmokrator.

“It proclaims that God himself had presented this image, this true likeness of Himself to reveal that indeed He had become man, that yes, He had sacrificed himself for humanity?for the redemption of each man?and woman?who had lived, was now living, and would live in the future. Yes, He indeed has been raised from the dead. And this gift, this proof, can be yours, my friend, for fifty dollars, American.”

I looked into his sparkling eyes, which were as blue as the nearby Aegean Sea. He was smiling.

“Of course, if you don’t want. . .well some fortunate soul will benefit, and soon, I think.” He reached out his hand, implying that it was time to give it back.

I looked at Barbara, who was shaking her head slowly from side to side, a pained expression in her eyes. I looked back at the merchant's sparkling eyes. The salesmanship alone was worth the fifty dollars.

I paid him, and he carefully placed the icon in a bag, protected by thick cardboard.

"You will someday know what you have bought, my friend," he said. "You have made a wise choice."

Barbara turned in disgust. In the back of my mind curious thoughts turned to excitement. Perhaps this icon was indeed from the fifteenth century, as the merchant had said. After all, it showed signs of fire and smoke, not unlike the famous Shroud of Turin. Wasn't that, too, from the fifteenth century?

Barbara turned away, and began walking to our hotel. I knew what she was thinking. After thirty years together, you just know.

And in my mind I imagined,

no?longed for?a pleasant surprise upon returning home. I would ask an acquaintance, an art historian, to evaluate my new acquisition. I would feel great joy and, dare I say it, Redemption, when he declared the piece genuine, an authentic relic from the Byzantine Church.

*~ Mystery at Cathedral Bay
(Excerpts from a novel in progress) ~*

Prologue:

Sierra Leone, West Africa

A messenger came in the middle of the night. As Maggie prepared herself for the ten-minute walk down the path to the clinic, she felt an emptiness in the pit of her stomach, a gnawing which hurt almost enough to bring tears. She and her mother had been close, having had many talks through the years about life and love and mission.

Her current mission was particularly hazardous, here in the bush country. It was dangerous to walk the village roads alone at night, without a male escort. Women could be snatched off the paths by rebels, and raped or forced into bondage. At certain times, even the friendly tribesmen threatened. Rituals of initiation didn't discriminate between white and black, only gender.

So in the dark night, two villagers escorted her to the compound, one in front and one in back, following the footpath to the paved part of the narrow road. It was dead still, so still she could hear their bare feet landing on the ground. She could hear her own heartbeat and their breathing. Her bare legs brushed the moist overgrowth, and she knew that her escorts were happy because her dim flashlight—which she carried on a key chain—scared away any snakes that might linger on the path.

“It was a stroke,” she heard her father say. “Out of nowhere. She hung on until Tyler arrived, then...”

She could hear him crying.

“Maggie, how soon can you get here?”

It was her older brother, Tyler. His voice was soothing, yet commanding. He was the take charge person of the family, and his demeanor was typical of other doctors she had known. The question caught her off guard. Next week she was scheduled to visit another remote village before returning to Freetown. Guilt overwhelmed her; she hadn't even thought about returning.

Now, she ached with desperation to be there, to pray for her mother at the funeral Mass, to comfort her father and brothers. Three days was too short. Just too short.

“Five days,” she replied. “In five days maybe I can be there. Depends on the flights out of Freetown. Or Monrovia. I'll have to check.”

“We can't change it,” Tyler said, “because of the holiday. The wake and Mass have already been planned. In detail. It'll be huge. Five priests.

The bishop.”

Maggie knew what he said was true; it couldn't be changed. For years her mother taught religion to the youngsters of the parish. Every family connected with the church would be there.

“We'd like you at the burial,” Tyler said. “At the cross in the dunes.”

She knew the place: an isolated driftwood cross hidden in the dunes overlooking Lake Michigan.

“How can we do that?” she asked. “We can't carry her casket all that way.” An image flashed in her mind: pallbearers walking barefoot along the water's edge, pant legs rolled up, carrying the coffin on their shoulders. “Besides, the excavation would wreck the dune.”

There was a moment of silence as she waited for a reply.

“We're having her cremated.”

She could feel her heart drop, as if she were in an elevator that

suddenly stopped.

Tyler continued.

“Mom donated every organ. She wants her ashes at the cross.”

It made sense, Maggie thought. The modern church now allowed cremation.

“And if you can use your special ability,” Tyler said, “be with us.”

She knew he was highly skeptical of her gift. He politely tolerated her feeble attempts to explain it. Her unusual ability would just happen, she had told him; it wasn't as if she actually had any control. Her mother said it was a Gift of the Holy Spirit, given selectively through the centuries only to certain saints. Tyler once opined that it might be inherited from their grandmother, as were Maggie's crystal clear green eyes.

A thought suddenly came to her. She remembered the promise of Jesus: “Whenever two or more are gathered...”

“Go to the cross and pray” she told Tyler. “But take someone along. If you do, I’ll be there. Look for my eyes.”

Chapter One:

In Northern Michigan

During our high school years, whenever I thought about Maggie O’Connor in a romantic way a blanket of guilt always descended quickly upon me. She was Tyler’s younger sister; he was my best friend. At that age, that kind of relationship was sacrilege. And even though I wasn’t particularly religious, her family was. As if by osmosis, magically, the O’Connor’s protective aura hovered to keep me at bay whenever I ventured into that forbidden territory. It made me feel as if I were lusting after a nun.

Yet, ten years and half a dozen affairs later, I still couldn’t get her out of my mind. So when the death of her mother brought us back in touch, I welcomed the opportunity. I would have occasion to know her as an adult with a mission, striving to fulfill her

dreams. And even though time had passed, the attraction was still present, though not in the conventional physical sense. There was something more about Maggie, something deeper and meaningful, some new undefined aspect that begged to be discovered. From the moment we renewed our acquaintance I felt it. I needed to know what it was; it was imperative that I learned her secret. And when I finally acknowledged this new hunger, remarkably, the cloud of guilt waiting to descend upon me no longer hovered ominously overhead, though I still felt its presence somewhere far in the distance, protecting her from unwanted overtures. I wondered, would it ever entirely vanish?

I am reminded of the day when I was first enlightened to Maggie’s special gifts. It was after her mother’s funeral, and the family—all except Maggie—had gathered at their cottage.

The sky was an intense blue and the sun was bright, casting a golden glow over the dunes. A very mild September breeze carried the smell of autumn.

Tyler and I had been walking on the beach only five minutes, yet I felt as if we were at the end of the world.

Some New Age types claimed the spot was home to a vortex, a portal to the beyond. And down the beach, deep in the dunes, stood the mysterious driftwood cross. It had been torn down several times over the years, but it always reappeared.

There was a stillness in the air as we walked at the water's edge. It felt like fall, when leaves would just begin to change color, before the winds would blow them, brown and wrinkled, to the ends of the earth. I imagined that Dolores' ashes would soon follow that same path.

We walked along the beach until we came to a faint trail leading into the dunes. When we arrived, Tyler nodded, and we knelt in the sand below the cross. I felt awkward, but followed his lead. He spoke these words out loud:

“Lord, creator of the universe, please, send us the grace to bear

her loss. Never let us lose the sense of gratitude for having known her. And Lord, give us a clear vision of our mission here on earth, that we may fulfill our roles as Mom has fulfilled hers.”

Tyler stood up, and crossed himself in the Catholic tradition,

“Amen.”

I repeated, “Amen.”

Following his lead, we looked at the cross and bowed simultaneously. Then he hugged me, and I could see tears streaming from his eyes. I glanced at the cross and noticed a strange optical illusion.

A pair of transparent eyes seemed to be looking back at me from the center of the cross itself. At first I thought it was my imagination, that my senses had transposed the vision of Tyler's water-laden eyes to the cross.

But the eyes in the cross weren't blue, as his were. They were green. A transparent crystal green.

Joan Donaldson

Joan Donaldson's *By My Own Hands*, her fourth book for young readers, will be published by Holiday House in the upcoming year. In 2007, her essay, "Saint George and the Dragon," received the Hearst Corporation's Prize for Excellence in Literary Nonfiction at the Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Conference sponsored by the University of North Texas. She will graduate this June from Spalding University with an MFA in creative nonfiction and writing for children. Joan and her husband John grow organic blueberries.

~ *Driving for Pearls* ~

Words

I closed my eyes and dove underwater, searching for just the right word to describe a sunset, a lavender sky smudged by translucent cirrus clouds. A word that would stimulate all the senses and resonate in the rhythm of the sentences. I groped about and touched the rough exterior of an oyster shell, a word hidden, buried beneath the current of language. My fingers tingled as they pried open the shell.

Clomp. Clomp. Clomp. John's work boots stomped onto the wooden floor of our porch. I shot upward and treaded water.

"Yes?" I tossed my hair out of my eyes and felt the words dripping away.

"I forgot to buy molasses. I have to have it for my compost tea. Can you run to the feed mill for me? I need baking yeast, too."

"How much?" I shoved paper and pen to one side of our table and plodded across the room to the gas refrigerator while picking seaweed off ears.

"A pound."

"Only have a pound, minus a little." I held out the red and white bag. Above the brand name, the smiling male baker shook yeast into a bowl half his size. The guy must be baking for a flock of kids.

“Can’t you buy more? I have to have it now. And please go to the feed mill.” John strode away. “I’ll put a five-gallon bucket in the back of the car.”

I stared back at the bay of words now chopped by waves, water too murky to explore. Might as well transform into farmer. I picked up my car keys.

Out in the barnyard, John hovered over a large fiberglass tub, fiddling with an electric bubbler that circulated five hundred gallons of dingy pond water. Bits of decomposing straw and leaves floated over the surface and began to dance when John plugged in the bubbler.

“What’s in it?” I sniffed.

“Compost. Humates. Your yeast. A few magic ingredients, like seaweed. Still need molasses to feed the yeast.”

“Double, double, toil and trouble,” I chanted, backing away. “Fire burn and caldron bubble... Eye of newt and toe of frog.” I opened the car door. “Can’t remember the rest.”

Standing at the mill, I listened to the chug of engines grinding corn and mixing feed. Chaff drifted in the sunbeams, and I mulled over how to depict the swirl of particles. One of the resident gray cats ran up, activated the automatic sliding glass door and trotted inside. A country music song slipped through the opening. At the loading dock, a school of pick-ups, red, blue, and silver, surrounded my green Subaru station wagon. English sparrows pecked at spilled grain. Across the road, the corn stood waist high. A blonde teenage girl trundled out a dolly with my bucket of molasses.

“Sorry it’s sticky.” She slid away the dolly. “Want me to put it in your car?” She jumped off the deck and hoisted the bucket into the car before I could answer. “Have a good one!” Her ponytail flipped as she turned away.

“Thanks!” I scrutinized her biceps and wondered how many tons she lifted in a day.

Back at home, John poured a fragrant brown stream of molasses into his tub, paused, eyed the bucket, and added

another cup. And this was a man who claimed he could only scramble eggs and slap together PBJ sandwiches. As the bubbler churned the brew, a fine mist rose, and the air smelled like the great fermenting vats of rum I had observed in Puerto Rico.

“How do you know what to do?”

“Read. Talked to Fred out in Arizona.”

John should have added for hours to the last clause. Whenever I found my normally reticent husband chattering on the phone, I knew the conversation focused on some new organic fertilizer or technique he had read about. Semi trucks would soon rumble up our half-mile driveway with steaming “Dairy Doo” or the UPS driver would roll out barrels of seawater. Bags of paramagnetic dust scraped off rocks in Canada, jugs of neem oil distilled from trees in India, they lined the walls of John’s spray shed. While I bit into words, testing their preciseness, John experimented, trying to find the most efficient pest controls and the best organic fertilizers. One evening when I had been at a quilting meeting, he had

set up a Sonic Bloom sound system that would supposedly stimulate growth in the cherry orchard. I had banished it after one night of listening to it screech, but I had allowed his box of grubs to remain in the refrigerator until a moist morning.

“What’s in there?” I had squinted at the shifting wood shavings, tickled by something small.

“Nematodes. Little worms. George Byrd and I want to see if they’ll eat the blueberry fly larva.”

“Who?” In my mind, I ran through the list of fertilizer salesmen and farmers.

“George Byrd, an entomologist from Michigan State. I talked him into partially funding this experiment. He’s coming over early tomorrow morning. Have to spread the nematodes when the soil’s wet.”

“You could take notes. Write an article for your organic farming newspaper.”

“Nah. George can do that. One writer in the family’s enough.”

Sentences

On our evening walks, John was a doctor making his rounds. He noted the color of both blueberry branches and leaves. He checked the twigs, scanning them for signs of botrytis, a mold that attacks and kills both branches and bush. He frowned at wilted shoots and scowled at Japanese beetles nibbling leaves.

“I’ve got to get some water on these things. Sun’s baking the soil. Killing the good bacteria. But I think those trace minerals are helping.”

While I fingered the web of a Queen Anne’s Lace blossom and pondered how to describe its texture, John studied the dirt. His beloved. The other woman in my life.

Pacing across the cherry floorboards, I read a page from a chapter out loud, listening to the confluence of sentences. Did each one strengthen the scene as they mingled in the paragraph? Did they expand the conflict of the story? My pencil crossed out some and flew others into

different paragraphs. My character spoke, affirmed the choices and resumed dictation. The kitchen timer announced suppertime.

The compost tea stank. I stepped back. “How long’s this supposed to work? Smells like you did add eye of newt and toe of bat!”

“Supposed to work five days!” John’s right arm was submerged to his elbow as he held one end of a hose near the bottom of the vat. With his left hand he gripped the other end of the hose on the surface of the tea. A gas engine roared. The brew churned and roiled as the hoses sucked and spewed the tea, mixing the mess.

“Gone anaerobic on me!” John yelled. “Have to spray it out!”

“Now? Came to say it’s suppertime!”

“Gotta put out a tank first!” John draped a hose end over the tub. Tea streamed over the surface and splattered him. He flipped the engine’s switch and dragged his sleeve across his face.

“Go ahead and eat. Save me a plate. I’ll be in after this tank. Still have three more to go after this one. Be a late night.”

John loved a good meal, but that night he fed the land, and the land fed him.

Another year, another summer season. In the bay of the barn, a large plastic container encaged by a metal grid work sits on a wooden pallet. John sliced the top off of the container and now he leans into it, arranging pipes that he welded to a stainless steel bowl. The gizmo looks like Tom Terrific, a cartoon character of my childhood. Sun glints on a new bubbler, a large pump intended for aerating ponds. When I asked how much it cost, John sent me to a weekend writing conference.

“How much oatmeal you got?” The plastic muffles his voice.

“About five pounds.” Not this again, I inwardly moan. Six pounds of baking yeast linger in my chest freezer because this summer’s tea recipe did not require it.

“Can I have it? Please? And next time you go to the coop, buy me fifty pounds.”

“Do you know how big a fifty pound bag of oatmeal is?”

“Make it twenty-five.” John jumps off the pallet.

“Quick or regular?” I quip.

“Quick. Here.” He hands me a cardboard box containing a transparent bag filled with a crumbly black substance.

“What is it?” I sniff, but can’t place the scent. “Compost?”

“Nope. Alaska humus.”

“Didn’t you already try this stuff years ago?”

“Yeah. But this time, I’m making tea with it. Please mix this with some oatmeal and set the whole thing in a warm spot.”

“It’s July. Warm everywhere. Can’t it stay out here?”

“It has to be at a constant

temperature, warm at night, too. We're cultivating good fungi, like when you make yogurt."

"Will it smell?"

"Shouldn't.

I stick the box in a corner near our wood-burning cook stove, the same place where I culture French goat cheese. I love to inhale the cheese's fragrance and sort through, trying to describe its scent, watching the whey ooze around the creamy curd. Now, we grow mushrooms.

A few days later, John turns back the box's flaps. "Mold's ready."

I peek. The smell is of humus after a spring rain. Fine white threads lace through the humus and oatmeal like a Shetland shawl. For a moment it is April and I am in the woods searching for morels, inhaling the softness of evening.

"Great stuff," John beams. "Wait and see, bet the blueberries grow three feet." He strides out with his treasure chest under his arm, and pauses. "How

cool is it going to be tonight?"

"Hmm, eighty now, in the sixties."

"That's why I have my tank on a pallet. I can forklift it into the barn and keep it warm."

Story

The next morning, sentences crash. Images flash. Hunched over our table, I scribble, stringing words, sentences and paragraphs across pages. The characters cheer. The chapter gallops to a turning point.

John rushes in. "You have to come see."

I put down my pen. My characters quarrel like small children, pulling on my skirt. Their voices fade as I leave the Cumberland Mountains of Tennessee and follow John. Overhead, barn swallows titter, darting and dodging. One bird swoops down, plucks a feather from the ground and rises. He drops the feather and another swallow grabs it as they play catch.

“Look!” John waves his arm. “Just the way tea’s supposed to be; even smells right.”

The motor of the aerator hums. Atop the bubbling brew, a foot of foam quivers, the color of chocolate mousse or the froth on a glass of Guinness. Like a simmering volcano, the foam expands, and a large dollop tumbles onto the cement barn floor. The tan fluff stands erect like meringue. The odor of fungus surrounds the tub as if I had opened a package of mushrooms. Another dollop plops onto the floor.

“Amazing. And you think this stuff will work magic?”

“Yup. It will feed good bacteria to the soil and plants, and that bacteria will boost the plant’s immune system. Should stop the gray mold and help the bushes grow. Healthy soil for healthy plants.”

“Did you write down the recipe?”

“Nope. Did you mark down the last time I sprayed? I keep forgetting.”

“Yes. I’ve been keeping track in my weather journal.”

“Thanks. Better move this outside. Making a mess of my barn. I’ll start spraying after lunch. Going to rain tonight, right? Need a rain to wash it into the soil.”

“Supposed to. Think you could spray some on tomatoes, please? Might help ward off blight.”

“Yup.” John jumps onto his forklift and starts the engine.

I stroll past barrels of seawater and a drum of fish emulsion. Brown gooeey drips crust the sides of the drum that reeks like dead alewives rotting on the beach. Working with words is less odiferous than brewing compost tea, and verbs seldom stain my hands. But John and I share a similar quest, and while he gazes lovingly at his fomenting creation, I return to my island and dive for pearls.

Anne Doran

Anne Doran is a former nun and teacher, retired after a long career in private and public education. Writing poetry is a relatively new love which has become a passion, now that there is time for study and work with master poets. She considers the process of creating, shaping and refining poems an encompassing pleasure and, though publishing has not been a priority, is thrilled to be included in the Bear River publication. Anne was in Linda Gregerson's workshop in 2007.

~ *Household Saints* ~

In a red book
with a broken spine
on a playroom shelf
between Aesop
and the Brothers' Grimm
we found Sebastian—
chest a pincushion
of arrows—and Cecelia
who'd been relieved
of her breasts. Akimbo,
we studied Peter,
crucified upside down,
as well as Phillip
who, in addition,
had a fire flaming
beneath. There was
Eusebius, scourged
then scalded, stuck

with scorched sticks
like the ones we used
for hot dogs, also,
Januarius, refused
by lions—but beheading
worked. The well-worn book
had heft, now, lost.
I miss its small, sure
print and line-drawn
miniatures just as I
mistrust absolute ardor.
And, sometimes,
when a palette of grays
muddy the landscape,
I want to believe
someone named
Zeno or Valerian,
Nestor, Methodius,
Regina or Hyacinth
did stand up
in black and white.

~ *The Boulevard Docks, Detroit River* ~

Go east on West Grand Boulevard,
cross Fort Street,
continue on to the river,
wide, fast and deep at the docks.

A waist-high concrete wall runs along the bank,
pock-marked and cracked, but holding.
Look down.
The river looks back.

Freighters from all over trail froth
as they skim the water,
south toward Lake Erie,
north against the river's will.
A sailor from Russia might wave to you.

If it's night, sit and kiss. I've done that.
I've also seen lazy mist settling, mid-morning,
and ice chunks sail by in sub-zero sunshine.

There's no stopping this river which carries
our past to our future, draining a city
that has drowned and revived, still gasping.

It's as if my father stands next to me,
leaning over the wall, watching ragged wood pilings
wobble with the current. He hands me a stone,
studies my throw, says, that's pretty good.

So I'll plop one in today. It'll sink through murk—
though the river's healthier now—fall past
a cruising eel, a fat carp, then lodge in the muck
till a storm kicks up the bottom, moves it on.

Joy Gaines-Friedler

Joy Gaines-Friedler has a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and History. Her poetry is widely published and has won numerous awards including first place in the 2006 Litchfield Review contest. She is currently an MFA student at Ashland University in Ohio, and works as an Academic Literacy Paraprofessional, a College Reading and Learning Association certified tutor, and runs poetry workshops. Joy had the honor of working with Bob Hicok at Bear River. Bob's writing-start and the drive up-north to the conference inspired her poem "A Pheasant Is Crossing I-75 North of Grayling." Joy's poem "Assisted Living" was picked-up by Rattle and will appear in the winter 2008 issue.

~ A Pheasant Is Crossing I-75 North of Grayling ~

where the highway is a line penciled between trees.
I am changing lanes to avoid it. It is the last day
in the month of expansion,

purple iris, peony, fleshy and plump as Mae West.
Today marks one year, like pollen stain,
that my father began his lousy check marks

on a schedule of medications he cursed,
then swallowed. That bird, inching its way
across the right lane, is becoming a sparrow.

My father told me how he almost drowned
three different times. Someone always saved him.

I put Bruce Springsteen into the CD player
...oh thunder road, oh thunder road...
and imagine myself dancing on that porch

in a summer dress, barefoot. I would have left
with Bruce if he would have asked me.
Last year, on this day, I asked my father
if I could call Hospice, get him some relief.
I'm looking at that god-forsaken bird,
I hate it for not knowing it could die.

~Assisted Living ~

A woman downstairs is speaking Spanish on a cell phone.
She hasn't taken a breath in forty minutes. Her task is to guard
the rice pale women that sit beside her in wheelchairs asleep
in the shade. They are like the shredded skin of exotic insects.

Exquisite. They are feathers and cotton. They are kites.
They once had New Year's Eve to think about. They had lovers.

They had many shoes. Today my mother showed me pictures of herself.
It was 1944. She was black and white gorgeous, her dark eyes pillows
among the uniformed men all devilish and legible, the tenements and
walk-ups plump with community. There were no shopping malls,
no endless rows of freeway lights. There was no sorry in her eyes.
One moonlit night while my father was dying

I heard a hum of voices through the wall. It was very late.
I loved the sound of them talking. The rise of question,
the pause, the rise of answer.
They spoke in the language of walls.

As they faded from black and white to color
my father died. Now, my mother curses the deaf,
the spoor of sparrows, the blossoms that slip from the dogwood,
the memory of kisses, the thing that lifts the wind.

Christopher Giroux

Christopher Giroux is an instructor of English at Saginaw Valley State University and a doctoral student at Wayne State University. He has attended Bear River since 2004 and feels privileged to have worked under the direction of Laura Kasischke and Thomas Lynch. “Death Watch (Ten Days)” and “Anticipation” were written in Laura Kasischke workshops.

~ *Death Watch (10 Days)* ~

1974,
the day after the Assumption,
and the descent was coming
much too fast.

From the second story,
he studied the sprinkler,
its gentle sweep
governed by the gardener.

From his bed,
the arch of water, when visible,
invoked the spirit of St. Louis;
each individual jet
followed its trajectory.
He imagined clouds before trade winds.
It was all science:
friction, resistance, gravity,
chemistry,
the limits of biology, sight.

Dragging a finger
over blue onionskin
he penciled lines to his beloved B.
Though German,
her name always lifted
Paris before him,
pre-war,
cement and stone,
waiting to be conquered.
Remembering successes, failures,
he yearned to see each fully,
the point of demarcation,
landing.

He imagined a cartographer's rendering on a transparency,
an aerial map:
départements, outlined in red;
arrondissements, in green,
nautilus-like, hovering around a cerulean Seine.

Droplets on the window,
a gust of wind...
he resumed his study.
At its zenith,
the arc of water
evoked the rockers of an overturned bassinet,
polished cherry,
the slats on which the mattress would lay
a ladder poised against an upper-story window—

He pictured, instead,
pale blossoms under water,
the desired relief, the sigh, of spring
in stretches of crumbly soil, composted,
a runway after an overseas voyage.

He remembered the others:
placing all the love
he could send
in that envelope,
small, slim.

His own wrist,
an arthritic claw,
mirrored the “C” with which he signed the note.

For the next ten days,
he would smell antiseptic, inhale dander, dead skin,
would wonder whether the letter
would arrive before death,
whether A. would send it.

White linens would support him
as he sank lower and lower,
the ends of the topmost pillow rising,
on each side
of his face,
like two cumulous clouds.

He would depend on those
keeping him tied down
to lift him up.

~ *Anticipation* ~

In the back of the station wagon, Charley stretched out her legs, short blond hair on tan skin, calamine spotting her ankles. She picked at the maroon fuzz and leaned against the flip-top Black Label box. She had decorated it with pictures cut out from her National Geographic for Kids, yellow trilliums, dogwood violets, mayapple. The magazine had called them ephemerals, early blooms.

The box held the distractions she could bring on vacation. The rule was “if it can fit in the box, it can come.” She searched for the double edition of Archie Digest. Her dog, Gabe, lay, just beyond her feet, on his rag rug, strips of white, some red, a little blue, all tightly wrapped, sewn together with white thread, circling over and over each individual woven strip, winding up and down, back and through. Rug or not, it really was unfair to the shepherd; he hated the car. The longer the drive, the more panicked he got: the crying, the

whimpers, usually some throw up. He ears lay pressed against his skull.

Snatches of conversation drifted over the empty middle seat and permeated Charley’s reserve—“Jesus! How late are you?”—but Riverdale High prevailed. Reggie’s plan was to waylay Jughead, giving Moose a head start on the cheeseburger-eating contest.

Gabe’s whimpering was interrupted by a short hacking cough; his jaws stretched wide, Charley could see black spots on the roof of his mouth.

Their bodies followed the curves of the road, swayed. The smell of ink made Charley’s head swim. The letters drifted across the panels, bled into another, leached onto her fingers. Words swam, the air sank, the car drowned.

Clenching her teeth, Charley locked eyes with the dog, unable to bridge the gap, to comfort him. Breaking the gaze, she squeezed her eyes tight, seeking comfort in night, darkness, from an ever-expanding universe of sun, glare, chrome. To distract herself,

she looked out the rear window. Knees to her chin, she raised her arm, created an L, and gave two quick downward jerks, signaling truckers to honk; she counted the soldiers, caravanning to Camp Grayling, who returned her wave with a pink-skinned salute, like some gentleman general hailing the vanquished. She read license plates—Maine, Pennsylvania, the Land of Lincoln.

The car eased to a stop. The signs said they were nearing Zilwaukee. The drawbridge must have been up, some freighter, low in the Saginaw River, inching its invisible cargo forward, inland. She could see the parallel beginnings of the new bridge.

“Positive, each time.”

“And you waited this long to tell me because?”

The dog’s panic subsided as the car lurched into park. Stomach on the ground, he crawled, beelined, his way to the child. His collar, Fiestaware-red, appearing and disappearing under his fur.

“Daddy, can you put the back window down?”

She stared at the red lines of the defroster, their promise of transformation and clear vision, waiting for them to sink.

“Lower, please!”

The glass eased downward, letting in the air. She breathed in the exhaust, Gabe’s breath was wet on her forearm, and silence slowly filled the car.

She smelled dog, felt the rumble of road climb up through the tires, the axles, the struts, through her Flintstones pillow. Trees blurred as wires dipped and arced as they reached a new pole, fell again, moved quickly upward. Rain danced on the window.

“Ready for lunch?”

She learned she had slept through Clare and Cadillac, had missed the Doherty Hotel. She loved the formal dining room, all cream and beige,

the black-and-white photos on the wall. Mostly she loved the soft-serve ice cream. With an animal cracker perched atop it, the dessert arrived in a silver cup on a saucer. The wafer could be used as a spoon until the sugary cream melted.

“Maybe on the trip back home,” her dad said. “For now, how about something fast? With the rain, Gabe would hate having windows up.”

They took the next exit with a fast-food sign. While she slipped on her sandals, the straps reminding her of her mosquito bites, her dad opened up the back door, fastened Gabe’s leash, and waited for the two of them to hop down. Gabe and her dad would walk around the parking lot while the girls used the restroom.

She left the stall, wriggling the bottom of her dress over her bum. Studying herself in the mirror, she found herself surrounded by brown tile; the small iridescent squares were even on the ceiling. She could see Carole’s feet, in lace-up Keds, moving in the stall behind the closed

door, Burger King-orange even though they were in McDonald’s. Soap flakes fell into Charley’s cupped palm, onto the counter.

She heard Carole’s gasp, panic.

“Honey, go find your dad. Tell him to get the dog in the car. I’ll meet you there.”

“But what about lunch?”

“Charley, now! Tell your dad I need a doctor.”

Holding Gabe tightly, Charley stroked his fur as they pulled up the drive to the emergency room. On the outer edge of the circle, her dad parked, ran up to the doors for one of the empty wheelchairs that sat under the concrete overhang. She pictured the cement falling, crumbling, crushing everything underneath it. She could almost smell the dust rising and settling. Charley opened her eyes, re-attached Gabe’s leash, and slid into the middle seat. A mess of leather and limbs, human and dog, they piled out

of the car, and she opened the front passenger door. A beach towel was wedged between Carole's legs.

"Out of the way, Charl."

Her dad was there with the wheelchair, helped Carole out and into it. Charley, stunned, knew it was blood soaking Carole's shorts, staining her Barbie towel. She knew Barbie was smiling vacantly, gaily waving, from her yellow VW convertible, but all she could see was part of rear tire, a fender. Gabe gave a jump, as Charley stepped on his paw. She slammed the car doors shut, tugged on the leash, and followed her dad under the awning, her eyes readjusting to the shade. The automatic doors slid open, and again her eyes had to reacquaint themselves with darkness. Another set of doors. She slid her sunglasses, pink camouflage, up into her hair and moved in her dad's wake; she rested her chin on the sign-in desk, noticed the sweat on the back of her neck.

"She's bleeding; she thinks she's a couple of months along."

Charley stared at the girl behind the counter. She scratched her red hair as red squares on the phone lit up, blinked. On and off, like Morse code, Charley thought. S-O-S.

A nurse, tanned, permed, wheeled Carole down the hall, her dad was gesturing excitedly to the woman, his motions punctuating the air.

"It'll be okay, sweetie. Your mom'll be fine. How about you sit in those chairs, and I'll get you something to drink?" They were like the chairs in music class, coral in color; they formed a J, and Charley could never sit tight in them. She always found herself sliding down them, a little pocket of air between the small of her back and the chair itself. Her stomach lurched.

Then, the girl at the counter noticed Gabe. "Hmmm... no dogs allowed, you know," she said though the waiting room was empty, the TV tuned in to Phil Donahue, the volume turned down. The girl

pushed one of the buttons on the phone. That button would be white, Charley thought, no chance of blinking. Within moments, a security guard walked up, said he'd take Gabe outside. Charley nodded. She knew about germs from science class. She turned back to the TV where scrubbing bubbles were now racing across the screen voicelessly, though their mouths opened and closed in unison.

The girl brought her a can of pop, and Charley drew the orange liquid up through the straw. She moved over to the window, so she could see Gabe; the guard—he was a black man—waved at her, threw the dog a stick, but never farther than the small swaths of grass that bordered the hospital's sidewalk.

The hallway remained empty, no sign of her dad. Charley walked to the entrance. She could see the guard, sweat staining his armpits, rub the top of Gabe's head, pat his flank. Gabe pushed against him, but his eyes, shining, remained fixed on the

entrance. Charley stood between the two sets of automatic doors; by shifting her feet, by moving one step backward and then one forward, she could manipulate both sets of automatic doors, alternately feel the air conditioning and then the summer humidity, as if it were her job to let the air in.

Not my mom, she thought to herself, sighing.

Leigh Grant

Leigh C. Grant teaches writing at Oakland Community College in Auburn Hills, Michigan and Macomb Community College. She has received Wayne State University's John Clare Prize for Poetry, endowed by the Academy of American Poets, and an honorable mention from the Springfed Metro Detroit Writers for prose. Her poetry and fiction have been published in *The Bear River Review* Issue 3, *Controlled Burn*, *The Paradidomi Review*, and *Cardinal Sins*. She credits a great deal of her inspiration to Laura Kasischke and her fiction workshops at Bear River in 2002, 2005, and 2007.

~ *Grandmother, When in Rome* ~

"...the speed of light must be infinite since distant objects such as stars appear immediately upon opening the eyes." ~Heron of Alexandria

She says it looks familiar
the painted halls of museums
accumulation of dust
musky smell of old women.

It's the first time she's
stepped foot here
hands raw from the tying of vines
Vaseline, pin curls resting in a scarf

Later she sits on the stone steps
She's seen it come alive,
rushing color, image moving
even without her glasses:
slideshow, watercolor, the bending
of time

The light does this
It shoots upward from puddles
catches rear-view mirrors, blinks
in time with thought

Inside the cafes she orders
sparkling waters, sharp
cheese, cured meat.
At home a pan on the stove
ready to fry something.

All her life she's worked
those vines, fruits of labor
bushels, pints, quarts.

She says it looks familiar
her dream of many years ago
when she went to California,
met a man she'd known,
his white grapes hanging low,
heavy on the vine.

In the church she watches them
build stained-glass windows, a family name
Jesus entering a garden, his hand
resting on the door.

In St. Peter's light escapes the cathedral door
others enter and she does not look back.
She sees the light breathe its way in
catching the ripples in a font of holy water

She knows this is now familiar
she waits for her eyeglasses to arrive,
catching the light in her hand,
bringing it closer to home.

~ *“June Bug and the Moon”* ~

The night we got locked in that room I learned about country music. She'd told me that had been his favorite, and maybe that's why the only station we could get was country, that maybe he was in there still, a long white finger moving in the dark, tilting the antenna just so. I learned that there was more than one way to say I love you, that sometimes a guitar could be a man's best friend, and that the dog doesn't always come home. At three a.m. we turned the music down, but not too much because she said she could hear him breathing if we did.

If we hadn't been upstairs we might have been able to get out the window easily enough. I cracked it open a little after we turned out the light, but she said that she was cold and that her sinuses didn't agree with April weather, so I closed it. The bed was big enough for two, so I slept on the left and she laid on the right, but I'm pretty sure she didn't sleep. The moon came through the curtains pretty bright and I could see her eyes wide open, looking at something. Just as it was getting quiet in my head she said something: “Jinny, do you think of licorice when you see the moon?”

“Not so much, June.”

“Just because those leaves are long and thin-like, and the way licorice sticks last a good long time, too.” The tree outside the window hid part of the moon, leaves stirring every now and then with the breeze. “It comes from a leaf, right?”

“I think so.”

“I really wish I had some licorice right now. This very second. I’d eat it and it’d kinda be like tasting the moon.”

“Mmm.” I hoped she thought I agreed, but really I thought the moon was more marshmallowy.

“Let’s turn on the lamp.”

“But it’s 3 a.m., June.”

“Just a little, please?”

“Are you scared?”

“Not so much.”

I pulled the cord and the lamp lit up bright, angry almost. She looked at me, reached over, and pulled the cord again.

“Maybe not.”

We lay like that for a little while, and I learned that life is harder after forty and that the grass is often greener where you’re from. I waited patiently through commercials selling pills to slim you quick and cheap furniture. I tried to guess whether the next song would be sung by a woman or a man. After dark the songs got a little slower and a little bit more sad. June was still awake.

“What’s wrong, Bug?”

“I think I hear him breathing.”

“No you don’t. That’s me.”

“No, he rasps,” she made a deep sound with her throat, “he smoked a lot.”

“Maybe we should turn it off and see.”

“No!”

“Maybe he’s tired too, June, and the music’s keeping him up, even though it’s his favorite.”

“Maybe...”

I reached over and turned the switch.

We lay there for a while, and my head got quiet again. Under the bed there was a box we'd never talk about again. It was made of tin and rusted on the edges. It was hard to open, but we had kept on trying. Inside there were little men made of metal, dusted in what June said was gunpowder, each carrying a weapon, feet melted into neat little squares so they'd always stand tall. Beneath them lay broken pieces of colored glass, and if we fit them together just so they'd make a pretty lake, with sailboats and picnics and a sun in the sky. We'd never talk about how those men must have fallen and broken things, but we knew that they must have.

Linda Gregerson

Linda Gregerson is the author of four books of poetry, *Magnetic North*, *Waterborne*, *The Woman Who Died in Her Sleep*, and *Fire in the Conservatory*, as well as two books of criticism, *The Reformation of the Subject* and *Negative Capability*. Winner of the 2003 Kingsley Tufts Award, she has also received awards and fellowships from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Poetry Society of America, Poetry magazine, the Ingram Merrill Foundation, the National Humanities Center, the Institute for Advanced Study, the Guggenheim Foundation, and (twice) the NEA. Gregerson's poems and essays have appeared in many journals and anthologies, including *The Atlantic*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Poetry*, *Triquarterly*, *The Yale Review*, *New England Review*, *The Longman Anthology of Poetry*, and *The Pushcart Book of Poetry: The best poems from thirty years of The Pushcart Prize*. She is on the MFA faculty at the University of Michigan. Linda Gregerson's fourth book of poems, *Magnetic North*, was a finalist for the 2007 National Book Award.

Constitutional (O.G., 1872-1962) was published in The Atlantic Monthly in March 2008.

~ *Constitutional* ~

(O.G., 1872-1962)

It's a wonder they didn't all of them die of the
sun those days. Remember
Ole's forehead and the backs of his hands?
The fair-haired sons of Norway in their bright
Wisconsin fields, the map

of blessed second chances writ in tasseled
corn. (The damage writ

in melanin.) I never could stand it, my father
would say, by which he meant the morning
constitutional: the dose

of electric fencing Ole found was just the
cure for frozen joints.

But joints be damned, the rest of it my father
loved, he'd cast about for a portion I
could manage, maybe

Linda could fetch the cows. Poor man. He little
thought how quickly
the race declines. Ourselves and our posterity.
It all alarmed me: dung slicks, culvert, swollen
teats, the single narrow

wire above the barbed ones, commotion
of flies on the rim
of the pail. We're better at living on paper,
some of us, better at blessings already
secured. The fence?

It was for animals. And insulated, quaintly,
with a species of porcelain
knob. That part, at least, I had the wit
to find benign, like the basket of straw-flecked
eggs. A touch of homely

caution in the liable-to-turn-on-us world.

Ordain and establish.

And breakable too. An old man at his battery-

charged devotions, double-fisted on
the six-volt fence. In order

to form. A measure of guesswork, a measure
of faithful refraining-from-
harm, let us honor the virtues of form.

And all the dead in company, if only
not to shame them.

Don Hewlett

Don Hewlett's poetry has been published in the Wayne Literary Review, Poetry in Performance, and the Poetry Tribe Review Anthology. Don was monitor of the poetry circle "Your Poetry Group" at the Plymouth, Michigan Library for six years. He had a play performed in the 2004, 12-hour, play marathon held at Oakland University and a staged reading at the "Village Players Theater" in Birmingham, Michigan. He also paints and his art has appeared in the MacGuffin Literary Magazine, on the cover of Bear River Writers Respond to War, and in Writers Reading at Sweetwaters. He attended five Bear River Writers' Conferences; 2001 with Richard Tillinghast, 2002 with Keith Taylor, 2005 with Barry Wallenstein, 2006 with Bob Hicok, and 2007 with Thomas Lynch.

~ *The Waffle Man Comes, 1940* ~

See! Tonight! ... Here comes the waffle man,
in his old boxy gasoline-engine truck,
with big side see-through windows
where I can watch him pour batter
on a square waffle iron,
close the lid, adjust the gas flame,
go to another waffle iron and load it.
Taking finished waffles and putting them into a bin.

I think he is really nice.

He leans out of the driver's window
in the white baker's jacket and hat
and I can see his lips through
the cone-shaped megaphone
when he faces me and calls out

“WAFFLES... Whole WAFFLES!

They are nice and sweet,
they tickle your feet.
Only cost two nickels to eat.
Whole WAFFLES!”

I can even hear him a block away.

When someone wants to buy
he stops at the curb.
Slides open the side window
and takes their money.
Puts two waffles from the bin
into waxed paper,
first sprinkling them, both sides,
with sweet powdered sugar,
and hands it to them.

I run over to stand near them.
When they leave, the waffle man might
have a waffle that didn't cook right.
He'll put powdered sugar on it
just like the ones he sells
and then give it to me.

Of course, that hasn't happened yet.

John Hildebidle

John Hildebidle's fourth collection of poems, *Signs, Translations* is forthcoming momentarily from Salmon Poetry in Ireland. Recently his work has appeared often on the www, at (among other places) Wilderness House Review. He teaches English at MIT. John attended the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2005 where Tom Lynch was his mentor, and 2006, where he worked with Richard Tillinghast. He worked with Linda Gregerson in 2007 and wrote prolifically there and after he returned home.

~ *“Always in the Silence, an Engine”* ~
for *Bill Roorbach*

That's hardly surprising, settled as I am halfway
between the main drag and commuter rail.
What's heartening (or baffling)
is the abundance of wildlife,
evading free-range dogs and feral housecats.
Cardinal, wren, sparrow, chickadee, even mockingbird.
Pigeon, crow, and red-tail soar above it all.
But skunk? 'coon? possum?
Squirrels are as litigious as usual, grey, black,
even (once) white, with dark eyes that refused
the label albino. The trains are few
and shut down rather early. The street, a cul de sac,
empties. Then comes a siren from the nearby fire station
or a whistle, alarmed by a level crossing.
The engines were just lying in wait.

~ *“We Get Too Soon Old, And Too Late Smart”* ~
for Linda

Apocryphal (?) “Pennsylvania Dutch” proverb

How long I kept faith with the notion
Promoted by parents and teachers:
“You’ll understand when you’re older.”
After that long waiting-time
(to be able to drive, or drink, or vote
was painfully enticing, even necessary).
the cyclic years, from weekend to weekend,
vacation behind or ahead, how long until
sweaters could be packed away?how soon
it seems we get older, then something like old;
but how far off lies anything like wisdom,
even good sense. Somehow you survive,
or finesse, your childrens’ questions
you slide past what the tv gurus call
“life decisions.” Is that it? Blithe avoidance.
We get old too soon, and more of a fraud.

One thing’s sure: “growing up” slow or fast,
means (if you’re honest) adding to the list
of things you’ll never learn: playing jazz piano
or blues guitar, watercolor painting, the secrets
of mortgages, car engines, computers.
Growing older (so soon?)?how it smarts.
that body, the one you’ll ever have
(there are, after all, limits to replacement
technology and boosting medications) develops

all the aches and inadequacies the tv ads
unashamedly bray about. Even with the spotty thing
that passes for your memory, you can recall
Being able to do pushups. There's no mistake:

Growing old's too fast, smartening up's too slow.
The trick is to shift perspective, acquire new
role models: forget Mozart, Keats, Tupac; dote on Frost,
wild wicked Yeats, Jagger (to be able, a grandpa!
to prance and shake your booty so), Dylan,
Tony Bennett, that couple, idling unsteadily down
a long airport hallway, hand in hand, visibly
in love. "Old too soon," I'd bet they'd say.
But smart enough to realize the pleasure
of leaning, each on the other. A lesson
only to be mastered with time.

Zilka Joseph

Zilka Joseph teaches English and Creative Writing. She was published in India, and in the U.S. in journals such as Rattle, Paterson Literary Review, Connecticut River Review, Gastronomica, Review Americana, and in Cheers to Muses: Contemporary Works by Asian American Women. She has won several awards, and her chapbook, *Lands I Live In*, published by Mayapple Press in March 2007 has been nominated for a PEN America Beyond Margins Award. She is currently pursuing an MFA in Poetry at the University of Michigan. Her workshop leader at the Bear River Writers' Conference was Linda Gregerson.

~ *Tantric Moon* ~

Karnataka, India

On nights she is whole again,
the moon rises red and hungry,
over the hills. Near Mudigere,

the villagers gather, beat drums, place
fresh hibiscus, incense sticks, and beaten
copper platters on the sandy ground

of a clearing. The drums beat faster,
voices cry louder, words throb and fade
in the embers. Arrack-drunk men

fall like ripe fruit among the watchers. Close
to the fire, the bare-chested tantric

priest begins his dance, his prayers. His chest
pulses gold in the light of the fire, and where
she touches his back, he is covered in silver.
Calling out, he turns to her, lifts his arms,
his feet blur. His moans touch her face.
While the drums drown the ragged
chorus of crickets, she tells him
her thoughts. He lurches forward and back
in her shining hair, her secrets
crawl over his body like fire ants,
swarm in his eyes, the weight of his head
grows too heavy for his neck, his jerking
shoulders. Then, he tears the throat
of a young rooster, sucks the blood, eats it
whole. Feathers, beak,
claws
fill the dark circle
of his mouth. She swallows
all. His sweat-lathered body,
thrashes in the dust, then sleeps.

~ *Turntable* ~

When Dad brought the silver-grey
Garrard home, we rushed to see,
breathe the holy, plastic-metal-oil smell,
feel the shiny translucent curves, run
our fingers over the raised letters of its name,
touch the springy record bed. And, record
changer it was too, the center extended
upward like the Qutub Minar, a spindle of chrome,
cleverly indented half an inch to clutch
a small heap of records. I was six.
Beatles it was, from morning till night,
the big green apple spinning madly,
the 45s stacked atop the magic tower,
turning into a swirling black pool, ring
within ring within ring racing around. My breath
steamed up my pink framed glasses,
I watched cross-eyed, the stylus lift off
its perch like a stiff bird, yet
glide to the exact spot?the inner
edge of the record and sink gracefully,

automatically, onto the whirling dervish
of a disc. Then the miracle happened

again. Money Can't Buy Me Love,
It's Been A Hard Day's Night,

I Saw Her Standing There I sang
while I wrote pages in cursive

for mean Mrs. Rice, sang at the table,
sang in my sleep. My teenaged sister

and brother danced every night. Her legs
were slender, his moves smooth, and together

they could really spin. I learned
how to jive. Steps my feet remembered

for a long time. Even after
my seventh birthday, when they brought me

home from the hospital, Dad carrying me
up the stairs, holding me tightly,

my bent fingers barely moving,
my wasted legs wrapped in a blanket.

Jeff Kass

Jeff Kass is a teacher of English and Creative Writing at Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan and also works as the Poet-in-Residence for Ann Arbor Public Schools. He directs the Creative Writing Program at Ann Arbor's Teen Center, The Neutral Zone, where he founded and continues to direct The VOLUME Youth Poetry Project; The VOLUME Summer Institute; The Ann Arbor Youth Poetry Slam; Poetry Night in Ann Arbor; NO COMMENT magazine and NO COMMENT Press; the performance poetry troupe Ann Arbor Wordworks; and The Second Tuesdays Visiting Writers Series. He was the Ann Arbor Grand Slam Poetry Champion in 1999 and 2000 and the runner-up in 2001 as well as the Champion at the inaugural Ann Arbor Book Festival Poetry Slam in 2004. His poetry and fiction have been published in numerous magazines and journals. This essay started in the workshop directed by Thomas Lynch and was later named a finalist for The 2007 Teacher & Writer's Collaborative prestigious Bechtel Prize.

~ Excerpt from the essay In Search of One True Word ~

Perhaps I'm thinking too much.

The poet and novelist Laura Kasischke says her best work happens when she feels like she's writing as if no one's watching. This idea brings to mind the cliché that we should all live as if dancing like no one is watching, a philosophy that has become so prevalent in our culture it's now a corporate mantra. Unfettered hordes of television commercials hawk this very fantasy. Whether the product in

question is a car, a beer, a personal music listening device, a computer, a shampoo, or an investment banking firm?the promise seems to be that if the discerning consumer takes control of his/her life and makes the required purchase, then his/her hips will gyrate, his/her hair will fling madly from side to side, and the world will cower at his/her carefree spontaneity.

This hook is appealing because it supposes that we have allowed ourselves to become so encumbered by social mores, by laws and gender roles and resumé's, that we've lost our ability

to connect with our most primitive, natural selves. What's being sold, then, is the product that can free us from our modern techno-chains (often with a new modern techno-chain?cell phone, I-pod, HD TV, laptop) by enabling us to fling our bodies madly about, thereby connecting us to our uninhibited natural urges. Though this sales ploy is an obvious bait-and-switch?buy this ultimate must-have product in order to liberate yourself from the consumeristic culture inundated with all the other must-have products you already have?it does speak to an honest yearning. We do want to strip away the white-noise detritus that swirls around us and connect more deeply to our inner selves, to the natural world, to the inner selves of other people close to us.

Indeed, as writers, that's our primary job. Unfortunately, as teachers, when we try to teach our students how to write, we too often convey the exact opposite.

The essayist and poet Thomas Lynch, who's also an undertaker in Milford,

Michigan, visited my classroom a couple of years ago, days after having attended the funeral of Rosa Parks in Detroit. He spoke with such passion about that experience, such awe about the unbroken wave of mourners and the intensity of emotion that pervaded the cathedral, that it seemed to me my enraptured students were understanding for the first time not only the historical importance of Rosa Parks, but the radical and revolutionary impact of the entire Civil Rights Movement. And then he began to talk hip hop?asked the students to recite some of their favorite lyrics, and then demonstrated by counting on his fingers how the rhymes shared a cadence not only with iambic pentameter icons Chaucer and Shakespeare, but also with biblical psalms and prayers, and even with childhood songs like "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star." Then, after drawing links between forms, he drew links between themes. "Look, what are these rappers writing about?" he asked. "Sex and death. Vitality and mortality." That's what he personally writes

about too, he explained, and that's what Shakespeare was writing about as well. "What do you think Romeo and Juliet is?" he said. "Sex and death. The oblivion that lies ahead of us in the future, and the oblivion that lies behind us in the past."

The lecture was an example of what Lynch refers to as connecting the dots. "Anything," he says, "anything you write about?any mix of things?you can connect the dots." Essayists (and poets) he goes on to say, "create the bridges, create the metaphors between" the dots. "How can I connect Wednesday to oranges?" he asks. "Eventually, everything rhymes."

And it does. If you live your life with your senses wide open and allow sparks-smacking collisions to happen. A current student, Maggie Ambrosino, believes finding the metaphors to connect more elementally to the world and to one's self is less a question of training one's mind than untraining it. By this, she means she must unpile the lessons she's learned in school about how to build essays step by topic-

sentence-body-paragraph step, and instead allow her mind to work more instinctually. Allow the metaphors to find themselves.

For Maggie, a senior in high school, that finding looks like what happened when she received a text message in the girls' bathroom a couple months ago that said VA Tech school shooting. She immediately recognized that how she felt?the physical sensation in her body?was similar to how she felt five-and-a-half years earlier in 7th grade when she watched the Twin Towers fall in New York. Beyond the obvious link between acts of unspeakable violence, Maggie saw a bridge in the images of people leaping from buildings to escape the carnage inside. The poem she wrote to describe how she was feeling thus begins:

We've always wanted to be birds.

As the piece connects the dots between New York City?all pock-marked and infected, smoking?and Blacksburg?so close you knew how the gun smelled, a little like steel wool and matches?Maggie continues to journey

across space and time on the backs of birds:

it's probably death anyway so why
not be
canary for a second, be sparrow be
parrot
cockatiel, peacock, oriole be
finch be hawk, gull-goose,
flamingo, heron
there is grace in the final arch
a body makes before hot splinters
of hip hit ground, necks curved
over hands over a gash between ribs
trying to keep yourself inside

Discovering a metaphor like Maggie's freshens our perspective on both events and offers insight we can use to integrate such horrors into a broader understanding of the human condition. But Maggie didn't create an outline charting the similarities and differences between September 11th and the Virginia Tech shootings, as she might have been asked to do in a compare-and-contrast essay. Instead, she took analysis out of her reaction?untrained her mind from what the talking

heads on TV were doing?and tried to explore how her body was feeling, trusting that exploration would yield a bridge to travel.

Lynch would call this untraining having faith?believing that if you have faith in language that yearns to ring true, then "the language won't let you down."

A recent experience with a group of first-grade students seems to bear this notion out. When I ask my high school juniors and seniors to challenge themselves to try to use figurative language, often they're stymied. But when I gave a group of six-year-olds the rather concrete task of walking through the playground at their school and finding describing words to chart what their senses were experiencing?i.e., crunchy woodchips or sharp winds?they stunned me with such metaphorical descriptions as "dandelion seeds floating like parachutes," "trees like fluffy beds in the distance," and "a generator rumbling like a whale in the water." What can such language discoveries mean other than the power of the

untrained, uninhibited mind?

It occurs to me that in high school we teach writing backward. Colleagues frequently defend the five-paragraph analytical essay by arguing that the process of mastering that structure (sometimes referred to as scaffolding) will compel students to organize their thinking in cohesive fashion. Then?after years of repetition of the same exercise (as many as three or four times per semester in some classes)?if they've managed to achieve competency of the form, they can be encouraged to experiment with some kind of creative writing. Or, as the age-old adage puts it: "once you learn the rules, you can go ahead and break them."

Seems logical enough, except?what if Maggie's right and the adage is wrong? What if the process of learning how to follow the rules, how to master the rules, teaches kids to become so comfortable with following instructions, it becomes too uncomfortable not to follow them? It's been my experience that some of the most resistant, rigid,

unimaginative students in my Creative Writing classes are those who've garnered a great deal of success in A.P. English. It's heartbreaking to hear such students?who clearly have terrific technical command of language?ask me, but, Mr. Kass, what are you looking for, when all I want them to do is take a look into and around themselves and see what they can find on their own. It's just as tragic to read their crisp, clear sentences as they express disappointment about the lack of imagination in their end-of-the-semester portfolios; I'm sorry, Mr. Kass, I guess I'm just not very creative.

No, no, no, and, again?no. It's not that the creativity doesn't exist; it's that it's been trained into submission. I suspect those students who haven't ascended to the same all-star analytical heights find it easier to experiment with new ways of thinking precisely because they've spent less time perfecting the art of following directions. They're more open to allowing accidents to happen because they haven't completely entrenched themselves in attempting to control the structure of

everything they write?and then been praised and rewarded for doing so. I can't count the number of handbooks and handouts I've seen distributed by teachers that define writing as a color-by-numbers process; some even going as far as to enumerate the quantity of sentences that must be present in each paragraph-block.

What if educators turned this process inside-out? Instead of drilling students with years of rules in order to elevate them to some mystical apex where we can then encourage them to break free, what if we first turned students loose to search for glimmers in the dark? What if we encouraged students of all ages to live like writers, to walk around like first-graders with wide-open, wondering minds that allowed them to see trees as beds and to hear electrical generators as whales? If we encouraged that kind of tapping into a sparks-smacking, metaphor-questing imagination for years until students became comfortably entrenched in that process before we introduced them to certain forms they could then play with, including structures like the

5-paragraph essay, how then might they write?

What if we valued playfulness first, and control second?

Diane Kimball

Diane Kimball's penchant (since childhood) for writing poetry and a new push to write memoirs stem from six decades of life lived in Michigan, Canada, France, and now Hawai'i. Last June, new writing surfaced in Richard McCann's creative memoir class at Camp Michiganiana. Diane's professional endeavor of curriculum writing while teaching in the public schools continues currently at the 'Imiloa Astronomy Center on the Big Island of Hawai'i.

~ *Emerging* ~

Stand back, witness, a voice says. I'm poised on a threshold into scenic views that my ancestors grew up in. I understand why I came here. Wanting to create a dialog with the unspoken voices of past generations. To step where a great-great-grandfather could have stepped. To look at a horizon a great-grandmother could recognize. Am I resonating with their sense of belonging in this place?

I understand what sustains me. Hearing something intangible yet welcoming in the occasional gusting wind at this height. I could be an ancestral Lady Elizabeth walking in the gentle hills above the town. My fine wool socks rub tightly against my

ankles and leave rashy-red marks. My knobby walking stick pokes the grassy way as I urge myself up to the highest point to survey the town. Highlighted by the square-towered church this discreet settlement of houses mixes gently into the scattering of forests and grazing land. Directly below me a rich brown-toned horse enjoys a snack.

In reality, I've joined a friendly group of American wanderers for a few days. We're ramblers, as the Brits say, immersed in the Cotswolds, a range of hills called wolds, which runs through west, central England. We ardent ramblers have hiked up an escarpment to view from above the slate-roofed medieval town and acres surrounding estates colored with grazing green for sheep and harvested gold from wheat fields. The landscape and then

the breeze soften into a vignette of a bucolic September. But I want to head back down this path toward the church tower. Past the fences adorned with cocks and hens, short and tall slabs of tailored limestone placed upright on irregular layers of this rock.

As we discover the town, we're slowly deluged by red roses on trellises, pink geraniums in lavish gardens, and mullioned-windowed houses two stories high. Lace curtains inside windows and grape vines pointing from slate roofs require camera attention. No cars travel our path this morning, so we're free to walk into quiet lanes of limestone cottages.

In a single moment's glance, I see it. Suddenly, centuries of familial living, and dying, intersect here. The pavement leads me across the narrow street for a verifying look. Authentic. The white letters impressed deeply into weather-gray metal. Strong. The nameplate bolted into the honey-brown limestone. Formidable.
WARREN FARMHOUSE.

"That's my maiden name!" Turning to Colin, our guide, I'm about to leap into that childlike twirl of happiness. "I didn't expect to see that here!" I'm filled with exclamations. I don't want to appear too ebullient. But I'm joyous and penetrated by tears. I could be in love with the whole world. I've entered the circle, my circle of belonging. Jump in, dance, a voice suggests. Yes.

"The WARREN MANOR is just around the corner and down the lane." So Colin has heard me. And seen my excitement.

"Can we stop for a look there?"

"Sure, you're the lady, right?" he laughs.

But I know the history. I would inhabit the farmhouse, not the manor house. What matters to me today is the recognition, a kind of with-ness. Then the moment passes while the camera film grabs the photo. My mind whisks away from another time. Just to experience the place in a single view, I've drawn myself within the circle. A belonging fulfilled.

Our group soon collects into the tour bus, and we pass the manor house, unmarked, decorated only with trailing vines. The talk now revolves around lunch at a countryside inn, The Royal Oak. Once there we stuff ourselves with chips, wine-sauced chicken stew, and drafts of Stella Artois. The remainder of the afternoon's ramble leads us up gentle hills and down into Lower Slaughter along the river Windrush.

"Everyone's done so well today. Tomorrow our walk will be our longest. About nine miles," Colin explains as the bus travels past Upper Slaughter.

"Today's distance felt just right," I say to Karen, a Londoner who's joined our trek for two days.

"Tomorrow we'll hike through ancient beech woods, then into former wool trade villages," Colin continues.

By now we passengers have nodded off for the duration of the winding ride along back roads to our accommodations in a nineteenth

century country house. Soon I'm alert again and recognizing the sheep-speckled approach to the private estate, its woodlands a backdrop for the pointed façade of the manor. Dumbleton Hall, replete with musty library, upholstered sitting room chairs, and creaky banistered stairs leading to the comfort of en suite bedrooms. All rich, savory, and sorted, that being the Brit talk for worked out in advance. Rest, dinner, coffee and dessert in the library-bar.

"I'm peckish," declares Karen at the appointed dinner hour of seven.

"Hungry?" I guess.

"Right."

"All this to- and fro-ing definitely works up the appetite," using my British, "at least we don't have to queue up." I can't remember what entrée I signed up for earlier today as we all sit down together at round, white linen topped tables in the expansive dining room. Soon, wine poured, dinner eaten, dessert awaits us in the library-lounge.

“I’m still jet-lagged so I’m going up early,” I admit to my fellow travelers after coffee. A few stay seated around the bay window looking out to the billowy forest behind the manor house. When I get upstairs, my room smells like old stuffed furniture so I draw back the heavy red-gold drapes and open the tall windows. From up on the second floor, above the gravel patio, I’m offered the best view of the pond and its surrounding cedars. Gradually a rhythm of sleep descends and my day-rambling body rests.

Somehow I’m awake at 3 am. A hedge bough at the window points like a paintbrush dabbing dulled colors here and there. As I get up and walk to the window, a strange quiet begins to spread through the room. The only way to touch this all-pervaded air is to suck in a breath and discover there’s no in or out. The silence softens, and I want to lie down on top of it and dream.

*I look out to see what the owl sees in the dark,
listening for what the stars have left for me
the silence starts to speak. Look out the high
window, at the pond and the cedar
that’s what you have for tomorrow?for all
tomorrows*

*stand below in the courtyard and call up
to yourself,
a Cyrano to Roxanne, the words already
heard from inside*

*I can’t explain who came; it was no one,
this most eloquent silence buzzing with
someone’s breath*

*who’d left it with the fog to settle the
argument between Rodin and this limestone
one marble-thinking gesture, but not the
thing itself*

*you carve the stone, says the silence. I thought
I was listening
for a voice, a different kind of symphony
which knocks my heart off its pedestal
a voice soft, thick with velvet from the
window curtain that slides
on my skin, rubbing the nap forward with
the grain*

*each moment is poised-waiting, potential, the
snapped photo just a thought*

*I once had?the real adventure is the moment
before the shutter clicks*

*when you've already seen what you needed,
says the silence,
the flower has taken another breath by the
time you look again*

*Am I conscious? My breath more accurate
than the camera;
the gentle wind hanging around the cedar
wants to lullaby the ducks*

*I understand the echo in my ears, the ringing
of the moths
the hedges, the sleeping hares, I am
the echo, the duck's call back to the night breeze*

Elaine Laura Kleiner

Elaine Laura Kleiner was born in Portland, Oregon, and educated at Oregon State University and the University of Chicago. She co-edited *Sacramental Acts: The Love Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* with Sam Hamill and has written two poetry chapbooks, *Beside Great Waters: Poems from the Highlands and Islands* and *This Sacred Earth and Other Poems*. She now lives in southeastern Michigan following her career as Professor of English Language and Literature at Indiana State University. Workshop Leader: Elizabeth Kostova.

~ *Sacred Encounter* ~

When Cezaria Abartis asked her friend to visit her for the opening of an important exhibition of the work of Vincent Van Gogh she had organized for the Toledo Museum of Art, Ursula Matthiessen, the distinguished cell biologist, was happy to accept her invitation. She had only recently returned from a nine week expedition aboard the U.S. icebreaker *Polar Star* to the Gakkel Ridge, a mid-oceanic ridge located in the Arctic Ocean between Greenland and Siberia. She had been part of a team searching for hydrothermal vents, where water spews forth from the deep sea floor at temperatures of 662 degrees Fahrenheit and is rich in

chemicals, especially sulfur and salt. Her role on the team of operating from manned submersibles and remote operated vehicles (ROVs) had been to study microorganisms that had adapted to thrive on these vents, creating rich underwater ecosystems that the scientists believed might represent some of the earliest forms of life on Earth. Their discoveries had been fantastic: species isolated for millions of years including giant six-foot-tall red tube worms, an unusual black jellyfish, yellow mussels the size of large potatoes, massive beds of anemones, and giant clams. All this life with no need of the sun, enduring incredible pressure in lethal cold. Her colleague John Edmonds believed their work was going to be important for the continuing search for life

elsewhere in the universe as well. But the loneliness and isolation of High Arctic camp life had begun to wear on her and now she was glad to move again in cities and among friends.

She had taken a plane from Boston to Toledo in the morning and had arrived in time to go to lunch with Cezaria before taking a look at the exhibition. Now, walking among the galleries, she paused occasionally before works that captured her attention. But it was the Van Gogh exhibition finally that most attracted her. The collection was made up of twenty-two paintings and five drawings and watercolors on loan from the Kunsthalle Bremen in Germany. According to an explanatory plaque on the wall, the title of the exhibition, "VAN GOGH: Fields," had been selected because "the field had greatly influenced the artist's personal and professional life. Many of his paintings focused solely on the serenity and stimulation he found in landscapes around him." Ursula remembered her experiences with the Dutch artist's many

landscapes, the branches of trees curving and twisting, the sky and ground rolling like waves, the sun blazing in a brilliant bright yellow, the short, powerful brushstrokes seeming almost to have a life of their own exploding with energy, and she concluded that the museum notes seemed fair enough. She turned to the paintings first: "Field of Poppies," "Wheat Fields with Reaper, Auvers," "House at Auvers." She passed slowly from painting to painting, stopping only when she came to "Cloudy Sky."

She read in the notes about the painting that Van Gogh found in nature the totality of life. He saw in nature humanity's place in the larger scope of creation. Though as a young man he had applied for ordination in the Dutch Reformed Church, after bitter experiences with the Church, he came to detest "theologians." He turned to the barest basics of Christianity, adapting the religion to fit his personal spirituality, and eventually developed a unique connection with God that stayed with him throughout

his life. “Disillusionment does not keep me from having a terrible need of?shall I say the word?religion,” the notes continued, “then I go out at night to paint the stars.” “Cloudy Sky” appeared to be one of his last paintings, done after he had admitted himself to an asylum and was diagnosed with epilepsy. It had been painted at Auvers in 1890 not long before his death by suicide.

Ursula had never seen this Van Gogh painting before but there was something about it she found confusing, uncomfortable, mysterious even. She wished Cezaria were there to talk with her about the painting. How could it express “humanity’s place in the larger scope of creation” as the notes suggested when there was nothing human in the painting? There were fields in soft greens and yellows and browns and there appeared to be straight furrows of grains growing in irregular patches. The patches were separated by black lines with little black spirals growing out of them which might be walls and trees. Specks of red streamed up from

the lower left corner of the painting which might be field flowers. A little rocky hill appeared to overlook the fields which stretched beyond in calm and order to the horizon. The top third of the painting was dominated by five big circular white clouds like wheels rolling across a soft blue sky.

The painting was so different from other Van Gogh’s she knew. There was no gigantic sun shining an intense yellow over fields of wheat, no shadowy violet-blue soil awaiting the sower for rebirth, no crows, colored in deathly black, swooping in to take away the seeds of life. The colors van Gogh used were often symbolic : yellow for love and light, red and green for life and passion and conflict, blue for infinity, and gray for surrender. Blues and grays?infinity and surrender?these were the colors of “Cloudy Sky.”

Ursula felt more comfortable with the painting now. Perhaps instead of finding “nothingness” in Van Gogh’s landscapes, she should instead try to see his personal connection as some

kind of sacred force in his portrayals of the skies, perhaps a source of an intriguing hope. The reaper of death is cutting down humanity as he passes through, but perhaps there is nothing to fear. Often in Van Gogh's work, in the center of the sky lies the sun, a common Christian symbol for God, a beacon of comfort. She thought, this sun is the source of calm, golden colors, and its dominant presence puts the land at ease and watches over the events below.

But in "Cloudy Sky," the sun, that Christian symbol for God, had been placed far off to the left and it was covered by clouds, bowing to what appeared to be a higher authority. What higher authority? Something that represented Van Gogh's religious vision of the Infinite, she decided. According to the notes, the painting had been completed in Auvers in July, 1890, just days before Vincent's death. It very likely conveyed his sense of a complete overview of life's entire journey, a combination of life and death, coexisting in nature. Here, the commotion of the daily world had

passed away, as the boundless field then stretches off into the distance until it finally meets the sky at the horizon. This was a painting of the Infinite, Ursula thought, a limitless view of fields and sky, with no tree or building to invade the vision, a system unfolding itself in perfect order.

She was drawn to think of her own work. She too had seen systems-- places where large amounts of heat and chemical mass were transferred from far inside the Earth to Earth's surface through deep-sea hydrothermal vents. Those vents controlled the chemistry of the ocean and gave rise to chemosynthetic bacteria that used hydrogen sulphide as a source of energy. Those bacteria did not need sunlight to produce energy, which was how they were able to live and grow in ocean depths and become a food source for a variety of fantastic creatures. This too was a system, a system obeying laws of physics and from physics, laws of chemistry that had been inscribed in the first moment of time. Where these laws came from, the nature of

their source was unknown. God, the Divine, the Sacred—should these be the names given to the mysterious source of these laws?

Vincent had wanted to join himself to this source. Again, turning to the painting's notes, Ursula read the words of his shocking letter to his brother where he complained, "Why, I ask myself, shouldn't the shining dots of the sky be as accessible as the black dots on the map of France? Just as we take the train to get to Tarascon or Rouen, we take death to reach a star... So to me it seems possible that cholera, gravel, tuberculosis and cancer are the celestial means of locomotion, just as steamboats, buses, railways are the terrestrial means. To die quietly of old age would be to go there on foot." Was "Cloudy Sky" his picture of the sacred Divine, the laws of the natural world inexorably at work?

When Ursula thought of the Divine she realized she visualized the paintings of the giants of the High Renaissance, the idealized beauty of

Jesus and the Madonna with their calmly contemplative expressions. But wouldn't Darwin have approved of Van Gogh's version of the Divine, empty altogether of human presence? Van Gogh had opened a new route to imagining the Divine, focused on his natural surroundings, the purest and most sincere topic he knew. Whatever the scene, vast or enclosed, he told his brother Theo, "I want to say something comforting." And with these final landscapes, she thought, perhaps he had.

As she left the museum and went to look for her friend, Ursula's mind wandered back to her own work. The laws of nature had spun out life on this planet and they may do so on another, or they may not, she thought. But at least those laws appeared to be uniform across the universe. Van Gogh had seen those laws at work in the subjects of his paintings. And he had tried to capture them in his art. She felt so close to him for a moment, close to his spirit, and then the city intruded and her mind passed on to other thoughts

Stephen Koelsch

Stephen Koelsch is the author of two books of poetry: *Dancing Bare*, and *The Cold Wick*, published by Trafford Publishing. His books are available to order through any bookstore, including the internet sites of Amazon, B&N, and Borders. Steve has also been fortunate in having numerous individual poems in regional and national magazines, and anthologies. He is a long time member of the Delaware Literary Association; and hosted their monthly poetry open-mics. He has been a featured poet at many poetry gatherings.

~ *Perfect Moment* ~

A groundswell of grace slams like a tsunami
unannounced, and catches me despite myself?
a young boy watching a woman walk away?
for the first time noticing, caught forever
in a frozen shutter of a moment.
Wanting to be touched by anyone,
willing to turn from all I know, in return
for meeting someone new...like her.
The being who owns the curves underneath
that skirt, pauses between the shadows,
and an iron line of beauty brands itself upon
my heart as the diapered archer bends his bow.
The world is lovely, deep and dark,
time is soft here, where perfect has stopped
to rest upon its restless journey. Bury me
in the sky, in the sunset of this particular moment
that I will search for, for the rest of my life.

~ *Spider Theatre* ~

Midnight at the web: an audience of spiders
quietly arrive, softly taking their places,
eight-footed theatre goers, shuffling
and murmuring among themselves?
obviously expecting a good show.

Draped in strands of finely woven silk,
the small prisoner rests at center stage,
her stillness shouting her readiness to begin.

Mardi Link

Mardi Link attended Bear River Writers' Conference from 2004-2007, enjoying workshops with John Robert Lennon, Thomas Lynch, and Richard McCann. These two essays are from *Bootstrapping*, her memoir-in-progress. Mardi's first book, *When Evil Came to Good Hart*, will be published in July by The University of Michigan Press. The book is a factual investigation into the unsolved 1968 murder of a Detroit-area family who were killed while vacationing in their summer cottage in the tiny town of Good Hart, just north of Camp Michigania. A second title in the same genre, *100 Witnesses in Isadore*, will be published by The University of Michigan Press in April 2009. Mardi has a degree in journalism from Michigan State University, is the former editor of *Small Press* and *ForeWord* magazines, and Antioch Writers Workshop's 2007 Betty Crumrine Scholar in Creative Nonfiction. She lives on a small farm in Traverse City with her three sons.

An early version of "Edgar" was published in *YourPlace*, a local website.

~ *Edgar* ~

One lonely July morning, I have an unexpected visitor. An injured water bird is skulking around the pasture, spearing bugs. He is an obvious interloper; the only body of water for miles is a little Koi pond by the farmhouse's front door. His dark form darts over the green stubble while his contorted shadow brings to mind the title line from the Edgar Allan Poe

poem, *The Valley of Unrest*: "Now each visitor shall confess/ The sad valley's restlessness."

The name of my little farm is *The Big Valley*, in homage to the TV-show ranch. I like to think of myself as Barbara Stanwyck's character, Victoria Barkley, and my three sons as Jared, Nick and Heath. There is no Mr. Barkley; we are alone out here on the outskirts of town where a nefarious visitor can be the impetus for a whole week's script. This new bird character needs a name too, I think; I silently call him Edgar.

The morning is a lonely one because the three boys, who should be here on the farm watching over the spread, are instead with their father for the weekend. I never sleep well when they are gone and so today I am up early, even though it is a Sunday. I see the strange bird at a quarter to seven, while I'm drinking my first cup of coffee. I pretend that the boys are just off on a roundup. I made it this far into the weekend I tell myself, blowing on the steaming coffee, just five more hours to go. That's when Edgar appeared.

He looks all black, though later I will see that he has streaks of brown and tan on his breast, yellow legs, and white shoulders that are mostly hidden by the black feathers that cover the rest of his wings. He is definitely injured but still maintains a military bearing, advancing at a forward incline and leading with his weapon-like beak, the most dominant part of his armature. One of his wings hangs down, though he doesn't let it drag on the ground. This alone gains my respect. The injury doesn't

impede or even seem to slow down his bug-eating carnage. If this were an episode of "The Big Valley," Edgar would play the part of a Rebel soldier, displaced by the war and wounded in battle, his uniform in tatters but his head held high.

I had planned to fill the day with mind-numbing chores – sorting the scrap woodpile and stacking what's usable, weeding the garden bed by the back door, cleaning out the pantry – but these tasks are now forgotten. One thing about Victoria Barkley, she identified the character of her weekly villain on sight. Whether carpetbagger, gambler or horse thief, everyone else might have given the visitor a gullible howdy-do, but not Victoria. She'd raise a drawn-on eyebrow, dismount, keep a firm grip on her braided whip and ask, "What's your business here, Mister?" I have a sudden and urgent need to know what kind of bird this is, and I need to know right now.

Edgar is not in Roger Tory Petersen, the classic bird guide I keep handy on

the kitchen windowsill. Or, if he is, I can't match him to the color plates or itemized descriptions. The kitchen window looks out onto my back deck, upon which hangs a broad assortment of feeders. Suet feeders and platform feeders, a hummingbird feeder and one that holds sunflower seeds and is shaped like a barn. Two birdbaths and a stone birdhouse I bought at a craft fair. A planter of sunflowers. Together, these attract the requisite cardinals, blue jays, gold finches, and woodpeckers, though every week or so I pick up the Petersen book to identify something more rare—a vireo, say, or a bunting.

In the family room of my house is a bookcase built by my father that covers one entire wall. I am thinking of a worn hardcover guide to shore birds published by The Audubon Society. I can't remember the title, but I can see the gold cover and I know exactly where it is on the shelf. Except, when I go to retrieve it, it's not there. I scan the shelves above and below, but do not find it. A strange panic sets in, all out of

proportion to this missing book. It was right here the last time I needed to look something up—a range map of bobwhites, I think. What has happened to it? Did someone steal it? What drifter, what 'ner-do-well has been to The Big Valley, I wonder, and what else did they take? I notice several other titles missing. I am sweating through my thin pajamas now, and my throat feels swollen. Victoria would never let herself panic like this, of that I am certain.

And then I remember. A couple months ago my ex-husband came over with several cardboard boxes and filled them with books from this bookcase. This is one significant plot point where Victoria Barkley's life and mine diverge; she is a widow and while I might like to think of myself that way sometimes, my ex-husband is very much alive. And staging a raid on The Big Valley's library, apparently. I had arranged to be away from the ranch when he came by, trusting him to be fair. I told him that I had a prior engagement, an important meeting in town where my presence was

required. The other members of this important gathering were three vodka gimlets, but since he had divested himself in his interest in The Big Valley, I didn't think that detail was any of his business. I think this library whodunit could be developed into an episode of its own, but for now I'm still watching Edgar's story unfold. Victoria always finds a way to put things right. That's what I liked most about the show.

Without the bird book, I turn to the Internet. A useful tool when you live way out past town and neighbors and libraries and stores; a jump I have on my television mentor. My computer is in an alcove by the main door to the house, next to a large picture window that looks out onto my front yard. A slight movement outside catches my eye, and I see that Edgar is now wading along the edge of the pond. In five minutes online, I determine that he is a Green Heron. A secretive, carnivorous, and solitary relative of the Great Blue Heron. They are native to the east, the Midwest and the coast of California too, so one blown off

course could have ended up on the other Big Valley.

In both states their status is considered "threatened" due to, among other things, "human disturbance." This soldier then, this interloper isn't a villain at all but is our long lost bird brother, Victoria's and mine. For each of the four seasons "The Big Valley" was on the air, it specialized in human disturbance. The ranch and the boys and their mother got along just fine every week loading the wagons and riding fence and breaking the broncos and having singalongs by the grand piano. It was other people who messed everything up. Outsiders who didn't live by The Big Valley's code: Do the work, pitch in and help, love each other, and look good in western wear while you're doing it. Victoria, wiry and carrying herself like a man, ditched her petticoats before the show began filming. I haven't found a good selection of leather vests or split riding skirts here in the upper midwest, but I try my best to keep true to the other parts of the code and expect

that of the boys, too.

Edgar is now casing the pond. Instead of questioning his motives, I now take this as an unintended compliment.

Three summers ago I designed, dug, built, and landscaped the pond myself, shoehorning it into a narrow space between a brick walkway and an ivy-covered fence. I filled the pond with Koi—fancy outdoor goldfish—and created a little liquid patch of elegance by my front walkway. The Barkley family would have enjoyed relaxing here at the end of a dusty and hot summer workday. I could have offered them a glass of ice tea and we could sit and talk about ranching and farming and single motherhood, watch the fish and watch Edgar.

Edgar stands very still for several minutes, his beak pointing toward the water. A quick lunge, and there is a small, white Koi struggling on the end of it. In two hunched gulps, the young fish is gone. The other fish speed to the bottom and school together while Edgar looks around for more. In an hour, the length of

one TV show, all the glittering fish are gone and Edgar is balancing on a rock, cleaning his feathers.

He will not be staying past the week I'm sure, as his food source is now gone. Another episode on *The Big Valley* concluded, though it has taken this damaged bird, such a fragile creature really, despite his outward bravado, to show how a real life is lived. There is a re-run version and a live version and I know which one I'm staring in. The one without a set or cameras or even a script. And no re-writes, either.

~ *My Parents are Golden.
My Brother and I Are More Like
Recycled Tin Foil.* ~

Recently, my parents celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. To mark the day, they invited a hundred friends and family to cruise Michigan's Saginaw Bay with them in an open-air tour boat, and then head over to their church for a chicken dinner. The event was a fitting salvo for two active people in their seventies who have an ideal marriage, are ideal parents, and who have achieved their vision of the American Dream. Together, they have good health, financial security, a propensity toward good deeds, and, no kidding, good looks.

While I watched the two of them stand united on the gangplank and greet the odd assortment of guests—their sailing friends, our frail Aunt Eunice, their Lutheran pastor and his wife, the cousin with the leftist political T-shirt—I wondered what happened to my brother and me. With parents like these, how could we have gone

so wrong? Between us we have three marriages (one common-law), two divorces, two DUIs, five kids, a propensity toward beer and/or vodka and/or marijuana, two bad credit ratings, and a history of disconnected telephones. What the hell?

I asked my brother about this when I went to the trailer park where he lives with his guns and his new girlfriend. I was there to pick them up—he and his girlfriend, not the guns—and give them a ride to the anniversary party. Neither one of them has a valid driver's license. When I got out of my mini-van, an old man without shoes or a shirt pointed at me and yelled, "Hey! She ain't from in here!" Must have been the new skirt from Talbot's I was wearing that alarmed him. Black, with little pink flowers. Just because I don't live here buddy, doesn't mean I don't belong. I flip him off. My cover is blown. He sits back down in his broken lawn chair.

"Not everyone can be like them," my brother tells me, once I'm safely inside the bosom of his doublewide. "Not

everyone wants to.” For the first time it occurs to me that he’s OK with this. He’s OK with the continental drift of difference between our parents’ lifestyle and his own. I, on the other hand, am not.

I want the suburban house that is so clean a Mop-n-Glow commercial could be filmed there. I want the lawn that no dandelion would dare roam. I want the garage with the organized shelves and the neatly bundled newspapers and the lawn mower that will start on the first pull because it just had an oil change. I want the marriage that is solid gold.

Logically, I know that in order to have these things, I would first have to give up the vodka, the impulse buying, the fun I had bartending, my two incontinent dogs, the old farmhouse, the three unruly sons and, gulp, the boyfriend with the Harley-Davidson. I don’t care. It is the day before the party and I walk into my parents’ house after a three-hour drive to get there, and there are no weird smells, there is no grit or pet hair on the

floor, no dishes in the sink, no food wrappers on the counter, no strife of any kind, and I want it.

“How was the traffic?” my father asks, setting aside the newspaper. “Aren’t you glad you have the van? It’s so good on gas. What are they getting for a gallon up north?” Then my mother: “Are you boys hungry?” Behind her is a fully set table, ice in the water glasses and matching dishes heaped with steaming homemade food. There are placemats. There are candles. There are special occasion napkins. “Your hair looks cute,” she says to me.

I wonder if my kids wish we lived like this. I wonder if we lived like this when my brother and I were kids, or if my parents have perfected this art of gracious ease only in their later years. Thinking back to when I was a girl, I don’t remember our house ever being dirty. I don’t remember our telephone ever being shut off. I don’t remember ever climbing into the backseat of a car that wasn’t freshly washed, with a basket of snacks and a

bag of my favorite toys inside.

My own family life now that I am a single parent is lived with a slightly different, um, shall we say, “tone” than the one that permeated my own childhood. I work full time so after school my three sons participate in a crazy quilt of loosely timed activities that give them some degree of supervision, without costing too much. These activities range from rock band practice with the neighborhood ne’er-do-wells in our garage, to soccer clinics that offer scholarships on a “no questions asked” basis, to church day camp with the Congregationalists. “Where are the damn bibles!” I yelled one morning when we were late. Again.

At home supervising themselves, the three of them have gotten very accomplished at video games. Let me tell you, it’s a proud moment when you take your boys to the mall for some early back-to-school shopping, make a detour into the arcade, and within minutes your youngest is dwarfed by a crowd of pale and

greasy teens transfixed by this little guy’s prowess at Tekkan 3. A proud, proud moment. Though not exactly something you’d share with the Grandparents.

At the anniversary party, the strain of parenting alone, in modern times, begins to show. All three boys have been asked by my parents to act as waiters, circulating amongst the guests with platters of cheese, crackers, and fruit. I overhear my 16-year-old bashing President Bush to my Grandfather, whose monetary contributions to the Republican Party are legendary. The middle kid is throwing random items over the side of the boat: ice cubes, a grape; a pacifier; cheese slices, in a rapid-fire re-creation of David Letterman’s gag, “Will It Float?” My father has taken a makeshift tip cup away from my youngest, but not before it has been stuffed with dollar bills.

The next morning my father finishes breakfast—a homemade egg and potato frittata made by my mother—then changes his clothes and says he is

headed back to the church. “Did you forget something?” I ask. “No,” he says, he needs to pick up his lawnmower and he didn’t want to do it yesterday in his nice clothes. He had noticed that the church volunteers hadn’t mowed the courtyard lawn, and he wanted the place to look nice for the dinner, so he had gone over earlier and mowed it himself.

“And when I get back, you need to take me over to the State Park to get the motorhome. I have to drive it over to the mechanic.” The motor home had been parked lakeside, at a nearby campground, and relatives visiting for the celebration had stayed in it. The refrigerator had leaked coolant and the whole thing now reeked of ammonia.

“While you’re out, stop at the pharmacy and pick up my cholesterol pills,” my mother tells him. “And get me some Zinc. I think I’m coming down with something. Probably all the stress.”

What is this? Broken things? Tasks left undone? Sickness? Unforeseen expenses? Could it be . . . strife?

A memory comes into my head then, unbidden. I am eleven years old and just home from school. My mother has gone back to work as an elementary school teacher, and at the end of the day my brother and I get home an hour before she does. My father, a school administrator, will be home hours after that. I am hungry, and decide to make myself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Store bought bread was not allowed in our house and there is no bread cut, so I find a freshly baked loaf my Mother must have stayed up late the night before to bake, and start cutting. I hack through three-quarters of it and still don’t have two decent slices. My mother comes home right then, sees the pile of crumbs, and immediately begins to cry. I felt surprise and shock at her reaction. After all, to my eleven-year-old self, it was just a loaf of bread. Now, remembering, I can feel her helplessness. It wasn’t just bread, it was a longing for some

small sense of perfection that would not come. It was the futility of even trying to achieve it. Of trying to work full time and still bake homemade bread and keep the house in order and the lawn mowed and the children watched over and fed.

I want to go back in time and tell her that even approaching that kind of perfection will take fifty years. But she knows this now, and so does my father. My brother knew it all along, or, perhaps, doesn't really care one way or the other. So, I tell myself instead. Maybe, I'll even listen.

Chris Lord

Chris Lord's poetry has appeared in several journals, won 1st place in three Ann Arbor Current poetry contests, and placed in other competitions. Chris' chapbook *Field Guide to Luck* was recently published by Pudding House Publications. Chris is co-host of the monthly series, *Writers Reading at Sweetwaters*. She founded *Word'n Woman Press* in March of 2007 and is publisher/co-editor of *Writers Reading at Sweetwaters'* anthology and publisher/editor of *Bear River Writers Respond to War* print edition. She attended the *Bear River Writers' Conference* in 2001 working with Richard Tillinghast, 2002 with Keith Taylor, 2005 with Bob Hicok, 2006 with Laura Kasischke, and 2007 with Linda Gregerson. Chris is honored to be editor of the on-line *Bear River Review* issues 1-4.

~ *The Green Field* ~

*She is a girl in goggles tracing a toy gun in sand?
a pilot spotting tracer fire as she hovers over land*

The black-capped chickadee is guarded, wary
of hawk hovering over the chain-link fence,
gives a high-pitched "seet" to fellow songbirds,
drops sun seeds in my hand. Hawk swoops,
captures squirrel. Chickadee gives "all clear,"
feeds upside down on a thin branch, brings flowers
to his mate sitting on four eggs in their knothole nest,
flies the furrowed field reaching to the horizon,
rides back to her on the shoulders of spring wind

*She is a girl building a bird castle of wet sand?
a woman cleaning oil from clumped wings on land*

The four-year-old girl is guarded, wary
of mama tearing down the white picket fence,
sister climbing too far out on a thin branch
I grab the chains as she pumps and pumps her swing
She says she doesn't want to be the yellow bird
crashing into a doghouse, shakes her feathers,
soars upside down in her favorite bedtime story,
flies the ripe field reaching to the horizon,
rides back on papa's shoulders in summer wind
*She is a heron preening as black rain laps the sand?
a gunner in a Blackhawk pounding targeted land*

The retired 4-star colonel is guarded, wary
of hawks gathering behind barbed fences,
wagging the dog, muzzling dissenters, eyes
the color of oil. I look in the clear eyes of the colonel?
he talks about the day his daughter enlisted,
how she saluted him in night-vision goggles
as she changed formation, flying upside down
over picked fields reaching to the horizon,
riding his decorated shoulders into falling wind
*She soars over bruised water and slick sand?
a girl woman soldier burning fences in a divided land*

Sharon MacDonell

After graduating from the University of Michigan, Sharon MacDonell started her career in Tokyo, working for Globe Net Productions and producing segments for a variety of clients, including the PBS/NHK co-production “Asia Now.” Stateside she’s produced for such shows as ABC’s World News Tonight, Inside Edition, and Forensic Files. Currently, Sharon’s a full-time mom and part-time journalist and essayist. She’s been published by Christian Science Monitor, Signature magazine, Strut, Metro Parent, Gihon RiverReview, and Literarymama.com, among others. Sharon was in Richard McCann’s workshop.

~ *Game Night* ~

“Daddy’s coming!” Cathy ran into the room. “Mom said he just called from the airport.”

It was 1972. I was eight years old, standing in the living room threading single strands of icicles onto our Christmas tree’s branches. A few years before, when we all lived together in Los Angeles, Dad said it looked like we’d thrown clumps of icicles onto the tree. Didn’t we know you only use one per branch? Didn’t we know anything? “I don’t know if I want him to come,” I said.

“How could we have Christmas without Dad?” She said, smiling into the tree.

I could never understand my older sister’s attraction to our father. She was ten, but she couldn’t guess the obvious. This wasn’t going to go well. It never did. Especially for her.

Of us four kids, Cathy took on the role of The Bad One very early on. Sure she had earned it, to a degree. She had done some bad things, like spraying the inside of a neighbor’s house with a garden hose, shoplifting gum from the store and getting bad grades in school. But what seemed so horrifically bad then now plays back like the story of a

naughty kid. And today it's clear to me she has always been a loopy optimist who often ends up in trouble. Her motto could be "What could possibly go wrong?"

I knew back then that she was naïve. She thought she could relax with our father and be honest, say any little thing that entered her head. Somehow she never learned the unspoken family rules or remembered the consequences for breaking them.

One dinnertime in California, my parents were discussing her bad report card. She made a joke about it, as if to relieve the tension. It didn't. Dad backhanded her across the face. Cathy clawed at the table to right herself, but her fingers caught her plate instead. It flew into the air spewing food as Cathy tumbled to the floor. I was in the chair beside hers, keeping my head down, but I saw her plate hit the table, flip and spin—faster and faster, louder and louder—until its low, spiraling hum drowned out her wailing.

He never would have done that to me. I was The Fragile One.

"Dad always makes Christmas more fun," Cathy said. "Don't you miss him?"

Our Christmas ornaments had followed us from L.A. to Detroit, but Dad hadn't. In 1970 he moved to Pittsburgh to work at a TV station there. He seldom took the brief flight home to see us, which was fine by me.

I took a Santa ornament from its mildewy box. "I just wish he wouldn't ask me about 'my arthritis,'" I told Cathy. "He always says it that way and I don't like it." My arthritis. As if I owned it. As if the disease and I were indistinguishable from each another.

"You want me to tell him you don't like that?" she asked.

"No," I said, surprised as ever that she believed she could influence him. "That's OK."

After dinner that night I sat in the living room and wondered what would happen next. There'd been no scene

at dinner. No tears. He came into the room and sat on the couch beside me. I shifted away but he caught my hand and pulled me closer. Examining my gnarled, eight-year-old fingers he asked in his tender voice, “How’s your arthritis, honey?”

Cathy was sitting safely across the living room at the bottom of the staircase. She couldn’t help herself. “Dad, she doesn’t like it when you ask her that.”

“Who the hell asked you?” he roared.

“Sharon told me that she doesn’t like it when you...” Cathy started.

“Mind your own goddamn business!”

Cathy shrieked in anger, then sobbed into the carpeted stair.

Holding my hand tighter, he asked me again, more insistent. “How is your arthritis?”

I wanted to say he shouldn’t yell at Cathy because she was the only one here who loved him. I wanted to tell him that the arthritis wasn’t mine and

at least she tried to understand how I felt about it, beyond the hurt of it, that it made me feel different and weak and pathetic to have it and to be asked about it that way.

But I was weak. Weak because I knew the only way to keep the peace was to follow the rules. Weak because I couldn’t save myself and save Cathy at the same time. Weak because I didn’t know what else to do but play along, and give him the answer he wanted—a few words that would protect him from worry and guilt until next Christmas.

“It’s OK, Dad,” I murmured, wanting to snatch my hand away, but letting it remain in his. “I’m OK.”

Pavel Martinez

Pavel Martinez teaches English on Riker's Island in New York City, his home town. He is currently pursuing a Master's in Creative Writing at CCNY and plans to graduate in 2008. He participated in the 2007 Bear River Writers' Conference. His teacher was Bill Roorbach. These poems were written and inspired by his trip to Bear River, which he says was a wonderful experience.

~ *Mourning Dove* ~

Hoo Hoo the dove called
suddenly everything stopped:
the black bee's buzz paused.

Silenced and dismissed,
the landscape gladly gave way
to this one moment:

the lake's reflection
nor the picture of the woods
could disagree with

its necessary
call and my basic response
to its beckoning

naturally, I approached
stood under the nameless tree
and searched the image.

Lighting a cigarette and letting out that first,
phosphorous filled, drag, I'm drawn by that
melancholic hoo... Gradually, everything stopped: the
leaves stood still, deer paused their grazing chew,
the powerful ant cautiously, as if detonating an
explosive, placed the crumb of bread on the earth, and
the lake was flat as a marble floor glazed by the sun?
brilliant as a tiled terrace reflects, immediately
after a short mid-afternoon storm, the resilient and
vengeful star's rays, screaming, "How dare you
interrupt my reign;"

The light on the leaves
The yellow buds suspended
The image unseen

Hoo hoo hoo calling
Who knows what? a mate perhaps
Or a friend's warning:

Who's this intruder?
Do beware of these creatures
They're both great and fierce...

A response rang from
It's adjacent companion
On another branch

Of a new tree
That pierced the bright-clouded sky
Framed as in a photo

An image, fluttering like a soft white butterfly
assists the flowering of the world while dancing
across the acreage of late May buds to join her
friends, appeared to float through the still life
frame of the trail and dewy knolls of the camp;
nothing else moved save in response to its approach.
Though not like when the wind blows the blades of
grass to and fro and they appear to move in unison
from side to side as if chanting a prayer from a vast
pew, nature, reverently, bent away from the image's
aura yet returned to its original stillness once
outside the reach of that radiant advancing figure,

The dove called again
as I turned from that swift light
which seemed bright Zephyr

better yet Boreas
up in the northern heartland
off the Walloon lake,

I noticed the leaves
blowing in the wind again,
dusties in the light,

the stoge in my hand,
seeming a long ashen limb,
fell from my finger?

open jaw and lips
chin to chest and hypnotized
by the mourning dove,

I awoke...

The bright approaching figure belonged to a fresh young plum named A-. Her smile flushed her plump cheeks to an orchid-mauve. She was too young for me to seduce; not because of her age or lack of maturity but because of her seraph like skin, soft voice, and coy manner. For the first time I was happy I couldn't have a fine young female. Had I been invited, I dared not touch her petals though they seemed tightly woven, vigorously bright, and wonderfully tempting, from a fear of sullyng them or god forbid crushing them.

Vicki McMillan

Vicki McMillan is an Assistant Professor of English at Aquinas College. She attended her first Bear River Writers' Conference in 2007 and worked with Elizabeth Kostova. Her creative work has appeared in *Sky*, *Controlled Burn*, *Voices*, *The Kalamazoo Reader*, *Fourth Genre* and *Grand Rapids Cosmopolitan Home*. She lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

~ *The Portrait Painter* ~

Jonathan Rye was a portrait painter in an age when miniatures on ivory had been replaced by daguerreotypes of maidens in stiff dresses seated on stiff chairs. This did not bother him. "Let the men in uniform, blue or grey, fill their pockets with these sad ladies swaddled in flocked velvet," he declared. "Let them tuck them close to their hearts. I will move to a grander canvas." And he did, filling the empty spaces in dusty hallways, the blank walls above fires.

And while the war raged he fled before it, offering hope to those left at home, donning a painter's smock in lieu of a uniform, choosing brush over gun. He was a man whose attractiveness was born not of any physical attribute

but of an ability to look beyond the exterior damage of life and into the beauty of a woman's soul. He looked upon a plain girl and saw the goodness there: the gentle ministrations to a trampled garden, the patient spooning of soup into an old man's mouth, the rescue of a bag of kittens from the river's yawning water and brought all to the canvas, sculpting a face in better proportion, revealing a grace known only to him. He did not view this representation as falsehood. He had revealed her beauty to a world too preoccupied to notice it.

He looked at the girl's mother and saw the bride she once was and imagined no harm in the erasure of lines, the addition of a slight rose blush to the cheek, a glint of gold in the brown hair now threaded with gray. And when the portrait was

revealed, all who gazed upon it saw
the woman that way as well. Even the
grandmother was grateful when his
brush and paint remembered her past
glories: a flushed face on the dance
floor of her youth, the fluttering fan
long gone to moth flirtatious once
more, her young body dressed in a
gown of yellow silk forgotten and
falling to dust in an attic trunk.

Jonathan Rye was a painter of dreams
and women loved him for it

Sarah Mkhonza

Sarah Mkhonza is a writer activist and professor of English from the University of Swaziland. She has published novels, short stories and poetry. She has taught at Saint Mary's College and Michigan State. She is currently a Visiting Scholar at Cornell University. She believes that textual intervention is a good method for writers to use in getting involved in creating understanding of issues. She believes that texts that express issues of women and children are necessary for society to understand itself. Sarah is producing a poetry chapbook that will be published soon entitled *Woman in a Tree*.

~ Woman on the Tree~

Climbing, hands clinging
Limbs reaching
Feet holding on
Life in life pushing and forcing
Muffled cries, no yelling
The sky is silent
The water is silent
Branches higher
Pain in my lower self
Tearing at me
Hanging on to the branches
Of this tree where I will
Bring to a homeless life
The baby of consequence

Contractions, yes contractions
As the baby comes forth
The little life cannot wait
It wants life where there is none
It sees not the moment of death
It wants life no matter what
Where can I get life
In this solitude
Where only the sky
Looks at me with hope

Silent death all around
Houses disappeared
Trees fell
Underneath this liquid death
The water rises even higher
I reach down for the life that comes

Tearing forth at forceful speed
Labour is a fire in me
Death is a reality
I say labour is a burden for me
Two deaths staring at me
My baby will come
Climbing higher and higher
Panic all over with hope
That this tree will not fall
For me and this baby
Like two birds alive
Should see tomorrow

Flesh opening
Throwing reality in my face
To look down is to lose grip
I dare not look, but do
I throw my cloth down there
Where the burning is
For I'm opening
I cling on with one hand
Push life out of me

Death defying cries
Tear the air
Like the sound of the oracle
Flesh against flesh I feel
Little parts, the body has emerged
Two hands, fingers
I pull and tie the little one to me
Life given where life is threatened
Like the tree we are on
Could go down at anytime
It is a saying 'never give up
Till giving up goes
When the tree goes down
That is when it will be time
As it stands I stand

The sound of help tears the sky
Baby cries also ring
As I put the nipple in this one
Who never knew cover and warmth

Yes sounds in the sky
And help drops to us
To leave the tree
With this baby
Is like waking up after
A not so good dream
For we came into the world
To love and to dream

~ *Tell Me A Lowveld Story for a
Story of the Seas (Excerpt)* ~

The lowveld sky was blue. The mountains in the distance stood out against the blue sky as if they were imposing themselves, like a greatness that stands forever looking at you. The trees make long shadows that they cast beyond our yard on the northern side of our homestead in the late afternoon. I could see the heat haze in the noontime sun when I got up from my work. I just had one chore to do for the day; prepare for the evening meal. I was washing a three-legged pot, scraping the dark soot from its bottom with a metallic scourer. After rinsing the pot I held

it with its legs and threw out the water. Its legs hit the ground with a metallic thud when I put it down. I picked it up and raised its handle and struggled with it to the kitchen. It was too heavy for an eight-year-old, and as I felt it cut my hand, I said to myself, "this is hard work." I leaned on the door of the kitchen and pulled it in and struggled to put it on the fire. I looked at my hand. It was red, where the handle of the pot had cut into it. I took the water that stood in the corner and poured it into the pot. I watched as its cleanliness settled inside and then pushed the wood together and bent down to fan the fire with my mouth. The red embers glowed and the ash went in all

directions. There were ants on one of the pieces of wood. They scattered in all directions when they felt the heat. I stood up, straightened my dress, and wiped my knees.

I went out to the edge of the yard, pulled a few sticks of firewood, and broke them against my knee. When I felt that the piece of wood was too hard, I put it on the ground and tried to break it by applying pressure with my whole body. Holding the piece of wood down, I jumped up and landed on the wood and it cracked as it yielded against the weight of my body. I broke it into three short pieces. I put those on the ground and started working on another piece of wood. I was breaking the last piece when I looked up towards the fields that surrounded our homestead. I could not believe my eyes! All of a sudden the horizon was alive with head rings of monkey skin. The people who fetch water for the king! I cast one glance and looked down again nursing the urge to run away. How could I run away when I was

in full view of them? Their war chant rang closer as they stampeded towards the homestead. I stood up and looked at the men as they approached. There were about ten of them, real men, their muscular limbs gleaming with sweat under the heat of the sun. They were now inside the acacia fence. I felt fear way inside my body. I decided to take the wood into the kitchen and then call the children.

“Come here, leave the nuts.” The children turned and looked up towards me. They stopped cracking the marula nuts and ran towards me crying. The men got nearer and nearer. I could now hear their war chant. Its sound rang against the huts like a harsh wind that had a life of its own. I could feel the mantra-like humming and the thud of the men’s feet on the ground as if it was way inside my body. I picked up the youngest child and then stood and looked at the group of men as they came to us. The rhythmic song of the people we called BeManti, which

means “of the water,” invaded the air and created an aura of power that I had never felt. It was as if people from another land had descended on us. When their feet touched the edge of the yard they shouted, “Sendlulise!” the cry that meant that they wanted food. Nobody argued with these men, when they wanted something. They survived by asking for food from people. Everybody knew that it was time to show allegiance to the King.

I held the children and walked them to the kitchen. “Tono, who are they?” The little ones kept asking. “Sh! If you are quiet, they will not do anything to you.” I said as we walked into the kitchen. “They want food,” I said as I put the youngest child down.

Right then a loud voiced shouted at me, “Hey child, we have no time to fool around. We have a long journey ahead of us. Lobamba is very, very far. Do you understand? Where is the food? We have not come to play here. “Sendlulise!” the man said holding the pillar of the kitchen door.

Even though I had never served the “People of the Water” before, I knew that cry was a voice demanding that I get whatever food there was and give it to them. These were men on royal duty and everyone had to do what they wanted. They were to be treated like the king. They were also out to enforce culture in the land. They would accuse people of not following culture. Women who did not wear aprons or cover their heads would be fined and the money would be used to buy food on the way. I had learned this from the few times that they had passed at our homestead in previous years. There was one time when they had taken my school uniform from our bunch of clothes when we were washing in the river because my stepmother had not worn an apron. There was nothing we could do because we had no money.

“Are they monkeys? I am afraid of them,” the little boy said clinging to my dress. “Pick me up,” the little boy started crying.

“Sh! They are just people.” I said as I took a big bowl and dished some of the porridge that was supposed to be for their midday meal. I filled the bowl and went outside. “Here is the food,” I said as I knelt to give the food to the men.

“Mnatsise!” The man with the loud voice shouted, asking me for water. “We have no time to play child,” he said looking at me with a threatening eye. They were already eating the food with their hands when I ran into the kitchen to get a full jug of water. “We don’t want water, we want milk or sour milk! Who can drink this hot lowveld water in this weather?”

I ran to the kitchen and took the calabash of the children and emptied our sour milk into a container and took it to the men. As I gave it to them I looked at the monkey skins on their heads as they ate. The fear subsided. I was no longer as afraid. Seeing the men sharing the container of milk as I knelt there waiting for them to finish made me feel I had

been able to quell their anger.

The little children were still clinging to my dress and pulling it this way and that. They would steal a glance at the men and then hide their faces against my body. The men continued to eat as the children looked on fearfully. The other little boy had all his fingers in his mouth as he always did when he was afraid. I looked at the men and wondered about older people, wrinkles, sweaty bodies, leather caros dangling on their waists over the pieces of cloth that parted and showed the outside of the men’s sinewy thighs. There was a mystery about these men. I wondered about the king. Was he like them? My thoughts came back to the men.

Now that they had eaten would they leave? My hand reached for the water container that the man was handing to me. I watched as he stood up. I was relieved when I saw the men stand up to leave, “You children, be good. Don’t trouble your parents,” the men said and left.

I watched as the men walked away until their heads of monkey skin disappeared behind the trees that marked the river that was below our home. They went away with the power of the rituals that were going to be performed with the water at the Incwala, the feast of the first fruits. There would be a full moon. Young men would go and get the acacia bush inside which the main ritual of the king and the ceremonial wife is performed. The Queen Mother would join him and together they would make rain.

I looked at the pile of marula fruits and then told the children to go and crack the nuts again. It was as if life was settling down again. After some time I turned to my daily chores. I put the calabash of sour milk back where I had found it and then went to the kitchen to cook.

I knew that there would be more men passing through my home as all the People of the Water returned home after fetching the King's water from

the Indian Ocean. December was the time when they walked through the country on their way back to Lobamba, the King's palace.

When my stepmother came back, she could not believe that there was no milk in the calabash. "You see, I leave milk in this calabash and you drink it all. What happened to the milk? Tono, tell me what happened?" She asked with anger in her voice. Before I could answer the woman landed blows on me. "The people from the King came . . ."

"What people from the king? You do things and then invent stories. Can the children finish this whole calabash of milk? You little thief and liar!" She was still beating me when one of the children walked in.

"Mother, there were people with monkey skins. They were big and fierce. They ate our sour milk, not Tono." The children said, each one telling the story of the men in his own way.

“You say there were people here?” her stepmother asked. “Why didn’t you tell me there were people? You bring people here? What people are these?”

“They are hairy people who look like monkeys, mother. Tono did not bring them, leave her. They came from far away. They were tired.” The little boy said, holding his mother’s hand. “Don’t beat her. She did not drink our milk.”

I was standing in the corner of the kitchen crying. I felt miserable. I looked at the little children. They looked at me with sadness. “Don’t cry Tono. Don’t cry,” one of the children said.

It was after the children had eaten that I took some time to think about my predicament. I wished there was somebody I could tell that my stepmother was very unkind to me. My father, who had died, had left me with her because there was nobody to look after me after my own mother died. Whenever I was treated unfairly, I would think of my mother and then

walk to my favourite spot, which was not far from the homestead. I wanted to be alone in this place, which was a place of peace for me.

I remembered the old days when the “People of the Water” would come even years later whenever I visited my stepmother. I would still go down to the river bed and think about the past. It was a little river below my home which was in the lowveld valley of Siphofaneni in Swaziland. This little rivulet wound through the cluster of huts that divided my home from the other homesteads on the other side of the road to Big Bend, a sugar producing valley that was further down stream. It was in this dry riverbed that I would sit down and think about how I could solve the problem that bothered me the most. I was just trying to answer an old question that kept nagging me. “Who am I?” I would hear myself speaking as if to somebody. Like on many days past, when I had asked myself this question, I could find no answer to it. This was the question that I was

turning inside my head as I walked towards the only place that I knew as a place of comfort. Not to say that this place had answers, it was just my place.

There were many days when I walked on that riverbed and thought about my life. When the water subsided after heavy rains, there would be mud and silt. Most of the time it was dry. The sand had the imprints of the hooves of cattle. Here and there you saw cakes of dung. The dung dotted the river bed and showed which way the cattle had been going when it was dropped. The cakes of dung were smaller on the direction that the cattle had taken. Once in a while I would see a cow and some herd boys. The sides of the river still had some grass even though it was winter and everything was dry. Goats and their young ones followed each other. They were nibbling on the leaves of the trees at the side of the river. I sat there and waited, just because I liked to come here, when I was not sure what to do about life. It was my place; a place where I could be quiet and feel

the river as if it was full of water that was washing over me and my pain. I would think about myself as I sat here, just here where the cattle grazed. Many times I looked at the imprints of hooves of cattle and then at the footprints of people. Some people had big feet. Some had small feet. Where the people crossed the river, there was a path. The sand was hard from being trodden on as people crossed to go to the other side of the river.

Once in a while the sound of the birds would disturb the silence of the riverbed. I would look in that direction and feel a presence of spirit. The birds were my friends, just as the sand and the trees. I wished I had wings so that I could borrow the happiness of the birds and fly away to a carefree world. I could see myself rising, landing on a branch and enjoying the chirp of other birds as I went on with no worry in the world. This presence of spirit made me think of the one day when I had lain there and felt I saw someone special. I remember looking up

stream and seeing someone coming down towards me. Even though I was not sure whether I was dreaming or not, I squinted my eyes and looked on, not believing that the woman was coming towards me. She seemed to be walking down from upstream. When she got closer, I could tell that it was Elizabeth Bolt, someone I had never seen. I had only read about her in a book. Yet when I saw her, I knew her. She was shorter than I had expected. She stood in the middle of the riverbed and said, "I know that you have been looking for me. I have been looking for you too. I just did not know where to look. Look now, here we meet on a dry lowveld riverbed. Listen, Tono, stop looking at these marks." she said referring to the welts on my body. I know it is painful. You cannot take the pain away by looking at it. Just stop," she said as if passing an order.

I felt an urge to start an argument with her and then stopped myself. I felt deep down that it was easy for her to say that because she did not know

what I had been through. I wanted to tell her that, but stopped myself.

"It's like reading the map of your life upside down," Elizabeth said.

"It really is. It is as if somebody wrote it like these hooves, no real reason for being here, no real direction, but just there on the riverbed of life. Yet here I am." My talk was dreamy, careless and playful. Even though I was talking to a stranger, I did not seem to be afraid. I was talking to her as if I had always known her. In my mind, I did not think I even had to ask her name. I just knew it, with a knowing sense that was deep down in me.

"That's what people do to make you feel small. Don't fall for it," she continued.

"Really?" I asked, my mind looking back into the window that she was opening for me. Elizabeth had never seemed to care what was happening to her, I thought, but standing there in the shadows, covering my spirit

with the aura of her presence, she amazed me. I was amazed that she had so much understanding about life, not just her life, but life in general. All the snares that had been set for me had always confused me. I had always respected adults and then found myself betrayed. I had respected Christians and found myself betrayed. I had respected culture, and found myself betrayed. I was in a big confusion, lying there on the dry riverbed of the perennial river that ran below my home. I came to a point where I had given up on life, and even wished that I had never been born.

“That’s true, you just have to get out of it,” she continued. “Don’t allow people to pressure you into doing something you know would never work for you. You know yourself. Don’t try to imitate other people. Dare to be different. It is a rule of thumb. Otherwise you will live to regret everything about the decisions that you take because “others are doing it,” “I am the only one who is not doing it,” you will feel “they think

I am abnormal. Who said that doing wrong is normal. Wake up and live on what you know!”

“Why are you saying this? I asked.

“Because I know that you are struggling with these things that creep into your mind and never leave. You are turning them over and over. I know you need help. I have lived in this world. I know what I am talking about.” I could hear her voice rising. She was beginning to walk upstream. All of a sudden the river began filling with water. I could hear it gushing as it crashed on the trees that grew on the bank. The dongas started crashing. I still lay on my dry spot. “You mean there was no reason for all this?” I asked, speaking at the top of my voice. I was amazed. I wondered how all this could happen to one person for no reason.

“That was the big lie that guides this land. Anything that divides people is a lie. People, Oh! you don’t know them. They like to try to jump sky-

high and make themselves bigger, especially when they do not have anything. Look, they were not your parents. They were not kings. They were just ordinary people like you. They did not even have what you have. I mean a decent education that you obtain by studying, or even wit enough to realize that by dividing you, they are messing up something good, something solid, pure and one in spirit. They were creating a major misdeed and saying that they want to live according to it so that they can be rich by exploiting you. They were faking it. There is nobody who is different in this world. All people are the same. Allow yourself to be fooled around with and you have had it.”

Angel Nafis

Angel Nafis is in her second year as a Wordworks member. She currently works at Shaman Drum Bookshop and as The Neutral Zone's Writer-in-Residence and is a student at Washtenaw Community College. She was a two-time member of the Ann Arbor Youth Poetry Slam Team that competed in the national youth slam Brave New Voices in San Francisco and New York City, and is a coach of the current youth team. She has performed her work to much acclaim all over the country.

~ I Know I'm Pretty Cuz the Boys Tell Me So ~

(a poem for any woman or womangirl seen as little outside of a fetish, or even freedom.)

My sister and I are two uttered words
back flipping out of white lips
pronounced wrong.
By the pale men that don't love us.
And sometimes by the ones that do.
I got the feeling their skin is about the same color as my pale yellow bones
and there is everything ironic about that.

On a bad day I fall in love three times.
On a good day, I lose count, and my mind,
stuffing hand written letters and my backbone, postmarked, into mailboxes.
Hope them to be received by some land or hand that I can memorize sweet.
Putting parachutes on all my sentences
so that the skulls of my sounds may find themselves un-shattered.
And this must be how all the women in my family love
and get loved.

By dark men too
spinned from night and knuckles.

Like Delci, mama, she's been dead almost 19 years
and her name still slides off of my dad's bottom lip,
the way only property can.

I hung one of her portraits on my wall the other day?
the charcoal stained my fingers blue, as if still fresh
and this is the closest I have let myself get to her.

The homeless black men
congregate under the tallest trees in the plaza,
on my way to work.

I cringe when they pronounce my name the way my dad does,
all thick like, with cities I've only been to twice,
and split personalities I've never been formally introduced to,
like: no, I don't have a nickel or a dime, or time to
listen to my name with Brooklyn and Queens tangled up in it.
These hands of mine are still blue with the closest I'll ever be to either of my
parents.

Except
now I'll trace the cadence of that blue smudge
to the spot under my pillow,
where I'll keep a dollar for every time he called her out her name.
And a prayer,
for my sister's white boyfriend, who too often, mistakes her name for dirt.
Doesn't even check the temperature of each syllable
nor the angle by which we un-bend our backs to stand eye-level with our
reflections.

With my face reflecting hers, swelled in guilt, my girl told me a week ago,
she couldn't unhinge her heart from her body long enough to swallow her man
whole.

And it's sounds like those, that get this girl feeling heavy or heat covered.

Or ugly.

But I know I'm pretty because the boys tell me so,
watch my legs move fast past'em cuz I hear
them yell: my thighs or my hips,
these curves that I'm about.

And I don't like the sound of my shapes in their mouths,
or these blue hands.

She must've loved her blue charcoal,
that indigo space

and don't my daddy be the bluest place.

Who told you to climb these mountains?

Who told you to let the butterflies out of my closet?

Who told you, you could hide in my jaw,
disguised as a song.

~ *Directions to Finding You, or Maybe Just an Inferior Prayer* ~

Say a butterfly had to die, for you to get a gift.

There must be some kind of prayer in that.

I want to know how you feel about capture.

Say I saw it there, that dead contraption of flight and warmth and wing on the
sidewalk

and bent down to take it with my hands,

the way most humans do,

when I should have used my imagination or some other less selfish device.
And isn't it something that when wings are fragile or transparent, and almost
not there at all,
I only thought of you
and me sometimes too, but only when I am bleeding, and borrow them
to write this poem.
It was dead, but not without life.
And isn't it something that once I put it in the envelope and sealed
with my tongue,
there was no turning back, or un-tasting of
the vinaigrette of loving you.
I've seen people misplace themselves in such a heart flare up,
watched their temperatures drop,
and I don't know much about wilderness
but on days like these when you are harder to find,
I want to learn the word "seasons" properly,
feel it's backside roll against my molars
so I can feel free, like when we write to summon, or when you are far away
and I collect dead things to keep you alive in me.
Say hair that traps sky and gnats, say splash, say,
I could talk about the antenna or thorax
but I've already mentioned prayer and capture
and there's no turning back now.
The blood will come soon again,
say swish and slow movement, say
maps are irrelevant,
say accidents are blessings too, say
bellies of fish and coins,
say the texture of language,

hatching, and other raw things,
say you accept this gift as all it was ever meant to be,
woman to search you,
say sister, say this discovery of death and prism in my open fist.

I am not afraid.

Say sister say this calamity of sweet and lack of coordination
and I am not afraid
of today, or an hour from now, or however long it may be
before someone captures my own dead butterfly self
off of some sidewalk.

I am here now,
speaking and giving
in bursts
of chest and effort, and temperature.

Sue Marie Papajesk

Sue Marie Papajesk, graduate of Northwood University is a published author, poet, and performer. Other venues includes journalism, advertising media, theatre, video, dance, choreography, inspirational speaking. She is an avid promoter of this conference and inspiring youth to use their gifts as a voice to heal the world. Sue has coordinated the Beaver Island Lighthouse School Student nomination and scholarship program since the inception of the conference and is currently working on publishing the students' work called Echoes From Bear River . A special thanks go out to Richard, James, Barry and the conference staff who have made everything possible for inspiring students dreams to come true. Sue has worked with Thomas Lynch and Barry Wallenstein.

~ *I'm Ripe* ~

I'm Ripe

I'm Ripe

For One of Those Spit Fire

Bedstead Cracking

Back Splitting

Teeth Baring Encounters

Reminiscent of Rhett Butler and Frankly My Dear I Don't Give a Damn

I'm Ripe

I'm Ripe

I'm Ripe for the Picking, Finger Licking?Heels Clicking

Soul Crushing Meaningful Pirouettes

Where History Proves Commitments

Up Tempo, Slow Deep Dips, Family Tree Un-Marred

I'm Ripe

I'm Ripe

I'm Ripe for Adventure

Where Deep Blue Bays, Sea Birds

Bent Corners on Maps, Compass Cracks

Gray Worn Bow Lines Cleats & Prows

Curse Ambition

Split Waves

Drive Foam

Slide Glaciers

I'm Ripe

~ *Greeting Card* ~

Stow that line

Run up the jib

Lean it out

Move into the wind

Watch out for the rocks

Glide over the bay

Watch the sunset

At end of day

Don't mention the fury

Or bring up the war

Life is too perfect

To shake up or stir

Pull out the throttle
Pour in the gas
Moons now reflect on bottoms of glass

Feel the wind breezes
The singe of the sun
Be thankful for friendship
When the day is done

~ *Helmet Head* ~

I used to have helmet head. Flying down pristine curving snowmobile trails 50 miles per hour totally mesmerized by the view. Virgin stands of pines with the largest girth I've ever seen. Snow covered and looking like the Johnny Mathis song, "Marshmallow World."

Stark contrasts on deep forest greens. White and grey shadows so spell blinding?they induce you to stop and watch as clouds obscure the sun. Breathtaking waterfalls one can't get to unless you go in by sled.

Somehow I totally forgot about vanity and my hair around the first few

corners. All of my cares in life and corporate grief pregnant with mindless pursuits roll off my back with each and every oxygenated earthy breath of the "Great White North."

Nowadays I sport a different kind of "do." Yes I still mess up my hair and it winds up being totally flat on top. But don't worry. This kind of mess is well worth the trip.

Imagine untold getaways and then reaching them within a few short hours. Peering at the view from above? Now that's the unexpected bonus, boys and girls.

Oh, the adventure and oh, the romance.

I've seen unbelievable reflections of the sun setting on Lake Michigan, East & West Grand Traverse Bays and Lake Skeegmog all at the same time. The kind of sunset you will never describe with words and can never forget.

And then there's the rise of the Mighty Mac, twinkling lights and golden arches coursing into full view over cowlings do-si-dos with sun dogs from runway 08 KMCD.

I've stolen away to secret island adventures, witnessed steam rising above Niagara falls (from 50 miles away) as we crossed over Canada into the US, water-colored cloud formations, mountains, oceans and oh yes, so much more.

Twenty years ago I used to live a mile from the historic FBO K3CM. I watched with child like wonder at airplanes coming and going.

Every so often on Sunday mornings, while cooking pancakes; I would hear the drone of airplane engines as they performed their aerobatic choreography. It gave me holy goose

bumps like the spring calls of geese flying in formation overhead. A haunting reminder of the change of seasons of life. (A premonition?) I would sit for spellbound hours watching from my southern-view bay window.

Often times I would rally against sensible urges and do the 50 yard dash to my car, and squeal out of the drive way, just to get close to the airport entrance twisting my neck and gawking. I drove by for hours daring to trespass.

The crowd buzzing, excitement painted on faces of children, multiple types, shapes and colors of flying contraptions circling above or parked on grassy knolls. (There were signs posted about: EAA Pancake Breakfast-Adults \$2.99, but I never ventured in fearing it a private affair for alcoholics.)

Once in a while-I even pulled over at the face of the entrance to watch, sitting in my hand-me-down Chevy Impala, playing Russian roulette with 50 mile per hour cars, sugar beet

trucks, and semis whizzing by.

This past weekend I arrived back home after another glorious trip down pristine trails through dark green forests and, alas, acquired another serious case of helmet head.

This time perhaps I had the straps pulled too tight. It left me melancholy for those days in my little kitchen, in my first owned house?cooking pancakes. This is where the seeds of my life's passion and quest for adventure are planted. Suddenly it all made sense.

From those memory filled days to now, I've chatted and shook hands with the greats?Jimmy Doolittle and Chuck Yeager. I kissed Glamorous Glennis, hugged Glacier Girl, and winked at the Old Crow. Then I secretly flirted for a ride with Joe Kittenger in his New Standard Bi-plane that floats like a dream stage prehistoric emperor dragonfly pirouetting on sea breezes.

And then there's the old Ford Tri-Motor with the breath catching views of the 600 ft. deep turquoise waters

of Grand Traverse Bay where I've watched F-16's scream by with smiling pilots saluting.

I've met my favorite aviation celebrity comedian and world known author/flight instructor Rod Machado who reminded me to always land like a butterfly.

I've slept at the foot of 27, KLAL (Sun N Fun), waking to the roar of the last of the few WWII navy blue Corsairs (flying 100 ft above my tent) best known in contemporary culture from the popular TV show Baa Baa Black Sheep.

I've driven the Welcome Wagon through July's dusty heat stroked throngs at OSH, EAA AirVenture, and had the privilege of picking up some very notable and interesting folks. My wages? Front row seats during the air show parked on the flight line in an air conditioned open- air mini-van.

I've seen the oldest type and make of every aircraft still flying today to the latest straight out of science fiction?Space Ship One and listened

to transmission of the pilot over loud speakers as he made history.

I've been to countless historic small town "first of the first" airports (FBOs), and saviors of aviation history just like the one back home.

I've attended so many Fly Ins I can't keep count, meeting the most down to earth folks with true badges of honor. One foot planted firmly on the ground and the other in the clouds impatiently tapping until their next run up, clearance and take-off, while humoring the rest of us.

After all this, may I add?yes, me a girl soloed in a fading beat-up tired old Cessna 152 (without a radio) squealing "It's you and me, God" at each take off and landing. If I give myself even a moment to hesitate and close my eyes, I can still feel it as if it were just moments ago.

(Winds calm, sky clear, temperature 72, altimeter 29.9, KCAD. Treading on 27, one clammy hand shaking, slips on the throttle, the other on the yoke- white knuckles covet the umbilicus.

Planting my feet firmly on the pedals, full breaks, gently thrusting forward the throttle, slide back the toes, right rudder, air speed comes alive, man and machine vibrate in anticipation.

Watch for 65 knots and then? The other-worldly takes over. The aroma of low lead exhaust tastes like honey, the earth rotates and shudders against me, and away from me, vs. me against it, and I am catapulted in a into a freedom I've never known?not knowing if I'll ever return?or want to.)

Wow. It's funny?I've even been lucky enough to leverage the past 10 years of employment and newfound home smack-dab in the middle of the approaches for 10 and 28 (KTVC). Close enough to hear each and every taxi, run up, take off and landing of every contemporary flying machine known to man.

And yes, I've even mixed up my special recipe and cooked hundreds of pancakes?just to hand them out at our very own EAA Chapter 230 Fly-in Pancake Breakfast (59M).

Helmet Head? It's an awfully good thing.

But Headphone Head? Ladies and Gents? now that's a girl's best friend .

(Authors Notes:

Fly In: A fun filled activity where any numbers of aircraft fly into airports.

Usually a fundraiser for Young Eagles or other scholarship programs that introduce aviation to youth and their first flight. Most serve pancakes and coffee for nominal fee. Millions attend. Historic aircraft and pilots always in attendance.

FBO: A service center at an airport that may be a private enterprise or may be a department of the municipality that the airport serves. Saviors of history and the home of flight in most communities.

Places: 08 KMCD?Mackinaw Island, MI-runway 8, OSH-EAA, Osb Kosh, Wisconsin,(800 thousand attendees) Experimental Air Craft Association-Air Venture, Annual Fly In.(EAA: A

international membership encouraging and supporting recreational aviation.)

KLAL-Lakeland Florida, Sun N Fun Annual Fly In. (Over 5000 planes in one spot!)

KC3M-James Clements Bay City, MI, 10 & 28 KTVC Traverse City, MI, KCAD-Cadillac, MI. 59M-Torchport Airport, Eastport, MI.

Mighty Mac: Mackinaw Bridge, 5 mile long bridge that links Upper and Lower Peninsulas of Michigan, over the Straights of Mackinaw.

People: Joe Kittenger, the highest balloon ascent, highest parachute jump, longest free-fall, and fastest speed by man through the atmosphere, Experimental Pilot.

Jimmy Doolittle?Raid on Tokyo post Pearl Harbor and so much more! Chuck Yeager?first to break the sound barrier in air plane. (Glamorous Glennis? Chuck's Plane.) New Standard Bi-Plane-a beauty! Glacier Girl? A frozen now restored P-38, Old Crow-Buds Anderson Plane-P-51 Mustang,

Cowling: the outside nose of the airplane like the hood of a car.

Sun Dog: a bright circular halo around the sun. An atmospheric optical phenomenon with ice crystals. Sometimes you can see two or more sundogs like circular rainbows around the sun.

I saw my first sun dog as the western backdrop of the Mackinaw Bridge. The double rainbows reached north and south shores, from the crystal waters up to 2000 ft., with the sun directly in the center of the Mackinaw Straights.

Misc.: Runways at airports are named after the points on a compass and where the runway is in relation to the points on a compass.

Helmet Head: An atmospheric phenomenon that happens to your hair from wearing a 5 lb helmet on your head snowmobiling.

Recommended Biographic Reading: The Right Stuff, (1979) Tom Wolfe, Chuck Yeager. Web search: Bud Anderson, Jimmy Doolittle, Joe Kittenger, EAA, and all the airports and communities listed.

Judy Reid

Judy Reid has a Master's in Education and had always considered herself a visual artist, with painting, photography and hand crafts, until she retired from Detroit Public Schools. Then she started studying the craft of words. She attends several workshops, retreats and conferences each year to learn and practice the craft of writing. Bob Hicok's coaching techniques, explorations, and inspirations are among the main reasons for her returns to the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2005, 2006, and 2007. Judy hopes one day to publish her chapbook, "I'm new at this."

~ *inanimate object speaks....* ~

because

I am

because

and my name is because

I am the ambassador

of truth

excuse

justification

I am a giving

revealing word

people pay

hard earned money

for the answer

if you were

the because word

you would hold the power

to reveal

what people want

if you were
the because word
you would be the envy
of other words
because you are
in constant demand

because the purpose
of what I do
is to analyze
summarize
the natural inference
of a result

because I am
the most direct
and complete word
for giving the reason
of a thing

because I am
the answer key
to that powerful
question word
why?

~ *Blackman Walking* ~

blackman walking
blackman standing at the bus stop
blackman leaning on the bus sign
blackman thinking
blackman saving family face
FORD's blackman supporting dreams

blackman walking
blackman leaving
blackman feeling
sorrow and pain
what is it all about
for who, what, where,
and when will I be a

blackman walking
with the music muses
in my head
in my feelings
in my heart
absorbing reflecting
following my dad
blackman walking

one day one day
I will be a blackman
driving flying
but for now

I am a
blackman walking
to the rhythm
in my mind
head and heart
feeling the wind and rain
on my face
touching the seasons
with hand, body and feet
penetrating my soul

reflecting what is in front
will I ever be a
blackman driving
blackman flying
through the winds of seasons
I look at my brothers
my sisters following
blackman walking
through the years of fears
never to end
until their end

blackman walking
packing jacking
filling the groves
with pipe in mouth
carrying wearing
the needs to
fill the tangles

with both hands in pockets
rhythm in the mind
and the little
hip limp to the stride

William Bennett Reid

William Bennett Reid, as a writer, prefers to use his full name, but still answers to “Willie” to those who grew up with him on the east side of Detroit in the Brewster projects. Others may choose whatever they prefer: William, Will, Bill, Billy, Reid or something they’ve created. Educated primarily in southeast Michigan, he holds a Master’s in Education. Bob Hicok has coached and inspired his work in poetry for the past three years at Bear River Writers’ Conferences 2005, 2006, and 2007.

~ *My Red Wagon* ~

Rescued from seasonal storage,
standing on end,
in a niche behind the kitchen door,
each year my red wagon never failed us
whenever called upon.

Its red enamel showed its mettle
shining bright as the first day it came home.
I have no recall if it had a name
or model emblem painted on.
What I do recall is

it had fat white sidewall tires
kind of flashy I thought.
Together we, Mother, I and it
slogged from vendor to vendor
in the open Eastern Farmer’s Market.

We stopped in stores also.
Almost magically there was always room
for one large rutabaga. waxed to prevent

dehydration; six medium yams,
each enough to make half a pie filling.

They sold so fast, there wasn't time they'd dry out.
By the way the large ones tended to be stringy.
We had a number six brown paper bag
that held inside smaller ones with measures of
sage, cinnamon, and nutmeg.

With wings tied back and feet together,
two live chickens, wrapped in newspaper
with nothing but their heads poking out,
pecked at anything that came near. Our load rode
gingerly on board beneath a sparsely boughed
one dollar Christmas tree. As we rolled home
all four wheels ran straight and true
without so much as a squeak, tracking like those
made by celebrated sleigh runners which never showed
in the heavy late December snow.

~ *Fantasy: Scatting* ~

I am late getting here to witness a visit,
one in 1932 that probably never happened.
I am standing on an adjacent balcony
of an apartment in Paris on the Rue de Palais.

Inside Gertrude Stein is happily reading her poems.
Her company, Ella Fitzgerald, who just popped in,
finds her new compositions joyful.
She is putting her own spin on Stein's work:

“Oop shoo be do be oop oop
Oop shoo be do be do”

Sounds like meaningless onomatopoeia to me.
Ella cuts it off saying, “Gotta break this off here.
Sorry I don't have more than these few minutes,
but you know the business.

“We're opening an orphanage in Harlem next month,
plan to call it Hanan House.
And my ship sails today!
Also there's this other business.

“Chic wants me back at the Savoy
to practice some new Fletcher Henderson arrangements
before Benny Goodman comes uptown.
He knows his health is failing

and thinks I may be the person

to hold the group together.” The two embrace.
I'm hearing a whimper from Stein
as she closes the window. I say trust me,
no “Oop shoo be do be” will ever sell.”

Bill Roorbach

Bill Roorbach's newest book is *Temple Stream*, published by Dial Press/Random House, which won the 2006 Maine Literary Award for Nonfiction. Others books of nature writing are *Summers with Juliet*, *Into Woods*, and *A Place on Water* (essays with Robert Kimber and Wesley McNair). He's the author of the bestselling book of instruction, *Writing Life Stories*, and editor of the Oxford Anthology *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction: The Art of Truth*. Bill also writes fiction and is the author of a novel, *The Smallest Color* (a selection of the Brisbane, Australia, literary festival, 2004), and a collection of short stories, *Big Bend* (which won the Flannery O'Connor Award in 2001). His short work has appeared in Harper's, *The Atlantic*, *Playboy*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and dozens of other magazines and journals, and has been featured on the NPR program *Selected Shorts*. Bill is an NEA fellow, a Kaplan fellow, and the winner of a 2002 O. Henry Award. Over the years, he's brought his passion for teaching and his commitment to new writers to Ohio State, Colby College, and the University of Maine at Farmington. He currently holds the Jenks Chair in Contemporary American Letters at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass. He lives in an old farmhouse in rural western Maine, and tries to keep it standing. *Bohemians* is posted on Roorbach's *Downeast.com* blog.

~ *Bohemians* ~ (excerpt)

At the Skowhegan Summer Art School I met a young artist whose oeuvre was comic. He went to their costume party as negative space: having cut and discarded a bunny out of a four-by-eight sheet of plywood, he carried around what was left

all night, the bunny's outline. For another project he cast moose prints in bronze, then attached them to his Nikes. Everywhere he went it seemed a moose had been.

Everywhere I go around here it seems a moose has been, too, but that's because a moose has. I love the winters in Farmington, and not only for the tracks of animals

otherwise mysterious. Generally, we get lots of snow, and then, when it's not snowing, lots of sunshine. It's a different world from the coast, weather wise, without the moderation of the ocean. Big storms in Portland are often insignificant here; what falls as rain and ice down there is often just plain, pretty snow here. I love a morning at zero degrees—we've had many lately—just cold enough to give the snow a squeak, not too cold for efficient breathing. If it's been twenty below overnight, what shows of Temple Stream steams, and there's the delight of hoarfrost limning all the trees and shrubs along its banks. Which are indistinct now, after a heavy rain in December brought the flow up and pushed enormous plates and pans of ice up onto shore. Weeks of cold have reified the results, and piles of new snow have made them treacherous—all those joints are crevasses now, ice caves: where's a skier supposed to cross?

I love looking out from the big window upstairs on a moonlighty night and seeing my ski track, the

way it curves doubly into the forest through a slot in the stone wall, the way it's a foot deep in three feet of recent snow. Your pole handles sink to knee height if you don't watch out—the ground's way down. Branches you walk under in summer poke you in the chest, stick you in the face.

Winter has a reputation as dead, but of course it's not: the forest is full of creatures making their ways, their tracks crossing mine or making use of mine all along my morning ski way, lately a moose. Or maybe it's some young artist escaped from Skowhegan. Deer particularly like my trail for its improved walking, leave splay-toes in deep blue recesses, urine tunnels, too. Squirrel prints atop the snow, little tail-dragging mice, clumsy-plunging coyote troughs, mincing foxes leaving holes where they've stuck their heads searching for subnivean voles, or leaving apple skins under the wild trees streamside. Every foot of snow makes a new altitude of apples available.

But it's the birds that bring winter fully alive, and in broad daylight.

I stop feeding the house birds around August, not because there's any worry at all of keeping them from migrating (that's an old husband's tale), but because there's just so much natural food available, every seed pod popping, every berry bursting. Also, the commercial seed's expensive, gives squirrels ideas about where to nest for winter: my house.

I start in feeding again at first snow. I like to see who turns up and when. Chickadee nearly always wins, seeming to have a memory and a habit of checking back. White-breasted nuthatch, ditto. But sometimes a blue jay, other times a sparrow wins the gold. The blue jays beak-flick the seed slot seeking certain favorites, empty the big feeder onto the ground quart by quart, but that brings the cardinal pairs back and then the mourning doves, even the rock doves from the old barn next door. The woodpeckers (hairy and downy) don't mind a feeder so

long as it's filled with sunflower seed, knock at the plastic tubes just for show. Goldfinches, green for winter, turn up in small flocks, but take their time—there's still thistle seed aplenty, lofted above the snow by one of the tallest of weeds. Juncos, redpolls, pine and yellow grosbeaks, anyone hardy might turn up. Crows like the compost pile. I love seeing one fly off all front heavy with a stale half bagel. How's he gonna explain that? See what you're missing, you bobolinks down there in Brazil? It's all a good show, especially before snow or in cold snaps, when every bird in town comes by to stock up on calories.

This morning my pileated woodpecker pair was back, one of them chiseling a hole in an all-but-dead black cherry tree at the hedgerow, knock-knock, like a carpenter setting a door. I spot him as I'm careening along downhill on skis made for chugging, get several stolen glimpses, plow and pull up at a spot where I can see through branches to the red repetition of his head. Down by the stream I stand and stare a

long time at the small window of open water—more life—then make a kick-turn. This startles some huge bird that startles me in turn—a big Tom turkey as it happens, seemingly alone, probably getting a drink of water when I came along. He flaps up into the air and chugs off with deep beats. I've been staring at him several minutes without seeing him, I realize.

And off I go on skis into the neighbor's fields through huge drifts and to the uncrossable Temple. But the brook that feeds it—Desi and Wally Brook I call it, for dead, beloved dogs—has found a coat of ice overnight, a plate-glass window of ice maybe thick enough to support a big person on skis, myself, 202 pounds in these days after Christmas. Or maybe not strong enough. Elaborate drowning scenarios accost me as I sidestep down the steep bank, Jack London winter deaths, me with my face in the water and unable to extricate, all tangled in skis and poles. Will I laugh as I drown like the crazy brother in Ken Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion*? The

thought makes me laugh, at least.

The brook's bed has frozen, so the flow is on top of ice and beneath ice both. If the top piece breaks, I'll be standing ankle deep. That'll just mean turning around early, bustling to keep warm while stopping to clear snow stuck to wet skis, no big deal, material for a 'blog, not a novel.

I make it across the flexing plate glass and into the next field, Joe Pye weed stalks dried and brittle and buried to their waists, fun to break. That's when I hear the many-voiced trilling of waxwings. An enormous flock is winging overhead, a full minute passing from first bird to last, one silver maple filling rapidly, while all the while another at the far side of the field empties. Sub-flocks break off, make forays. Total of something like a thousand birds, estimated by counting to one hundred and pinching the sky. You could mistake them for starlings, but it's the wrong time of year for such a great flock, and more important, there's a general impression of slate blue, slate grey

as they blow by above. A few views of brightly rusty undertail coverts cements the ID: the bohemians are back! It's been years! I stand on my skis and wait and eventually a group lands in a tree close overhead. I love the yellow band at the tail tips, the spots of red sealing wax on each wing, the rakish masks. They're bigger, chestier than the familiar cedar waxwings of summer, and they're here from much further north, visiting the extreme southern edge of their territory, stripping berries from trees and shrubs in their path, snarfing dried concord grapes, plucking tender buds.

#

Later in the afternoon I'm in the dooryard roof-raking great mountains of snow off the porch troughs when I hear the trilling, and here come the thousand bohemians in a jazzy mass to fill our old looming elm tree. It's a toilet break, as it turns out, and the snow blooms in grape-purple flowers, decorated here and there with

the orange of bittersweet, the red of winterberry.

Later still I'm driving to town for birdseed, and in the road ahead I spot them, my thousand waxwings picking up crop gravel or maybe even tasting the road salt, anyway, multitudinous birds busy in the road, wings all aflap in competition and excitement over whatever it is they're finding. I slow down as I would for anyone in the road, but (thinking of crows, of mourning doves, of crossbills, of goldfinches, or all the other nimble birds you see on the yellow line constantly), I don't stop altogether—they'll flee and fly, right? And of course they do, scattering every direction including at me, coursing over the windscreen of my trusty Subaru, their reaction time way too slow, denizens of a land without cars or roads. I look in the rearview and see that I've hit two birds! Two birds are in extremis behind me! My heart sinks as I roll to a stop, climb out, run back.

One of the injured old Bohemians
half-wings it into the woods. He won't
make it, and I doubt I could help
even if I could get to him—that's
how high the drifts are. The second
old Bohemian has expired. I take the
guilty opportunity to handle him,
examine those colors close as my
hand, feel his warm body, stretch his
wings out. He's good in the hand. I
can still feel the flight in him. In the
end I toss him over the snow bank
with a solemn word, but not quite yet
forgiveness for myself.

But the flock's still in the
neighborhood, still going strong.
That's the point of flocks.

Kerry Rutherford

One of Kerry Rutherford's earliest memories was in a tree above a cranberry bog on the twenty acres surrounding her parents' rented house throwing balled-up Wonder dough to her dog, Pudgy. She was confident that when she grew up he would turn into a prince and they would marry, but that was only the first of many times her imagination betrayed her. Kerry earned a degree in anthropology from the University of Washington, and then headed north to spend several years in Kodiak, Alaska. After many moves and jobs (crab-pot webber, teacher, grant writer, mother, musician, waitress) she left the Pacific Northwest for the Midwest and now calls Indiana home, working for an arts nonprofit and spending her free time creating music, writing, painting and playing cards. Kerry was in Richard McCann's Memoir workshop.

~ *The Call of Darkness* ~

The birds are "calling-in" the dawn, warbling through the full darkness outside my window. I don't remember them doing this before.

Didn't they used to announce the dawn as its gray morning light oozed across the landscape from the east? What could have possibly told them it was coming now?

But what do I know...being more familiar with the calling of darkness, with the musings from under a blanket of stars, looking beyond all this, wondering if there is some purpose I cannot find when it is so bright and all my imperfections are exposed, open to scrutiny by day-creatures whose vision is grounded in what is seen under the brilliant gaze of the sun.

~ *Little Kerry: a memoir* ~

It's not that she didn't feel safe... it's that she didn't feel anything at all. I'm asking now, years later, why she dreamed herself back to me from that very time and then made the dream so vivid that I remembered all the details when I woke up, and then made the dream so important that I immediately remembered that day, over fifty years ago, and not just the details of what happened but everything she felt (and did not feel) and how those things ran like a thread through her life like a fragile bond to the earth plane. Am I given this chance, this memory now because the thread is solid enough to trace back, to look for clues so I can find her and bring her home to me?

In the dream the children were in a house, in a dark living room, crowded around a television, watching the image of a young girl lying with her legs apart as someone touched her, over and over, as if to arouse her. I kept yelling, "Turn it

off. Turn it off! She's just a little girl, you shouldn't be watching!" Finally I went behind the TV and pulled all the plugs from the outlet, so no one could witness her shame.

In the tall grass behind the playground, in the real world, her seven year old self had no one to pull the plug as her boundaries were invaded, her innocence taken. In the church her nineteen year old self said, "I do," to someone just because he asked. In the reeds behind the beach on the Mexican coast her twenty-four year old self said nothing as the boy, whose name she does not remember, had his way with her and then walked away to tell his friends about the easy American girl. The procession of her men gets blurry. I cannot remember them all.

Far back in the woods of Kodiak, Alaska, behind Dark Lake, as her twenty-seven year old self took off all her clothes and lay alone in the creek, miles from any man, surrounded only by sun, water, moss-covered trees and bird song, letting let it all flow

over and around her...she asked for
help...asked to be found. Through
the dreams of her fifty-eight year old
self, she was.

Lisa Rye

Lisa Rye resides in Bloomfield Hills and Harbor Springs, Michigan. She completed her BFA degree at The University of Michigan in 1979 and her MFA degree at Vermont College in 2004. She has published poems in Artful Dodge, California Quarterly, English Journal, Penumbra, Permafrost, Rattle, REAL, Riversedge, The MacGuffin, and The Paterson Literary Review and has a poem in Roger Weingarten's anthology, Manthology. Lisa has received many honorable mentions and been nominated four times for Pushcart Prizes. She is married to Jonathan and has two sons, Benjamin and Calvin. Lisa's first book of poems is titled Blood Sisters. Lisa enjoys teaching a newly-formed poetry class.

~ Amidst All That Frozen Beauty ~

Everything was fast and white.
Snow covering eyelashes made the invisible
more invisible. My sister's mittens
gripped my waist, my gloved fist gunned
the throttle. We flew,
or at least it felt that way.

By the wood-burning stove, we had layered wool socks
and bundled into snowmobile suits
the family shared. Nine and eleven-year-olds,
on their virgin ride, couldn't have known
the snow-laden landscape's woods ahead
and no horizon to fall from, would teach.

It was finally our turn.

Instead of a thrill from speed, I learned
from a green branch, ten feet from my face,
that stopped my heartbeat, and I saw
clearer than ever—us as unique
particles mingling with the snowflakes.

After hearing myself yell “jump,” something else in me
released just in time. My sister landed
softly in a snow bank, as if gently blown.
Her laughter in the silence raised me
from my burial next to the sunken machine, and told me
she'd never tell.

Melissa Seitz

Melissa Seitz is a lecturer at Saginaw Valley State University. Her husband and son are an inspiration to her. Her dog Woody hangs out with her while she writes and plays electric guitar, but refuses to run with her. Her poetry and fiction have been published in the Bear River Review, Cardinalis, Cardinal Sins, 43 Negative 83, This is SVSU, and the Weathervane: A Journal of Great Lakes Writing. She has attended the Bear River Writers' Conference four times: 2002, 2005 (Laura Kasischke), 2006 (Jerry Dennis), and 2007 (Laura Kasischke).

~ *Before Reality TV* ~

I remember watching myself on television, waiting for the old RCA screen to explode, and plaster the image of the young blonde in the blue shirt and hip huggers onto the walls and ceiling. I watched myself twist my hair behind my left ear, bend slightly toward the reporter as if I couldn't hear him among the wall of concert-going people behind him, and give him a dazzling smile. The reporter asked me what I knew about the Allman Brothers. I laughed and said, "Eat a peach."

I am waiting for a change: a train, a plane, a bus, something with a driver. I have a car, but when I drive,

it is as if I am driving with my eyes closed. Sometimes I imagine myself driving along Lake Superior, finding an empty beach, and watching the gale-force, wind-whipped waves shove the ice floes towards the shore, and breaking them into pieces of blue and white glass candy on the rocks. No stoplights here to signal change. Sunlight and moonlight are all I have. Twilight would be brief, perhaps not exist at all.

I had not planned on being on Dean's bed, listening to that song, a song with my name, thinking that it should have been Donna on that bed listening to a song, any song. I did not understand why Donna had forced the issue, pushing me into

Dean's bedroom, where a black light illuminated posters of Hendrix and Joplin. A lava lamp sat on top of an orange crate filled with albums. Dean held his guitar, waited, and then said he wanted to play a song for me.

If traffic lights didn't exist, would I know when to move forward? Stop? Go? What if cars only moved forward on sunny days or partly cloudy days? What if we knew that sunlight meant that we should make love, play with a child, dance to a Beatles song, or chase a dog around a kitchen table? What if no one could go anywhere when the moon was full? Sunlight would signal go. Moonlight would signal stop. Be still and dream, sleep, dream. Twilight would be just the slightest hesitation, a blip in the universe.

I have no memory of that reporter or any blue shirt. I am positive that my teeth were never that perfect. I remember running to the bathroom mirror, examining myself closely, searching for the girl on television, and feeling a shiver in the California

coast line. I called my mother in Kansas that day, and asked her if she had seen any good tornadoes lately. She said no, and asked if I had been taking my vitamins.

Where am I now? Where is my mother? Is she stuck in yellow, the warning zone, the color of daffodils? Doesn't yellow signal cowardly? Who makes that shit up? My mother is anything but cowardly. Yellow is a color that children use when they paint a picture of the sun shining down on a happy home, a square box with a triangle on top. Yellow is a warning of things to come. The light turns yellow, and you had better be aware. Beware of that SUV driving through that intersection, aiming to kill you in your little hybrid, and pray for red—moonlight—stop.

I felt the earth pitch forward that night in Dean's bedroom, inside the old farmhouse. I had looked back towards Donna, and watched her close the door, gently. I stood there, my inability to make a simple decision suddenly complicated by

the look in Dean's eyes, and the beginning chords of the song, then his voice, not Gregg Allman, but close, throaty, bluesy. I sat down on the edge of the bed, as he sang to me, and I felt myself disappear. He sang a song, my song, my name, but not really my name. I had discovered my real name years ago. I had told no one of the discovery.

My mother is stuck in the yellow zone. Limbo. I'm sitting at a stoplight, on my way to see her, and I cannot remember how to shift out of neutral, find first gear. The car behind me honks. Green. Go.

The television was still on when I returned to the living room that day, but the news had moved on to the latest Star Wars movie release hype. I remember looking around my apartment. The furniture looked the same, the plants were still alive, and the stereo still held center stage in the living room. I was incredibly late for work. Why couldn't I remember the reporter or the blue shirt? I knew that I would never say "Eat a peach" to

any living person, again.

Sometimes my mother recognizes me, and then sometimes she says things I don't understand. "Your mother was mixed up with those people." Yeah, the cruel trick of being an adopted daughter. Who the hell am I? One day she told a friend of mine that I have a brother. My friend was afraid to tell me in case it might be true, and I didn't know. It was the first I had heard of it in 52 years. One day she thought I was her granddaughter, but she doesn't have one. Her granddaughter died 19 years ago. My daughter. That's cruel.

Thirty years ago, I saw Dean in a motel parking lot in my old hometown. I had come home to surprise my mother for her birthday, and decided to take a quick trip down the main drag to see if anything had changed. I pulled in, got out of my car, and said hello. He said he had started a new life in Colorado, and then he apologized for closing the motel-room door, as if we might have gone inside, but did not. I remember

feeling the pavement buckle, heard a snap in the distance, and saw some heat lightning crackle across the sky. Nothing felt quite right.

Green, red. Sunlight, moonlight.
Yellow. Twilight. Twilight.

I had shut off the television that day, lighting a cigarette on the way out, feeling the bright California sunshine bleeding all around me as I walked to my car. I remembered something my mother once told me. She said that we all have a double out there somewhere, a spitting image, someone who looks exactly like us, moves like us, talks like us. I had wondered if I should tell my mother about the girl on television. Is that what adopted daughters did? Tell their mothers about seeing a double? But what if I had been the girl on television and had forgotten? What would my mother think of me?

My mother stares at me, as if she might have known me somewhere long ago. She tries to tell me a story, but the words come slowly now, if at all. I hold her hand, tell her that she is

looking beautiful today, ignoring the fact that her wig is on backwards, and she has part of her breakfast on her chin. Twilight.

My birth mother named me “Connie Jo.” My adoptive mother re-named me “Melissa.” I went to an Allman Brothers concert. A boy played his guitar and sang to me in a farmhouse. I thought about the girl on television who had said “eat a peach.” I say the words aloud to my mother. “Eat a peach.” She smiles at me and says: “Right. That would be lovely.”

Susannah Sheffer

Susannah Sheffer is the author of three books, the most recent of which is *In a Dark Time: A Prisoner's Struggle for Healing and Change*. Her poems and essays have appeared in numerous magazines and journals, and she works regularly with teenaged writers, both individually and in workshops. At Bear River 2007, she was a member of Linda Gregerson's workshop.

~ *The Silence* ~

You've swallowed the moon.
It swells inside you
until you are gravid with refusal to talk
or to leave the desperate company
of others. Is something
wrong? Why are you so quiet?
You don't tell what you've done.
Finally the poison works
in ways no one can miss:
the trembling legs, convulsive
not like sobbing but like protest
or surrender.

After they take you away,
the sky is a taut, blank canvas,
without trace of the radiant disc,
the luminous story
you took with you and did not yield.

~ *How Manifold* ~

How manifold are thy works,
O Lord! That there should be
this stench of seaweed, tangle
on the shore, rougher, less sensuous,
more like itself
than anything the feet imagine.
That there should be this family
crouched together by the dunes.

Look at their hands. Look at the things
they want to make. Find me all the flat stones you can.
The father sends the girl looking,
testing each one – the distraction of the heat
in her palm, but then back to the question:
does it work, is it right? How she wants
to go forth and bring back the stones he needs.
They make a path. They dig a hole
for water to fill. How manifold
are thy works, O Lord,
that you have made this family
and trust them to find their way back.

She goes into the ocean alone
and afterward she has to find them
through a blur of seawater,
eyes without glasses, tangle of hair.
She pretends to see them,
or pretends she doesn't need to,

as though she knows all along
where she is going, which ones they are.
When she arrives
they are sitting on their blanket
as in a painting.
They have not been thinking of her,
or they've been thinking in ways they cannot say.
Something keeps her from flinging herself
onto the towel.
How manifold are thy works, O Lord,
that you hold her in that moment
and then release her
in all her power and longing
back into the scene.

Julie Sommers

Julie Sommers, a 2006 Graduate of Beaver Island Lighthouse School, attends Lansing Community College. She is a talented musician, plays multiple instruments and loves to write in any form. This is Julie's second time attending the conference through nomination and scholarship. Hound of Redemption was originally printed in Poetry in Performance 35.

~ *Hound of Redemption* ~

Counting clocks do they all lie time
Sadistic thoughts lead to sinking minds
Forget the lost superstitious walls
A devil's home is a lonely road

Barbara Stark-Nemon

Barbara Stark-Nemon lives and writes in Ann Arbor and in Northport, Michigan. She has attended the 2006 and 2007 Bear River Writers' Conferences, where she worked most closely with Elizabeth Kostova. Barbara continues work on her first novel, on Master Gardener certification, and doing strategic planning for non-profit agencies.

~ *Laughing Mouth, Crying Heart* ~
Chapter 30 1944 (Excerpt)

She had been called to the commandant earlier than was typical. She stood near the door, waiting as she often did while he finished his work. He asked for her often. At times he wanted only to sit at this desk and have her work on his shoulders, neck and forehead. Other times they removed to the small room, which he had instructed her to keep stocked with the towels, sheets, oil and pillows that suited him and the full body massages that occupied hours of their late afternoons. Klare had correctly assumed that silence allowed them both to avoid the realities of their association. She

could transport herself to the place where her hands could do their job by feel alone. He, alone among the officers who ran the camp and the town, did not use cruelty as the basis of his conduct. Silence obviated the need for explanations, permission, resistance, or acceptance. Only bodies spoke and each spoke a truth understood by the other.

On this day, the wait by the door was long, as the Commandant discussed a new order with an assistant. The painting of roses behind the Commandant's desk had become Klare's secret ally. It was full of beauty and impressionistic sensuality, the porcelain vase a stable base for the deep pinks and creamy white in the riot of open blossoms. She could fairly smell the pungent

ripe perfume of summer roses.

In fact, she had realized this morning, there was a real bouquet of roses in the sitting room. It was from there that a faint fresh smell of roses had come. Klare had squeezed her eyes shut to keep the tears of longing for her own garden, her own roses that this scent summoned. She had not yet finished the careful work of cleaning and straightening the sitting room, when the Commandant had called. When she returned, she would reward herself at the glass table; where the roses opulently spilled from a crystal bowl. Would she touch them? Straighten them? Was that expected? Allowed? Or would she only stand above them, and breathe deeply?

“Herr Commandant, this messenger was most insistent. He brought roses and an important message regarding Dr. Baeck, and several other inmates. He says it is urgent to speak to you before the visit of the Red Cross.”

“Roses? Whatever did he bring roses for?” the Commandant asked irritably. Klare could see the tight lines across

his forehead that signaled a headache.

“He said, ‘Ladies of the house should have beauty even in a war,’ Herr Commandant.”

The commandant paused and looked at his assistant for a long moment. “What did you say his name was then?”

“Lieutenant Stein. Bernhardt Stein.”

“Tell him I will see him tomorrow at 10. That will be all.”

Klare stood frozen to her spot. The man had said Stein, not Steinman. Was it possible that Bernhardt was here; close by and working to free Leo Baeck? Could he know she was here?

“Frau Koppel!” the Commandant spoke sharply.

Klare’s attention snapped back to the room and the commandant. Had he spoken to her?

“Yes, Herr Commandant,” she answered quickly.

“Please return at 2 PM sharp. I

haven't time now."

"Yes, Herr Commandant." Klare slipped through the door and down the hall into the sitting room.

Ten minutes passed before she stood at the table, cleaning and polishing the ashtrays, the glass now shining and spotless. The roses were beautiful. Klare's thoughts had quieted. She could make no further sense of what had just happened and so she left it in her thoughts. Instead, she gazed at the roses and thought of the girl Frema who taught the children's art class in the camp; if only she could see these flowers! There was so little for the children to draw. In one swift motion Klare snatched a fading bloom from the bowl, and thrust it deep into her pail beneath the polishing rags. Trimming brown petals from several of the other roses, she worked at the arrangement, thinking as little as possible. When she finished, she went to the servant's quarters and thrust the faded rose deep into the pocket of her coat before returning

to the kitchen to help with the midday meal.

"Here is a rose to draw with the children," Klare whispered to Frema as she passed her that evening in the darkening bunkroom.

"Ach, thank you Frau Koppel. Such a thing! How did you get it? They forget already things of beauty. This is wonderful! I must have something for the children to draw that I can show to the inspector. He wants only the pleasant pictures."

"I found it. I thought of you, but be careful, yes?" Klare smiled and continued through the barrack.

She reached her bunk and saw that her mother was already sleeping; clutching the tattered sacking that was her only blanket. Too tired to do more, Klare climbed to her own platform and slept instantly.

Not more than an hour had passed when a shrill whistle and the shouting of the guards woke all the women in

the block to dread and confusion.

“Get out! Now! In the yard, all!”

Klare was on her feet in the aisle before she could think, pulling her clothing and shawl around herself as she nearly lifted her mother first to sit and then to stand beside her. She weighed no more than a child, but her head sank to her chest and she leaned forward unbalanced.

“Mutti, you must wake quickly! We have to stand!”

“No, no, I cannot.” Johanna shook her head and seemed to have no strength to return her head to center.

“You must, Mama, please!”

Klare walked mechanically forward, her arm under her mother’s shawl holding her frail body. Frema appeared on the other side, whispering “Come Frau Gans,” and Klare felt her mother straighten and move between the two younger women like an aged marionette.

The night was mild for October,

but it was damp and Klare shivered.

The harvest moon hung low and huge between the bunkers as the 130 women were shoved into the yard.

There were more than the usual numbers of guards. It couldn’t be another transport already. They’d lost twenty women only this morning. Keeping her eyes down, Klare moved silently, running the possibilities through her foggy mind. Someone tried to escape. Something had gone missing. There were new orders. What?

“You! Out!” An officer was shouting, pointing his club at a woman in the front row.

“No, please..” Klare could hear the woman pleading, her voice rising.

“Silence!”

The woman could not stop, knew better but could not control her fear, and the tension rose in the air until the inevitable crack of a rifle silenced her as she dropped to the ground.

“You, move!” The officer continued, choosing women in what appeared

to be random fashion, as he pushed through the silent crowd. He neared Klare, who stepped quietly in front of her mother. He was an officer who met with the Commandant from time to time, and Klare watched him until she knew he recognized her. Only when he was directly in front of her did she drop her eyes. Pausing only a moment he turned to Frema and shouted.

Jessie Stern

Jessie Stern attended Richard McCann's workshop on memoirs at her first Bear River Writers' Conference in 2005, where she got the needed boost to complete the autobiography she had been working on since 1998. In 2006 she was in Laura Kasischke's workshop, and in 2007 Bob Hicok's workshop. She participates in a monthly senior writers' group which compiles a book of members' works to be sold at the annual Detroit Jewish Book Fair in November.

~ *Getting Older* ~

Seventy-six
And reluctantly counting
The years
The months
The weeks
The days
The hours
Can it be
The minutes too
As time flees
Wisdom
Awakens
Its message
The time allotted to us
Adds up
To
What matters most
Is
NOW

~ *Never Miss a Beat – An Evocation of the Heart* ~

A Memoir

Preface

As far back as I can remember there has never been a day when I have not thought about the mystery of life. Sometimes in ecstatic wonderment. Sometimes in fear and trembling. Perhaps it is in my genes. Perhaps I brought it with me from a previous life. Perhaps it is part of being human.

While it is not the purpose of this memoir to lecture, a bit of advice might slip into the text, given the fullness of my experience. After all, age is reputed to bring wisdom. You be the judge.

I learned in a social science class for senior citizens at the University of Michigan, Dearborn Campus that everyone has an urge to leave something behind. In older people the urge gets stronger. It is my hope that sharing a lifetime of personal stories will satisfy that urge as well.

And there may be a bonus: writing will release the power of healing

Ellen Stone

Ellen Stone teaches both creative writing and special education at Community High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Her poems have appeared in Cottonwood Magazine, Kansas Quarterly, The Detroit Metro Times, and in the collection, *In The Garden*, published by Outrider Press, 2007. Ellen's workshop leader at Bear River was Laura Kasischke.

~ *First* ~

Pennsylvania, 1970

My first
kiss was amalgam
was too green near water
was summer come back soon
was the breath of his nostrils
was smooth as his fingers
was wild berry meadows
was sunfish in shallows
was alfalfa baled hay rides
was legs touch electric
was fierce with a membrane
that lasted through forty
years wishing I'd told him,
I loved him, and yes.

Boston, 1940

My mother at fifteen
wants a bikini,
not just her sisters

under her shadow.
Down on the boardwalk
the sno cone stand opens.
The boy, Jimmy Walstra
walks over to find her.
Revere Beach in summer,
out in the open,
hot sand and seagulls,
he reaches down for her.
She sees him coming
all tan and shiny,
white teeth and smiling
and wants to say yes.

Michigan, 2000

My daughter at thirteen
wants to find someone
to tell her she's lovely,
looks in the places
girls look when they're younger:
a boyfriend, the movies
alone in the darkness,
she wishes to be
all alone in his arms.

How to tell her
to wait 'til green summer
comes dawning. A boy
sees her laughing
all long hair and swinging.

The heat and the sun
melt his eyes to her singing.
She sees him
and smiles full
of waves on the ocean,
the moment she knows
in her heart to say, yes.

~ *Hopefulness* ~

*for my daughters

I want you to wake up and feel hopeful
every day, even if what is ahead
seems too hard, or you're tired.

I want you to see what's happening outside,
the way the sky looks dawning and the air feels
on your skin. I want you to care about what's growing
in the garden, to look down at the earth and study it,
watch the colors of the lettuce leaves, their impossible
translucent greens and rusts, the lush tangle of the peas,
the joy of finding tiny perfectly shaped pods among them,
the squeak of their skins when you touch them, gently.

I don't want you to despair at disorder,
the way the tomatoes will grow too fast
before you stake them, or be riddled
with flea beetles before you know how to treat them.
Everything will happen too fast; you won't feel ready.

But, you don't have to know everything.
It is good to find someone to trust
when you don't know what to do next.
It could be a stranger, even, so long as he knows
how to garden like you want to.

Pick some place to start. Thin the spinach
or beets with careful small hands. It's okay
to be on your hands and knees. Dirt is a good thing
to have in your fingernails and on your clothes.
It washes out. Take a moment to sit there
in the garden, listen to the birds flit and twitter
or bees hum in the lavender.

The garden will heal your worries. It will,
because things die in the garden
when they're not supposed to.
Plants wilt and wither.
They turn yellow. It's okay.
You can try and make them better.
But, if they don't make it through,
that happens, too.

The truth about the garden is that it shows you
how to take steps, each day.
That's really the most important thing:
to start small and somewhat manageable,
to chart a little bit of a path and try and follow it,
to not give up, even if you're lost.

That's what I want you to know.
It's what my dad taught me,
even though he might not have known it.
I know how important it is,
and it's what I want to give to you.

Julie Stotz-Ghosh

Julie Stotz-Ghosh was a member of Linda Gregerson's workshop. Her work has appeared in various journals and anthologies including *Quarter After Eight* and *Poetry Midwest*. She teaches at Albion College and lives in Kalamazoo.

~ *This Waiting* ~

This waiting—years had passed
since the last time I saw you read.

Your poem about the bees, like a trapped bee,
taps taps inside my head from time to time.
You sealed them in your walls: honeycomb
river of inspiration, winter insulation, until
silence—when did it take me?

I came to thank you for buying me dinner once
when you knew I needed company, something.

I didn't thank you then

or tell you what was really the matter:

my father in the rafters of his nightmare,

my nightmare, how we are pulled into grievances
beyond our own grieving, a consequence
of the silence we try to hear.

My father buzzed from room to room, cracked
plaster and pried apart two-by-fours, wrestled
the porcelain bathtub onto the back porch,

chopped a hole into the basement, cut a hole
through his bedroom ceiling to let in some light,
some air to help him breathe.

I never saw him that year. The house was
dehydrated by its own silence, and I was made
silent, amazed and embarrassed by your kindness.

After your reading, I shook your hand, smiled.
You looked through me, signed my book:
your name, the year. Too many years.
Suffocating silence.

This waiting—when did it take me?

When my father came home from the hospital,
he spent a lot of time in my old bedroom,
looked through the things I'd left behind.
He'd call me at my apartment, ask questions:
What was your favorite subject?
Did you like to play music?

Where did you learn to draw?

~ *Field Party* ~

Anheuser Busch and ice in a silver trashcan
on the dirty flatbed of the rusted Ford
you called Green Machine.
Hot dogs hissing, spitting juice and steaming
beneath the iron dome of your father's Weber.
Kick ass ultra premium leaded guitar riffs—
heavy metal land of the no man's land. Oh
And Oh O O you were so pleased with your
quick wit and carburetor. Revving the motor,
strangling the steering wheel after ten cold ones,
under the influence, hell yeah! This baby's
got guts! Veering on winding gravel roads,
kicking up dust, oh yeah! Are you scared yet?
Hey, I'm talking to you! Are you scared?

Margret Catchick Sturvist

Margret Catchick Sturvist is a French and English teacher at a high school in northern Michigan where she resides with her husband and two children. Her poetry has also appeared in *White Crow* and has been honored by the Sky Blue Waters Poetry League and at the Gildner Gallery A-SEED juried theme exhibition, "Through the Window," in 2005 where one of her poems took second place. She attended Bear River Writer's Conference in 2007 where she worked in a group with poet Linda Gregerson.

~ *The Craft* ~

C'est en forgeant qu'on devient forgeron

--French proverb

Heat of the fire meets me like a sunburn;
skin blistering, I lean closer to the flame.
It is in forging that one becomes a blacksmith.
Will my skin soon blacken and
crackle like Cajun fish, crispness enclosing
the flesh of white beneath, that flakes apart
in a chrysalis of scars waiting for a rebirth?

The hammer and anvil are not tools for the passive;
they do not perform the work on their own
but rather require a firm grip, the handle
polished smooth, wood rubbed clean
by all who have wielded these instruments before.
It is only in forging that you become the blacksmith.
Vibrations ring, fingertips to shoulders,

muscles strain and pull, singing to the
sound of metal pounding metal
softened to a red glow by the flame's kiss.

It is in forging that one becomes a blacksmith.

There is no other way,
no series of interrogations,
ceremony or ritual
to grant the coveted title —
only this moment of heat
searing into bones,
slicing vital organs,
pulsing until liquid fire
shines out from
eyes, nostrils, fingertips
like molten lava
on its slow run to the sea.

Fighting every instinct,
ignoring the threat,
I step into the furnace,
consumed by flame.

~ *Born Again* ~

We sleep in the basement
during the summer's heat.
Retreating from the sun.
We find refuge in the

cool, dry darkness below.
It is a burial to be desired.
Beneath the ground
we lie silent, side by

side in the small bed
that used to be my mother's.
She died in that bed, and
though this is something

we never speak of,
she is always there in my mind
while we pass the night
breathing in the stale air

of a room with no light.
I dream her fears and sorrows:
a nightmare in which
I am putting glass dishes

in the cupboard — so carefully—
yet no matter what I do
they all spider with white lines
and collapse at my touch

and I try to control, contain
the disaster, grasping at shards
until the blood runs down my arms.
When I awaken the air is still,

for no sound of life
reaches us down here below,
the clock keeping time only
with the rhythm of slow breaths;

but I want more than
my mother's muffled loss.
So I climb the steps to where
the warm sack of humid hangs

at floor level, just above me,
and emerge like being dipped
back into birth headfirst; into
the world of heat & sound & sorrow.

Keith Taylor

Keith published two new books in 2006. *Guilty at the Rapture*, a collection of poems and stories, was named a Michigan Notable Book of the Year for 2007. *Battered Guitars: The Poetry and Prose of Kostas Karyotakis*, a book he translated with his friend William Reader, was published in England. His next book, *If the World Becomes So Bright*, will be published by Wayne State University Press in 2009. Over the years his work has appeared in a couple of hundred places, ranging from *Story* to the *Los Angeles Times*, from *Bird Watcher's Digest* to the *Chicago Tribune* to *Michigan Quarterly Review* (two issues of which he recently guest edited), *Poetry Ireland*, and *The Southern Review*. He has won awards for his work here and in Europe. He works as the coordinator of undergraduate creative writing at the University of Michigan.

~ *The Day After an Ice Storm* ~

When it dawns crystalline, blue,
the air sparkling with prisms
reflected off oak and spruce,
off every twig, branch or limb,
even off trees cascading
over fences, trees uprooted
by the splendor of ice—
the day lifts us, takes us out-
side ourselves, outside the news
of a nurse driving back home
last night, at the blackest hour
of the ice storm, when I was
watching electrical arcs
illuminating the yard.

I heard trees break apart
and was thrilled with fear. She stopped
to help at an accident—
it looked far worse than it was—
and a young man, 23,
also leaving work in his truck,
spun out on the ice killing
the nurse who already might
have imagined the next day
dawning crystalline and blue,
brittle, gloriously cold.

~ *Starting to Roll* ~

Faith lifts her legs
and falls;
her whole body
follows
left until the final
impediment—
her arm—
blocks the perfect roll,
flip,
turn.

When she finally
makes it,
she lifts her head
and squeals,
belly happy
until the adventure,
the roll back,
a new start.

~ ***A Monk's Rule*** ~

for Christine

But for you, my love,
I would take a monk's rule.
Rise long before dawn,
have a simple breakfast
of unbuttered toast and milk.
One cup of coffee, black.
I would go upstairs,
sit with paper and pen,
and plumb the deepest reaches
of my mind or soul or self.
Evenings I would read
nothing but books written
in the first millennium.

Richard Tillinghast

Richard Tillinghast co-founded Bear River and was director through 2005. He has written and published in several genres: poetry, essays, travel writing, translation. He is the author of some eight books of poems and three books of essays. For many years he reviewed books and wrote travel pieces for the New York Times. A collection of poems, *The New Life*, is out this year from Copper Beech, along with a collection of essays, *Finding Ireland*, and, in collaboration with Julia Clare Tillinghast, a book of translations from Turkish, *Dirty August*. He lives in Ireland, where he writes full time and publishes feature journalism and book reviews in *The Irish Times*.

~ *Two poems about weather* ~

1. Snow in the Glen

Weather is never only weather.
Not out here
where nothing comes between the pure
self and its elements.

After Christmas a storm overtakes us.
Big, clean, soft, driven,
absolving—pure as feathers.
Inside this snow, time is not.

In the night, the world stopped.
And now the world begins.
At the top of the sky the wind nudges
a big cloud west to east.

Our pond goes suddenly occult.
Someone in a hat carries a bucket
across the frozen yard.
The school bus driver turns on the weather.

The farmer with his John Deere tractor
forking fodder for the yearlings
stares up at the mountain's white dome
pure as an owl's call.

2. Rain in the Night

The rain with its complexities
its poundings and pourings,
the short vowels it pronounces on the slates—

the way it jugs-jugs,
lapses and lulls
then bottoms out—
the deepest of marimbas,

fills everything there is to be filled
and then overflows
the rain barrel, cistern, empty flower pots,
the reservoir at the top of the hill.

The sky bends low
enough to touch my face as I lie awake
listening to it,
pleased by its monotony—

only the slate roof and skylight overhead
repel it.

The wind in a gust
tosses it underhand
like a woman sowing seed into ploughed ground,
then flings it
harder, rice at a wedding.

You turn to me half dreaming under the covers,
talking in your sleep,
“There you are.”

Barry Wallenstein

Barry Wallenstein is the author of five collections of poetry; *Beast Is a Wolf With Brown Fire*, (BOA Editions, 1977), *Roller Coaster Kid* (T.Y. Crowell, 1982), *Love and Crush* (Persea Books, 1991), *The Short Life of the Five Minute Dancer* (Ridgeway Press, 1993), *A Measure of Conduct* (Ridgeway Press, 1999). His poetry has appeared in over 100 journals in the U.S. and abroad, in such places as *Transatlantic Review*, *the Nation*, *Centennial Review*, and *American Poetry Review*. His 1971 book *Visions & Revisions: the Poets' Practice* [T.Y. Crowell] was reissued in a new and expanded edition by Broadview Press [2002]. A special interest is his performance of poetry with jazz collaboration. He has made six recordings of his poetry with jazz, the most recent being *Euphoria Ripens* [Cadence Jazz Records] April, 2008. He is an emeritus Professor of literature and creative writing at the City University of New York and is also an editor of the journal, *American Book Review*.

~ *Reading Keats's Urn Poem in the Country* ~

The cicadas are amorous tonight
in this realm of our listening.
How are we to behave under such sound,
the waves of it teasing our minds
out of thought? Keatsian trills thrill down
to the exposed nerve beneath a broken tooth.

Is that anger I now hear
within the singing bug's song,
or is some critter resisting penetration?
Are we truly one or are we two?
This is the rasp I hear
against a heaven fallen.

So clear are the facts of waters rising in a flood
only to recede while other waters flood elsewhere.
The facts are registered in the music provided
by the creature's tymbal organ.
Why so sexy, the lovers wonder,
leaning close, trying to understand, listening.

~ *The Circus Man* ~

The Carney barker boasts & cries—
“step right up folks...see in this tent
the world's strongest man alive,
and off to the left, the smallest woman,
a midget minus a half she is, stands,
and see right in here folks, the famous geek,
feathers still on his lips
and there's the one who swallows knives
and then fire—
step right up folks / take it all in—my friends.”

But in the shadows,
to himself, he groans:
“I've lost a son, missing these many months
and in my own home town;
for me he's far away as China.
He left soundlessly – first he's here
and then nothing, zero, silence.

He took his gear, his pipe and everything.
Some would smile at such a young man
smoking a pipe; he never smiled back.

Nor could I interest him in the animals
or the freaks – fascinations for most kids.
No, he'd fashion a gun out of wood
and take aim at the world 'round his room.
My brother, a juggler with the show,
told me years ago he considered the boy off
off somewhere in his own universe
where a glum face tells the world stay away.
I know nothing about these things, but he's gone."

The crowds thin away towards evening,
and the animals relax in their cages and stalls;
the chimps clean each other;
the amazing oversized tarantula?
accustomed to spinning her horrible webs
just inches above the children?
is boxed up for the night. Strings of light
go on all along the sawdust pathways
while the barker bows his head, unsmiling,
bereft of a love that's growing old in hiding.

