

VERSE WISCONSIN

FOUNDED BY LINDA ASCHBRENNER AS FREEVERSE 1998

“Accessible is the new experimental. I feel I’m pushing edges all the time, but I’m doing an even harder thing than experimentalists are: I’m branching downward, not outward.”

—Todd Boss

“In the Hibiscus Collective, women nurture each other as artists...We inspire and encourage each other to become better writers. We give each other hope that our voices will be heard...”

—The Hibiscus Collective

“I don’t just read poems to the residents; I embody the poems.”

—Lisa Marie Brodsky

FEATURES

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*Tess Romeis*Lester Smith*Bruce Taylor*Marilyn Taylor
*Jeanie Tomasko*Timothy Walsh*Marilyn Windau
Mark Zimmermann

🦋 Editors' Notes 🦋

Welcome to readers and contributors from in-state and out. Another editor asked recently, *Is there such a thing as Wisconsin poetry?* While we're not sure yet if there's such a thing as "Wisconsin poetry," there are Wisconsin poets, of all kinds, old and young, well-known and just starting out, urban and rural, university-affiliated and not, experimental and traditional, formalists and free versers, dramatists, lyricists, spoken word activists, visual artists, and poetry animators, natives and newcomers, all of whom we hope to include in print or online at versewisconsin.org. As a group, these poets are both creative and supportive—just take a look at the *VWOnline* "Links" page for a list-in-progress of the programs, organizations, and groups started by state poets, from reading series in the rural northwest, to presses, publications, and writers' colonies, to one of the nation's top creative writing programs. For a population of under 6 million, that's a whole lot of organization and output.

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WISCONSIN FELLOWSHIP OF POETS

Verse Wisconsin (VW), the new face of Linda Aschbrenner's well-loved small-press poetry magazine, *Free Verse*, is part of that organization. It is our mission to publicize poetic activity in Wisconsin, as well as to publish Wisconsin's best poetry alongside that of poets from outside the state. Think of *VW* as a series of windows on a panoply of ever-changing views, as well as a set of doors that, we hope, will swing freely in both directions. We think the features in this inaugural issue exemplify both the kinds of activities that we want to report on, as well as the values that contribute to Wisconsin's poetry community: inclusiveness, accessibility, innovation, and the desire to share what we make. *VW* aims to keep opening doors and windows onto more of Wisconsin's poets, and we invite you to participate in the process of creating *VW*: read, submit poetry, write us letters, send in your story ideas about writing groups, like the Hibiscus Collective, p. 22, publication venues like the innovative Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf, p. 18, and poetry service that makes a difference, like the Alzheimer's Poetry Project, p. 29. Write about how poetry relates to your life, or the life of someone you know. Visit our website, with extended content for feature articles, as well as a section of themed poetry and images on "Doors & Windows." Send us photos and more links for versewisconsin.org. Ask for one of our "Books Received" and write a review. Remember that *Verse Wisconsin*, like its predecessor *Free Verse*, is an all-volunteer operation that aims to break even—we appreciate your donations of whatever size and your subscriptions, and welcome your professional knowledge from proofreading to accounting to marketing and publicity!

January in Wisconsin—snow on the ground, ice on the lake—and what do we do? We keep busy. We go outside—put skis and blades to feet for fun, bore a hole through the ice to fish, continue

biking to work, some of us, regardless of the temperature, make snowmen. Or we stay inside. Make hot chocolate, make fires to keep warm, watch the snow falling outside our windows, watch our neighbors falling outside our windows, invite the neighbors over for some poetry.

Thanks to Cathryn Cofell, CJ Muchhala, Richard Roe & Shoshauna Shy for volunteering to help with proofreading! Lingering errors are, of course, the responsibility of VW's editors.

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Books Received Fall 2009— Publisher & Author Links available online

- Kim Addonizio, ed.**, *Best New Poets 2009*, Samovar Press, 2009
- Sharon Auberle**, *Crow Ink*, Little Eagle Press, 2009
- Barbara Jordan Bache-Wiig**, *Yoga Woman*, Poetry People Press, 2009
- Mary Jo Balistreri**, *Joy in the Morning*, Bellowing Ark Press, 2008
- Cathy Smith Bowers**, *The Candle I Hold Up to See You*, Iris Press, 2009
- Jan Chronister**, *Target Practice*, Parallel Press, 2009
- Geraldine Connolly**, *Hand of the Wind*, Iris Press, 2009
- James Crews**, *One Hundred Small Yellow Envelopes*, Parallel Press, 2009
- Alice D'Alessio**, *Days We Are Given*, Earth's Daughters, 2009
- Philip Dacey**, *Vertebrae Rosaries*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2009
- Bruce Dethlefsen**, *Breather*, Fireweed Press, 2009
- Rob Eckert**, *Pheromonal*, Desperado Press, 2009
- R. Virgil Ellis**, *Sing the Poem Electric*, Woodhenge Productions, 2009
- R. Virgil Ellis**, *The Tenting Cantos*, Desperado Press, 2009
- Kathryn Gahl**, *Life Drawing Class*, The Cottage Corollary, 2009
- Ed Galing**, *Tales of South Philly*, Four-Sep Publications, 2000
- Sid Gershgoren**, *The Extended Words: An Imaginary Dictionary*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2009
- Edward Hirsch**, *The Living Fire: New and Selected Poems*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2010
- Karla Huston**, *Inventory of Lost Things*, Centennial Press, 2009
- Charlotte Innes**, *Reading Ruskin in Los Angeles*, Finishing Line Press, 2009
- Jim Johnson**, *Driving Gravel Roads*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2009
- Jesse Lee Kercheval**, *Cinema Muto*, Southern Illinois U Press, 2009
- Michael Koehler**, *Red Boots*, Little Eagle Press, 2009
- Judy Kolosso**, *Aubade*, Dumford's Landing, 2009
- Judy Kolosso**, *In the First Place*, Dumford's Landing, 2009
- Michael Kriesel**, *Moths Mail the House*, Sunnyoutside, 2008
- Estella Lauter**, *The Essential Rudder: North Channel Poems*, Finishing Line Press, 2008
- Linda Lee**, *Celebrating the Heartland*, Jericho Productions, 2009
- John Lehman**, *Acting Lessons*, Parallel Press, 2008
- Ellaraine Lockie**, *Love in the Time of Electrons*, Pudding House Publications, 2009
- Ellaraine Lockie**, *Stroking David's Leg*, Foot Hills Publishing, 2009
- Arthur Madson**, *Out of the Welter*, Fireweed Press, 2009
- Robert B. Moreland & Karen M. Miner**, *Postcards from Baghdad: Honoring America's Heroes*, 2008
- Ralph Murre**, *Psalms*, Little Eagle, 2009
- Cristina M.R. Norcross**, *The Red Drum*, Firkin Fiction Publishing, 2009
- John Pidgeon**, *The Formal Impulse*, Parallel Press, 2009
- Andrea Potos**, *Yaya's Cloth*, Iris Press, 2007
- Anne Shaw**, *Undertow*, Persea Books [Lexi Rudnitsky Prize Winner], 2007
- Thomas R. Smith**, *Kinnickinnic*, Parallel Press, 2008
- Nadine St. Louis**, *Zebra*, Marsh River Editions, 2008

more Verse Wisconsin Online

“Doors & Windows” Poems
UW-Madison Poetry Fellows
Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf Postcards
Audio by the Hibiscus Collective
Todd Boss Poem Animation & Audio
Book Reviews
& poetry recordings by both
print & online contributors!

- River Editions, 2008
- Richard Swanson**, *Eastern Europe 1989 (A Saga)*, 2010
- Marilyn L. Taylor**, *Going Wrong*, Parallel Press, 2009
- Marilyn L. Taylor, Denise Sweet, & Ellen Kort**, *Wisconsin Poets Laureate*, Marsh River Editions, 2009
- Don Thompson**, *Where We Live*, Parallel Press, 2009
- Alison Townsend**, *Persephone in America*, Southern Illinois U Press, 2009
- Marine Robert Warden**, *Finding Beauty*, Bellowing Ark Press, 2009

“Doors & Windows”

Online Poetry By

- | | |
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| Sharon Auberle | Michael Kriesel |
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| Melodie Barker | Peg Lauber |
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Books Reviewed Online

- Sharon Auberle**, *Crow Ink*, Little Eagle Press, 2009, Reviewed by Russell Gardner, Jr.
- Sharon Auberle**, *Saturday Nights at the Crystal Ball*, Cross+Roads Press, 2008, Reviewed by Russell Gardner, Jr.
- Robin Chapman**, *Abundance*, Cider Press, 2009, Reviewed by Richard Swanson
- Jan Chronister**, *Target Practice*, Parallel Press, 2009, Reviewed by Estella Lauter
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- Ralph Murre**, ed., *Bar Code: An Anthology*, Little Eagle Press, 2008, Reviewed by Richard Swanson
- Marilyn L. Taylor**, *Going Wrong*, Parallel Press, 2009, Reviewed by Barbara Crooker

Air Lock

A space odyssey this is not, though in midst
of another blasted trip, wife and I,
for the U.W. Clinic, made to reminisce
over last month's glimpse of how ultrasound
can turn a pocket of the universe inside out
already up side down: a college son's rare syndrome,
"Thoracic Outlet," with "a clot the size of a brat,"
that flock of doctors' hospital talk,
his only symptom sudden, "classic,"
(brought on in an Eddie Bauer trying a sweater on),
his left arm gone purple as grape popsicle.
And though it seemed we missed this Christmas,
cold as hell, we needed no fleece and,
thankfully, received none.



Now, as if detainees we've made of ourselves,
early for the appointment, we linger
until lingering turns to dwell
in an air lock on the far edge of Fond du Lac where—
with or without needing to eat—
we ate, hands still bearing the trace
of Bacon Burgers and Curly Fries.
Forgive me, should you think there ought
not to be surprise. I take a quick glance
at my wife's eyes, big, beautiful, blue,
that just happen to have been
for thirty-three years eyes of a C.C.R.N.,
eyes that will hear no lies—
my eyes.



Zippering up, slowly slipping on gloves,
it's as if we're looking around for the rocks
in this superheated box a southern-most sun
at its zenith turns to sauna, when in truth
we loiter for warmth that cannot be had between us
until this thing is done, our son is cured,
the operation a success, no need for a second one.
Finally, we run for the car, cross a white wind,
a gust's rush of nothingness
enveloping us like a ghost-herd of horses.
I step on more horses, her 300M, for heat.
Halfway across state, though we cannot know it,
awaits a slate clean of complications.
We've been to see the Wizard. One of us maybe prayed.
We're off for the specialist's, pilot
to co-pilot, mum.



On the way home, somewhere around repairs
on Highway 151, just as, one right after another,
reflectors flare, steering us clear
of on-coming cars, I find my tongue,
but see by dashlight she's asleep. So
I tell myself what I might have told her,
why I have not wept or, even in relief,
weep. Outside it's zero on the overhead console,
though we're here warm, cruise control on,
hurling through space as if in place.
Like the interior, it occurs to me,
earth's an air lock where zero's absolute.
In an hour, maybe, we'll pull into the garage,
park, another air lock. Out of one into another,
whether we make it there or not.
Now tell me, dear wife, what one of us is without
a sorrowful sense of life?

—KARL ELDER, HOWARDS GROVE, WI



Pillar History

In the basement there's a 4 x 4 x 7.
It's cedar, painted white,
props up the stairway to the kitchen.
You can go up or down.

On the post are horizontal lines
to record the verticals
of children's lives.
Three sets,
dated,
remembered.

Firstborns always have
the highest marks.

At 1989 the pillar history stops
but not the lives.
Youngest becomes tallest,
oldest shortest,
middle retains growth stability.
Parents shrink.

You can go up or down.

—MARILYN WINDAU, SHEBOYGAN FALLS, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Hidden Snow

Staring at the picture window's winter
yard, I focus hard and try to freeze time
from under the couch. Halt each flake of snow.
I'm six and watching *Twilight Zone* alone.
A silver flying saucer delivers
cancer and I know sooner or later

it'll find me. Now forty years later
it's late November. Another winter.
My uncle Dale and me, delivering
firewood. Later, there's still enough time
to cut red oak. The two of us alone,
his tumor in remission. There's no snow

yet, so our hands stay dry. Most years there's snow
before Thanksgiving. Each day it gets late
a minute earlier. Back home, alone
with my thoughts and a bottle of winter
bock beer, dad's old paperbacks kill some time.
"Swinging his broadsword, Conan delivered

a killing blow." Cancer of the liver
killed my dad. "Like twin piss holes in the snow,
the wizard's eyes flayed his soul." The last time
we brought dad home the clouds were bone. Later
I walked to Dairy Queen. It was winter
then, too. Two years ago. I drink alone,

thoughts looping down a logging road. "A lone
figure trudged the tundra where nothing lived."
Cancer just keeps coming back, like winter.
"Rolling downhill he grappled with the snow
ape— sheathing his knife in its guts." It's late.
I unsheathe my chainsaw, sharpen its tines

and brood on Conan's grim God, Crom. One time,
he helps, granting strength at birth. My dad's one
gift. The scabbard's orange, plastic. It's late.
I sheathe my blade and rise; deliveries
tomorrow. I see where this all goes. Snow;
no snow. Banal repetition. Winter.

Trees. Time. Lives. The way my stoic liver
works. I drink alone, waiting for the snow
and a later season, beyond winter.

—MICHAEL KRIESEL, ANIWA, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author
"Hidden Snow" won the 2009 Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets Muse Prize

Looking for the Past

All we have to do is to find
the razed building
that had a ghostly bald head
looming in its attic window

and the moony face of a boy
strumming his unstrung guitar
in the basement
like the wind sifting through the rubble

— EDWARD HIRSCH, NEW YORK, NY



Classic Superheroes of My Childhood

Of course Superman, the black and white
version with slack tights and baggy briefs
that winking chin dimple
his dreamy phone booth ways.

And I'm loath to admit, Mighty Mouse,
his rodent tail hidden beneath a billow of yellow
as he puffed his chest, flew and swooped to save
Pearl Pure Heart from the clutches of Oil Can Harry.

Then Roy Rogers, not because he could ride
upside down and sideways and shoot bad guys
at full gallop, but because of that smile,
twinkling from under the shadow of his white hat.

These super men, the ones I dreamed of,
and one woman, a cap of pin curls, arms folded
around clean sheets, mouth spitting pins,
the cape of her apron flying in the breeze.

—KARLA HUSTON, APPLETON, WI

Settling Accounts

He has a mouth like a bankbook,
all he has to do is open it
and I disagree with him,
whether I do or not.

He's a crisp, white shirt, a wingtip
shoe, a black and white TV,
neat, tidy, cool. Chocolate
wouldn't melt in his hand.

He thumbs through rows
of folders, everything catalogued,
not a bungalow, a child, an ambulance,
a morning, out of place.

He knows where apples belong, paintings
and penitentiaries, butterflies and blood.
Whenever he sees me, he looks up from his ledger
and hands me a paper clip.

—RUTH BAVETTA, SAN CLEMENTE, CA
visit VW Online for more by this author

Elegy



Yin to my Yang,
The man who taught me the Zen of roofing,
Hunkering down in his stocky bibs
As he muttered Nothing matters
(The Existential Roofer),
And I, a simian rainbow,
Reach not exceeding my grasp,
Barefoot in cutoff jeans too short
(What's a heaven for?).
He died in a dark room,
Wild critters gnawing at his bowels.

Now bristling gray gone white I
Roof my last house,
Not with nailing gun pops
(Bullets or fists in film noir gangster flicks)
But the persistent taps of a woodpecker
Well beyond his fourth hour
Still refusing to seek medical attention:
Nothing matters;
My shingles are guaranteed thirty years.

—GARY JONES, SISTER BAY, WI

Calculation

for G.O.

I remember his arm
bathed in fluorescent light.
His fist twists a screwdriver which
twists a screw onto his model train track.

I remember doing math,
eighty-six years of cells
subtracted from light equals dust.

I don't remember when his death
stopped digging like a screw.
The pain slipping into abstractness,
this math I do in order to sleep.

—JOSEPH BRIGGS, MADISON, WI



While I Mourn

For weeks, I've painted walls,
ceilings,
avoiding damage to trim
around windows and doors,
using blue tape to catch drips,
just to keep moving through
my grief, the empty haunting
loneliness of being without you.
I climb ladders, extend poles to
reach high places,
I give second coats to spots that
need them—to do anything not
to wallow. So much depends on
it. Sometimes a beam of sunlight
lands on the fresh paint. I step
back periodically to pronounce,
“How does it look to you?” My
ivy inspiration room looks cheery,
a sanctuary after a day's work in
the garden or house. Can you see
the dustbowl color in the hallway?
White birch in the foyer, or slight
white in the kitchen?

—JANE-MARIE BAHR, MENOMONIE, WI

Jeanette and Justice: Skirting Oblivion

by Sarah Busse

My friend Jeanette Hinds died almost two years ago. I didn't know until my holiday card was returned with a nice note from her daughter, Jane Ellen. Jeanette and I were in a poetry critique group together more than ten years ago, while I lived in Rochester, Minnesota. There were eight of us, and we called ourselves the Group of Eight—we were too busy writing poems to come up with a better name. We met at Jeanette's house, in her family room with its color scheme straight out of the early seventies. We ranged around the coffee table, sinking into the couch, propped on folding chairs. Jeanette always sat in her chair, to the right of the fireplace.

When I knew her she was in her seventies, a matriarch with six grown children, several grandchildren and (I think I remember) a few great grandchildren already in the clan. It was clear to me that her life was supported by three pillars: family, faith, and poetry. And between those, she knew her priorities and lived out her values; family was always her "number one job," she said. As a young woman trying to figure out how to fit writing into my life and also maybe have a family, she was one example, a role model of the possible.

After learning from her daughter that my Christmas card would never get to Jeanette, I searched my bookshelf for solace, and turned intuitively to Donald Justice's essay "Oblivion" (in *Oblivion: On Writers and Writing*, Ashland, OR: Story Line Press, 1998).

One of my favorite prose musings on poetry and the life of poetry, Justice explores through three examples (Weldon Kees, Henri Coulette, and Robert Boardman Vaughn) what can happen, or fail to happen, to writers who are committed to their art yet passed over by fame, critical attention, or even publication. There are lovely passages in it:

There is a randomness in the operation of the laws of fame that approaches the chaotic, and I believe that the various degrees of oblivion to which these three poets have been consigned are no more proportionate to the real value of their work than the fame of some others is to the value of theirs. The success of these three—what there was of it—ought to be measured in terms of the poems they wrote or perhaps by no more than a splendid phrase here or there, almost lost now. It may help to remember that underlying all this was the almost spiritual type of dedication I have been trying to identify. It is too dismal to concede that success is measured only in terms of notoriety and riches and such toys. (55)

Jeanette lived that life, a life of dedication to poetry which threaded through and around her other loves. Upon her death, several of the poets who knew her wrote poems of homage, and these, along with some of her own poems, were collected into a chapbook *Elegy for Jeanette*. That is one mark and measure of poetic success, surely.

But reading Donald Justice didn't help me on this particular day. As much as I love his essay and am usually comforted by the idea of undeserved oblivion, I found myself restless as I read it over this time. And my unease could be traced, I realized, to one passage early on, where he tries to define the class of people he's considering, stating they are all

artists, far less visible, but true artists nonetheless. The news magazines and the academic establishment on which we so heavily depend for our opinions simply have no organs for seeing this underworld or underclass of art. (54)

Fair enough. But then he goes on to say:

Do not mistake me. I do not have in mind the productions of societies of amateurs, literary clubs, workshops; I mean the real thing. (54)

Ouch. My friend Jeanette was all of those: an amateur who belonged for years to the League of Minnesota Poets, a participant and leader of their workshops. She taught literature and poetry classes at the Rochester Federal Prison for years. She worked hard at her own writing and believed in choosing just the right word, paring away all extra. Yet it's clear to me from his own statements that Justice would exclude her from his company of "real" artists.

The Justices of the world write off my friend and her chapbooks as not worth much time or consideration. They do it gently, but they do. Some days, I have been a Justice too. I believe in excellence. I believe that the muse is not democratic. Jeanette's poems—I can admit this as I read them over now—often do not achieve excellence, as Justice would understand it. They are perfectly competent, but they lack the *true strange* of the masters.

Last Walk

Her grandson, who turned fifty
in the spring she died,
walks the land.

Already the new owner's blade
turns black furrows edged with last
season's stubbled corn.

A horizon of bare willows suspends
the greens of a coming year
in the long slow flow through woody
fibers and cells.

Indifferent trees eventually
will shelter a new crop of robins;
a cool twilight owl
asking "Who?"
will not care who owns the land.

At mid-life, her grandson
directs and measures each step
as he understands, like a weight,
how the latent and eternal land
lies lightly pressed
under his heavy ephemeral boot.

—JEANETTE HINDS

from *My Mother's Keys*, Lone Oak Press, 2002

But I can't write Jeanette's poems off today. I can't dismiss her example, because as I read over the poems in her book I am struck by this: they would speak to so many. They are heartfelt. They are, if not simple, simply stated, and moving. They are the work and words of a woman who gave a great deal of her life to poetry, who helped others find the real joy of working with words. And I can imagine many of my non-poet friends relating much more easily to her work than to the better known and widely revered poets that line my bookshelf.

This is a poetry that speaks to congregations, to occasion, and also to the quiet one by the window, reading for the first time.

Jeanette published two books in her lifetime, a small chapbook titled *Traveling On*, which she had printed for (and dedicated to) her church on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. Her second book, and the stronger one, is *My Mother's Keys*. These poems she began to write upon the occasion of her mother's death. Her daughter had taken a series of photographs of objects around the old farmhouse, as well as photos from the day of the farm's auction and the funeral. Jeanette used those pictures as a starting point for her poems. She was determined to capture on the page her own sense of what

her family had been, its values, hardships and tender moments. Well aware, as an only child, that she was a hinge between generations of

Many of us, in our multiple and various lives, our daily ins and outs, are dedicated makers. And those of us fired by ambition to dream of going further, making something greater, longer lasting, seem to me this day to be the odd ones.

the past and the future, she saw this work as mainly a legacy she wanted to pass on to her own children and grandchildren and was less interested in selling copies of the book to outsiders, although some of us encouraged her in that direction. Many of these poems came through the Group of

Eight's workshopping sessions. When I read them, I can't help but remember our back and forth over certain words and phrases, line breaks, titles.

Jeanette's poems are exactly as her mother's doilies, which she writes of in "What Angels Leave." Based on Jeanette's description of them, I'm pretty sure I would have found her mother's doilies less pleasing than I find Jeanette's poems. And yet their fact cannot be denied, any more than I can pass by the many quilts of my own grandmother or the words of my friend. What do we make of all this *making*? Is it all great art? No, and I don't think Jeanette aspired to produce "great art." And yet, there it is. And much of it, lovely. Much of it speaks to what is uniquely human: the urge to beauty even after our work is done.

Many of us, in our multiple and various lives, our daily ins and outs, are dedicated makers. And those of us fired by ambition to dream of going further, making something greater, longer lasting, seem to me this day to be the odd ones. Could ambition be a mental illness? Jeanette knew her place and her priorities. She did not feel limited or constrained by her roles as mother and teacher, wife and church worker. She considered those roles her real work in the world and the poems were secondary. Not less worthy of her hard work and attention, but secondary. These years removed, married and with my own two children, I can see that although I too seek balance in my life, I have followed a different path from Jeanette. I think Jeanette may have known a peace in her choices that I do not know.

Today, I am forced to acknowledge additional uneasiness in the face of her example. What is real value in a poem? The literary establishment(s) of our culture will never take a second look at the poems of Jeanette Hinds. They are unaware of her existence. But are these small and solid, secure and workaday poems less worthy? Jeanette was a workshopper. She was an amateur. She spent hours making centerpieces for the conference tables for LOMP conferences and coordinating their poetry contests. And yet her example stands before me, a woman who wrote poems that have been real comfort to others, even as her example and teaching have touched many. If that's not "the real thing," what is?

My thanks to Jeanette's daughter, Jane Ellen, for her kind assistance, and also to Michael Peich and Story Line Press.



What Angels Leave

Monet's *Grainstacks*

 painted under varieties of light;
 Grant Wood's Iowa farmland
 female contoured;
 Grandma Moses' sleighs and steeples
 in primitive primaries...

 unaware of gene pools
 she carried them; we all carry them

 back; back
to some Cro-Magnons equipped with saliva and clay
 crawling through dark caves
 to create rhinos or bursts of bison
 depicted with extra legs
 to denote speed.

 unaware of gene pools
 she carried them; we all carry them

I remember her hooked needle crocheting
 from a dense center—
 looped stitches
 interlocked row on row
variegated threads: circled pastels
 bold red, blue, and yellow
 or
 beige oblongs glinting gold,
 or
 rectangles carefully bound.

beyond routines of work and food and sleep,
beyond a muddy February funeral day—

 her small doily
 held in my hand
 solid-color
 green as lifetimes of grass,
 endures.

—JEANETTE HINDS

from *My Mother's Keys*, Lone Oak Press, 2002

They Called Her Birdie

To be in Birdie Banks' classroom was to assemble on the branches of a willow tree in the season of birds. Her 4th graders added and subtracted birds, studied the map by migrations, read the birds' lives and learned more words than you'd think would fit in our mouths. Before dawn she explored the marsh back of her bungalow, then came to Room 104 with a story, her voice hopping from word to word, branch to branch, excited, lighter than air. We'd catch her words, little creatures we'd lose if we weren't quick as they were.

Fall 1945, back to school and the war ended, Miss Banks brought home a story from the desert. Out before the sunup, as ever, she saw the sky fill up in every corner with one sudden light, first whiter than any white she had ever seen, then red, then some nameless thunder that rattled and dirtied the air around her. July 16, 1945, it was. She told us it was marked in her Book of Days.

Oh Birdie -- hair in a bun, flowered dress, school marm glasses -- it was all your disguise. Oh Birdie, you were our wild woman of thicket, marsh, and desert, our see-er come home covered with feathers and dangerous dusts, bringing home word of the new seasons and what they might mean for the children in her willow tree.

—JIM HAZARD, WHITEFISH BAY, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Following Each Other

I'm home for a week
from the navy.
It's Sunday.

Mom naps after supper.
My little brother
listens by her door

for snores, or maybe
just her breath
before he

turns to me.
*Let's take our bikes
and go get ice cream.*

Showing off
he races down
the highway.

No headlight.
Always a decade
behind me.

Too far ahead
to hear me yell
slow down

*the trees are
disappearing
in the dark.*

—MICHAEL KRIESEL, ANIWA, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Indiana Spring, 1946

We pushed and stumbled through thickets of young willows, cotton woods, red osier, belly crawling on spicy weeds we couldn't name, all of it now our own Iwo Jima. We wanted our beautiful war back.

Bending and entering a willow shelter we found a cold fire site, wine bottles, rusty Prince Albert can, bloody butcher's paper. On a budding willow limb boxer shorts filled with green flies, shocking as a dead man.

Out of there, quick, to our junkyard torpedo bomber. String of bullet holes on the fuselage, three Japanese flags painted under the pilot's place. Wingless and ready for us, and what else

can I tell you? We went on or we didn't. One died in Korea, some did what they promised themselves, most didn't. I guess you could say we made what we could of the wreckage we inherited.

—JIM HAZARD, WHITEFISH BAY, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author

All That We Do Here

The first snow of winter is shining across the sidewalks making us think of what comes last, after this glory of flakes swirling, glittering past streetlights sweeping through shadowy canyons downtown freezing us in winter's glamour; we know all that we do here, what we have done here, covering ground with our streets, will cover the snow.

The last melt's in April, when snow's been corroded studded with garbage: slag heaps of yellow and grey release what's kept frozen all season, dung from dogs who pick their chilly way through icy grass patches beside cold curbs; leashed, shivering, they turn twice and squat, drop their hot waste to shrivel on walkways running wet with what was snow.

—JUDITH ARCANA, PORTLAND, OR
visit VW Online for audio by this author

The Long Ride *for Miriam*

The rabbit kits I found yesterday while weeding before tilling were fully furred but motherless—not that she wasn't around; I saw her carelessly gallivanting, by the rain garden, casually nibbling wild violets and clover that liberate our back yard. When I uncovered her shallow fur-lined nest, the kits were huddled together, soft, gray petals of an unexpected flower. They eyed me stupidly, their tiny bunny brains uncertain what to make of this terrible goddess. When they did not move at my intrusion, I turned the sprinkler on, and they toddled off but were back today, five of them in their condemned tenement, safety in the wiggly mandala of kinship, lacking strategies for finding any better place. Sighing I brought a white, plastic pail, lifted them inside, and took them for a ride down the hill, across the street and down again to the water shed near the pond. Startling a pheasant up from its nest, I let them go next to a grassy mound. It is mid May; the days are mild.

—SANDRA LINDOW, MENOMONIE, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Marion
1921-1992

Back in 1990,
I went to spend the summer at Grandma's house.
It was a time of being spoiled
with books and tapes,
and though I would never admit it to my friends,
Grandma still bought me G.I. Joe action figures.
By then Grandma's sister, my great-aunt,
Marion, had moved in, to spend the remainder of her time.
When I was a kid of just six or seven,
she would babysit me on the farm
where she lived with her husband Jim,
and I spent my days with the geese and pigs
and playing in the cornfields.
She'd cook lunches with the best
Illinois sweet corn you ever tasted.
Emphysema brought her down
and trapped her to an oxygen tank and wheelchair.
While Grandma was at work,
Marion sent me to the five and dime for cigarettes—
even though Grandma tried to scare me
with visions of the house blowing up.
Marion and I sat at
the screen door of the back porch,
talking of the Depression
and books—she liked Barbara Cartland.
After we finished smoking two or three,
she'd wipe off her tubing before putting it
back in her nose and then
wheel off to watch her "stories"
and I back to Stephen King or Dean Koontz.
When Grandma came home,
I would exchange knowing glances
with Marion, our secret safe.
We spent two more summers like that,
and the house never did blow up.
I learned all about growing up
in the thirties
and farming in the sixties
and all the ways you can cook corn.
After I left in '92, before I started
working summers instead of visiting Grandma,
Marion died. I didn't go back for the funeral,
though I did smoke a cigarette in her honor.
And I thought about our time together,
brief as it was, and how we never once
blew up anything.

—JASON HUFF, BEAUMONT, TX

The Dames Aflame

There is always that one house
in the neighborhood that hosts the geese in winter,
the other lawns padded with snow,
while the one is clogged with honking birds.

Just last night, I was gone from cold and ice,
drinking with you at the tiki bar
watching “The Dames Aflame” toggle their grass-
skirted hips. The gaggle of them danced

around you, around the magnet of you, your
large laughter. And here, too, up north,
back home: the one goose flying up to arrow-point
the way, the others drawn after in trust

as they claim the air.

—COLLEEN ABEL, MILWAUKEE, WI



Say No More

His instinct was to blurt it all out, to take the chance
of saying too much. Never much good at getting
stoned, he took to pacing the deck, to hanging over
the rail and watching the water give way to the ship.

Belowdecks, all was sundry. All was as it was the day
before, and the day before that. Unrepentant vicars
danced the nights away. After seven or so days at sea,
he finally began to work on his new tetralogy, the one

he had dreamt of all along, despite the wishes of his
grandparents, his parents, and the good, honest people
of *Entgegenwärtigung* Town, who all, of course, had
wished him well. The work went quite well for several

days, until it went less well, and then finally stopped,
repeating the last few lines over and over and over.

—HALVARD JOHNSON,
SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE, GUANAJUATO, MEXICO

What Happened to the Future

we watched films about it
when we were at school
they told us
we were going to have
heated roads to melt the ice and snow
air-conditioned highways
running through the deserts and
cars that could drive themselves
while the family sat in the back
playing games together and
we were going to discover
how to grow food in the deserts
build farms beneath the oceans and
live in cities on the moon
nobody would ever go to bed hungry
nobody would ever die
from any horrible diseases and
there wouldn't be any more wars
we'd all have our own personal jet-packs
strapped to our backs
lifting us into the skies and
everyone would be free
with the wind blowing
into their faces and
loneliness
despair
would be something make-believe
that we'd watch for entertainment
on our giant TV screens

—JAMES BABBS, STANFORD, IL
visit VW Online for more by this author



When Asked Why Do I Always Have to Leave the Country and Cross the Ocean When I Travel

Would you ever
like to glide through passageways
and aisles of night,
tossing the hours behind you
like confetti or blossoms,
while below you sprawls the sea,
a voluminous train rippling with fathoms and light?

—ANDREA POTOS, MADISON, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Candlelight Hike at Pike Lake

So cold the snow crunches underfoot,
we follow the luminarias' steady glow
from pool of light to pool of light

Arm in arm, we gauge the length of the slope
by the distance between the lights,
the angle by the pitch of darkness

Orion is visible and The Dipper is there,
low, but a summer promise
We are bundled, knit and felted against the cold
Our only contact voices and dim huddled shapes
moving ahead and crunching behind
as though bears have woken for a midwinter stroll
The lights are steady in the windless night,
with unblinking stars and luminarias
as a path-constellation visible to the walkers

The Way the Light Shines

The way the light shines
through Vermeer

on a Dutch afternoon
a girl with a pitcher

of something cool
and sweet I'll bet

The way the boys
in the low sloop

laden with the smell of salt
look through Winslow Homer

The way the stars see
through Van Gogh in the night

The way you'd come
right through

me painting you
in your room with red walls

The way water-lilies
make love to Monet

—RALPH MURRE, BAILEYS HARBOR, WI

At the end there is a leaping blue-glow bonfire
with more huddled bears and their cubs
transfixed by fire in the night
as though a few stars were pulled down
and piled for their warmth

—TESS ROMEIS, CEDARBURG, WI



Ursa Major

Bears again last night.
Yellow teeth, small brown eyes,
sniffing noses know
where I hide.
They want me.
Black bears eat ants, berries,
leave claw marks on trees,
break into hollow stumps,
bees gush out
look for exposed skin to sting,
instead of this thick furred beast.

Once a polar bear
swayed in silver snow sifting
from an everywhere sky, no horizon break,
muzzle bloodied from a seal
risen too soon to the breathing hole.
Northland bears have patience
covered by snow drift
until the attack.
This bear in my dream never misses,
never goes hungry.

—LISA CIHLAR, BRODHEAD, WI

Silly Little City I Live and Love In

Silly little city with your harp street lamps,
blizzards and vigil light stars,
with your tutued street lights
and 30 below wind chills, bandshells and polkas,
and steamy smoky lake's pink waves,
with your huge orange moons rising from the lake,
with your huge red suns rising from the lake,
with your sad jumpers falling into the lake,
& your socialist watershed and Oriental Theatre minarets
 and Sunday morning Quakers' meetings
 surrounded by church bells and taverns,
with everyday George Washington
walking down Wisconsin Avenue,
with your ice fishing clinics and beer blessings,
with your seven deadly sins parades,
with your alewives' parades and cladaphora winds
 and streets named after sausages (Nock),
with Francis Bacon's blue face
 on the side of your art museum
 and Joseph Cornell's "Celestial Navigation
 by Birds" (Gallery 18) inside your museum,
with your statues of Goethe and Burns,
 Olmstead parks and bakery winds,
silly little city that erases me, I keep
fastening your lake winds to the page.

—SUSAN FIRER, MILWAUKEE, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author



Sonnet: Milwaukee, City of Rumors

Running down rumors along Milwaukee's dark,
Brucknerian boulevards, streets, and alleys,
in the urban half-light of America, half-hoping
to find some truth in them: the rumors, say, that
the Brewers will move to Havana, taking all
of the city with them. Ah, the sunlight, the salt
sea air. But no, that one evaporates as soon as
one catches up to it, leaving the others, the one
that very late at night, just before dawn in fact,
early morning joggers by the lake can see Ed Gein
walking the beach, something round and wrapped
in newspaper beneath his arm, looking for a waste
basket empty enough to receive it, the one that
Lake Michigan will be rebaptized Lake Wisconsin.

—HALVARD JOHNSON,
SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE, GUANAJUATO, MEXICO

Home, Sweet Home

A mouse in its nest inside a moose skull
looks up at miniature icicles
 dangling from cracks in the bone
above her head,
Silver icicles inside a moose skull
as darkness falls
 and the cold wind howls
while the mouse feels
 safe and warm--
home, sweet home.
But one night she froze
and come spring
 there was a mouse skull
inside a moose skull
 and inside the mouse skull
A spider spun a web
and lived all spring--
 home, sweet home,
and when it died
A tiny mite moved in
inside where the spider's brain was
 and lived all summer--
home, sweet home,
 before it died,
So there was a skull in a skull in a skull in a skull
causing a poet's brain in its skull to think
 isn't the Earth in the Sun's skull
the way his poems
 are in his head?
And the sun in the Galaxy's skull
and the Galaxy in the Universe's skull
 and the Universe in the Big Bang's skull
and the Big Bang in Eternity's skull
 and Eternity in Infinity's skull and....
Home, sweet home.

—ANTLER, MILWAUKEE, WI

Miniatures, a Quintet

1. Ars Poetica

I'll leave the porchlight on for you,
the mother says.
That's what the poet says, too.

2. At the Feeder

Is the favorite word
Of the hummingbird
Stillness or motion?

But I'm the same:
Should I stay home
Or cross an ocean?

3. The Suicide

I always liked
to be early
for my appointments.

4. Hanging the Wash Outdoors

My mother stood
with wooden clothespins in her mouth,
a fan of benevolent little cannons
she plucked out one at a time
and squeaked down over my heart,
which is still on the line.

5. Tanka

I have written
too many poems;
they live now
in refugee camps,
inside tents.

—PHILIP DACEY, NEW YORK, NY

Blowboats

They were feminine, lacking engines,
so you called them *blowboats*,

scorning those gorgeous sails sliding
in your marina house windows.

You preferred power, the guttural growl
of the throaty motors that you

tooled with every day after school,
your back to the waves. And that's how

you saw yourself: a fury
of pistons and fists that sent me

reeling, a flung-back fish.
I left you just before summer, before

the boaters and bathers descended,
and by the time you noticed

I was already a dot on the horizon,
buoyed by the sea's own machinery.

—COLLEEN ABEL, MILWAUKEE, WI



Weather, You Are My Husband Now

Waves' feral beatitudes alive me.
I pier dance in wave-scripts'
battered doo-wops. Gold rocks
punctuate shored lake-tossed trees.
Barky waves locomote. Leafless
velvet sumac antlers air. *Salix*
discolor's high withies' silver
catkins cross soft sky.
(Is beauty merely
the opposite of nothingness?) Blue
birches, the flying carpet of lake,
taffeta rocks, a beach-
ball of broken bird, vernal
witch hazel. Vernal witch hazel,
I am like you with your
shredded yellow petals, spicy
perfume & water-witching branches.
Brave showy shrub, watch me
unfurl in cold winter air. Watch me
always dowsing locate water.

—SUSAN FIRER, MILWAUKEE, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Any Constellation

Dear Professor, Sorry my poem is late. I'll be turning it in tomorrow, if it's any constellation.

—Note from a student

About that poem— will light come out of it?
And will it blaze like Ariadne's crown,
with phosphorescent daggers hanging down?
Will galaxies recede, to make it fit?

I think I'll go outside tonight and stare
straight up, so we can find the perfect place
for it, some pleasant cul-de-sac in space
with curb-appeal. Adjacent to the Bear,

perhaps. Or tucked under the outspread wings
of Pegasus, who might suspend his flight
so he can skim over your poem tonight
along with scores of goddesses and kings—

those starry listeners, silent and remote,
wheeling to the pulse of what you wrote.

—MARILYN L. TAYLOR, MILWAUKEE, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author



New York Postcard Sonnet #64

A sampling of what I've heard out on the street:
"It's like alchemy, it's so cool." "Be strong, okay?"
"I haven't had falafel in years." "They thought
they were in Paris at the Champs Elysees."

"So maybe just forget it, don't exercise."
"You're the cellist from last night, aren't you?"
"72nd Street, music for my eyes."
"I don't want to spend all day shopping for shampoo."

"Would you care for part of a bagel?" "Don't make a will,
just put me on your safe deposit box."
"He had a beautiful tone, great breath control."
"Everyone wants a quick and easy fix."

"I like waiters with a sense of irony."
"If you cared about me, you'd have texted me."

—PHILIP DACEY, NEW YORK, NY

Phineas T. Barnum

Here it is!—The Truth in entrepreneur
miniature: I appraise an impure appetite, sate
the masses. Is it a bitter truth? Is pure sunshine
better than sunshine seen in a prism?

I insist it isn't. In this here Supreme Museum
(reprint it in the papers as I narrate), I present
Supreme Triumphs! Empires, ruins, runes!
Truths that bear Nature's human banner,

that animate numbness, temper the brutish—
treasure them here! See the Siamese brethren sup!

Hear Earth's tiniest heart beat in Mr. Thumb's breast!
At a mere ten pennies per, step up! Step up here!

Anastasia Romanov

I sit in a room,
transom vista: rain
or moon or stars or
mist, no visitation.

So? It is not in vain.
I am a Romanov.

Rainstorm in a samovar,
rats on a minor moon—
assassins storm in. I soar
into vast air.

Sir John Falstaff

Of Honor, Hal, or of its joint fashions,
tho' fair strains of Honor soon join
a toast to hail fair traits, alas,
if "Honor" stirs fools to toil in rash fits
all's aslant.
If all's aslant, Honor, too, is aslant.

Honor? I'll toast Honor, Hal!
To Honor—a star on a fool's hairshirt!
To Honor—hoarfrost final on a harlot's tit!
To Honor—halo of a rash on a lion's ass!
That is all of it, Hal. I insist that is all. So
all hail Honor as I honor a fair lass's loins...

To a fair lass's loins!
Hal? Hal?

—MARK ZIMMERMANN, MILWAUKEE, WI

Three Lipograms—See Contributors' Notes

Goddesses

for Pat Valdata

We were in the National Museum of Women in the Arts, looking at dresses by Mary McFadden, our English Major minds thinking of goddesses like Aphrodite, Venus, Jackie Kennedy, their pleated tunics, their embroidered and beaded gowns. We were talking about Enheduanna, the first poet, and what her words mean now, coming down through the fabric of time. But what was on our hearts, here in the Capitol, where men make monuments of cold white stones, were our mothers, both recently gone. Their absence, an old one, Persephone and Demeter in reverse, winter's frozen length of shot-silk, spring's return in green brocade. But there is no returning in this story, each of us unmothered now. Grief has dressed us in black caftans. Across town, in the Tidal Basin, the Yoshino cherry trees have let down their gorgeous petals, wrapping the earth in pink ribbons, the way a ballerina tapes her ankles in silk that seems fragile, but is strong enough to keep her on her toes as long as she needs to remain *en pointe*.

—BARBARA CROOKER, FOGELSVILLE, PA
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Blackberries

“It never hurts to ask,” mother always said, but here we are, on the coast of Normandy, I’ve lost the word for “blackberry,” and my tongue’s too dumb to ask. We’re standing on a windswept cliff, watching a regatta of clouds race by. Then suddenly, it comes to me, *les mûrs, les mûrs*, and I feel their black juice loosen my throat, the seeds hitchhiking between my teeth. Years ago, visiting your cousins on Whidbey Island, we picked blackberries for breakfast; long scratches ran up our arms like train tracks crossing the border. We have crossed an entire ocean this time, but the word *blackberry* takes me there, while my body remains here, sipping a kir at a sidewalk café. These crossings, these borders, these berries, hot and heavy on the tongue.

—BARBARA CROOKER, FOGELSVILLE, PA
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Roman Holiday

In the Vatican cafeteria, I say, “Wine in milk cartons? That’s not something you see back home. Red blood of Christ or white?” You sigh and take the red, and chide me not to be so flip. Upstairs in marble chambers old men sue for holy favors. I say, “Come on, Ace, we’re on vacation, here to take our ease along the Forum, eat Italian ice beside the Coliseum. No one owes this gilded tomb. Let’s let spumoni ooze *come la lingua* on our tongues; refresh our eyes at Rome’s bright fountains; put our living blood to use.”

—LESTER SMITH, DELAVAN, WI

Tom Thumb

Like everyone, he owns a welcome mat to wipe his feet. He hasn’t ever met the neighbors, doesn’t know whose baseball mitt lies in the yard, who feeds the midnight tom prowling the alley, or the brindled mutt tearing his trash. He’s sure that simple math means one of these white houses hides a meth lab. He insists that love’s a myth, it’s sold like soap, or like a box of moth balls—he will not be pinned under its thumb.

—LESTER SMITH, DELAVAN, WI

Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf

by Shoshauna Shy

My personal inspiration to write poetry happened by ambush. I didn't make a conscious decision to sign up for a writing course or otherwise hunker down with pen and paper. It was merely a matter of coming across a poem somewhere, and having it take me into a poem of my own that I didn't even know I wanted to write. Because of this, I decided it would be exciting to get poetry out of the classrooms, bookstores and libraries into sight of the public-at-large where it might not ordinarily appear. Quite possibly, I thought, people who were convinced that they didn't particularly *like* poetry would find themselves unexpectedly caught up in a particular poem.

See postcards & poems by
Ronnie Hess,
Derek Mong, and
J. R. Solonche at
versewisconsin.org

In 2004, I founded the Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf program. A friend with an affinity for the literary life offered financing. I partnered with two local businesses, Budget Bicycle and Community Car, to bring poetry to the streets, seeking poems about bicycling, carpooling, and other alternate forms of transportation to produce on laminated bookmarks attached with a chain to the handlebars of Budget Bicycle's Red Rental Bikes. Others appeared in palm-sized vinyl books for the glove compartments of the fleet of Community Car, a Madison-based car-sharing company. The next year, I conducted a call on the theme of the written word and the many modes of communication it takes, from text messaging, handwritten letters, and imaginary emails from Emily Dickinson to farewell notes written in bathroom steam. These "Postage Due" poems were produced on java jackets and bookmarks distributed by two local coffeehouses and two independent book stores on and near State Street, Madison's major downtown hub.

Since then, I have conducted two other calls on the themes "No Direct

Route Home" (poems that take the reader on surprising detours) and "Lines in the Sand" (poems that cross boundaries of any kind). Poems were paired with the original abstract art of Midwestern artist Sarah Spencer and produced on 4" x 6" quality cardstock postcards.

All of the calls have been conducted via cyberspace and have yielded submissions from six different countries outside of the U.S. Every contributor to the last postcard project received ten of their own postcards plus several of the other poets' cards. The remainder were available free of charge at two poetry conferences, three Madison-area libraries, two grocery co-ops, a bakery, and three community centers. Look for them also in Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Arizona and Washington courtesy of the poets who participated in the project. (Contact shoshaunashy@yahoo.com for specific cities and locations.)

Bookmark www.PoetryJumpsOfftheShelf.com to keep tabs on the next Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf project. In 2009, I offered something new called the Woodrow Hall Jumpstart Award for a Wisconsin poet who had already contributed to the literary landscape and wanted help in launching a new program idea. I hope to offer this award again.



Deliverance

Oh for life on a remote tropical island!
No need to worry about
Terrorists
The IRS
Your children's education
The grocery store
Computer failure
Personal liability insurance
Incessant calls from your lawyer
doctor, dentist and accountant
Traffic jams
Expensive prescription drugs
Extensive wardrobe
Big veterinary bills
Country club dues
but you, your family and pets
will need to know
how to deal with tarantulas, typhoons
and head hunters.

—RICHARD W. MOYER, BERWYN, PA

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Practicing Fade-Aways

—after Larry Lewis

On a deserted playground in late day sun,
My palms dusted black, dribbling
A worn leather ball behind my back, this loneliness
Echoes from the handball courts nearby.
Nearly all the markings—free throw lane, sideline,
Center circle—all rubbed to nothing.
A crack in the earth cuts across the schoolyard
Jagged as a scar on a choir boy's cheek.

Twenty years ago,
I ran this very court with nine other
Wanna-be ballers. We'd steal
Through peeled chain links, or hop
The gate to get here: Our blacktop Eden.
One boy, who had a funny pigeon-toed set shot
And a voice full of church bells, sang spirituals
Every time he made a basket,
The other boys humming along, laughing,
High-fives flying down the court.

And a boy we called 'The Sandman'
For how he put you to sleep with his shoulder fake or drop step,
Over six feet tall in the tenth grade,
Smooth talker with an itch for older guys' girlfriends.
One Sunday morning, they found him stabbed to death
Outside the Motel 6, pockets untouched,
Bills folded neatly against his beautiful cooling thigh.
And 'Downtown' Ricky Brown,
Whose family headed west when he was two,
But still called himself a New Yorker,
Who never pulled from less than thirty feet out,
And could bank shots blindfolded.
He went to Grambling, drove himself
Crazy with conspiracy theories and liquor,
Was last seen roaming the French Quarter, shoeless, babbling
About the Illuminati's six-hundred sixty-six ways
To enslave the populace.

At sixteen, I discovered
Venice Beach, with its thousand bodybuilders,
Roller skates, and red thong bikinis.
I would stand on the sidelines and watch
The local ballplayers, leaping and hollering
Quicksilver giants, run and gun
Already grown into their man bodies.
Funkadelic rising from a boombox in the sand.
Now, all I hear are chain nets chiming as I sink
One fade-away after another,
The backboard, the pole, throwing a long shadow
Across the cracked black asphalt.

What the nets want must be this caress,
This stillness stretching
Along every avenue, over high school
Gymnasiums and deserted playgrounds,
And the ambulance drivers drifting into naps

Back at the station house.
What the boys who ran these courts wanted was
A lob pass high enough
To pull them into the sky,
Something they could catch in both hands
And hang from,
Long enough for someone to snap
A photograph, to hold them there,
Skybound. Risen.

—JOHN MURILLO, MADISON, WI



The Year My Mother and I Mistook the Pool for a Father

If I couldn't sleep I nightgowned out there
and held my breath on top of it.

Who's afraid of the dark? Not me. There should be

something sweet in taking care of your own.
Sweeter than water than blood than honey than tar.

My mother and I mistook our pool for a clean-shaven man—
she crouched on the edge

and surface-dipped her face. *Left side, right side.*

The night, with its orange cat in a burlap sack scent,
made the water look solid.
Like it could kiss back. Why else would it ask

my mother and I to undress?

We decided this was the best way to live.
We set up two chairs and cut our own hair

over the pool. We unhooked
the backs of our dresses, dove. We floated ovals

around each other, fountaining green
mouthfuls to the deep end and pausing every now and then
like statues of living women. Of dead women.

The wetness felt honest.
(I still can't trust an unwet body.)

My mother fed the pool
water fed it blood fed it honey. I said, *Tar?*

No, she said. *He won't be able to handle that.*

Who were we all those nights?
Who were we talking about?

—LAUREN BERRY, MADISON, WI

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wind across the wire

when leaders say we'll cleanse the world with fire
and jingo prophets teach democracy
I walk far out of town once more

squeeze between some rusty strands of old barbed wire
and hike beyond the no trespassing signs
that guard an ancient snow-quiet hill
just to see young trees: aspen, birch
who owns this place? no one
seems to know or care—that's why I'm here
 little springs pulse and feed
 the earth
trickle over limestone fossile rocks

at wood's edge an old log tobacco barn

 jumps out

door storm-weathered creaks on one hinge
 I poke my head inside
 smells of musty dark
 pungent empty

instantly quail thunder from a rafter in that void
 flushing out the door
 {no one would expect them roosting here}

dissolving far away in snowy fields
 a covey of feathered comets, almost twenty
 whicker through me
 their wingbeat laughter
 an apocalypse

quick pulse the springs

 listen gentle quail boom

 through windblown fields

 lighter lighter than the snow

bob-white bob-white bob-bob-white

—CYRUS CAMPEN, WAUSAU, WI

Harriet Street Elegy

I wake with rust inside my head, the bed
beside me empty. Green-tea February sun.
Crosshatch of light through faded curtains, browned
by radiator. Mattress prone on carpet.
The hardwood floor worn smooth, black paint fading,
the ridges warm against my feet. I let
the kettle scream. The things I want to tell you.
Your desk is dark with pencil shavings, pens,
a photo from the beach last June. We sit
on front porch steps, we're sunburned and smiling
for the camera. How I hurt you then.
I know this. Last night's dishes in the sink.
The grease lifts, floats on soap bubbles. I'll use
the last clean towel, leave the front door open.

—NANCY REDDY, MADISON, WI

Night Poem for Carrie

Late summer
I find that you have discovered the crickets,
 help you lift the window
so they can coax you and woo you
 to a night
 that is inside your bones.
Your sleep begins to sway
 like a wheat field.
A distant train rumbles
and hums along the bed that you hug.
Tiny cars wobble and bump.
I keep watch as you go out,
 your face passing,
 its small flutterings
in the darkness of flying windows.

—ALIXA DOOM, LE SUEUR, MN

Disarm Your Doors

Listen to what the captain says
when the aircraft comes to a stop:
Disarm your doors for arrival.

Prepare to undefend yourself—
Disarm the subtle doors of breath,
disarm the double doors of hands.

Disarm your skin, the revolving door
that lets you out and lets you in,
and disarm the portals of your lips.

Raise the white portcullis of teeth,
open the throat that rusted shut,
the gate of all you've locked away.

Disarm the oaken doors of grief
and the hatchways of compassion,
the doors that lead to hidden stairs

and doors to chambers painted red.
Before you reach the terminal,
let every door on hinges swing.

—WILLIAM KEENER, CORTE MADERA, CA
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Throw Away The Key

She doesn't want to answer the door this time.
Promises slide under the door like a bad news letter
Why open it?

Peep-hole face bobs, a ridiculous sudden flower
that makes her think why is it here?
She doesn't want to answer the door this time.

Not much between them now. Pressed pine, short brass chain,
Five dollar bolt, two sides of a dead story,
she doesn't want to answer the door.

Sirens wail below, traffic parts like the red sea.
The window looks good, with a clear honest view.
Why not open it?

Invisible elevator, feet first, through a tree, past a bird.
Reports claimed the impact was so great she ate her own shoes.
She wasn't going to answer that door again.

—YVONNE M. ESTRADA, LOS ANGELES, CA
visit VW Online for audio by this author

A Sunday Walk At Indian Lake Park

As I begin my walk this Sunday afternoon, I anticipate encountering the small white frames, between 8 to 10 inches long, 6 to 8 inches wide and perhaps an inch deep. They are set on 5 feet high posts and about 10 yards or so apart along the trails. Inside each one there's a poem. They are the main reason why I chose to come here today.

The wind feels warm and comfortable on my face like an invitation to come closer, an invitation to listen to these words from the past posted here just for me.

I walk along the trails very aware of every step I take. I'm afraid that if I don't, I'll miss one of the poems. My eyes are always wondering a little farther down the trail searching for the next poem. When I discover one of the frames, I walk toward it slowly. I want to savor every second before I can stand next to the post and read the poem inside the frame. Not wanting to disturb the space around the frame holding such precious treasure even my breathing slows down in anticipation of getting closer to the words in the poem.

The leaves of some trees are gone. Others shine under the autumn sunlight, showcasing their newly found colors. The leaves of the closer trees are reflected on the glass of the frame and I imagine them reading the poem along with me as the wind makes them shimmer bringing color in and out of the frame.

I stand reading the poem. There's a deep silence I don't feel anywhere else, as if the poet stood by my side, reading the poem with me, getting pulled by the magical trails the words create for us. It's up to us to follow them, to get lost in their weavings and detours until we arrive safely back to where we stood under the warm autumn sunlight being the same and yet changed.

—NYDIA ROJAS, MIDDLETON, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Spotlight on the Hibiscus Collective

The Hibiscus Collective is a group of Madison women writers named for a genus of plants noted for their glorious, variously-colored flowers in warm temperate regions throughout the world. Members (in alphabetical order) Fabu Carter Brisco, Blanca Cruz, Araceli Esparza, Jolieth McIntosh, Rakina Muhammad and Nydia Rojas are dedicated to ensuring that multicultural voices are heard in oral and written traditions. The name was intentionally chosen to symbolize ethnic women writers as these beautiful flowers, also known as rose mallow or *flor de Jamaica*, that are found in all the continents of the world. We include all types of literary expression with two members from Puerto Rico, one member from Mexico, one member from Jamaica, one member from the urban United States and another from the rural United States. Hibiscuses grow plenteous in the places we grew up in as children. As a collective we are united through

our love of literary arts and our decision to represent our unique cultures. We take the collective concept literally and utilize reading fees for projects that we support.

In 2006, we began talking to each other about the need to be a part of a writing group that allowed us the freedom to be ourselves as women and artists, as well as to hone the craft of writing. We began meeting on a monthly basis and meshed our ideas together to become a cohesive group determined that multicultural voices will be heard. After three years, we are still in the formative stages of implementing our vision, strengthening our infrastructure and building an artistic support base. Future plans include inviting women from other ethnicities to join. The Hibiscus Collective doesn't meet June, July and August. We plan an Open House in summer 2010 to invite interested writers to learn more about who we are. The Hibiscus Collective understands that we are a part of the world community and we are committed to sharing our gifts and talents through readings, performances, publishing and teaching.

One of our favorite memories is our first reading together at the South Madison Health & Family Center-Harambee. Since our decisions as the Hibiscus Collective are collectively thought out and discussed, Harambee was chosen in recognition of Burr Oaks being the most ethnically and culturally diverse neighborhood in Madison, along with our understanding of how this particular community appreciates the arts, although programming is seldom featured on the south side of Madison. It also seemed very appropriate to hold our first public reading in a facility that offers healing services. We made this public reading an extension of how rotating meetings in members' homes are conducted. We brought delicious food to share at Harambee just like when members host the meeting at their homes. Araceli often shares Mexican cuisine, while Blanca includes Puerto Rican. A wonderful memory is eating Nydia's summer food in her garden. Rakina always emphasizes unusual organic, healthy foods. Fabu cooks southern or African, and Jolieth cooks stunning foods from Jamaica with various textures and spices. She always includes fruit, especially avocado. When the meetings focus totally on writing, we agree to potluck so that the meal and cooking load is shared. Intuitively, we always have included food as a further extension of our cultures. We provided good food to our first Hibiscus Collective reading to Madison as an extension of the wholeness of who we are. Our newest member Blanca served as the Mistress of Ceremony and her young daughter read a poem too. Araceli read a poem about a braided life against the backdrop of a braided quilt installation on the wall of Harambee. And we each shared our poetry in our distinct lyrical voices. We had a large audience full of community supporters, friends, family, and church members along with wonderful coverage in the media with two articles in *The Capital City Hues* and *The Madison Times*.

Another agreed upon special memory is of Edenfred, located in Middleton. Edenfred is a magical mansion that supports Wisconsin artists as a retreat location. It seemed to symbolize the women of Hibiscus Collective as similarly hidden, nestled away in woods until one discovers a place of startling beauty. Edenfred is spacious,

Christmas Sunday in Church with My Father

Twenty years from that sunny land of my birth.
Twenty years from that sacred building with its mahogany pulpit,
choir seats and long benches.
Memories of vibrant Sunday School classes and Youth Fellowship
hikes on Red Hills
danced in my mind.
A time of my life long gone,
yet more precious than silver.
Faces of long known 'sisters' and 'brothers'
clearly remembered, like the red church hymnal.
Faces wrinkled by age,
bodies shortened by time
and eyes dimmed by cataracts.
Their showers of welcome and hugs
poured on me like needed blessings.

My father's tuneless voice floated in the air.
His face as radiant as the summer sun
while his spirit soared like an eagle.
I winked at him.
I felt the power of our love,
even stronger than the historical Kingston Parish Church.
Altos, sopranos, tenors and croakers
flooded the room to the music of
'The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy.'
My shoulders and my tambourine were in unison
as the Christmas joy flowed through my body
like the fragrance of the flaming red Christmas poinsettia.
'Amen,' shouted my father
as his slender hands moved
like that of a musical conductor.
'Daughter, Merry Christmas, I'm happy you're here,'
he whispered to me.
I squeezed his hand.

—Jolieth McIntosh, Madison, WI

On Your Day Off

You slide into traffic.

For a few tree-lined blocks
you could be
a business woman
or healthcare professional.

Later, at home—dipping your hands into
inches of paper pulp you almost see the
blues, pinks, and mauves
of the updated misses department.
You stir pulp
until it purples, until no one
calls you ma'am or asks you to check prices.

And still later, when fibers collide,
when the paper flaps on the clothesline,
you forget barcodes, the sound acrylic nails make
drumming on your countertop. Instead you hear
geese honking beyond boxers
and solitary socks.

—EMILIE LINDEMANN, MANITOWOC, WI



Our Body

It's too heavy
in the early morning
too easy to lay down
lightly late at night.

If only this were bigger
and this smaller,
if these were like that
and that was blond.

If this could be longer
harder, sharper,
if that weren't so soft,
so palpable and moist.

If only it didn't fill
and empty, didn't ache
so sometimes to be held
and others to be let go.

—BRUCE TAYLOR, EAU CLAIRE, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Uncut

After we'd watched a nude scene on the Fringe,
I mentioned it appeared that circumcision
was much less common here. I saw him cringe.
These Brits! Always so quick to pour derision
on what's "not done," always so petrified
of being embarrassed, even second-hand
(I'd spoken to my sister). Sitting outside
next week at a French café, I hadn't planned
to mortify him: I was worried that
the noon sun on the back of my pale neck
would burn, so I reversed my long-billed hat.
A large bow perched absurdly (what the heck)
over my forehead. "No!" he blurted, "no!"
But I refused to move it. Risk a burn
to save face among those we didn't know
and wouldn't see again? How could he turn
so proper—he, who could recite by heart
Larkin's "They fuck you up, your mum and dad"?
But shame has many fountainheads, which start
in caves we never saw. Perhaps he had
a yen to ditch decorum, too. I knew
he'd met my sister dancing to the song
"Rock Lobster." In the midst of it, she threw
herself to the floor, astonishing the throng
by wildly wiggling arms and legs in the air
like a lobster, as her friends did at Penn State.
One might have thought he'd be appalled, but they're
together still, two decades from that date,
and I suspect he partly longs to be
as brash as any Yankee, careless, free.

—SUSAN McLEAN, MARSHALL, MN

Theory of Lipstick for Kathy

“Coral is far more red than her lips’ red;”
—Shakespeare

Pot rouge, rouge pot, glosser, lip plumper, bee
stung devil’s candy and painted porcelain
Fire and Ice, a vermilion bullet,
dangerous beauty lipstick, carmine death rub, history
of henna. Fact: more men get lip cancer

because they don’t wear lipstick or butter,
jumble of a luminous palette with brush made
to outlast, last long, kiss off, you ruby busser,
your gilded rose bud bluster is weapon and wine.
QE’s blend: cochineal mixed with egg, gum Arabic

and fig milk—alizarin crimson and lead—poison
to men who kiss women wearing lipstick, once illegal
and loathsome—then cherry jellybean licked and smeared,
then balm gloss crayon, a cocktail of the mouth
happy hour lip-o-hito, lip-arita, with pout-fashioned chaser

made from fruit pigment and raspberry cream,
a lux of shimmer-shine, lipstick glimmer, duo
in satin-lined pouch, Clara Bow glow: city brilliant
and country chick—sparkling, sensual, silks
and sangria stains, those radiant tints and beeswax liberty—

oh, kiss me now, oh, double agents of beauty
slip me essential pencils in various shades
of nude and pearl and suede, oh, bombshell lipstick,
sinner and saint, venom and lotsa sugar, lip sweet,
pucker up gelato: every pink signal is a warning.

—KARLA HUSTON, APPLETON, WI



Sixty-one

monday I crossed off cowboy
tuesday fireman
wednesday president
thursday I couldn’t find the list
friday my own fishing show
saturday catching for the cardinals
sunday I took a nap
sorry
I had to
the moons flew by too soon

—BRUCE DETHLEFSEN, WESTFIELD, WI

In Class Exercise

My Hand Is Sad When ...

it is not with your hand,
tapping at a polished table top
tuning out and away from
any happy song on the radio.

It thinks why try
and sulks in its pocket
drinks too much coffee,
stirs, trembles
at the soft shapes it makes
longing to reach for you,
at the way it is always
waving to you goodbye

cradling my saddest face,
smoking my breath away,
idling lightly across some
white unbothered page.

—BRUCE TAYLOR, EAU CLAIRE, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author



Physical Comedy

One evening I said out loud
that I admired those who did
good physical comedy.

My wife was lounging nearby. I heard her laugh
and wondered why she did that.

“Why are you laughing?”

“Because you do good physical comedy already.”
She said.

“Really? I didn’t realize that.” I said.

Then she said,
“You do it whenever we make love.
It must be something you were born with.

But you need more guided practice.
I would coach you. Even tutor you.

Are you up for that?”

—JERRY HAUSER, GREEN BAY, WI

The Secret of Salami

If our thoughts could be sliced thin as salami slices,
cross-sections showing the marbling of meat and fat,
the flecks of spices and peppercorns,
the redness of the wine infused
through this divine concoction cured in a casing,
aged, fermented, and air-dried to perfection—
if we could slice our thoughts in this way—
each slice a stanza, say, infusing its taste
and substance on your tongue—

if we could do this, I would, and perhaps will—
set my argument before you on a plate, not a page—
three types of salami, some olives and goat cheese,
a few slices of Westphalian ham.
There, can you taste it? The aromas enticing,
sharpening your appetite.
Are you salivating where you sit?
Salivate, from the Latin *sal*, meaning salt,
which is also what *salami* means.
Salt—salami, salivate, even *salary*, yes salary—
a payment in salt.
Salutation? A greeting with salt? Well, perhaps not.

But the secret of salami is not the salt.
The secret of salami is simply that it is not cooked.
It is cured, not cooked, fermented but never fired.
It is a thing unlikely as opera, where people sing
in a language it's better not to know
if you want to hear the underlying beauty.

If I founded a church, for the sacrament of communion
I'd dispense with those tasteless wafers
and instead use slices of salami,
a pungent burst of enlightenment on parishioners' tongues,
the tang of true wisdom from the seasoned fibers
of beings not unlike ourselves.

—TIMOTHY WALSH, MADISON, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

The Center of the Universe

It's not what you think

not a fiery knot where stars are born
an endless white flood streaming
outward and outward and yet outward
to the triumphant blare of trumpets

not a black, hard kernel
resisting touch, hissing
like a nest of sleeping snakes
stirred by a stick

It's near nothing important

nothing marks it as different from anyplace else
you might or might not have visited
any colonies of stars nebulae quasars
any memories of methane silica dust

You might easily trip over it in the dark
pick yourself up, rub your knee, spit out a curse
and walk on, without recognizing
where you had been.

—JUDY BARISONZI, CUMBERLAND, WI



She Bargains

If I had a stone when you wanted
an egg
If I sold my eggs for gold
If you threw stones
If you broke me
If I built a wall of stone
If eggs did not exist
You unhappy creature
Chapped hands clapping
Here do you want this
I offer my beautiful
millstone

—MURIEL KARR, SUNNYVALE, CA
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Muse Sick

Blues spreads all through my right thigh.
When I get better we talk once again. She
says she only wants to eat food that has
parents. I say I could eat her heart if it were
saltier. I work the night shaft at a machine
that makes plastic doll heads. She drives a
forklift to Hawaii and back. Neither of us
have any tattoos. People change. Al Green
was once a soul singer but later became a
preacher. When I was thirteen my parents
learned how to do the Cha-Cha-Cha at a
dance school. They had a princess phone
on the nightstand by their bed which they
would take off the hook just before they
went to sleep. I used to think that Italy was
what you called a gravel road and that
Greece was what you cooked chicken in. I
used to believe that hazelnuts were full of
irony as seasons marched through carrying
rifles. But now I know it's the almond trees
that are really worth remembering. What
else? O yeah, bees and speckles of pollen
and the odd color of water.

—MAURICE OLIVER, PORTLAND, OR
visit VW Online for more by this author

Why I am a Painter

for Rebecca, for Debra

I bought some paint and some canvas
because I tired of the poem,
its grubby little voice, its essence
as feeble as a ghost's.
I wanted something my fingertips
could trace, something as
burly as the pain of waking every
morning. I thought paint
would be that succedaneum. I thought it
could replace every vapory
poem, crowd them all into silence and
muscle them back into the
dark from whence they came. I took
the brush and studied its tip.
I looked at my box of colors.
It seemed worlds of possibility opened
for me, worlds as solid as
the pillar of the Cyclops.
I called my first painting "Poem." I
called my second "Poem II."
I painted and painted until I became
near mute, until I became the quiet man at last,
the man I told myself I wanted to be,
a man who whispers because he is irrefutable.

—COREY MESLER, MEMPHIS, TN
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Adrenal Glands, After A Spring Shower

In this scenario Satan has been a devil all our
lives but we've never met him until we decide

to live together. She yells at me because I like
to ride my bicycle across the kitchen table and

I scold her for singing in the shower in a voice
like a canoe being dragged quickly over a gravel

driveway. I hate her extensive collection of
English watercolors and she despises my framed

B&W photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe's nude
eggplants. Champagne or peach juice. Strauss

waltzes or urban hip-hop. It's not easy being
green. Or Italy has the slowest postal service

in the world. Either way, the live studio audience
gets to decide by popular vote whether Orpheus

flies a kite in Iraq or Jesse Helms was the best
senator North Carolina ever hash browned.

Sunny boxwood. Rich dark soil. Free Cha-Cha
lessons and row merrily down the stream.

—MAURICE OLIVER, PORTLAND, OR
visit VW Online for more by this author

The Caterer

As I fix their meals I think
of these caged wild birds and animals hidden
in clearings of the forest grown up
from a swamp around old navy bunkers
that once stored armament and ammunition.
If it's cold, I slip them an extra smelt
or ounce of hamburger and line up the round
stainless steel cake pans, plus a few
old aluminum pans a Mexican wolf

has put a tooth through; I shred the packs
of horsemeat, torpedoes full of blood,
for the Abdim and Milky storks
into round layer cake pans, then move
on to Harvey the Jabiru's dish
making meatballs the size of softballs,
arranging them geometrically
in long aluminum cake pans.
In go the smelt diagonally like
crossed swords on an escutcheon,

then the large mackerel in the middle,
with capelin on the other diagonal.
But it's on the Saddlebill storks' pans
I really shine: four regular meatballs
in the corners with one in the middle;
then in go four dead mice between
the meatballs, and, last, two dead chicks
either side of the central ball. I look down
satisfied: a very still, still life.

—PEG LAUBER, EAU CLAIRE, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

A Hundred Flutes

The song of the hermit thrush
is like rain on a street at night

wind in a field of winter wheat
a hundred Irish flutes.

It ripples your bones
works your spine

like lemons, like spools
of yellow silk

unraveling,
like loneliness,

like finding a patch
of yellow lady's slippers—

no one around to tell
how your body

is ringing
like a thousand golden bells.

—JEANIE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI

Birdfeeder Rights

After all, who buys the birdseed
I think as I watch the grackles

fill the maple with noise
and attitude. Masses of them—

brothers, sisters, all the cousins—
budge for a shot at the small feeder.

Last week they emptied it
in under an hour. I took it down,

hid it away. So smug. But here
they are again, lining up

with more friends, saying
Ain't life grand? shouting,

Abundance! I have the rights
I start to yell, but, behind me

on the grapevine the cardinals
and the goldfinches start

to sing; as if to me, as if
to say, *Who are you to tell us*

*who should eat, and how much—
who are you to tell birds anything?*

—JEANIE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI

Poetry Cuts Through the Fog: The Alzheimer's Poetry Project

Beginning to End

My mother forgot how to build a fire.
What a wonder this is, to forget
and be forgotten, like smoke that ascends
to where we never look. What are we
when no one remembers us? We are
windswept, arriving on a rock shore,
too far gone, beyond rescue.

I lay twigs on birch bark in the fire pit,
and remember the brief flare of her face
at the strike of a match proffered
to a stove through an open door.

She reached deep and kindled.

I don't remember my father's face,
but see him in my hands as they grasp
the axe, hefting and wielding it, cracking
cedar to break open its combustible heart.

In the woodpile's shocked silence
you stir beyond my bright shards, and I
wonder: What are you, who sleeps
in my tent, breathing softly as if
my flesh were ash and embers on the verge
of remembering flame? You are dreaming
and from the warmth of your dream I rose
in darkness to build you a fire. What am I,
with all my dead wood in careful piles,
my match in hand, poised to strike a spark
and catch fire to waking eyes? I am, at last,
going home, the way the dawn comes on.

—GRANT ADAMS, GRAND MARAIS, MN

by Lisa Marie Brodsky

I walk into a room of anywhere from four to twelve people to see a circle of elderly people—all of them different in their Alzheimer's diagnosis. No matter what residential facility I attend, they are all home-like, comfortable, and even extravagantly touching. Two facilities had glass boxes outside the residents' bedrooms depicting art projects or pictures of loved ones, anything to bring the resident back to their own life. In the circle, some look around expectantly and are more aware and I think, Stage 1 Alzheimer's; they'll enjoy the poems that they might remember from their youth. Some have a hazy look in their eye, some slouch down and sleep: Stage 3 Alzheimer's, the sort that I will try to engage with touch and rhythm. I must speak loudly and slowly, move around the room in an animated fashion. I become a sort of poetic circus character to them. I smile, sing, laugh.

And so goes my work with Alzheimer's residents. I am part of the Alzheimer's Poetry Project, started in 2004 in New Mexico by poet Gary Mex Glazner with the purpose of visiting Alzheimer's residential communities and reading classic poetry to them in a large group which helps in memory care. I visit a few residential facilities a month and read from *Sparkling Memories: The Alzheimer's Poetry Project Anthology* anthologized by Gary Mex Glazner himself. Glazner is not a doctor or expert on Alzheimer's, but a poet who has made it his life's mission to facilitate the creativity of people living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia. At the official website of the Alzheimer's Poetry Project (www.alzpoetry.com), Glazner writes:

By saying to people with dementia, we value you; we are saying we value all members of our community. By working with health care professionals and giving them a tool to have fun with and stimulate the people they serve, we are saying we value your work. By working with family members who have a loved one with dementia, we are saying you are not alone

in your struggle to treat your loved one with dignity.

Glazner has tremendous love for Alzheimer's patients and for poetry, and he looks for people who have that same capacity to love and respect when he trains those interested parties.

I happened to be an interested party back in 2006 when Glazner approached me via email. I had been working with Alzheimer's residents in some capacity since 2005, and when I heard of the program, I was immediately impressed and interested. Glazner, now living in New York, recently received a grant from the Helen Bader Foundation in Milwaukee to form branches in Madison, Baraboo and other Wisconsin cities. He has traveled to Germany and is in the middle of setting up a branch there. The love of poetry and the elderly spreads as we do our best to reach minds that have been too much forgotten, hazy from the effects of Alzheimer's.

For training, he took me aside and coached me on voice inflection, how to keep an audience's attention and how to liven up the poems. He comes from a background of performance poetry and has done a lot of innovative poetry experiments which are outlined in his books, *How to Make a Living as a Poet* and *How to Make a Life as a Poet*. Because of my previous experience with Alzheimer's residents, he did not need to verse me on what experiencing that would be like. I started visiting residential communities as part of the APP (Alzheimer's Poetry Project) earlier this year.

I start out with William Blake's, "The Tyger" and say the first two lines with heavy rhythm: "Tyger, tyger burning bright / in the forests of the night" and bounce their hands up and down to the beat. Most are either confused or delighted. I encourage them to repeat the lines after me. This gives them a sense of accomplishment and participation. We move on to other poems such as a portion

of “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe, which I say in an accentuated beat, and have them repeat the four lines that encapsulate the poem. Sometimes I incorporate poems which reflect the season or current events. The residents often find something personal to hang onto from a certain poem.

For instance, when I read Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “How Do I Love Thee?” a woman who had been quiet thus far recited the whole poem with me. She later told me that had always been her favorite poem and she was glad I had read it, for it brought her comfort and peace.

After four or five poems, alternating between serious and funny, I ask the residents a question that will start the creation of an improvised group poem. I ask, “What is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen?” The healthier, aware residents often have no problem answering this question. Some have said God, church, a rose, a baby, the mountains. But even the more advance-staged Alzheimer’s residents can surprise me. One man lifted his head, looked at me and said, “You!” which was very sweet.

I then take four or five answers and incorporate them into a poem or story that I improvise. They are often delighted to hear their answer used in a poem. This is my favorite part of the session because they get to interact with me and tell me a little bit about themselves, if they are able. One woman told me about her husband and how he loved to take walks by the light of the moon and that made a beautiful poem for me to create and share.

One woman relayed the experience of holding her new great-grandson in her arms and the realization that he wouldn’t remember her. Then, the magic happened. She began to sing, with tears in her eyes:

Too ra loo ra loo ra

She was a slender woman with a long, swan-like neck and a ruffled shirt.

Too ra loo ra li

It was a lullaby she had sung to her new great-grandson.

Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, hush now, don’t you cry!

I knew the lullaby and, in front of the circle of elderly people, I started to sing with her.

Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, Too-ra-loo-ra-li,

She couldn’t remember what she had for lunch. She didn’t recognize the clothes she wore. She could barely remember her son’s name.

Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, that’s an Irish lullaby.

I clapped wildly and she blushed. She remembered that lullaby from her youth, she said. Isn’t it a marvel, I wondered, how she could remember such a thing from so long ago and not remember her own name?

Unlike traditional poetry readings behind a podium, our goal is not to impress the audience with fancy metaphors and similes, but to enhance the lives of Alzheimer’s residents using the beauty of poetry. While Alzheimer’s residents might feel foggy regarding the goings-on of their day, week, or month, they light up at the sound of poetry. It is a universal language that can cut through the fog and speak to them on a visceral level, taking them back to their youth when they memorized many of these poems by Shakespeare, Blake, and others.

I don’t just read poems to the residents; I embody the poems. I bounce around in the middle of the circle and hold their hands, tap their laps, interact with them fully so they feel they are a part of the experience. It is beautiful how they liven up. We want to make contact with them—people who have had very little physical contact, minds that have lain dormant for what could be years.

The main reason I do this is because I want to show people that Alzheimer’s residents are not blank slates that have no memory. They are alive, suffering, perhaps, but they need attention and care. Their minds need stimulation. Poetry furnishes the spark in their eyes, and they provide the spark in *my* eyes as I leave, feeling a warmth in my heart that only the Alzheimer’s Poetry Project can bring.

For more information on the Alzheimer’s Poetry Project, visit <http://www.alzpoetry.com>, and for a poetry chapbook about my experiences working with Alzheimer’s residents, contact Parallel Press and ask for the chapbook, *We Nod Our Dark Heads*, <http://parallellpress.library.wisc.edu/chapbooks/poetry/author.shtml?brodsky>.



Sensory Intervention

If you find me adrift, incoherent,
one day when I’m older,
and if you can’t get through
with your usual loving talk or touch,
please treat me, close-up, to slow-roasting turkey,
or beef stew simmering on low, with baby carrots.
Confront me with coffee beans freshly ground,
then arrange for a gurgling percolator
to send its wispy tendrils my way.
One day, fry up some bacon, crispy, not burned.
Bake yeast bread in my presence.
Carry over a loaf, still radiant from the oven.
Imagine my wink, my shy smile.

—ANN M. PENTON, SARONA, WI

Courting Disaster of Biblical Proportion

My calico cat is stretched
on the center rack of the oven,
which I left open after the cheesecake
squeezed through the spring-form pan
and burned itself up.

Purring and warm,
perfumed in vanilla and blackened butter,
like Shadrack, Meshach, and Abednego
she is sure that she can walk into fire
without being burned,
certain that her God lives to serve.

—JOAN WIESE JOHANNES, PORT EDWARDS, WI

How I Think

It's as if I wander for weeks through dim streets
listening to pipes leak.
At the bottom of a railroad embankment
feral cats claw through garbage slung from trains.
Dumps of bone and slag
border shuttered mills and tanneries. Scavengers
wade through drainage ditches pawing for scrap.
It's as if I'm wed to my route,
like the aged engine of a slow freight that hauls its weight

on rusty tracks. Until, one purple evening,
a saxophone riff
echoes from tenements, and it's as if I'm enveloped
in the reeds of Ellington, the Jimmy Lunceford brass,
the Basie rhythm section.
The sound is swing. The scent is rum and cola.

It's as if I'm drinking at the Savoy in Harlem.
The year is 1936, and dancers
spin like whirligigs. A baritone voice chases the band,
catches the beat of an up-tempo tune. The lyrics jump
from shotgun shacks to The Ritz,
bounce from down-and-out to the top-of-the-world.

Dozens of couples pause just long enough to shout
for more. It's as if a ceiling mirror
reveals that I'm the singer. Phrases and melody—

like a river of poetry—flow until closing time.

When the club shuts,
it's as if a month has passed, though a clock

on a loading dock shows it's only been minutes.

Darkness descends.
Under a crumbling trestle, an amber lantern flickers.

—RICHARD MERELMAN, MADISON, WI

The Firemen Have Left Your Mother's Apartment

The firemen have left your mother's apartment,
and I am standing in her kitchen holding the egg
I brought over for breakfast.

You have just finished talking to the manager
about disconnecting her stove and microwave.
We are thinking this day cannot get any worse.

Our dog Pal is under the car seat in a wooden box
tied with a red bow, and on the way here I read
out loud the note that was supposed to assure us
that she was cremated alone;
but both of us are picturing a cartoon of boxes
labeled Chihuahua, poodle, retriever, St Bernard,
each fitting inside the next like Ukrainian dolls,
a fat man whistling as he pours ash from a large pail.

Those of us who have been married a long time
read each other's minds, and now we are thinking
that even though the ad from the pet funeral home
featured an assortment of urns,
\$138.00 is enough to pay for a box of ash.
Besides, we need to buy a coffee pot
with automatic shut-off for your mom,
who has already forgotten what the fuss is about.

I turn on a burner for one last time
and crack the egg against the side of a pan.
I am thinking it is so hot I could fry this egg
on the sidewalk, and you are thinking
how glad you are that we don't have to worry
about Pal overheating in the car.

—JOAN WIESE JOHANNES, PORT EDWARDS, WI

In Rings

the heart-
wood will
protect its
innerness
until one
wintering
when the
sawmill's
interest in
sweetness
swings &
the sound
—sung in
a round—
brings a
truthy new
clarity to
the toothy
circularity
of things.

—TODD BOSS,
SAINT PAUL, MN
visit VW Online for audio

Todd Boss's first full-length collection is Yellowrocket (W.W. Norton, 2008). He grew up on a farm near Fall Creek, Wisconsin, holds an MFA from the University of Alaska-Anchorage, and lives in Saint Paul. Editor and founder of Flurry, an online journal of wintry poetry from Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Dakotas, Boss co-founded motionpoems.com, a poetry animation project. More information about Boss is available at <http://www.toddbosspoet.com>. Watch an animated poem and listen to Boss read his new poem, "In Rings," at versewisconsin.org.*

Wendy Vardaman Interviews

TODD BOSS

author of *Yellowrocket*

WV: You've got a first book that's published by W.W. Norton and poems from it that appeared in *The New Yorker* and *Poetry*—how did you do that?

TB: It was a perfect storm. A lot of important people "discovered" me all at the same time, and began telling other important people about me.

WV: You appear to have burst onto the poetry scene: is that an accurate picture of what happened?

TB: I guess it looks like a "burst," and it's definitely a burst of success. But in fact, I sent poems to *Poetry* magazine for 15 years before they took a poem. I've been writing for 20 years. I have piles of rejections from magazines large and small, just like any other poet. The road's been long; suddenly it's successful, but that's a cumulative result.

WV: Tell me about some bumps in the road for you. What's the worst poetic failure you've experienced?

TB: When I was 28, a big-time agent got interested in an unfinished novel I was working on. I quit my day job and worked on this novel for a year, and when it was finished, the agent didn't want it anymore. In truth, I had no business writing a novel, or thinking that my first novel would be saleable. But I gambled a lot on hubris, and lost the respect of many who trusted me, and supported me, during that time. I'm still, years later, mopping up from that. Didn't learn a thing though; as soon as I got the poetry book deal from Norton, I quit my day job. I'm with Stupid.

And then there are all the small bumps. Once an editor hand-wrote a note on a rejection slip: "There is an overwhelming narcissism in your work." Ah, hell. Skin thickens.

WV: When did you decide you wanted to be a poet? How long have you been writing poetry?

TB: I've been writing poetry since I was

Circling Back with Todd Boss

by Ellen Kort

Sometimes in the middle of our world of sound bites, cell phones, and texting, that we have come to know as communication, a beacon of light appears out of nowhere. That beam aimed itself directly at me when I received a copy of *Yellowrocket*, a book of poetry by Todd Boss which was forwarded to me by the publisher W. W. Norton. Todd Boss! The years spilled backward in a matter of seconds. How long had it been since we connected? I read the book at once and loved it. I picked up the phone and blessed the universe when I reached Todd at home. What fun we had trying to remember exactly how we got to know one another. We laughed trying to follow a few dead-end roads and then I reminded him of his two handmade books and poems he sent me when he lived in Alaska. He told me he has kept a packet of all the letters I wrote him over the years. We marveled at the twists and turns of life and together discovered he grew up in Fall Creek, Wisconsin and I grew up in Menomonie. Such a short distance away. We talked poetry. He told me about the poems he wrote in college and laughed when he said it was a way to impress girls. He remembered the poetry he wrote in Alaska, poems that reconnected him with his roots in the Midwest, the nostalgic memories of his grandparents' farm near Abbotsford, Wisconsin. He asked me about my writing and how it felt to be a poet laureate and I asked him, "How cool is it to be one of the hottest poets in the country?" After weaving the years in and out of our lives, we finally remembered that it was a mutual friend, Minnesota publisher Beverly Voldseth, who sent me his poetry years ago, and I responded to it by writing him an "I really like your poetry" letter. And so it goes. We never know how one spark can keep a story alive, how memories can spin a circle back to its original source. Sometimes all it takes is a few words, a few poems. Thanks, Todd. Keep writing.

a kid, but writing it seriously since my college days, 20 years ago. I took poetry seriously as soon as women started responding to it. It was my wife who encouraged me to get an MFA. Having her attention, and keeping it, was a primary force...If she had liked my muscles instead, I'd be a champion bodybuilder today.

WV: Tell me about how you get/have gotten a living, as a poet. How did you end up at The Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis, where you worked for 5 years until recently, and what did you do there? What are you doing right now?

TB: Why, are you hiring? Let's get clear: I don't make a living as a poet. At The Playwrights' Center I was Director of External Affairs, which meant I was the nonprofit's fundraising and marketing director. I raised \$1.4 million a year for the organization, and spearheaded all communications programming. It was a great job, but when I got a book deal from Norton, I went into a tailspin. I had worked 20 years for this, and it was very difficult for me to turn it all off at 9 am and reserve it for after 5 pm; impossible. So I quit and began consulting for the organization, which I still do on a part-time basis. I'm starting to get artist grants now, too, which is helping. And we have health insurance through my wife's work, so we're alright for awhile. But I recognize that I have taken a risk; it's something I had to do. I intend to make it work. Writing freelance articles, taking private commissions, getting my second manuscript ready for the publisher, applying for grants, taking paid speaking engagements; things are adding up.

WV: I'd like to know a little more about your past jobs. (This is kind of a personal obsession—how do poets survive when poetry makes no money, and do they try to find something that relates to poetry or not?) So, besides your work at the Playwrights' Center, what other jobs have you held? Have you taught writing and if so, did you like it or not?

TB: Before my years at The Playwrights' Center I was a flak for a PR agency. My clients included Magnetic Poetry, those little refrigerator words...

Before that I was a freelance journalist, and before that I taught English and worked in the administration of a small private liberal arts college.

Currently, I make money on private commissions (I've taken about 6 of them in the past two years, and they each pay between \$500 and \$1500), articles (I'm writing a feature piece now for *Poets & Writers* ["The Audio Revolution: How to Amplify Your Poems," Sept-Oct 09]), and I've been lucky this year selling more poetry and winning prize money. I'm also consulting with The Playwrights' Center and other theater organizations in Minneapolis. And I'm getting some small grants.

WV: You lived on a farm in Wisconsin as a child. Did you spend your whole childhood there? Did your parents stick with farming? Did you feel isolated there, or free to explore your own thoughts and imagination?

TB: The farm was a hobby farm, which is quite different from a dairy farm or a "serious" agricultural endeavor. No, my parents didn't stick with it, they live in northern Michigan now in the woods. I didn't really feel any more isolated on the farm as a kid than I do now in the city as an adult, nor any less free to explore my thoughts and imagination. One need only opt out of the noise of modern life in order to feel free, no?

WV: *Yellowrocket* includes many poems about farm life, for example "Ruin,"

"Yellowrocket" and "Wood Burning." Do you think of yourself as a rural or a city person?

TB: I believe that America is a nation of displaced agrarians. Most of us have farms or small towns in our family histories. Most of us recognize that something was lost in the move. I think of myself as a rural person living in the city, which is, I believe, a shared modern predicament. I like to think I'm writing for the displaced farmer in all of us.

WV: Does the Midwest manifest itself in other ways in your poems—e.g., their formal choices, voice or subject matter?

TB: Absolutely. Everyone on the coasts has remarked on it. I'm not aware of it, of course, but it's there. I can't change my Midwestern frame of reference any more than I can change my bone density.

WV: Is there anything specific you would point to in your work as particularly Midwestern?

TB: Not sure; my tongue is native to me, so I don't hear it like others seem to. I can only say that after living in New Hampshire, I recognized Robert Frost's as a distinctively New England voice. Maybe my poetry's Midwesternness is in its straight-talk. The plain English. The respectful attitude. The generosity, a certain warmth and maybe naivete about it. A willingness to share joy unabashedly. The landscape, of course. A

The Hush of the Very Good

You can tell by how he lists
to let her
kiss him, that the getting, as he gets it,
is good.

It's good in the sweetly salty,
deeply thirsty way that a sea-fogged
rain is good after a summer-long bout
of inland drought.

And you know it
when you see it, don't you? How it
drenches what's dry, how the having
of it quenches.

There is a grassy inlet
where your ocean meets your land, a slip
that needs a certain kind of vessel,
and
when that shapely skiff skims in at last,
trimmed bright, mast lightly flagging
left and right,

then the long, lush reeds
of your longing part, and soft against
the hull of that bent wood almost im-
perceptibly brushes a luscious hush
the heart heeds helplessly—

the hush
of the very good.

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disinterest in hipness, irony, anger, angst, pop culture references, academic blather? The treatment of God as a sympathetic character? Not sure.

My Son Puts His Pants On Backwards,

fly
in the rear,
and I
tie my tie

quickly,
cockeye,
and out we
trip into

the great
disheveled
throng fan-tastic, tails

untucked,
his mitten
in my glove.
Don't love

dress funny
sometimes?
And shouldn't
it be sin

to wear so
carelessly
such finery?
It fills me

up with
sympathy!
I swear
we'd lose our
hearts if
they weren't
with elastic
and butterfly

pin
clasped safely
in.

from *Yellowrocket*.
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WV: Is Minneapolis-Saint Paul a good place to be a writer? Do you feel isolated or disadvantaged living in the Midwest instead of New York or some place coastal?

TB: I've been to New York a dozen times, and to the other coast a lot too ... Believe me, we're not missing anything here in the Midwest. It's nice to visit the coasts, but people there have a profound sense that they're not living in the "real" America. I see my life in Minneapolis as a huge advantage in my writing. I can be free of everything New York-ish and Los Angeles-ish about this country. It's a great asset.

WV: What's your favorite city or place?

TB: My favorite places tend to be small towns. All kinds, everywhere, here and abroad. I actually dream about small towns, recurrently. I know some small town dreamscapes so well I could draw you maps.

WV: Which regional/national conferences do you attend? Do you attend workshops away from home? How much do you travel?

TB: I travel a lot. Every summer I'm off to some writing workshop or another. This year was my first year at AWP, but it was time well spent, and I'm sure I'll go again. It's important to get out of your community, or you begin to assume it's the only community. And it's important to immerse yourself periodically in a culture of writers. On the other hand, I'm not a joiner, which leads me to play hooky a lot at conferences. I go off and write when I should be in a workshop or social function.

WV: What advice would you give a young 20-something poet about staying in or leaving the Midwest? about getting an MFA?

TB: Go where you want to go. Get an MFA if you want to teach; otherwise skip it, and just write and read like crazy wherever you are.

WV: Many of the poems in *Yellowrocket* focus on domestic life—being a dad, marriage, etc. I interviewed Ron Wallace a few years ago, and he told me that the editor of his selected poems made him winnow down the dad poems. Have you encountered any resistance on the part of editors to poems like "My Son Climbs In" or "My Son Puts His Pants On Backwards"?

TB: Those were my editor's favorite poems in the collection, but it's interesting that neither was published elsewhere, though I sent them to a lot of journals. I think a "selected poems" demands different rigors about inclusion than an individual book, so I can understand Wallace's issue. But it wasn't an issue for me with *Yellowrocket*.

WV: Both those poems are also pretty comfortable about wearing their sentiment on their sleeves: how do you go about balancing sentiment and the reader's possible rejection of it?

TB: I keep the reader in a sentimental poem by giving

them extremely specific details or painting an extremely specific picture. Modernism has refused sentimentality, and that's important, I suppose, but let's face it, we all get sentimental, just as we all get lonely or frightened or sad; it's a bona fide part of the human experience, and if my reader "rejects" it on the grounds that it's not "modern," well, that's their head-game.

WV: How old are your kids? To what extent do you and your wife share parenting duties? household chores? Do your kids make poetry harder or easier to write?

**Modernism has refused
sentimentality, and that's
important, I suppose,
but let's face it, we all
get sentimental, just
as we all get lonely or
frightened or sad.**

TB: My kids make poetry impossible to write unless they're sleeping. My girl Sophie is 9 and my boy Theo is 6. They are hyper-literate, wildly imaginative, passionately emotional, full of beans. My wife and I share most parenting duties and household chores. Every poet should have children, because they force you to see the world again, which is the true meaning of re-vision.

WV: How do you make poetry a daily part of your family life?

TB: I don't. I don't write every day; if I did, I'd go insane. And when I do write, I leave the house to do it, or wait till the kids are in school or asleep. It's not part of my family life, it's the flip-side.

WV: Your marriage poems seem pretty risky: sometimes in their sentiment, sometimes in their confessionalism. Do you get any grief about their content, either at home or by editors? I am thinking my husband would not be happy if I wrote up the fights you describe in "Don't Come Home," or "Mess." Of course, you could just be working with a poetic persona here, but they are very convincing!

TB: Nothing's much worth writing that isn't risky. Those poems are convincing because of the risks they take. My wife has veto power over anything I write, so my courage in sharing these poems is also hers. You should see the stuff we didn't have courage for.

In my opinion, your husband needs to consider: He can like what you write, or he can be affected by what you write, it's a choice. Unless you're out to hurt him, there's nothing but the truth to be afraid of.

WV: *Yellowrocket* is getting some high-placed reviews for a first book. Is there a downside to that?

TB: No downside, really. I don't write my poetry for critics, so I'm not too invested in what they have to say. I have this poem I'm afraid to publish: "Pity the critics / their straits. ... For while we / feast, they / pick at plates of / Wits and Nerve, / and bowls of / minced Opinion, / on which alone / no one, not even / journalists, can live."

WV: Tell me about your use of the internet to market your poetry and yourself as a poet—you've got a website, a Facebook page, a blog. How important are these tools? Do all poets need them?

TB: All poets should seriously consider them. My web site is my most important tool. It's my shingle, my front door, my newsroom, my sample room, and my party room. A site that has audio is particularly important—those mp3 files have made fans of casual readers, and landed me on a lot of radio programs. The Facebook page doesn't do much for me, but it allows others to connect with me, so I think it's important for that reason.

WV: You're also making use of YouTube and readers can find some animated poem collaborations there. Some of the videos feature you as the actor, and some use your voice with other visuals. Do you think of these videos as readings of your poems, or as a separate and serious art form? Do poem-videos always work, or could they potentially detract and distract from the words?

TB: My animator and I are calling these Motion Poems, and they're at motionpoems.com along with a few animations we're starting to do for other poets. It's not a serious art form, no, and it can indeed detract from a serious poetry reader's experience of a poem. But the goal is merely to find a new way to deliver poetry to non-poetry readers, and, by engaging them, inspire them to read more.

On the other hand, if the medium is the message, then perhaps we ought to accuse the printing press of corrupting the art of poetry. My seriousness about audio and video is partly an attempt to rediscover poetry's perfect format. Let's remember that poetry roots are nearer the aural than the printed.

WV: You participate in numerous collaborative efforts with artists and musicians. What's the collaboration you enjoyed the most?

TB: The collaboration I enjoy the most is always the one I'm doing now. Currently I'm working with a flutist on

Ruin

was rumored

to be rooming
up the road
where

a neighbor's barn'd
burned down.

Their heyday
a payday
away,

Pride,
Ruin's bride-to-be,

paced our property
in the long

laced gowns
of afternoons,

while Ruin
rode shotgun
in Dad's old Ford

and pulled the wheel
hard toward

cabarets.

Dad had
work, but

Ruin had ways.

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a suite of poems, and I hope soon to be working with a great young marimbist out of Madison. A composer is setting a little cycle of my pieces for solo voice, and that's fun to watch evolve too. Every collaboration opens a new cave-hole onto process for me.

WV: Do you ever collaborate with other writers? Do you think poetry could benefit from more poets also working together on projects?

TB: Alicia Ostriker and I batted a renga back and forth for awhile, and that was cool; if I'm going to duel, I'll prefer an opponent with a rapier wit. So much depends upon who's at the wheelbarrow's other handle.

WV: Do you have a preference about publishing in print versus publishing online? Do you try to place your work more on one side or the other?

Immortality is a grail, fame a Dixie cup.

TB: I want to be in the publications that have a consistently high-quality output of top work by great writers. That'll mean different things to different people, but for me it's mostly print journals, with a smattering of online journals like *Salon*, *Slate*, *Blackbird*, and others. You'll be known by the company you keep.

WV: Your poetry content is comfortable with tradition; you write about nature, joy, love, angst, anger, and although you don't work in traditional forms like the sonnet, you pay a lot of attention to craft and to sound, too. To what extent are your poetic choices designed to be accessible to an audience? Is there a place for edgy or experimental poetry in your work?

TB: Accessible is the new experimental. I feel I'm pushing edges all the time, but I'm doing an even harder thing than experimentalists are: I'm branching downward, not outward.

WV: Your influences also feel traditional and accessible; I see Kay Ryan, Billy Collins, Robert Frost, for example. Do you consciously work with your influences? Do you sometimes work against them?

TB: Kay Ryan quoted Robert Bly in a letter she wrote me once about influences: he said we should "plow them under," and I really like that advice. The people that have influenced you should feed your work, but the ground should be made new.

WV: What are you working on now?

TB: I'm working on my second

collection, *Fugue*, which will deal with loss, memory, and flight. I'm also collaborating with two photographers on a series of photography-inspired poems about the original Boss family farmstead near Abbotsford, Wisconsin. Also gonna try throwing some of my poems on iTunes and see what happens.

WV: What do you like to do besides write poetry?

TB: Walk, ski, make firewood, burn firewood, cook, eat, travel. I love a dinner party.

WV: If you could be well-known only in your own time OR in the future, which would you choose?

TB: Immortality is a grail, fame a Dixie cup.



Backyard Repast

Three greedy squirrels
pack their cheeks
with oily, black sunflower seeds,
scurry to bury the treasure
in secret lawn caches.

A dainty brown jenny-wren
pauses in her busy-body day
to join them at the ground feeder.

Disdaining squirrelly antics
the tiny fuss budget
peck-pecks at her millet dinner.
I imagine her stopping now and then
to blot her sharp bill
with a crisp, white linen napkin.

—MERLE HAZARD, MACON, GA

Prowling in Produce

In the super market I prefer
the produce department over
the packaged food sections,

it's the openness of the aisles,
where people make eye contact,
among humid, wet, earthy odors.

Standing by lettuce and celery
is like standing on a high hill
with autumn's palette of color,

the purple faces of egg plant,
yellow squash, red beets, greens,
and beige potatoes combined.

I don't buy turnips and rutabagas,
Depression roots my mother
concealed in mashed potatoes.

And I'm careful to read the signs:
organic grown cucumber passing
itself off as zucchini in a wrapper.

Attracted to the exotic veggies,
unfamiliar with bok choy, I ask
an Asian lady how she cooks it.

Her cart contains raw endive,
kale, fennel and kohlrabi,
odd veggies I've never eaten.

I stuff three baseball size kohlrabi
down a long plastic sleeve to show
I'm not just seeking conversation.

I ask the check-out lady how to fix
kohlrabi; she says she doesn't cook,
and the tiny Asian lady is gone.

—JOHN L. CAMPBELL, BROOKFIELD, WI



Contributors' Notes

Colleen Abel is a Pushcart Prize nominee, and a former Diane Middlebrook Poetry Fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her manuscript, *The Swimming of Witches* was a finalist for the Four Way Books Intro Prize, the New Issues Poetry Prize, and others. She is a doctoral candidate at UW-Milwaukee. pp. 12 & 15

Grant Adams's father grew up in Iola, where he learned to hunt and fish, trapping muskrats in order to buy school clothes. His mother, a first generation Finnish-American, was born and raised on a family farm in Eagle River. She recently returned home when Grant interred her ashes there. "Beginning to End" is Grant's first published poem. p. 29

Antler, former poet laureate of Milwaukee, is the author of *Selected Poems*, *Ever-Expanding Wilderness*, *Deathrattles vs. Comecries*, and *Exclamation Points ad Infinitum!* His work appears in the recent anthologies *Poets Against the War*; *Poetic Voices Without Borders 2*; *Best Gay Poetry 2008*; *Comeback Wolves: Welcoming the Wolf Home* and *Wilderness Blessings*. p. 14

Judith Arcana's chapbook, *4th Period English*, is a collection of poems in the voices of high school students talking—and arguing—about immigration. A native of the Great Lakes region who lived briefly and visited repeatedly in Milwaukee and other Wisconsin towns, notably with her dear friend, Wisconsin native Lois Nowicki, she lives in Oregon. Visit juditharcana.com. p. 10

James Babbs lives and dies a little each day in the small town where he grew up. He works for the government but doesn't like to talk about it. He likes getting drunk and writing, and sometimes it's hard to tell the difference because both of them can be very intoxicating. Recent poems have appeared in *Gutter Eloquence*, *Fight These Bastards*, and *Song of the San Joaquin Quarterly*. p. 12

Jane-Marie Bahr was born, raised, educated and employed in Wisconsin. Her poetry publications include *Hummingbird*, *Wisconsin People & Ideas*, *Free Verse*, *Poesy*, *Poetry Motel*, the WFOP's *Museletter*, and others. She is currently working on a series of poems, "Seasons of Grief: The Gerry Poems," and adjusting to life as a widow. p. 6

Judy Barisonzi has been a Wisconsin resident since 1966, and she now lives among the lakes and woods of northwest Wisconsin. Semi-retired from teaching English at the University of Wisconsin Colleges, she gives workshops in creative writing and memoir writing, participates in several local writing groups, and publishes poems in local and national magazines. p. 26

Ruth Bavetta's poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Rattle*, *North American Review*, *Nerve Cowboy*, and *Atlanta Review*, among others. In 2001 she visited near Rhineland and discovered that the Big Woods of Laura Ingalls Wilder's Wisconsin look nothing like the redwood forests of California. It took a serious wrench of the mind's eye to get that cabin into the proper landscape—green, leafy and crammed with growth. p. 6

Lauren Berry received an MFA from the University Of Houston, where she served as poetry editor for *Gulf Coast*. Her work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Cream City Review*, *Whiskey Island*, and *Hayden's Ferry Review*. This year she accepted the Diane Middlebrook poetry fellowship at the University of Wisconsin, where she will work on her first collection, *Mosquito Fever Speeches*. p. 19

Todd Boss's debut poetry collection, *Yellowrocket*, was published in 2008 by W. W. Norton. Todd's poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and elsewhere. He lives in north suburban Saint Paul with his wife and two children. pp. 32-36

Joseph Briggs received his bachelor's in English from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh in 2007. He then moved to Madison with his wife, where he enjoys all the artistic currents the city has to offer. "Calculation" is his first published poem. p. 6

Lisa Marie Brodsky has worked with Alzheimer's residents since 2005. Her poetry has appeared in *The North American Review*, *The Southern Ocean Review*, and *Born Magazine*, among others. In 2008, Parallel Press published her chapbook on working with Alzheimer's residents, *We Nod Our Dark Heads*. Her full-length collection, *Motherlung*, is forthcoming from Salmon Publishing. Originally from Chicago, she's resided in Madison for eight years. Recently married, she has three beautiful stepchildren. pp. 29-30

Sarah Busse is the co-editor of *Versé Wisconsin*. pp. 7-8

John L. Campbell started free-lance writing for business and trade magazines in 1995. His book, *Writing in Retirement*, www.writingretirement.com, explains his evolution into fiction and poetry along with the profiles of thirteen other writers-in-retirement. His latest poetry chapbook is *Smelling Older*. p. 36

Cyrus Campen has a BS in zoology from Wheaton College, an MA in European History from Northern Illinois University, and an MA in English from Northern Illinois University and Oxford University, England. He has taught in public schools and at universities in Illinois. He currently resides in Wausau, Wisconsin. p. 20

Lisa J. Cihlar is Wisconsin born and raised. There was a short stint in Illinois, but that was done for love and she convinced him to come back north with her. Recently, poems have been published in *The Pedestal Magazine*, *qarrtsiluni*, and *Wisconsin People & Ideas*. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and selected to be part of The Other Voices International Project. p. 13

Among her many other awards, **Barbara Crooker** is the recipient of the 2006 Ekphrastic Poetry Award from *Rosebud*. Her most recent book is *Line Dance* (Word Press, 2008), winner of the 2009 Paterson Award for Literary Excellence. She lives and writes in rural PA, but has a fondness for Wisconsin based on the lovely audiences she encountered in Madison and Waukesha, and the excellence of writing that she found when she judged the Lorine Niedecker Prize. p. 17

Philip Dacey is the author of ten full-length books of poems, including *Vertebrae Rosaries: 50 Sonnets* (Red Dragonfly Press, 2009). His awards include three Pushcart Prizes, a Discovery Award from the New York YM-YWHA's Poetry Center, and various fellowships. His website is www.philipdacey.com. Over the years, he has given readings in many places in Wisconsin, most recently at the Great Lakes Writers Festival at Lakeland College. He lived for 35 years across the border in Minnesota. pp. 15 & 16

Bruce Dethlefsen has published three volumes of poetry. His latest is *Breather*, published by Fireweed Press. Bruce is the secretary of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets. p. 25

Alix Doom has published in numerous magazines and some of her poems have appeared in anthologies such as *County Lines* (Loonfeather Press, 2008). She has lived in the Minnesota River Valley for many years. Her favorite vacations still include crossing the Mississippi River to meander the back roads of the neighboring state of Wisconsin. p. 20

Karl Elder, Poet in Residence at Lakeland College, is among five Chad Walsh Award recipients who will read in Denver come April at an AWP session in celebration of the 60th anniversary of *Beloit Poetry Journal*. His most recent volume is *Gilgamesh at the Bellagio* from The National Poetry Review Award Book Series. p. 4

Araceli Esparza was born in Madison, WI. Her parents, from whom she still gathers her strength, were migrant farm workers from Guanajuato, Mexico. She currently participates in the women of color poetry group, Hibiscus. Her writing fluxes from observation to hip hop to cultural translations where, beyond language, she translates the new American culture. p. 23

Yvonne M. Estrada is a Southern CA native who lives, works, and writes poetry in Los Angeles. Her stepdad (who has been her dad for over 25 years) has a friend who visits him yearly, and who hails from Milwaukee. John Sierpinski is his name, and Yvonne discovered a few years back that he too is a poet, a pretty cool connection to Wisconsin. p. 21

Fabu is Madison's third Poet Laureate. She has a published chapbook, *In Our Own Tongues*, and another forthcoming from Parallel Press, *African American Life in Haiku*. Visit <http://www.artistfabu.com/> p. 23

Susan Firer's most recent book is *Milwaukee Does Strange Things to People: New & Selected Poems 1979-2007*. She is curator of the *ExpressMilwaukee* online poetry column. The Poetry Foundation has included her poem "Call Me Pier" in its Poetry Everywhere animated poem series, available for viewing on YouTube or through the Foundation. She was Poet Laureate of Milwaukee from 2008-2010. pp. 14 & 15

ed galing is 92 years old, born in New York in 1917, and often writes about this era, but not always. He has won many literary awards and two Pushcart nominations, written 70 chapbooks, and become Poet Laureate of Hatboro. He was featured in *Free Verse* #92. p. 11

Russell Gardner, Jr. grew up on a central WI farm, lived in many states as an adult, and is back in Wisconsin. Writing poetry (and prose) since college, he also does mixed media visual art and helped originate and then coordinate the Epidemic Peace Imagery project featured in *Free Verse* #99/100. p. 11

Jerry Hauser has published 17 chapbooks in recent years and has published many more poems in journals of poetry and literature over a 25 year period. Currently he is finishing a book of poems under the title of "A Stir of Seasons." p. 25

Jim Hazard grew up in Indiana and the South Side of Chicago, moved to Wisconsin in '63 and has been here ever since, although he does have a passport he uses now and then. p. 9

After living and writing in Appleton for 21 years, **Merle Hazard** moved in 2008 to Macon, GA to be closer to family. p. 36

Jeanette Hinds (1921-2008) published her first poem at age 13. She continued to write and publish while raising six children, going on to publish two chapbooks, *Traveling On* and *My Mother's Keys*. She volunteered as a poetry teacher at Rochester Federal Prison and was active for many years in the League of Minnesota Poets (LOMP). pp. 7 & 8

Edward Hirsch's new book is *The Living Fire: New and Selected Poems* (Knopf, 2010). p. 5

Jason Huff grew up in northern Illinois and southeast Texas, where he studied poetry under R.S. Gwynn for many years. He's battled both mental illness and substance abuse, and published work in *The Texas Review*, *descant*, and *Iron Horse Literary Review*, among others. He has a ton of family in the Appleton/Neenah area. And he loves cheese. p. 10

Karla Huston is the author of six chapbooks of poetry, most recently, *An Inventory of Lost Things* (Centennial Press, 2009). Her poems, reviews and interviews have been published widely. pp. 5 & 25

Joan Wiese Johannes was born near Horicon Marsh. Her poems have been widely published and won numerous awards. Her chapbook *Sensible Shoes* was the 2009 winner of the John and Miriam Morris Memorial Chapbook Contest sponsored by the Alabama Poetry Society. She lives in Port Edwards, WI with her poet husband Jeffrey. p. 31

Halvard Johnson has lived and worked in Chicago, El Paso, Cayey, Puerto Rico, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and New York City. He also taught overseas in Germany and Japan. He currently lives most of the year in San

Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico. Both his parents were raised in Milwaukee, where he spent many childhood summers, and where many extended family members still live and work. pp. 12 & 14

These days **Gary Jones** spends more time writing poetry than brawling in bars, but the two activities came together in his poem "In Memorium," a piece that won second place in the Hal Grutzmacher writing competition. His poetry has appeared in many publications over the years. He is a writer, teacher, and this past summer a roofer, who lives on the northern Door peninsula with his books and gardens and wife of many years. p. 6

Muriel Karr fondly recalls a Greyhound bus trip through Wisconsin in the 1970s. Menomonie is such fun to say. And one delightful town whose name she can't remember has a little waterfall right in its center. You can order Muriel's two poetry books from Bellowing Ark Press. p. 26

William Keener is a writer and environmental lawyer in the San Francisco Bay Area. His chapbook *Gold Leaf on Granite*, won the 2008 Anabiosis Press Contest. Poems are recently published or forthcoming in *Atlanta Review*, *Margie*, *Isotope*, *The Main Street Rag* and *Terrain.org* among others. He has not yet been to Wisconsin, but Milwaukee friends in California have him saying "Cheesehead!" when smiling for the camera. p. 21

Ellen Kort has authored 14 books and has been featured in a wide variety of anthologies. She was named a 2004 Fellow of Letters by the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts and Letters, has received the Pablo Neruda prize for Poetry, the Council for Wisconsin Writers' Award for Outstanding Encouragement of Wisconsin Writers, and the Robert E. Gard Wisconsin Idea Foundation Award for Excellence. p. 32

Michael Kriesel is a poetry reviewer for *Small Press Review*, and his reviews have appeared in *Library Journal*. He has won both the WFOP Muse Prize and the Lorine Niedecker Award from the Council for Wisconsin Writers. He's been nominated for six Pushcart Prizes. Books include *Chasing Saturday Night* (Marsh River Editions), *Feeding My Heart To The Wind* (Sunnyoutside Press), *Moths Mail The House* (Sunnyoutside Press), and *Soul Noir* (Platonic 3way Press). pp. 5 & 9

Peg Lauber divides her time and activities between Eau Claire and New Orleans. She and Sandy Lindow will be busy editing the 2011 *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar* this year. p. 28

Emilie Lindemann is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She enjoys pedaling her pink bicycle past cornfields in rural Manitowoc County and is also an avid vintage clothing collector. Emilie's poems have appeared in *Columbia Poetry Review* and *The Blue Canary*. p. 24

Sandra Lindow lives on a hilltop in Menomonie, WI where she communes with perennials and attempts to keep a particularly wanton rabbit from chewing the tops of her carrots. She teaches part-time at UW-Stout and has published six books of poetry. p. 10

Ellaraine Lockie has received eleven Pushcart Prize nominations. She's been the recipient of multiple prizes but among the coolest is her first place in the Summer Shark Poetry Contest from the Aquarium of the Pacific. She's authored seven chapbooks, serves as Poetry Editor for *Lilipoh*, and teaches poetry workshops. She visited Appleton last summer and met many WI poets with whom she's corresponded and collaborated. p. 11

Jolieth McIntosh was born in Jamaica and began writing poems at an early age. She presents her poems regularly at African Association and Caribbean Association events. The Hibiscus Collective poetry and prose group is a source of support as an artist and gives her opportunities to present her work. Jolieth lives on the northeast side of Madison with her husband Carl. p. 22

Susan McLean is a professor of English at Southwest Minnesota State University. Her first full-length poetry book, *The Best Disguise*, won the 2009 Richard Wilbur Award and was published by the University of Evansville Press. She once had an on-campus interview for a teaching position at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, but was not offered the position. p. 24

Richard Merelman took up poetry writing in 2001. Previously, he taught political science at UW-Madison. He was born and grew up in Washington, D.C. and has lived in Madison on and off since 1969. His poems have appeared in journals such as *California Quarterly*, *Free Verse*, *Measure*, and *Wisconsin Academy Review*, among others. p. 31

Corey Mesler's first full-length poetry collection, *Some Identity Problems* (2008), is out from Foothills Publishing. He has been nominated for numerous Pushcart Prizes, and two of his poems have been chosen for Garrison Keillor's *Writer's Almanac*. He once spent a long weekend among the comely writing department at UW-Madison, where he fell in love with a raven-haired poetess who spurned him and turned him into a bristly shoat. With his wife, he runs Burke's Book Store. He can be found at www.coreymesler.com. p. 27

Richard W. Moyer is 78 years old. He obtained his AB in English at Harvard College in 1953, an MH from University of Richmond in 1976, and an MA in English from Temple University in 2000. His poems are widely published, and he has one chapbook and one book of selected poems to his credit. p. 18

John Murillo is the current Jay C. and Ruth Halls Poetry Fellow at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing. A graduate of NYU's MFA program, he has received fellowships from the *NY Times*, Cave Canem, and the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, MA. Poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in such publications as *Callaloo*, *Court Green*, and the anthology *Writing Self and Community: African-American Poetry After the Civil Rights Movement*. His first collection, *Up Jump the Boogie*, will be published by Cypher Books in February 2010. p. 19

Ralph Murre, of Sheboygan, Milwaukee, Hubertus, Kewaskum, Maplewood, Algoma, Fish Creek, Sister Bay, Ellison Bay, Egg Harbor, La Crosse, Ephraim, and Jacksonport, now lives in Baileys Harbor. He's also had several addresses in California, Kentucky, and Florida, but prefers Wisconsin. p. 13

Maurice Oliver's poems have appeared in numerous national and international publications including *Potomac Journal*, *Dandelion Magazine* (Canada), *Stride Magazine* (UK), *Cha Asian Literary Journal* (Hong Kong), *Kritya* (India), *Blueprint Review* (Germany) and *Arabesques Review* (Algeria). His fourth chapbook is *One Remedy Is Travel* (Origami Condom, 2007). Find him at <http://cshoe.blogspot.com>. He lives in Portland, OR. p. 27

Ann M. Penton, Sarona, WI, retired to a lake place in the northern woods after college teaching. She has been enjoying having more time to observe nature, explore her curiosities, investigate southern climes in winter, and write poetry. She has received awards in WFOP and WRWA poetry contests. p. 30

Andrea Potos lives in Madison with her husband and daughter. She works part-time at A Room of One's Own Bookstore and also at Parallel Press, UW-Madison. She has a collection from Parallel Press, *The Perfect Day*. Her book *Yaya's Cloth* won a 2008 Outstanding Achievement Award in Poetry from the Wisconsin Library Association. p. 12

Nancy Reddy recently moved to Wisconsin to attend the MFA program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Previous publications include *Prairie Schooner* and *New Orleans Review*. p. 20

Nydia Rojas lives and writes poetry in Wisconsin, where she also enjoys spring, summer and fall and frowns on winter. Her work has been published

in the *Wisconsin Academy Review*, *International Poetry Review*, *Revista Review Interamericana*, in the anthology *Between the Heart and the Land: Latina Poets in the Midwest*, and in many other literary magazines. p. 21

Tess Romeis, Cedarburg, is a housewife/poet and member of the Stone Kettle Poets. p. 13

Shoshauna Shy is a member of the Prairie Fire Poetry Quartet. In May 2004, she founded Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf. Her poems have been published in numerous journals and magazines including *The Seattle Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *The Briar Cliff Review*, *Rattle*, *Rosebud* and *Poetry Northwest*. Her collection, *What the Postcard Didn't Say*, won an Outstanding Achievement Award from the Wisconsin Library Association in 2008. p. 18

Lester Smith is an award-winning writer, game designer, and poet who works as a writer and technologist for Sebranek Inc., an educational publishing house in southern Wisconsin. He is also the current president of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets. As time permits, he publishes other writers via Popcorn Press. p. 17

Bruce Taylor's latest collection is *Pity the World: Poems Selected and New*. Professor Emeritus at UW-Eau Claire, he is the editor of eight anthologies including, with Patti See, *Higher Learning: Reading and Writing About College*. His work has appeared in such places as *Able Muse*, *Light*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, and *E2ink-1: the Best of the Online Journals*. Taylor has won awards from the Wisconsin Arts Board, Fulbright-Hayes, the NEA, the NEH, The Council of Wisconsin Writers, the Bush Artist Foundation and is the recipient of the Excellence In Scholarship award from UW-EC. pp. 24 & 25

Marilyn L. Taylor is serving as the Poet Laureate of Wisconsin for 2009 and 2010, and enjoying every minute of it. Her award-winning poems have appeared in dozens of anthologies and journals, including *Poetry*, *The American Scholar*, *Measure*, *Valparaiso Review*, and *The Formalist*. Her sixth and latest collection, *Going Wrong*, was published by Parallel Press in July of 2009. She is also a Contributing Editor for *The Writer* magazine, where her articles on poetic craft appear bimonthly. p. 16

Jeanie Tomasko is a Madison native, living in Middleton, but just as liberal. She is a nurse who loves to write, take walks, and birdwatch and thinks everything is prettier in Fall. She is the author of a forthcoming chapbook, *Tricks of Light* (Parallel Press, 2011). p. 28

Wendy Vardaman, author of *Obstructed View* (Fireweed Press, 2009) is the co-editor of *Versé Wisconsin*. Visit www.wendyvardaman.com. p. 32-36

Timothy Walsh's awards include the Grand Prize in the *Atlanta Review* International Poetry Competition and the Kurt Vonnegut Fiction Prize from *North American Review*. He authored a book of literary criticism, *The Dark Matter of Words: Absence, Unknowing, and Emptiness in Literature*, and two chapbooks, *Wild Apples* (Parallel Press) and *Blue Lace Colander* (Marsh River Editions). He is an Assistant Dean at UW-Madison. p. 26

Marilyn Windau was nurtured on Big Bend farms, in raspberry patches in Fremont, by blue gills from Green Lake and by books in Madison. Graduating from UW-Madison, she married a civil engineer from Wauwatosa and raised three daughters in Appleton and Sheboygan Falls. She teaches art to elementary school children in Oostburg. p. 4

Mark Zimmermann lives with his wife in Milwaukee where he teaches writing and humanities courses at the Milwaukee School of Engineering. The poems published here are lipograms. (A lipogram deliberately excludes one or more letters of the alphabet; here the lipogrammatic constraint has been determined by the letters that appear in the name of the person who provides the title/subject of the work.) Mark's project with lipograms was featured in *Free Verse* #94. p. 16

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