“In my brain’s basement, a reference librarian sits at a gray, metal, government desk. When I’m writing, she hands me whatever old image or line I need, when I need it.”

—Michael Kriesel

“The truth is that oblivion is not just commonplace for poets, but practically the rule. To harbor ambitions for any other fate is almost by definition to be deluded.”

—David Graham

“In my brain’s basement, a reference librarian sits at a gray, metal, government desk. When I’m writing, she hands me whatever old image or line I need, when I need it.”

—Michael Kriesel
**Books Received January-December 2010**

**Publisher & author links available online**

- **Elizabeth Alexander**, *Cave Radiance*, New and Selected Poems 1990-2010, Graywolf Press, 2010
- **Elizabeth Austen**, *Andrea Batters*, Carol Stevens *Kara* **Sara** **Susan**, Sightline Press, 2010
- **James Babbs**, *Another Beautiful Night*, Lulu Publications, 2010
- **James Babbs**, *things that aren’t important happen all the time*, Interior Noise Press, 2010
- **Julie Carle**, *Ongoing*—2010, and *Coffee House Press*, 2010
- **Miriam D’Hulster**, *Dance of Movement*, Finishing Line Press, 2010
- **Derrick Harriell**, *Come, Willow Broke*, *Coffee House Press*, 2010
- **Tim Hunt**, *Faulds. Line the Backwaters*, 2010
- **Deborah Jackson-Wilson**, *Walking Between Raindrops*, Milvino, 2010
- **Gary Jackson**, *Moving Mix, Metropolitan*, *Graywolf Press*, 2010 (*Winner of the Cave Canem Poetry Prize*)
- **Shane McCrae**, *In Camera*, Rescue Press, 2010
- **Angélique Winter beacon*, *Smoke Coffee House Press*, 2010

**Thanks to Ramona Davis, Melissa Lindstrom, and Charles Rybak for volunteer proofreading help. Lingering errors are ours, of course, the responsibility of VW’s editors, who would like to note this mistake in VW105**: Rebecca Hazleton’s poems were incorrectly formatted in the print magazine, but appear as they should online at http://versewisconsin.org/Issue105/poems105/rebecca_hazleton.html.

**Contact us:** editors@versewisconsin.org.

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**Books Reviewed Online**

  - by Amanda Brink
- **Sue Chonette, *Slovenly Human Weight*, Canarium Books, 2010**
  - by Ross Lockard
  - by John White
- **Mary Jo Balistreri, *Verse Wisconsin* Fellowship of Poets**
  - by Kate Kellar
- **Linda Aschbrenner, *Wisconsin Poets’ Calendar***
  - by Joseph Kral
- **Ron Czerwien, *Dance with the Darker Sister*, Parallel Press, 2010**
  - by Lou Roach
- **Eric Greinke, *Poets Without a Day at the Beach*, Red Dragon Press, 2010**
  - by Judith Swann
- **Dave Etter, *What I Learned in Kansas*, Parallel Press, 2010**
  - by Lisa Vihos
- **John Dubord, *First Words of Spring*, Parallel Press, 2010**
  - by Lou Roach
- **Liz Rhodebeck, *For Ghosts and Other Ghosts*, Red Dragon Press, 2010**
  - by David Young
- **Tim Hunt, *Faulds. Line the Backwaters*, 2010**
  - by Lou Roach
- **Deborah Jackson-Wilson, *Walking Between Raindrops*, Milvino, 2010**
  - by Madison Stickler
- **Gary Jackson, *Moving Mix, Metropolitan*, *Graywolf Press*, 2010**
  - by Russell Gardner, Jr.

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**Books Received September–December 2010**

- **Beryl Munroe**, *O Body Swayed, Cherry Grove Books, 2010**
- **Charles Neidhart**, *How There’s This Voice of Unborn Youth*, Vol 2, Centennial Press (in cooperation with Lat Lada), 2010
- **Georgia Ressmeyer**, *Today!/Then My Mouth Was Clean*, Finishing Line Press, 2010
- **Liz Rhodesbeck**, *What I Learned in Kansas*, Parallel Press, 2010
- **Robert Sonnensky**, *Unravelled Thought, Unbleached Denim*, Xlibris, 2010
- **Sandy Stark**, *Counting on Birds*, Fireproof Press, 2010
- **Alex Stoli**, *I Lived in America, Parallel Press, 2010
- **David Young**, *Field of Light and Shadow, Selected and New Poems*, Alfred Knopf, 2010

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**Submission guidelines can be found at versewisconsin.org Please send us a review copy of your recently published book or chapbook, along with your announcement and a press release.**
What Becomes of the Deported?

I ask myself.
Do they disperse like child-blown bubbles?
Or linger beneath saguaros and deliquescent
Do their bones merge into the desert detritus?

I picture them as
ghost choruses crossing
undulating lines.

I doubt they huddle around
Sonoran campfires and reminisce
about butchered chickens in Iowa.

I picture them as
child-blown bubbles?
Do they disperse like
Singing the old camp song round the campfire
as you forget it forever—
Or you tell yourself you'll never forget
although there's one thing you never forget
Where you are is your home now forever
You get used to being dead forever
and their favorite counselor hugs them close.
They'll never see again

The Evening of the Fourth of July

You think you're immune
in this landscape: a nephew's backyard,
burgers on the grill, amused children
chasing the bubbles you fling into the air
from your wand. You're so sure of yourself,
on earth, on your feet.

Go ahead and play badminton
on earth, on your feet.

You Get Used To It

The hardest thing about death
is the first night.
 ALTER the first night
you get used to it
Like kids at summer camp
homesick their first night
Cry themselves to sleep
but the next day
Make new friends
and get used to it
And go swimming and canoeing
and fishing and hiking
And do beadwork and dress up
like Indians and roast
Marshmallows and wiener and sing
songs round the campfire
All the campers’ and counselors’ faces
illuminated
And at night the counselor
who loves the campers
Walks the dark silent cabin
with lit candle observing
The dreamy faces
of the sleeping campers
And feels happy looking down at them
and when camp ends and it’s time to go home
The youngsters don’t want to go and cry
saying goodbye to new friends they love
They’ll never see again
and their favorite counselor hugs them close.
You get used to being dead
the same way.
You get used to being dead forever
and don’t want to go home.
Where you are is your home now forever
although there’s one thing you never forget
Or you tell yourself you’ll never forget
as you forgot it forever

Singing the old camp song round the campfire
your arm round your best friend under the stars.

Gatekeeper of the kingdom

As the gatekeeper of the kingdom
I have always looked upon you as a giant.
Views a great there’s nothing you can do I have told
You we don’t have vacancies this season try your luck
In Hades there’s plenty of room for your family and friends.
And it’s free for the poor and needy like you free lodging free food
All you can eat

| Coney Island Redux |

Coney Island this drab summer day

gives us slippery oysters to eat.
We slide them down, then
spit them back up.
The ghost of The Steeple Chase hangs in the mist
with screams from glee cleft riders,
jilted laughter, a ruckus of lights.

Today the Ferris Wheel is still.
A few lost people speak Russian
near the shipwrecked hotdog stand.

On washed up beaches
tufts of children build sand castles.

—Amy Billone, Knoxville, TN

Confined

Why the white picket fence?
No bigger than
half a parking space,
within no-man’s land.

What lies inside
can no longer leave.
Is it to keep out those that want in?
Which,
considering the weathered
Genitive form found within
and the grave locale
across the solitude,
would appear
to be very few,
if any at all.

—Jim Giese, Plymouth, WI

The Question for You

Don’t, he shouted, please don’t. The crayon made
a crazy web of violet triangles and intersecting lines.
Later I heard my mother on the telephone—
She will be severely punished. I said I didn’t know
who did it—I never saw. At the roadside I pocketed
lavender flowers and shoved them into sewers.
For years, I pressed my confession into sandboxes,
erased one letter at a time—I-it-was-me.
Everything I wore was purple. At twenty-two, I forgot
my favorite color is crimson, darker than fresh blood.

It’s not that I need something purple to wear

A few lost people speak Russian
near the shipwrecked hotdog stand.

I have no amethyst jewelry, only garnet.
My clothes
are purple to the least expect them—When my mind leaps and spills,
I promise you’ll find purple patterns where you
least expect them—When my mind leaps and spills,
I promise you’ll find purple patterns where you
least expect them—When my mind leaps and spills,

—Amy Billone, Knoxville, TN

Ice

to inhale deeply, exhale slowly.
Ice

| What Boys Do |

curling up
inside an empty
garbage can
I rolled down
the warm
flowing hill
jeans torn
hair short
wind-blowen
my gym shoes
blue and gray
thinking
this is what
boys do
they tumble through
summer green
like babies
in the hard dark
spaces where
rubbish was

—Amy Billone, Knoxville, TN

Erum Ahmed, Karachi, Pakistan
In college I took a course or two with the Poet in Residence on our campus, who happened to be Richard Eberhart. Though I was young and determinedly unimpressed by my professors, Eberhart came to my life trailing a rather impassive list of honors. He was a winner of most accolades the poetry establishment could bestow, and in the last year of his life a Pulitzer Prize, The National Book Award, the Bollingen Prize, and a stint as national Poet Laureate and Consultant to the Librarian of Congress. He was a founding member of the renowned Poets’ Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Scholarly books were written about his career. In his years as a professor he taught at many leading universities, including Columbia, Tufts, Brown, Swarthmore, Princeton, and finally Dartmouth. His poems appeared in every major anthology, where he was frequently featured as one of our chief poets of World War II. In fact, his poem “The Fury of Aerial Bombardment” was, even to my prematurely jaded undergraduate eyes, a pretty terrific accomplishment, along with “The Groundhog,” “The Cancer Cells,” “Over the cover, clover,” and “Salt.” In short, anyone who knew anything about the poetry scene knew and respected Eberhart.

Even better, to my way of thinking back then, Eberhart knew, or had met, everyone. I was not too cynical to enjoy sitting in his living room in one of his workshop sessions, where he would lean back in his chair, puff on his pipe, and recount firsthand anecdotes of everyone from Yeats and Dylan Thomas to Allen Ginsberg. We all knew, as well, that he had once been the teacher of the most famous poet of the era, Robert Lowell. Moreover, he was the most famous poet of his college, his undergraduate, his first, academic establishment poet to take the Beat poets seriously, which was a further feather in his cap from my perspective.

He lived out his extremely long life (finally dying in 2005 at age 101) about as richly honored and respected as a poet can be.

But well before his death I realized that my famous former professor was not so famous anymore. It seems increasingly obvious that, despite his accomplishments and high reputation, lasting for decades, the poet Richard Eberhart was one whose name really was writ in water. When my generation dies, I expect he’ll turn permanently into a footnote, and of those minor figures growing up increasingly in the biographies of others, only noted in the most exhaustive critical histories of his era. Looking back, I realize that his brand of highly wrought Romantic formalism was passing out of fashion even as far back as the 1960s. A young poet today who invokes his name as a model would not be considered a curiosity at best. His handful of best known poems have gradually but relentlessly been vanishing from the main anthologies. He rarely appears on syllabi or in anything but the most specialized journal articles anymore, and I can’t recall the last time I heard his name mentioned at any gathering of poets. I sincerely doubt there will be any more scholarly works about him to come. A mere half decade after his death, Eberhart essentially has no fame anymore.

So what happened? The short answer is that what happened to him is what will happen to every other poet now breathing, and of so few and such unpredictable exceptions that it nearly doesn’t matter. For a few decades Eberhart enjoyed an uncommon degree of renown, it’s true, but quite rapidly the natural order of things re-established itself, so he has been, and by large, forgotten. The truth is, no poet enjoys any comfort in life for poets, but practically the rule. To harbor ambitions for any other fate is almost by definition to be deluded, and, as the example of Eberhart nicely illustrates, honor, and attention during one’s life are no guarantee of posthumous reputation.

Of course, the ambition to write a great poem is not the same thing as a desire to win the Pulitzer Prize. We all know that, and we do it. Yet many a poet has imputes enormous amounts of time, energy, and precious hope seeking honors, reputation, prestigious publications, and all the rest of the things that we know, or should know, will evaporate rapidly even if we are lucky enough to achieve them in our lifetimes. Much more likely we won’t even reach a fraction of the renown of an Eberhart who, even at the peak of his career, was seldom spoken of in the same breath as a Years or Frost. And now isn’t spoken of at all.

In 1962, an unknown and unpublished young New England poet wrote to a prominent literary figure, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, informing him of her newfound degree of reputation. “Up to her time,” she said of her poems were “alive.” Higginson’s baffled condescension toward the unconventional poems of Emily Dickinson has made her a famous poet. But to her credit, he did know that she was a remarkable woman, even if he had no idea her fame as a poet would one day eclipse that of every other single American poet who was considered great in 1962. He become somewhat impressed and pen pal, someone she playfully referred to as her teacher. You and I might fancy that we would not be so obstinate as to miss the true genius of an Emily Dickinson, but I, we’d be wrong. Smarter people than us considered her a mere oddball writer for decades, until in the twentieth century her reputation slowly grew to be what it is today.

In one of their exchanges, Higginson suggested, no doubt kindly and diplomatically, that Dickinson’s work was not ready for publication. In her letter her disavowed any ambition of that outward kind, focusing entirely on the inward ambition that any serious poet must cultivate:

“I smile when you suggest that I delay “to publish,” that being foreign to my thought as firmament to the sun. If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her, if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the chase, and the approbation of my dog would forsake me then. My barefoot rank is better."

Some critics and biographers have assumed that Dickinson was being disingenuous, seeking advice from a leading literary light while pretending not to be interested in his help toward publication. I probably thought so, too, if I gave the matter any thought when starting out as a poet. But what if she meant what she wrote? What if, in fact, she really was inquiring of a well-known expert his opinion of the quality of her poems, without expectation of a “career” in the art or recognition? What if she was merely informing the inquirer, or wished to reach out to a possibly kindled soul? We know from biographical research, reinforced by everything Dickinson wrote, that she was the archetypal self-taught poet, preoccupied with the work itself, forming and sticking to a daily writing regimen—

What I am groping toward here, tentatively and with many patches of self-doubt and personal bewilderment, is a stance toward poetic vocation different from the more or less conventional ambitions that guided me through college, graduate school, and my early “career” as a publishing writer.

I have no advice to give or answers to the big questions. But I can offer some testimony from my own experience in this strange enterprise. In my writing life, as the years passed and it gradually became obvious that the prize committees were never going to give me a call, the major critics would not be gushing about my work, and I did not come on the cover of American Poetry Review, I reacted by gradually cutting back on my attempts at conventional publication and generally push myself forward in the maelstrom of Po-Biz. To be honest this was as much a matter of temperament and doth as principle, at least in the beginning. I have often felt like the world’s worst schmoozer and hustler, no doubt largely because it’s distasteful to me. On a given day I had to choose between promoting my career and promoting poetry, I more often chose the latter. Most days I focused on the work itself, forming and sticking to a daily writing regimen—

At the same time I also resolved to do more of what Dickinson had done, reaching out to like-minded souls in a variety of ways. Unlike Dickinson, I was fairly sociable about it, comfortable enough leaving my house to meet other poets. I went to writers’ conferences, became active in online discussion groups, and attended as many readings and open mics as I could. I participated in informal workshops both online and in person, wrote fan letters to poets I admired, did a bit of book reviewing and essay writing connected with other writers on Facebook, and so forth. I met more than a few fellow poets online, and maintained a friendly correspondence with a fair number of them. Few of these were new activities for me, of course; what was different was that more and more I put the energy and time I used to devote to submitting work and promoting myself into the writing that was my “barefoot” or grassroots action. I happily submitted my
it's not been a smooth road, I should add. Nor do I imagine I will ever achieve the perfect wittily blus of non-ambition. As Donald Hall once noted in an essay, "Nothing is learned once that does not need learning again"—nothing important, anyway, I believe. The old corrosive and envy-laden sense of ambition does appear in my soul on a regular basis, despite my best intentions. But I know what to do about it, at least. I send a poem I love to some friends. I attend an open mic and recite a poem by someone else. Every year I introduce my students to great poets of the past and cheer them in their own attempts to master the art. I swap new drafts with fellow poets over email. I send off poetry by the ounce to small and not-so-small poetry pubs and get responses, often with no attribution. ...
Shelves

Today, I put in shelves and barely thought of anything but books and compact discs, of space and symmetry and all the things I hadn’t read or listened to in years.

I still haven’t. I like to know they’re there, not just in memory, but in my hall and living room, like reunited teams posed for a photograph, in which each face will show up elsewhere in a different snap, a part of a collection, but itself if moved or lost. Rearrangement’s glib—posed for a photograph, in which each face not just in memory, but in my hall I still haven’t. I like to know they’re there, I hadn’t read or listened to in years.

of space and symmetry and all the things

One day we were down—this is true, I am not making this up for the story’s sake, or for pity’s sake—to our last potato. Standing in the kitchen, my mother held that spud up, and we all looked at it like Christ might have looked at those mealy leaves and fishes. How could a woman feed a family of five on one potato? We were sent out, three of us, to forage—for dandelion greens maybe, or to beg a lettuce head or a carrot grown by Mr. Dow down the street. My brother Earl, six years old then, came running back into the house waving a five-dollar bill over his head. He’d found it on the sidewalk. My mother made us all kneel down on the kitchen floor and thank God for the miracle.

Another day my baby brother Donny came up from the basement, covered with coal dust and cobwebs, his eyes shining. He put a glass button into my mother’s hand. I found a diamond, Mama, he said. We’d never have to be poor again.

Donny’s a grown man now, and rich. He still fixes his own cars, though he hates doing it. His wife says he doesn’t understand that he has money. And Earl can make a dollar go farther than anyone else I know.

Me? I admit I pinch pennies. Save string. Recycle. Scrimp. Then save some more. Look every gift horse in the mouth for resale possibilities. But also I see miracles lying on the sidewalk, jewels in glass.

—MARYBETH RUX-LARSEN, SOMERSET, MA

Memories of Cousin Stanley

My novelistic cousin Stanley died of MS, contracted late in life, leaving me with regrets, for we’d had a “somewhat competitive relationship” (so Harry his friend had summed it up the time we drove, all three: eighteen, out of Chicago to Canada). The revealing bit about me and Stanley comes from this trip, not from his visit with Joan his wife to us in England, he reading at length from his first, best novel: “The lock...the lock was in my hands!”

But that time, too, is part of the story, for when he’d finished, flushed, I gave him only a nod. “Got it,” I said. “The lock...the lock was in your hands.”

More than “somewhat competitive.”

I took him out through the rain that evening to tour the Cambridge Colleges; he had to see this stuff, I insisted. He might have preferred reading more of his novel.

Once, at a party in Cambridge, Mass., he asked how I’d liked his 5th and I said I’d wait for the paperback. Not nice. Not consingly.

Driving Wisconsin, Harry grew tired of our bickering, proposed a contest: we’d fight it out, the first exhausted from non-stop-talking the loser. He must have figured our babbble would keep him awake down the moonless highway. And so we talked, on and on, me and Stanley miles and miles. Who knows what we said. Words. Kindly Harry declared it a tie.

Later, afflicted, Stanley labored with canes, a wheelchair, before he died. I sent a sympathy letter to Joan, but truly we’d failed to love one another with canes, a wheelchair, before he died. As cousins should, as all of us should.

Said. What else? When my friend Kirk had need of a name for his new punk band I suggested “Cousin Stanley,” and so it was called. Stanley would have been pleased to lend his name to a punk garage band out of Meadville, PA. And in my own writings sometimes I’d name a character “Stanley,” give him a walk-on part. But mainly I wanted to tell how we yakked on that trip word after rapid meaningless word unlistening to each other down the miles of the dark Wisconsin night.

—BARRY SPECKS, SANTA BARBARA, CA

1957

Back in 1957 my major concern was my sex life, while in Tulsa, Oklahoma, they buried a time-capsule not to be opened till fifty years later, containing choice items including a new Chevy Belvedere with gasoline supplied in case that fuel might no longer be known in our world when they dug the car up in 2007, the Chevy having no need for fuel, destroyed by water seepage. That fall a Yankee rookie named Kubek twice hit homers, third game of the World Series, Kubek named Rookie of the Year, and lest we forget, on Oct. 4th the Soviets scared us by launching Sputnik, starting an overdive of strive that continues to this very day.

Albert Camus won the Nobel Prize, Liz Taylor exchanged one marriage for another; a brave little black girl and eight of her friends faced down bigots in Little Rock, and Mario A. Giannini died (inventor of the maraschino cherry).

I noted such matters in ’57, like everyone else opined, even marched, but really my prime concern was my sex life, should I be ashamed of that?—not Sputnik, Kubek, the Nobel prize, not Liz nor the Chevy Belvedere.

—BARRY SPECKS, SANTA BARBARA, CA
Circa 1969

My 1956 Mercury was not much of a car, Bought in Chico, California for $75 By a 15-year-old runaway, It took me down the coast "T'ill drowsiness led me to A closed gas station where My sleep was interrupted by A zealous county sheriff's deputy. Busted on weapons charges, lying My ass off, no one to tell them Who I really was, or that I was Only 15 and far from home. My Mercury faithfully waited the 15 days It took me to serve my sentence. For the knife, the chain, my smart mouth. It took me to serve my sentence

—John Lehman, Rockdale, WI

Old Address

My address book is the crossed out numbers of my life. Where my kids have lived. Old girl friends, places I worked where I needed to connect, and sometimes did. My parent's birth dates, along with others, are jotted in the back. They moved to Chicago in 1919. My mom with her mother and sisters, my father alone. I call their old telephone number and wait. I picture an ancient, dial-up phone — the woman who answers is younger. "My, my, now who can that be?" But I picture the phone number and wait. Where my kids have lived. Old girl friends, places I worked where I needed to connect, and sometimes did. My parent's birth dates, along with others, are jotted in the back. They moved to Chicago in 1919. My mom with her mother and sisters, my father alone. I call their old telephone number and wait. I picture an ancient, dial-up phone — the woman who answers is younger. "My, my, now who can that be?" But I picture the phone number and wait.

—Harlan Richards, Gordon, WI

Not Kansas

Move backwards, through the pane of glass, If the glass scratches or cuts you, it will be healed on the other side. None of this has happened yet. The split tomato drips its life's blood. Weeds thrive with wicked abandon. Wrinkled-faced apples rot sweetly. The potent herbs are dried and aged. After you have eaten all this, step up through the glass again. You have no home. There is nowhere to live except within your skin.

—Linda Back McKay, Minneapolis, MN

The Runaway

Strapped sublimely at the teat of God, bringing it out warm and whole, wet molecules of ecstatic precision— I swaddled emptily, sky-naked, beneath the shocked wood of the barn decked out in disrepair, where the threshing floor of my brains directed me to abandon my family and run off.

And the course of nations lumbers where it will, yet none of this concerns me in the least, who dirtied my ephemera with hay-dust, and woven blankets, for my piddled cry. All of these were the chalkboard visions to pound in secret on its useless board.

—David Lube, Milwaukee, WI

A Summer Evening Walk

I walk my grandpa’s dog in the middle of dormant Main Street, fluorescent lights glare out from a storefront, a stubborn orange-sky is stubbornly setting. Two cars sit parked on the heaving brick road—client and beautician, engulfed in the stern light, are framed by the window announcing, Linda’s Shear Impressions 402-687-2267. Wrapped in a black cape, Sandy meets Linda’s eyes in the mirror until a good piece of gossip prompts Sandy to shift her shoulders, turn her head, to look back and up as if the reflection hides some portion of the story. The dog tugs west away from the two ladies in the window, but know (because Linda cannot say no) we will see her late night show again this evening with another guest sitting in the chair, sharing from their life or their children’s lives or their neighbor’s.

I can only see August— rain, corn, heat. Stars have risen by the time the dog pulls back east under the streetlight’s orange glow. The sky now black, the First National sign flashes in red lights: 9:47 87° then does it again 9:48 87° and 9:49 87° and 9:50 86°.

A Mercey Grand Marquis glides past with its low tires humming on the street until it slows where the Main Street brick ends and becomes the shoulderless blacktop leading away from town. The car cracks, the steering wheel whines, then heads back up the street to park in front of Linda’s window. A question mark emerges slowly from the car as Linda opens the door, back straight and tall, followed by Sandy in the cape. The question mark navigates the curb with the help of an exclamation point and a billowing black cloud. All three figures wave and pause when the dog barks. I can only see August— rain, corn, heat. Stars have risen by the time the dog pulls back east under the streetlight’s orange glow. The sky now black, the First National sign flashes in red lights: 9:47 87° then does it again 9:48 87° and 9:49 87° and 9:50 86°.

—Casey Francis, Quincy, IL

Illinois Summer

Twilight fell and skinned its knee and Delphi brought it inside to the medicine cabinet and taped an antiseptic gauze on the wound and the blood turned the white gauze a wonderful pink tint with hints of blue-grey and peach.

—Kenneth P. Guiney, Albuquerque, NM
By the Numbers

Dear Tom,

You were already gone when I got there,
11/14/06,
Room 114,
I sat with you till 4:11 pm CST,
Central Shiva Time.

The same numbers
piling up,
some unexplained order
from the untangling
of your life,
second by second,
thread by thread.

Your number is up,
when it’s up,
1’s and 4’s
a chugging train,
rolling boxcars,
cat’s eyes.

The roll of the dice—
One is a die
Two is a dice
Four is a life—

—RICK MCMAHON, EUGENE, OR

Wire-To-Wire

You’d scan the text on yellow paper, the vital wire
that a boy from Western Union
delivered.
Uncle Vic
would promise a platinum Bulova
for graduation. Perhaps
there’d be a late acceptance
from the rare school
that didn’t think you stupid.
You’ve even kept the ones
you’d rather forget: 

He loved you STOP Fifty
years, and wires are rubberized.
These are the lines that bind
or dribble from breast pockets
to set the user twittering.
After your visiting son
Googles a virtual friend
you face him nose to nose,
“Robert.” The boy next to me,
Miss Groethe leans to each child,
scans each face intently.
We line up, march forward
to the front of the room.
We step to the left of the room.
Good-bye. Good-bye.
Bobby drops his pencil;
Miss Groethe calls our names:
“Bobby,” who has been Bobby all week,
scans each face intently.
“Good-bye, Robert. Good-bye, John.
Good-bye, Nina. Good-bye, Barbara.
Good-bye, Good-bye.”

Your number is up,
when it’s up,
1’s and 4’s
a chugging train,
rolling boxcars,
cat’s eyes.

—KENNETH P. GORMLEY, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

Good-bye, 1935

I sit straight, eyes ahead, hands folded,
waiting for somewhere else:
maybe out on the playground,
pushing the merry-go-round
around and around its slow circle.
Miss Groethe calls our names: 
“Robert.” The boy next to me,
who has been Bobby all week,
steps to the front of the room.
We line up, march forward
to the front of the room.
We step to the front of the room.
Good-bye. Good-bye.
Bobby drops his pencil;
Miss Groethe calls our names:
“Bobby,” who has been Bobby all week,
scans each face intently.
“Good-bye, Robert. Good-bye, John.
Good-bye, Nina. Good-bye, Barbara.
Good-bye, Good-bye.”

—RICHARD MEERMAN, MADISON, WI

Present Perfect

Edmund sprinkled the twenty-third psalm
on his eggs and hash browns
at the greasy spoon.
Whose front door resides
not ten feet from the bus stop.
He spreads Isaiah forty-three
on his toast,
and knows Matthew twenty-two
thirty-seven to thirty-nine
are encapsulated in the vitamins
he swallowes with his orange juice.

Edmund feels ready to face the world
now that his fortified breakfast
is completely consumed
and energizes his heart and body,
so he stands at the bus stop
newspaper under his arm,
briefcase in hand.

That night, after supper,
Edmund rereads
the Song of Solomon
in Lisa’s lithe fingers
and the kisses they share.

—HELEN PADWAY, MILWAUKEE, WI

Go Figure

The moon is out in half. Zero stars.
My headlight cover 75% of the wide road
until eight angle onto my street
and they spill 10% into the drain gullies
either side.
My garage door takes 30%
longer to rise on cold nights.
The mail box squeaks a loud 95% protest
as it is opened and I pull out 75% ads
and 25% bills which add up to a 100%
appointment. Dinner costs 10%
of my week’s budget but there is only 25%
of the week left so I am ok.
I am not a child safe
in a first grade classroom,
but . . . what?
Bobby drops his pencil;
Nina sniffs. We march out.
Dimly I understand that
the world has changed.
But what have I done?

—BARR CRAWFORD, HANCOCK, WI

Once Upon a Dime

A new eatery called La Croissant
opened up, the owner, a tall, dark Turk,
runs the place, coffee served
in cups on saucers, every hot refill
poured as though it’s his blood.

My wife took me there, a women’s
hang out, elegant ambiance, gossip
floating like dust motes— where I
wanted to say to my wife—tell me
is your old man out on bail yet?

His morning Happy Hour features
Dollar-a-Cup Coffee, nothing terrific
for geezers like me, who recall
when a dime bought coffee with
free refills and no added sales tax.

Forget this dollar-a-Cup cookie shop,
give me Gyros West, the din of early
blue-collar crowds, where coffee mugs
are always full, where you can relax
among friends with mud on their shoes.

I miss mornings with my old writing
pal, whose critiques began by asking,
what the hell is this story about, amidst
the wiggle-jiggle of tattooed waitresses,
and clinky clatter of heavy plates,
where kitchen aromas are a mix of
bacon and eggs, biscuits’n gravy,
wafting the air with greasy vapors,
orders shouted in Greek and Spanish,
yesterday’s stains on today’s aprons.

—JOHN L. CAMPBELL, BROOKFIELD, WI

A Father’s Regret

While we scuba dive on a coral reef
five miles out in the Gulf of Mexico,
a jelly fish, like a gigantic, unraveled
condom, attaches itself to my son’s
shaved head. Damn, I never got to do
shit like this with my dad.

—JOHN LEHMAN, ROCKDALE, WI
The Killers

The killers come and go. The victims (the alleged victims) blend together. Almost always black males either in or on the periphery of drug dealing.

I write my client’s name on the file in black marker, read the complaint, go to the jail, look over the police reports, try to get him out on bail, plea bargain, or go to trial. At sentencing, the victim’s family crying the same things over and over—He is missed. He was loved. He loved.

The killers come and go. So do the rapists, the armed robbers, and the burglars. But the child molesters. I remember them all. How they look into my eyes out of some dark animal terror; how the creepy fidgeting accompanies every lie; how the reverie of their terrible animal terror; how the creepy fidgeting accompanies every lie; how the reverie of their terrible animal terror;

I imagine an empty wash of tears, that hill shaped like hands in prayer. Life is shape and touch a mere solid slope for grief to lean into. Nana says we’re crazy, no Carmen lives here and that’s no way to bury the dead, yet tells us not to cut Mr. Hahn’s rhubarb since he sprinkled the patch with his Mrs. Nana feeds us veggies born of compost and crap but won’t dare taste the neighbor, believes more in a living God in heaven than a dead Carmen in her own backyard. Look, I say, but she won’t, ever. Not even when I threaten to dig, not when I lash out that even Jesus un earthed himself as proof. Instead, she says enough. It’s getting dark, and it’s my turn to tend the garden.

—Thomas J. Erickson, Milwaukee, WI

No One Ever Asked Me…

... a decorated Vietnam vet, if I killed anyone. Not my son, my dad, my grandkids nor my wife. My answer is Steven Craven, an Army sergeant. Of an almost three-hundred battalion men, he’s the one who didn’t return. I had asked for volunteers to build a school. His rifle rested against a tree when he was shot. But you are not responsible for that, you might object. And I’d look you in the eye and say, Oh yes we are.

—John Lehman, Rockdale, WI

Wondering After Carmen

Past the ball field behind Nana’s, on the hill by the airport fence, we find a mini shrine: a rock painted Carmen, a photo of an old woman holding a hairless dog. Dead dog?

Dead mom? A Happy Mother’s Day balloon, nearly dead, creeps us out cold so we run like the devil is chasing us, last one home a dead Chihuahua.

Porch safe, we wonder Carmen’s death. Foul ball? Low plane? Maybe vanished.

I imagine an empty wash of tears, that hill a mere solid slope for grief to lean into. Nana says we’re crazy, no Carmen lives here and that’s no way to bury the dead, yet tells us not to cut Mr. Hahn’s rhubarb since he sprinkled the patch with his Mrs. This is how I learn the truth about faith: Nana feeds us veggies born of compost and crap but won’t dare taste the neighbor, believes more in a living God in heaven than a dead Carmen in her own backyard. Look, I say, but she won’t, ever. Not even when I threaten to dig, not when I lash out that even Jesus un earthed himself as proof. Instead, she says enough. It’s getting dark, and it’s my turn to tend the garden.

—Cathryn Coffell, Appleton, WI

On the Meaning Of

This is what life does. It wakes you in the morning before the morning glories open and gives you the sound of your mother’s voice. Life spreads itself across the ceiling to make you think you are penned in, but that is just another gift. Life takes what you thought you couldn’t live without and gives you a heroin instead. Or a dragonfly, stitching its way through the milkweed. Life contains all of your tears in a vessel shaped like hands in prayer. Life is shape and touch and sound and bone. It whispers and sings and touches you all over and you almost never feel it. You push your way from phase to phase. You are a horse with blinders. You think you are pulling forward but you are being driven. While going about your solitary life, one hool in front of the other, real life is turning the stars, like mirrors, in your direction.

—Linda Back McKay, Minneapolis, MN

Finding a Poem

A cat has jumped up on my chair, is there a verse there? I have seen this same cat everyday for eight years, we have grown a bit older together and all the poems residing in his night-dark fur have been spoken. He’ll have to wait today.

The other one lies sleeping and there is nothing new about a sleeping cat, is there? His tail curls around his body like a snake; his eyes are closed but his ears are alert waiting for a breath of excitement or perhaps a poem of his own, but he is probably sick of writing about his people and how they sit for hours in front of a computer staring at him and tapping away expectantly.

—Jackie Langefors, Verona, WI

Stonecarver

He fancies himself a brother to pirates and corsairs. And he sits in the village tavern sporting a beret he bought on a drunken spree: In Madison, the week he sold his tombstone works. Now, he sits and smokes and coughs and swears.

He says he does not know what to make of young people like me. All I know is that he is no advertisement for stone carving. You don’t spend years plowing stone plains with a chisel without getting stone farmer’s lung. Talk about beholding fear in a handful of dust.

—John Sime, Readstown, WI

Accomplice

I’m the nondescript one in the heavy coat and the black mood, pockets emptied of keys and coins, water bottle confiscated.

I’m listening to the announcements, one delay after another. It’s the way we fly now, drained and edgy, as if we hadn’t slept for a week.

At security, an armed guard removes a Makita drill from someone’s duffel, waves it like a weapon—which perhaps it is—and scans the rest of us, all implicated. We shrink into our suddenly insufficient skins, avert our eyes and study our guilty hands.

I’m earbudded, buzzed with caffeine and fluorescence, the one in the last row, considering varieties of weather, whether the flight will go, whether there’s a code word, some inside information I should know.

—Antonia Clark, Windsor, VT

visit VW Online for audio by this author

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So many planets have to line up for a poet to reach full potential. Revision is one of them. Not Jupiter, but maybe Mercury. You wouldn’t write poetics if you didn’t like playing with words. So why not develop that playfulness further…via revision?

1. Last Line First / Best Line First

Got a lachkuster poem? Take the last line (or the best line) and throw out everything else. Start over with that one line as the opening of a whole new poem. Use the process to reboot your brain.

2. Saving What Works

Often more than just one line needs to be extracted and expanded on. Here’s a failed Abecedarium of mine that contained an idea worth salvaging. The germ of a separate poem is in boldface.

Where Light Goes

Zombie Christ rises like a B movie. Yet be not deceived. None return from death. X is the true cross of man, marks the spot where light goes, leaving images behind.

Vivid an instant. Gone but permanent. Zombie Christ rises like a B movie.

3. Follow/Through

Sometimes I get off to a good start… and just stop. “Artistic Heaven” was originally five lines.

Heathen Heaven

There’s an empty church in heaven, a spray of stars I don’t believe in. I walk for hours staring at my feet. Dark houses crowd the street like echoes waiting for a sound. Murdery my shoes lead me to the lobby, then an elevator, finally a pokey office house. Floor-to-ceiling windows sing with exclamation points of light! No one’s sitting at the desk big as four pool tables.

Veins of pink and yellow sepulchre in the marble. I see a vacancy and fill it. The universe runs itself. A black chrysanthemeum closes continuously, deflowering creation at the end of time.

4. Start A Salvage Yard

Start a salvage yard of images, and lines saved from broken poems. Some lines of mine have taken years to find their final resting place. Here’s an extreme example, composed mostly of old lines, which I’ve boldfaced.

like echoes waiting for a sound. Murdery my shoes lead me to the lobby, then an elevator, finally a pokey office house. Floor-to-ceiling windows sing with exclamation points of light! No one’s sitting at the desk big as four pool tables.

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5. Haiku Titles

For years my titles sucked. Some magically. Most often they were basically content, ie: label things: Sailor on a Greyhound, Communion, Country Garage. You get the picture.

When I get through with the idea.

I like to develop the way it wanted to, and not just the subject line. I wrote Sometimes I Don’t Inhere, Still I Smell God.

A few of my critique group members said they liked the subject line a lot better than the title. So I used it. Since I didn’t think the subject line “counted” or mattered, I had allowed myself to be more creative with it. I kept doing this… and then began incorporating a lesson I’d learned from writing haiku. In haiku you pair two images that aren’t obviously connected, but that have a kind of subconscious resonance between them, like the invisible sparks between magnets. I began writing titles that didn’t have a literal connection to their poems, but that somehow complemented them. Here’s one example:

Like a Raspberry Seed Between My Teeth

Across the road a white screen door slaps. Redwing blackbirds scatter. Cattails’ slow explosions complemented them. Here’s one example:

no one comes back from the dead except in zombie movies.

The crow in my throat says goodbye— black boomerang that gave me gravity.

I say ab, tasting smoke as it goes. I’d rather say rezebra sport unicorn horns orange as traffic cones

but halos dissolve here like wintergreen Life Savers.

In my brain’s basement, a reference librarian sits at a gray, metal, government desk. When I’m writing, she hands me whatever old image or line I need, when I need it. It’s a blessing in this line of work, to be sure. Often these phrases are years (or decades) old, but never found a poem worthy of them.

But if memory isn’t that helpful, keep these gems in a folder, a journal, or even just save all the various drafts of your poems, combing through them periodically for new ways of approaching the ideas / material. These can also be the seeds for future poems.

6. Leftover Lines

Sometimes a line you’ve cut from an earlier draft makes an interesting title. That’s what I did in this one:

steering from the passenger Side

Somewhere near the county line my piece of shit Dodge dies. The sun melts my jeans and black t-shirt like biodegradable trash bags. A mile later, my cock drops off. A crowd maps it, rumbling up like a birthday balloon or a shingle torn off hell’s roof in a windstorm.

Drinking With Your Ghost After The Funeral

Sitting in a pickup in the middle of a field, the engine ticking down to nothing, windows filled with rows of corn sticking into shadow, I drink until you’re sitting next to me through what you’re real at the cemetery, what was left of you after the accident concealed by bronze and brown and withered and miraculously healed in everybody’s memory.

Drinking With Your Ghost After The Funeral

Where Light Goes

This revision habit flow better within the constraints of whatever form I was working in. This revision habit carried over to my free verse and improved my poems. It tightened the writing, resulting in riper musicality. These days my poems are forms and half are written in free verse. I’ve also gone back and revised many older poems, some written several years ago.

On average I spend 10-40 hours on a poem, 2-3 hours each morning. First drafts are usually easy, flowing out in an hour or two. With the second draft, the poem’s 90% done. The majority of time for me is spent fine tuning drafts #3 on, getting that last 10% of the poem as perfect as possible.

I’ll often return to a poem months later. Sometimes years go by between revisions (or versions), as with Drinking With Your Ghost…

Drinking With Your Ghost After The Funeral

Sitting in a pickup in the middle of a field, the engine ticking down to nothing, windows filled with rows of corn sticking into shadow, I drink until you’re sitting next to me through what you’re real at the cemetery, what was left of you after the accident concealed by bronze and brown and withered and miraculously healed in everybody’s memory.

Whiskey lurches back and forth between us in the muddy light until the bottle’s dry and dark as that smoked glass we used to watch eclipses through, though tonight there’s just a wobbly moon and a few raccoons stealing corn like no one’s there.

The sun melts my jeans and black t-shirt like biodegradable trash bags. A mile later, my cock drops off. A crowd maps it, rumbling up like a birthday balloon or a shingle torn off hell’s roof in a windstorm.

Drinking With Your Ghost After The Funeral

Sometimes it’s what we’re not that matters most.

(quoted in Verse Wisconsin)

7. My Road To Revision

Until five years ago I only wrote free verse, revising very little. Then I started working in forms, and revising more, getting the poem to flow better within the constraints of whatever form I was working in. This revision habit
**AMIT MAJMUDAR**

**THE PRICKLYPEAR GRIMOIRE**

The hamlet, a fish possessing both Male and Female organs of generation, knows the act of Union from both perspectives, like the Greek image, Tiresias (though he was first male, then female, then male again, never both simultaneously). This is the rare, sexual wisdom of the androgynous Archmage (whom some call Jesus, and others, Maddalenus) transcending the mere sexual knowledge which is the Seducer’s, that is, Satan’s. The true Magus, like the indecisive hamlet, opts for both, his eyes his oracles. The fertility of self-love is infinite; it is always in the mood.

Commentary on the Second Table, or the Table of the Variables:

The hamlet, a fish possessing both Male and Female organs of generation, knows the act of Union from both perspectives, like the Greek image, Tiresias (though he was first male, then female, then male again, never both simultaneously). This is the rare, sexual wisdom of the androgynous Archmage (whom some call Jesus, and others, Maddalenus) transcending the mere sexual knowledge which is the Seducer’s, that is, Satan’s. The true Magus, like the indecisive hamlet, opts for both, his eyes his oracles. The fertility of self-love is infinite; it is always in the mood.

**Sigil 2: The x and y Axes**

Here is the highest Sigil, that commands Demonic spirits like so many hands, The Leaf that’s green at the same time it’s gold, As hard to grow as it is to hold. Temptation, figured as the Sbeginning The words for Simper, Summer, Simmer, Sinning, Then and the parallels that sever It in seven bits.

**Sigil 3: The septapartite serpent**

Lucky number
Prime like 3, but Not the holy, not in heaven—
Mater dolorosa? Dollarous dollar—
The higher the priest, the whiter the collar.

**Commentary on the First Table, or the Table of the Desyssixboucnucleolcde**

From the *al-Qur’an*, and the various traditions surrounding the Prophet Mahomet, the true *Magus* learns that the making of images is forbidden, or *haraam*. The mind that multiplies reality does so by feeding on Thought, as reflected back to it in Perception (which is reality without Thought); and by doing so feeds, as it were, upon a body without soul, as the *sawarab* thrives on the corse of *Pharaoh*. Just so the *cicada* will clack its timbrels, but the sound is out of proportion to the Insect making it. The attempt to turn language into music is to shuck words of timbrels, but the sound is out of proportion to the Insect making it thrives on the corse of so feeds, as it were, upon a body without soul, as the *sawarab* thrives on the corse of *Pharaoh*. Just so the *cicada* will clack its timbrels, but the sound is out of proportion to the Insect making it. The attempt to turn language into music is to shuck words of timbrels, but the sound is out of proportion to the Insect making it.

**Graph a grid**

Two straight lines, Level and Upright, The x and y, the Breadth and Height, The Collarbones athwart the Spine, Rafterers of slumber, pillar of pine: Before they made the Crucifix, these Four right angles formed two Axes; Four nineties, when the math was squared, Equipped one Intelligible Sphere.

When Xenophontos weds Yourcenar To music yoking the effects Of Xylophones and Yodelers, Then his XY and her XX Shall yes and more and yes and yes And with two letters spell all texts.

Graph a grid

One for me, Abel, Cain, Cain.
Two intents, Vulpine y, Verte s.

Draw a grid

4 x 4.

*x* and *y* Axes

Cross the top, down the left, From old Rome’s a, a, alphabets.

**Graph a grid**

One for me, Abel, Cain, Cain.
Two intents, Vulpine y, Verte s.

From the *al-Qur’an*, and the various traditions surrounding the Prophet Mahomet, the true *Magus* learns that the making of images is forbidden, or *haraam*. The mind that multiplies reality does so by feeding on Thought, as reflected back to it in Perception (which is reality without Thought); and by doing so feeds, as it were, upon a body without soul, as the *sawarab* thrives on the corse of *Pharaoh*. Just so the *cicada* will clack its timbrels, but the sound is out of proportion to the Insect making it. The attempt to turn language into music is to shuck words of timbrels, but the sound is out of proportion to the Insect making it.
Three Card Monte

1. Poet as Dealer

Ménage-a-card is what I play post poetry – words (then hands) will find the lady, leave their mark

in clever dedications. I’ll mark her book with scotch rings, stretch the play from bar to bed. Which one? My hands

first brush black’s wrist, and then my hands run zig zag down red’s back. I play the poems, read my queens and mark –

I mark to win, or play more hands.

2. Queen of Hearts

Devoted to his art, his hands punch air with gestures, leave a mark that fades, won’t last beyond what’s played

for laughs or tears, seductions played to raise the stakes. He slides his hands around my waist in jest, a mark
to make me his. He thinks this mark is easy, weak for rhyme, that hands this fast get everything but played,
yet played he is. My hands mark red.

3. Queen of Spades

It’s poetry that leaves the mark, not him – the words, the beat, the play of rhyme. I want the flaming hand,
the muse divine and not the hand that fascinates me when he’s hovering over my thigh. No mark he makes on me takes flight. No play that vows he’ll read my work or play the go-between will make me mark his bed. This queen unmans the hand, a hand in play without a mark.

—MARTTHEU RUS-LARSEN, SOMERSET, MA

Selected Animal Cracker Stories

1. Congress votes on the upper class baggy pants interviews dyed blonde during a four hundred dollar haircut green beans farm bill. And before you can whistle Dixie Chicks a seeing eye dog serves in three different wars then retires in a hula skirt.

2. A brothel riding in the back of a van spots Girl Scout cookies on an oil rig of rocket-propelled grenades fired into the toilet stall where a senator caught a line drive ball playing against her sister Serena in the US tennis shoes, airborne with the no-smoking sign on.

3. The unidentified man used only barbed wire to cut an identity card out of crowds of young Iraqis with landmines blooming in Baghdad. Later, the mugger runs through the park in her car under a streetlight swatting asphyxia on a skateboard speeding downhill in the pouring rain.

4. Or in the mind of magnolias as neighbors talk over a fence of boundless AK-47s to capitulate. Voluminous lips. This interconnection of single lawn mowers, O swinging suburbia, with a post office in Safeway, wearing flip-flop Jacuzzi, grows in my organic garden.

—MAURICE OLIVER, PORTLAND, OR

Shuffling Through The Evening News

Dinner time kerosene heart burn of fluids in the swine dish curled as if it were a ram’s head of sweetbreads cork opener wine glass from five and dime or a fetus-fired napkin holder with lim in a pocket book of time based on the hierarchy of supply line border patrols of an incessuous nature a sisterhood of road rage stuffed in a dumpster smells like old gym shoes now fast forward to a truncheon interviewing the windsurfer about higher tuition or poppy fields of the open-minded with the exception always being dried when he sees women sucking in public.

—MAURICE OLIVER, PORTLAND, OR

Confession

I haven’t been since eighth grade.
In high school once,
I followed a girl
into the girl’s lavatory.
The girl’s name was Caroline.
My brother once had a Golden Retriever;
I liked that dog more
than most people I know.
I never liked The Canterbury Tales.

I think that French fries
are a vegetable and country is the Special Olympics

of music. I have a short
attention span. I hold grudges,
and have more regrets
than you could shake a stick at.
I repeat myself. My French
is nowhere near as fluent
as when I lived in France
27 years ago. I like to play with matches.
I’m usually the only person
in the room who thinks I’m funny.
I couldn’t tell you
whether I have life insurance.

I prefer my hammock
to work or church.
I go to the movies by myself
and I love it.

—RICHARD HEDDERMAN, WAUKATOSA, WI

Her marching orders

The soft incessant hum
of the refrigerator
was playing in her head
all afternoon, until
finally she opened
the back door,
grabbing her pocketbook,
and walked out
of the kitchen,
leaving the door open;
she didn’t look back
on the piles of dishes
stacked up in the sink
or that she had left
the water running.
she just turned
the corner of the house
and walked out
to the street;
the never ending
humming still ringing
in her head
down to her heart;
she walked
down the block,
and walked out
the corner of the house
she just turned
the water running,
or that she had left
stacked up in the sink
on the piles of dishes

—THOMAS J. ERIKSON, MILWAUKEE, WI

Momentum

I.

On the Friday night we did not go
to San Francisco I went to a poetry
reading and you were in the hospital
because you weren’t you.

You asked me to bring you back
a present so I wrote you a poem
about not going to San Francisco
while you stayed in your room
and read Anna Karenina.

On Saturday night, I played cribbage
at the bar with the old-timers. You
made popcorn and tried to get
the other patients to dance.

On Sunday, you washed your hair
and waited for me to come so
we could talk.

II.

The mums—the ones you got
from your dad when you were
in the hospital in April—
are opening again.

It’s too late, though.
The freeze is coming tonight
and by tomorrow their yellow lids
will be permanently peeking out.

At the grass turning brown
the wilted stalks falling
the flitting of the sparrows.

—THOMAS J. ERIKSON, MILWAUKEE, WI
The Average Couple

I no longer know what is true and what is untrue.
The lies fly back and forth. Our tongues become us.
And what do I see in the mirror but the man who said,
“As it is now it will always be.”
And you must have the same delusions.
The glass gives back what you want to believe.

But we’ve been at this a lifetime.
How many times did we meet by the bandstand?
A thousand, maybe ten.

And what about those walks through the park?
Even my solitary strolls include you now.
The first lie was who else would have me.
Maybe that was the first truth as well.

But isn’t life built on lies.
It’s the glue that holds the monotony together.
Let candor have its way
and the whole thing could collapse into hatred.
Well, indifference anyway.

And yet, we do have a lovely house.
We’ve been convinced since the day we bought it.
And two cars that are, according to the advertisement, better than every other car.
There’s even a kid on the way.

Sleep Cycle

Dark thoughts tumble.
A laundry list of niggles, doubts and regrets.
Throw in a sneaker to balance the load and then it’s thump & thud all night long.

Not Sleep

The nights I scream I have no dreams.
Wake early. Tired.
The nights I dream I dread to wake
Wake early. Tired.
The nights I scream I have no dreams.

Arabella’s Birthday

At the piano, scrunching her pecan toes
in their little boats of shoes,
she presses the compliant pedal, allowing the vibrations
to linger longer in the wood and in the air—the case of mahogany, the soundboard
of tight-grained space.

Lately, it is the scent of cedar and the resonance
of brass-wound strings
that lift her spirit, grant momentary wings
vanishing as the scent dissipates or sound dies.

In the rocking chair, she sharpens pencils
with a little sharpener made of brass.
The cedar shavings curl on her fingers
she saves in a muslin sack.

For her birthday, there was a frosted, candied cake,
a little choir of flames on spiraling sticks,
her name in florid, sugar-ice script,
frosting flowers frozen forever on the verge.

They sang, she wished, she blew,
extinguishing the flickering motes of mystery.

They ate the wedges of cake, disemboweling it
slice by slice,
the angle of emptiness left by the vanishing cake
widening like clock hands flying farther apart.

People walked wineglasses around the house,
sat on the back deck where torches spewed
citronella smoke,
sprout into trees.

She leaves the house, walks up the hill,
sits on the bottom stair, curls her cashew toes,
and glides along the hall.

Arabella slides into her shoes—little canvas canoes—
to day that tends to consume
in their little boats of shoes,
what they’d one day do.

And wombs don’t lie.
For her birthday, there was a frosted, candled cake,
she saves in a muslin sack.

The cedar shavings that curl on her fingers
with a little sharpener made of brass.

The cedar shavings that curl on her fingers
indeed. What do I see in the mirror but the man who said,
Also, what would have he.

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People walked wineglasses around the house,
sat on the back deck where torches spewed
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She leaves the house, walks up the hill,
sits beneath the gingko tree—
her body an assemblage of things that might one day
sprout into trees.

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Ailings

Sore - Uncle Dom dropping in, a little short this month.
Abscess - Dom back, still as charming. Just a little more, Mary?
Blood poisoning - Dom skippedy-do; your wallet’s twenties too.

Ache - your husband, lounge chair lumpen specimen, setting new records for TV catatonia.
Throb - Melanie, next cubicle over, everyone’s therapist phone drone. I’m here for you. Blah, blah, blah.
Spasm - your sister, family reunion, 80 decibels: You hate me, you always did!

Ulcer - the town’s only factory gone, its sludge pool а tourist attraction.
Amputation - Main Street stores lopped away, one by one.
Paralysis - your job gone, your house in foreclosure; you, its pillar, in its shadowed center.

—RICHARD SWANSON, MADISON, WI

Waiting

“I wouldn’t call it a time bomb,” he says.
I would.
I kick him in the foot.
The cancer on my kidney, my only kidney, is inside me, not him.
This young surgeon looks 18, must be 30, 35.
He has the power to decide.
I have to wait.
Four months, since June.
I’m not a whiner. I don’t have panic attacks or headaches.

—ESTER PUDLO, MONTGOMERY, AL & FITCHBURG, WI

American Idol

Other echoes
inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?
—Eliot, “Burnt Norton”

Far from the icy air of Plato’s forms they float like lesser gods, fluid, ephemeral through this, our world of vested screes, each celebrity du jour voted in then voted off—

—As if it’s a show, reality, The Swan, Hell’s Kitchen, Project Runway, another stab at the mappa mundi, expansion westward, atomic trail—

Here’s the passkey I need to get connected, the tunes loaded, the hours to go. This is how I know I’m American, no dizzy drive through mindfields; no hot pursuit by angered kings—

Here’s trying to keep my image up, stylist at work while I track a hundred channels.
Here’s Posh & Becks, our latest stylist at work while I track a hundred channels.

With a knockout figure like mine, the stylist says, angling for a better tip, I, too, could sport a posh bob, I could go that blonde.

—JANE SATTERFIELD, BALTIMORE, MD

Formula One Indianapolis

This is road racing where they changed the Indy 500 oval—not just muscle cars roaring round and round, but made into this tricky track, curtly chicane.

The announcer over rock ’n roll at this “citadel of speed” pumps the crowd, some waving 25-ounce Foster’s cups, concession stands and giant signs everywhere.

Fans wave Ferrari flags.

On the tightest curves camera buffs crowd the woven fence.

Beer and brats, lucky cool May day.

Giant screens at strategic spots preview the drivers the cars from Spain, Germany, Italy, India, Canada, none American yet but plenty of Yanks in the stands, nations united for speed!

Here they come nineteen thousand five hundred rpm million dollar engines’ mosquito whine and million dollar tires.

When drivers let up on the gas backfiring like wartime you can’t hear yourself think or even feel yourself tingling just the cars!

The crowd ecstatic at last for this they flew oceans fought snarls of traffic walked miles to this tightly controlled and safe violence, such innocence, nations united in the mystique of speed and skill 220 miles an hour where are we speeding the earth 67,668 miles an hour around the sun the sun 44,712 miles an hour around the galaxy the further the galaxies are the faster they move apart the farthest quasar 15 billion light-years away any galaxy with a redshift greater than 1.4 is moving away from us faster than the speed of light where is it going where are we going on this lucky cool June day?

Slowly after every race they vacuum the old brickyard blacktopped now.

—R. VIRCH ELLIS, CAMBRIDGE, WI

Verse Wisconsin

Verse Wisconsin.org
Something

When he said asparagus he meant perpendicular. When he said chair he meant singular. When he went crazy he took no one with him. When he came back from wherever he was he wasn’t happy with whomever it was he returned with. Not that he didn’t recognize who it was more he wasn’t in the mood. For mood he meant something else and for something else he meant to say Can you give me directions to the nearest grocery store? When he said grocery store he meant The Statue of Liberty. When he said statue he meant whomever.

Whenever he said tree he meant tree and whenever he said water he meant water. When he said spring he meant almost here. When he said sky he did not know what he meant so he stood there for hours in the side yard confusing the roof of his garage with the neighbor’s chimney nearby. When he thought nearby he wanted to mean sky but really it didn’t. Instead it meant now.

Once in the middle of the night in the middle of a dream while he slept in the middle of the bed he remembered the word morning. When he woke he said morning but really he meant tomorrow. And when tomorrow came he said nothing. Of course he meant something but nothing very specific.

—CX Dillhunt, MADISON, WI

My Fault

The sun was hot, the wind calm. I wanted a few minutes of quiet conversation with the friends who had joined us on the sailboat while our kids explored the island of Poros. We knew about the medemene, how the wind whips up most summer afternoons in the Aegean, but it hadn’t happened to us. So I left the dock lines on deck to be coded later, after we had rested awhile. Suddenly, the foresail filled and split. In our rush to get it down, someone kicked a line overboard. The stiff main would not go up. The propeller gaggled on the line. There we were in the midst of a fullblown medemene with no power, headed straight to a rocky shore. Never used a sea anchor but soon learned to mount it and steer the boat before the wind at a headlong pace into the harbor we had left. Anchor—stopped in thirty feet. Over the side to cut the line. The prop worked, thank the gods, and she motored sheepishly to shore. That evening, taking turns into the gap between the seat and the back pointing upward along the massive entrance doors, wood clamps holding this ready-made saintly slide, the ropes attached above his shoulders where Massimo our Maestro Vetratista has carefully removed two pieces of glass into the harbor we had left. Anchor—stopped in thirty feet. Over the side to cut the line. The prop worked, thank the gods, and she motored sheepishly to shore. That evening, taking turns into the gap between the seat and the back pointing upward along the massive entrance doors, wood clamps holding this ready-made

—Estella Lauter, Fish Creek, WI

Writing with My Left Hand

I’m writing this with my left hand concentrating on every word, every letter there is no flow here—not grace to these words I am writing this with my left hand as my right hand twitches with anxiety the muscle use is different, the thoughts unfamiliar am I the person still writing or is this the voice of shadow-shell of self I used to be this person, spinning the world on a separate axis; my right hand needs to hold the page down, to stop the world from spinning away and falling off the desk I'm writing this with my left hand and it’s tiresome my left hand is stronger and has more scars the arthritis hurts more, the fingers more crooked for some reason my teeth are clenched as I’m writing this with my left hand my right hand is laughing at me—not so godly after all this is starting to cramp but I have more to say maybe it is the right hand who writes in shadow maybe this is who I was meant to be graceless, unrefined, sincere. It is difficult to write this way.

—James Ritter, Sheboygan, WI

Lake View

We often hear of the shimmering diamonds strewn across the surface of a grand body of water while the sharp white peaks of sailboats cut through the air. Usually overlooked is the intrusive angling of the breakfast water, dark and corroded by years of oversea, the tug and the barge trailing thick trains of smoke. We are familiar with the young lovers watching clouds floating by in each other’s eyes, asparagus the stars, its plush burgundy carpet interior and matching awnings outside anchor the seat of misplaced Midwestern wealth. On the southern outskirts, St. Peter’s posits a squat, square turret like a solid, righteous thumb, architectural embodiment of Luther’s hymn, a might fortress indeed.

—Christopher Austin, MilwaukEE, WI

They Lower San Biagio Blessing Children into My Arms

La chiesa di San Biagio, Gerfalco, Toscana, Italia

The small wooden church pew has been turned around below the high, single back window looking out onto the castle as bounds lean into the gap between the seat and the back pointing upward along the massive entrance doors, wood clamps holding this ready-made saintly slide, the ropes attached above his shoulders where Massimo our Maestro Vetratista has carefully removed two pieces of glass (one on the right and one on the left from the top corners of the middle section) where Cesare our blacksmith today agrees his iron frame is strong enough and I am told if anything goes wrong get out of the way save yourself after all Biagio is huge and heavy and (one on the right and one on the left from the top corners of the middle section) where Cesare our blacksmith today agrees his iron frame is strong enough and I am told if anything goes wrong get out of the way save yourself after all Biagio is huge and heavy and mostly glass and we can fix him put him back together, make a new one and if we are lucky he will mostly stay together even though some of his pieces are bulging, his lead is weak, and chunks of his glass have already fallen with the old cement during his careful five-hour removal from the hole in the wall above.

When the blacksmith and the master window maker ask if I am ready, I can feel the sun pouring through into the early afternoon, still-cold church, San Biagio hanging there waiting, and standing firm above them all, holding one of the ropes, is The Father of the Priest, who introduced himself that way, smiling.

I look up. Shield my eyes. Say, Yes, yes, I am.

—CX Dillhunt, MADISON, WI

Skyscape

Prague is called the city of a hundred towers, noted for the many spires and basilicas which do not a picture postcard perfect horizon.

Ancient streets golden enchantments Old World lace

Still—the capital of the crossroads of Europe, residence of mad monarchs, visited by musical geniuses, ma vlast to many more has nothing on his local terrain.

No alchemy here: tourists crowd medieval sites

To the north, St. Louis’ minaret steeples on the left and St. Patrick’s dome on the right the vertical arms of a massive goalpost that frames the moment, waits on a hasty Hail Mary play.

Midtown the Ramada shoots eight stories towards the stars, its plush burgundy carpet interior and matching awnings outside anchor the seat of misplaced Midwestern wealth. On the southern outskirts, St. Peter’s posits a squat, square turret like a solid, righteous thumb, architectural embodiment of Luther’s hymn, a might fortress indeed.

Look upward angel, home scene from the ground floor

—G. A. Scheinoga, Eden, WI
Do-It-Yourself Home Improvements

O’D is not always on.
HOT is not hot.
Often hot is not cold either, instead a low-rising steam, a gargle, an unsteady heilch of empty.

Tool belts perpetually loaded.
A hammer needed here, a screw loose there, dust tape in stacks where framed photos should be.

This was our house. A structure that always hoped for more, that knew money could buy love but wasn’t a price we’d pay.

So torn apart at times we’d have to stay away.
With a friend or at the Ramada, those neatly wrapped soap marvels, sheer order and tuck.

Back at that house, months with planks for floors, holes where beds should be, possessions in heaps, rooms dark.

As if someone was supposed to stay but wasn’t sure they should, as if someone else was trying to leave and not come back.

—Estella Lauter, Fish Creek, WI

Always Inside This House

Always inside this house another house longs to be built, gorgeously reconstructed from the raw island ruins of accidental fire and flawless faraway lives, its near-naked rooms exposing sheet rock & nails, sooty sails of wallpaper adrift over bunk beds, windows painted shut to loving beds of half-lice in the shore-yard, this house a reminder that all architecture is a sail unfurling the past, a deconstruction under fog, flamable and stark naked form anyone’s prelawn drowsy fire might spark and catch hold of, the word “Fire” a smoldered headline flaring up to bed down with us while we navigate nakedness together in this doused summerhouse rising daily out of its own reconstructed driftwood and ashly seaside, For Sale

signs dotting the cove, cypress sailing across The Narrows where sapphire tides carry Friendship Sloops and construct heavenly views as we swim in the beading of our current well-being, vacant as any house boarded up at each season’s close, nakedly

posed against pointed fins and half-naked ledges, huddled here, a scarred sailor’s shelter one winter, till smoke unhoused him, a kettle left on the stove flame, firing him from the haze of his drunken bed, transients ourselves trying to reconstruct

his frosthitten story, a construct of nightmare, hearas, and back naked confession, our usual rumpled bed-sheets mounit tonight, tant as sails rigged toward the future, our fiery visitor vanished from the house, the word “house” a mere construction, a blaze of letters like “naked” and “fire”, for the one who sailed asleap in our bed.

—Kate Sontag, Ripon, WI

The Land of Oz

Someone throw a brick at my head.
Be brave. Aim.
Pitch it with vigor. Then, please, have a heart.
Kneel down to my prostrate body there in the road leaking red on the gold, spreading life fluid on the weeds between the cracks of shiny. Take me home emerald country road, where ruby shoes are nailed to hide and thus diminish the results.

It’s none of those I’ll be taking to the future—just that sturdy bond between us as he bit and held, when letting go no longer was an option.

—Mary Mercer, Madison, WI

I even thought that choices all belonged to me including the one we never talk about— who gets to die, who lives forever.

I didn’t think a small white dog could catch me unaware, and yet the real surprise was that, when his furious teeth found my hand, he would not let go.

And my own barnacled hold on that great red chair did nothing to dissuade him. That’s what I’ll remember most—though his teeth sank to the knuckle, though the pain grew wild as fire, though my free hand waited in the wings to hide and thus diminish the results.

—Marilyn Windahl, Sheboygan Falls, WI

I thought that moving furniture was a good way to be useful, to belong.

—I thought there would be warning signs (like the hiss from my cat or the whine of a hinge).

I didn’t think a small white dog could catch me unaware, and yet the real surprise was that, when his furious teeth found my hand, he would not let go.

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—Mary Mercer, Madison, WI
Set Wing to Wind

A butterfly with a broken wing
clung silently to the lattice gate
like a flower on a broken stem
twirling in the summer wind.

It fanned the air as it satisfied
to leave seeds of life waiting, hidden
safely in the growth below among
blossoms in the fading summer sun.

—GERALD BERTSCH, SHEBOYGAN, WI

Without You

I’d sit in half a world, the rooms
beige instead of red, aqua, gold.
There’d be no music-track of dogs
howling or incessant vacuuming;
I’d re-read books, watch TV, drive
myself crazy. I’d miss your smile,
the song of your voice, the warmth
of your body next to mine, the way
you care for kids, dogs and cats.
Lake searching for my missing
glasses, without you I wouldn’t see
what I need in order to see.

—JOHN LEHMANN, ROCKDALE, WI

The Big Black Bird

in the green maple tree
sings a doleful tune,
sitting in the shade
on a sunny day.

—RICHARD MOYER, BERWYN, PA

The Blue Time

Twilight is the worst time.
Though you are gone ten years now,
the blue time still brings to mind
your favorite phrase, a child’s misspeak
that took your fancy 50 years ago
and became your mantra––
murmured to me with goodbyes, or
from the driver’s seat; on getting up
or presenting a gift; when you broke a cup
or interrupted my poem-making.
How I yearn to hear it now:
you, handing me a glass of sherry
while we settle to watch
the shadows gather
in this place you made for us––
I, hearing again, at this blue time,
you murmur “Whom loves you.”

—NANCY PETULLA, MERRILL, WI

Then and Now

For forty years he left his shoes in the dining room,
thought empty milk cartons went in the fridge,
would not read Mailer or Updike,
put Mahler on the turntable—loud,
and didn’t respond to poetry.

These days she shovels snow, cleans the chimney,
despairs over a new knock in the engine,
shoots predatory woodchucks herself,
and shivers under many blankets
night after chilly night.

—BARB CRANFORD, HANCOCK, WI

I Danced with Rose

Her kitchen is like an herb garden.
It smells of cut oregano and basil.
A small aged man sits at her table
eating fresh baked Italian bread.
She stands at the old white stove.

Her simple dress is apron wrapped.
Lightly her hand moves a long spoon
stirring thick red tomato sauce.
I touch her gently on the shoulder.
She smiles at me, and takes my hand.
I say, “Dance with me, Rose.”

We dance in her delicious kitchen.
I breathe in the richness of her spices
as we glide around the wooden table.
The old man looks up at us smiling.
Rose softly hums a little tune.

—NANCY PETULLA, MERRILL, WI

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—NANCY PETULLA, MERRILL, WI

Dance Me Down

I just don’t know
what to do
So dance me down
the avenue
Be soft and
be sweet
And be light
on your feet
Be kind and
take care
And remember
I’m there

—CLINT JENSEN, TOMAH, WI

Attune

The tuner deftly tapped -
The clear, translucent tone for me to form.
Then pressed against you, deep, and warm...

A quarter, no a half key round,
The sure and skillful task
To make us, once,
One pure, perfected sound.

—HENK JOURBERT, WHITEFISH BAY, WI

Grandma Shoes

My great grandma had one pair
of shoes, black leather.
Chunky heels, black laces. Serviceable,
the catalog labeled them.
They lasted forever
and her feet hurt.

The style was basically
unchanged for my grandma.
Black, serviceable,
go-with-everything shoes.
Her feet hurt.

My mother’s generation
caught a break.
Hundreds of styles, colors,
shapes. Leather softened
a bit, styled for comfort
and good looks.
But her feet hurt.

Now it’s my turn.
Age-appropriate shoes,
cushioned insides over thick
rubber soles, designed
for walking.
I can stand
a little longer, work
a little longer,
... did I ask for that?
I’m tired, and my feet hurt.

—JUDITH SEPSY, NEW BERLIN, WI
Denise Duhamel's most recent books of poetry include Kingfisher: Two and Two (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009 and 2005), Milo at Un Sentiment, a Limited Edition chapbook (Finishing Touch Editions, 2005), Queen for a Day (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001) and The Spinster Social Banner (Southern Illinois University Press, 1999). Her most recent book of nonfiction is A Half-Century of Collaborative Poetry (an anthology which Duhamel edited with Cathrynň Kress) from Soft Skull Press was published in 2006.

Born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, and educated at Emerson College (BFA) and University of Pittsburgh (MA and PhD), Duhamel has taught at Temple University and is by taking a class. I've done this often, from their laces on a tree branch. The fat boy huffed and puffed in copious tears. Duhamel was later thrown out away from the school. (as a spouse) perfectly poised and like Mary Poppins, a life that was\n
Proposal

I became a reverend online so that I could marry my niece and her fiancé. I didn't want marriage to be a traditional wedding. I became a reverend shortly after my divorce as the Universal Life Church doesn't care about a cleric's marital status and neither did my niece when I told her I was afraid to bring her bad luck she would have none of that and besides who better to officiate than someone who knew the pitfalls of relationships and I could keep an eye on the new couple and they could come to me and I'd know the warning signs I'd missed in our marriage. My niece believed in marriage and me regardless of my failures and her fiancé nodded and I told all this to my friend Bruce who was getting divorced himself at the beginning of one marriage (as a reverend) and at the end of another (as a spouse) perfectly poised to let him know it was all going to be OK. When he said I bet you can't wait to marry someone now that you can I said you must be kidding I'll never get married again and he said what I mean is I bet you can't wait to marry another couple.

From my 2004 interview, Duhamel's poetry has been described as "running, suggestive, and startling. Her poems speak with a wild irreverence. Not afraid of critics and naysayers, Duhamel experiments with form and subject, creating poetry that challenges the reader's notion of what poetry should be. She presents what poetry could be as she fully engages pop culture, the joys and horrors of it, while maintaining the ability to poke fun at our foibles—and make us think."

To experience a Duhamel poem is to take a wild ride down the harrowing side. Maybe she's gotten a bit crazy about money (Katherine), or more than terrifying as she recounts the tale of her parents' horrifying fall down an escalator in Atlantic City. Duhamel has something to say.

I had the chance to ask her a few questions via email recently.

Karla Huston

Denise Duhamel

D: The old joke is: What are the three main reasons to become a teacher? June, July, and August. I do think that teaching gives me more free writing time than other occupations. I also like teaching because I am constantly getting to talk about writing and books I love. I have been teaching (gulp) since 1985.

KH: Yes. I agree. Teaching gave me permission to talk about poetry and buy books which I did, both, in copious amounts. Do you think there is a different attitude toward writing between teaching a workshop versus teaching a regular class?

D: Students are much more vulnerable in a workshop situation.

KH: You've recently published a collaboration with Amy Lemmon called ABBA the Poems. I agree.

Versificators.

DD: I think I just loved teaching poetry. I'm trying to imagine you with a piece of chalk in your hand. So you are using poems to make you laugh, are you serious? Were you always funny? You say you made a fuss and wrapped his tooth in tissue. The teacher said his mother had taught him to waltz, which made me angry even though my story was totally untrue. I liked to color with the boy, who was like quiet was I. One day, after biting into a cracker, he spat out his front tooth which looked like a tiny ice cube on the palm of his finger. The teacher made a fuss and wrapped his tooth in tissue. During naptime, he slept on a plastic mat by my side. I stayed awake to watch him to give the tooth to me, but then I asked him to wake him, he said he was going to take it home to put under his pillow. I fumbled puzzle pieces and started to cry. Even then, my expectations were too high.

—Denise Duhamel, Hollywood, FL

Fourth Grade Boyfriend

Then, in fourth grade, the fattest boy in class wrote me a love letter that read, Welcome to this new school (I had just moved.) You are very pretty. I want to be your boyfriend. I didn't like his plaid shirt or his big melon head, so I crumpled up the note and ignored him. Then, in fourth grade, the fattest boy in class wrote me a love letter—Denise Duhamel, Hollywood, FL

Kindergarten Boyfriend

My kindergarten boyfriend said his mother had taught him to walk, so I told my mother about how he'd taught me, how we glided around the schoolyard during recess. How all the other kids dropped their balls and abandoned their jump ropes to watch us. I was afraid to bring her bad luck she would have none of that and besides who better to officiate than someone who knew the pitfalls of relationships and I could keep an eye on the new couple and they could come to me and I'd know the warning signs I'd missed in our marriage.

D: It's called my failures and her fiancé nodded and I told all this to my friend Bruce who was getting divorced himself at the beginning of one marriage (as a reverend) and at the end of another (as a spouse) perfectly poised to let him know it was all going to be OK. When he said I bet you can't wait to marry someone now that you can I said you must be kidding I'll never get married again and he said what I mean is I bet you can't wait to marry another couple.

—Denise Duhamel, Hollywood, FL

For more about Denise Duhamel, visit Verse Wisconsin's page here.
If my current project doesn’t work out, I can always write another poem about my failure.

DD: I think our project took over two years. The poems with additional constraints (like palindromes or all “o” sounding endings) took quite a while. We were slow and methodical actually. Amy was moreso methodical actually. Each teenager encounters a new generation and cultural norms, and the way they buck against those norms is fascinating to me. I love the bridge between childhood and adulthood.

KH: Interesting that some of these authors (Glatt, Koertge, Hernandez) are also poets. Do you think about writing fiction again?

DD: Yes! In Kaeling! I have a long poem called “Lucky Me” about some of the poems we wrote. That way the bear will think the creature that pissed in a circle of your urine--so eventually your tent is surrounded by must have a penis over eight feet off the ground.

DD: It is hard not to want everyone to think you’re doing great work. I just noticed I wrote that last sentence in the second person because it’s easier to do so. So when I say “you,” I mean “me.” You can’t be an artist and expect everyone to love your work and feel comfortable with it. You have to ruffle feathers. That’s part of the job description. So a bad review is better than no review at all.

KH: Speaking of publications that ruffle a feathers, if you believed the criticism, you must believe the praise. How hard is this to do?

DD: “DNA Tests Prove Poet Denise Duhamel is the Love Child of Frank O’Hara and Anne Sexton”.

KH: I know poets read other poems and reading is essential for lots of good reasons. But when you’re not reading other poets, do you think you’re doing great work. I just noticed I wrote that last sentence in the second person because it’s easier to do so. So when I say “you,” I mean “me.” You can’t be an artist and expect everyone to love your work and feel comfortable with it. You have to ruffle feathers. That’s part of the job description. So a bad review is better than no review at all.

KH: As the author of numerous books and chapbooks of poetry on your own and in collaboration, do you have a favorite?

DD: No favorites. It’s kind of like admitting you have a favorite kid.

KH: Once when I asked if you were bothered by critics’ sometimes-tough comments, you said, if you believed the criticism, you must believe the praise. How hard is this to do?

DD: It’s the meds. They say, “I wish I could lose weight.” “It’s the meds,” they say. “I wish you wouldn’t complain so much.”

KH: Speaking of publications that ruffle a feathers, if you believed the criticism, you must believe the praise. How hard is this to do?

DD: “DNA Tests Prove Poet Denise Duhamel is the Love Child of Frank O’Hara and Anne Sexton”.

Tongue Piercing

Mondays are the splinters you get licking an ice cream stick. Raising mice to remove last remnants of chocolate.

—HEINDA ANAKER, PORTAGE, WI

Youthful Beasts

One way to protect your camp from bears is to take the piss bottle you keep in the tent to piss in (so you don’t catch a chill going outside in below freezing temps) and empty it each day on trees nearby so eventually your tent is surrounded by a circle of your urine--but when you pour it on the trees pour it high as you can reach while walking in a circle around them so they’re circled with your piss scent from eight feet up to where their trunks go into the ground. Why? That way the bear will think the creature that pissed must have a penis over eight feet off the ground and depart post-haste thinking a monster lives there.

—ANTLER, MILWAUKEE, WI

Hearing Perfectly

“You’re missing all the high pitched, soft consonant sounds,” the audiologist told me.

“You mean women’s voices?”

“Well, yes I guess you could say that.”

Isn’t it odd, how men suffer this deafness?

We stare intently with sympathetic smiles watching their lips shower us in sentences half heard.

I’ve noticed that missing so much of what she tells me has deepened my affection for her.

Is this what they mean by making more out of less?

—CHARLES RIES, MILWAUKEE, WI

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Amidst the chaos of the city, she sought solace in the pages of her favorite book. The protagonist's journey mirrored her own, and she found comfort in the shared experiences. As she turned each page, the world around her seemed to fade away, and for a moment, she was transported to a different realm. It was a reminder of the power of literature to transform the mundane into something extraordinary.

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The Library of Congress, with its vast collection of books, stands as a testament to the enduring value of knowledge. It is a place where stories are preserved and shared, where ideas are exchanged, and where the written word continues to shape the course of humanity. As the sun sets and the night descends, the flickering light of the library's reading rooms invites readers to lose themselves in the pages of their chosen books, to explore the minds of others, and to expand their own horizons. It is a beacon of hope in a world that often seems to move too fast, reminding us of the importance of slowing down and immersing oneself in the world of words.
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Jessica Nelson North: Recalling the Reaches of Silence and Sound, by LaMoine MacLaughlin

Why Being an Obscure Poet Isn’t Such a Bad Life After All, plus Ten Ways of Knowing Your Poetic Sun is Setting, by Charles P. Ries

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Poetic Justice, A Review-Essay, by Wendy Vardaman

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Coming in November

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Interview with Kimberly Blaeser

Ann Fisher-Wirth on EcoPoetry

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Jeff Poniewasz on Ecoliterature

What Editors Want, by Charles P. Ries

Verse Wisconsin publishes poetry and serves the community of poets in Wisconsin and beyond. In fulfilling our mission we:

- showcase the excellence and diversity of poetry rooted in or related to Wisconsin
- connect Wisconsin’s poets to each other and to the larger literary world
- foster critical conversations about poetry
- build and invigorate the audience for poetry