POETRY BY
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FEATURES

INTERVIEW WITH BRENDA CÁRDENAS

ONE POET REMEMBERS JAMES HAZARD
BY JOHN WALSER

AT THE KITCHEN TABLE:
SHOSHAUNA SHY TALKS TO
DOUGLAS GOETSC

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$8
Summer, more than any other season, celebrates community. Framed by Memorial and Labor Days, studded with picnics, swimming pools, parks, bikes and barbecues, we gather with friends, neighbors, family, formally and informally, through the long days and lingering twilights.

As women poets, we both engage in multiple communities through our families, neighborhoods, churches, schools, and various volunteer and professional activities. As Poets Laureate of Madison, we engage more formally with the idea and fact of community than most poets do; poets as a breed have a reputation for being solitary figures. Popular imagination has us off, dreaming in our towers and attics, or wandering solo along drowsy rivers, lost in reveries.

But in fact, while writing a poem may be a solitary act, poets depend on community in multiple ways. We need readers, editors, and fellow writers. We need supportive friends and family members who are willing to provide us that attic space, that corner of time on a Saturday morning. We need bookstores, coffee houses, bars, libraries and other public places to congregate, meeting old friends and new alike. Poems are not written in a vacuum.

In this issue we celebrate community. The online issue features brief essays by poets describing their various communities and community-oriented projects. The poems in the online issue are excerpted from our own most recent partnership: the 2013 Wisconsin Poets’ Calendar, published by the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, an organization that exists primarily to create community among poets across the state. And we like to imagine that the poems, both online and in the print version of Verse Wisconsin, form their own sort of community of voices, which will thread its way through your summer days.

This will be our last summer issue. Beginning in 2013, we will publish Verse Wisconsin only twice each year, in the fall and spring. This change will allow us to pay some attention to our press, Cowfeather, not to mention enjoy a few more summer evenings with our families and friends. As much as we’re looking forward to publishing a few books each year, we will miss sending out this gift of verse and voice to you each midsummer. We hope that you find something here that you think is worth sharing with your community.
**Books Received January-April 2012**
*Publisher & author links available online*

- David Blackey, Odesia, 2011
- Jim Chapson, Scholia, Arlen House, 2011
- Fabu, *In Our Own Tongues*, University of Nairobi Press, 2011
- Barbara Gregorich, *Jack and Larry*, Philbar Books [available through Amazon], 2012
- Lowell Jaeger, *Wt*, Main Street Rag, 2010
- Mike Lane, *They Can Keep the Cinderblock*, Exot Books, 2012
- Margaret Rozga, *I haven’t been to Baghdad*, Bern Press, 2012
- Margo Taft Stever, *The Hudson Line*, Main Street Rag, 2012

**Books Reviewed & Noted Online**


Submission guidelines can be found at versewisconsin.org. Please send us a review copy of your recently published book or chapbook! Join us on Facebook for announcements & news.

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**Mission Statement**

*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

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**Books Received September-December 2011**
*Publisher & author links available online*

- Rose Mary Boehm, *Tangerines*, Black Leaf, 2011
- Bill Henderson (Ed.), *2012 Pushcart Prize XXXVI*, Best of the Small Presses, Pushcart Press, 2011
- Jacqueline Jones LeMon, *Last Seen* [Winner of the Felix Pollak Prize in Poetry], UW Press, 2011
- Mike Lane, *They Can Keep the Cinderblock*, Exot Books, 2012
- Margaret Rozga, *I haven’t been to Baghdad*, Bern Press, 2012
- Margo Taft Stever, *The Hudson Line*, Main Street Rag, 2012
- Rick McMonagle, Spencer Butte Meditations, Mountains and Rivers Press, 2011
- Pepe Oulahan, *It’s Just Business* [Music CD], A Bare Bones Production, 2011
- Alison Stone, *Wait* [Winner of the Brittingham Prize in Poetry], UW Press, 2011
- Matthew Stolte & The People of the WI Protest, *Don’t Call, WI Pro TestPo*, eMTeVisPub #6, 2011
- Elizabeth Tornes, *Snowbound*, 2011

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**Monday, July 2**

**Unexpected Shiny Things**

by Wisconsin Poet Laureate Bruce Dethlefsen

**Sixty-one**

monday I crossed over 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

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For more information, visit versewisconsin.org.
What Women Are Made Of

There are many kinds of open—Audre Lorde, Coal

We are all ventricles, spine, lungs, larynx, and gut. Clavicle and nape, what lies forked in an open palm; we are follicles and temples. We are ankles, arches, soles, spines. Pores and ribs, pelvis, and roots, and tongue. We are wishbone and gland and molar and lobe. We are hippocampus and exposed nerve and cornea. Arcola, pigment, melanin, and nails. Varicose. Cellulite. Divining rod. Sinew and tissue, saliva and silt. We are blood and salt, clay and aquifer. We are breath and flame and stratosphere. Palimpsest and bibelot and Cloisonné fine lines. Marigold, hydrangea, and dimple. Nightlight, satellite, and stubble. We are pinnacle, plummet, dark circles, and dark matter. A constellation of freckles and specters and miracles and lashes. Both bent and erect, we are all give and give back. We are volta and girder. Make an incision in our nectary and Painted Ladies sail forth, riding the back of a warm wind, plumed with love and things like love. Crack us down to the marrow, and you may find us full of cicada husks and sand-dollars and salted maple-taffy weary of welding together our daydreams. All sweet tea, razor blades, carbon, and patchwork quilts of Good God! and Lord Have Mercy! Our hands remember how to turn the earth before we do. Our intestinal fortitude? Cumulonimbus streaked with saffron light. Our foundation? Not in our limbs or hips; this comes first as an amen, a hallelujah, a suckling, swaddled psalm sung at the cosmos’ breast. You want to know what women are made of? Open me, open me, openopenopenopenopenopenopenwide and find out.

—Bianca Spriggs, Lexington, KY

visit VW Online for more work by this author

An Oshkosh Fourth of July

The family clan came over we put brats and burgers on the grill. The parade went right by my house with bands, flags and politicians. There were fireworks in the evening and really no need for the Norman Rockwell exhibit at the Paine.

—Len Tews, Oshkosh, WI

visit VW Online for more work by this author

Winslow Lane Neighbor

To the man who shot bottle rockets into my yard on the Saturday before the 4th of July:

Sir, I rounded the corner of my house in the soft cushion of the late garden night, bright stars overhead, trees framing yard from road, sky from ground, when the whoosh and fire of your bottle rocket shot through those trees and fell just yards from my feet. The sleepy calm of the closed-off watering and the perfume of the roses, the rhythmic sound of the few quiet bicyclists on the street beyond the garden, all yanked awake by that swift trajectory.

Neighbor, you aimed the rocket over your trees as if we, who live outside the boundaries of your small square, are your targets. Is your yard an empire? Are we your barbarians?

—Martha Kaplan, Madison, WI

Recently

Faith in my friends wavers. They seem more like strangers. Some seem unworthy of my trust. My enemies seem to multiply.

Recently I began to look old and see zombies in all of my mirrors. I have begun to wear a Kevlar vest and pack a magnum when visitors come.

Recently my therapist answered her cell phone before our session was finished. Then put on her coat and walked out. Her action must be an illusion, I thought.

Recently caring colleagues assured me that voices (I have been hearing) behind walls are not those of condemned souls. Or even of Big Foot.

In the future when I feel alone and confused, I will seek help from my friends by e-mail, cell phone, or land line. I may even travel to their homes for help.

I should go to my friends when pterodactyls, demons, pythons and hell-fire frighten me. Recently they asked me if I still saw such things. Recently I reassured them that I did.

—Jerry Hauser, Green Bay, WI

4th of July

He’s lighting the fireworks in an empty beer bottle. The fuse catches, he runs back to the house, back to us waiting to see which direction they’ll shoot. It’s a ritual, every year. The neighbors take their dog in. We tell him not to light them. He doesn’t listen. He’s shot his fire at the house, the yard, the tool shed and once or twice to the sky. This time it takes the bottle with it to the ground, breaks it open. Splashes a little fire and flips around like a fish on a rock where the river’s run dry. It’s the 4th of July.

—Isabel Sylvan, Hazlet, NJ
After the Disagreements

Clean your gutters
(even if you’re gutterless).
Climb the ladder (the (green) one in the garage) (way in the back) to a stagnant river of rain.
Reach into the (bone-cold) (are bones cold?) mass of nature’s knots (don’t wear gloves) (they won’t help (with seeds) at all) and unstop the freefall (funneled down to a spot of ground) where you will drop and pool within the pooling pool of pine needles and pine needles
acorns and oak leaves and whirligigs drowned and lazy beneath the thin iced skin of this tea of debris).
Litter your yard with what you should have raked away on last week’s tarp (And while you stand up there less angry now and high on the house nod to the flies and boxelder bugs who shingle your second story your bedroom and bath layering you warm during their stunned vigil in the late season sun go on while they watch over their already dead husks).

—Chuck Rybak, Oneida, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

The Healing Side of Glass

At the gym I dip and curl and press and, yes, occasionally catch my reflection in storefront glass when I pass.
Sometimes, though, when the glass absorbs the light just right, I see through myself to the other side where the naked mannequins stand, steel rods pushed up their ass, disjointed arms and legs awaiting physicians of fashion to heal their gestures of distress in dress of mood and mockery.
Do not, like Alice, I tell myself then, look too deeply into the glass. Turn, adjust your focus to new light on the street, others beside you—find their pace, walk with them, smile, nod, invite their gaze, make your gesture their balm, not their malaise.

—Robert Nordstrom, Mukwonago, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

Bridge Club

During the big war, women in our village formed a bridge club, there being no formal entertainment, unless you count Ladies Aid or the Coop Guild, and the school Christmas program at the town hall.

They took turns being hostess, and everyone dressed to "go out." Did their hair in pincurls and curlers, put on their best dresses, earrings, their good silk stockings, taking care to get the seams straight. Wore their high heels, applied lipstick. Sprayed perfume, did their nails.

Two tables were set up, the house slicked spick and span. Lunch served after cards was fancy, even with rationing. Shrimp salad, maybe, the toast cut in triangles, or chicken ala king in tiny pastry puffs. Desserts were edible art, frosted tarts, maraschino cherries, real whipped cream.

Every other Monday night we kids watched amazed as our ordinary mothers transformed themselves into ladies for bridge club.

—Peggy Trojan, Brule, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

The Collection

Across the street at the new hotel polished wingtips strut Art Deco carpeting, greeting fellow warriors with a raised cup of steaming brew. Gathering together in the corner booth, plump ham faces spritzed thinning hair High Street suits clever jokes and insults, the boys’ club meets together each dawn snapping briefcases and contemplating empires.

—Liz Rhodebeck, Pewaukee, WI

Recall

At the gas pump a petitioner asks you to release your name. A familiar voice sings from someone else’s ballpoint pen. Your vote is neither raindrop, rubber stamp, razor blade.

Back home, your HD flat screen unplugs your heart: the plastic coasters, couch-hidden cushion change, your whole room falls into its sideways black door.

—Brent Goodman, Rhinelander, WI
versewisconsin.org
Ancestors

For Lauren and Ben

In my childhood the streams brought
sacred beads
that I hung on my chest
like those calendars on the walls
of my grandmother,
a solitary midwife.
My ancestors sang
on the prairies where infinite lives.
In my childhood my brothers died
in the swollen belly of the night.
In a mud bed
I found the thread of all answers.
Under my hands grew
the glasses and plates
of the constellations.
My ancestors ran
from one city to another
with seeds and fish
of terrestrial and natural Gods.
They did not have the hours
that the sun spends in the wings of cormorants.
They did not have gold on their side.
The wind planted their bones and flesh
in hilltops of acahuat and silence
My ancestors walked from one side
to the other side of the Earth,
quietly
with their mouths in the ruinous waters
that rain leaves
after dying in the leaves and the stones.
I am the one who did not know the threat
of the wheel and the metallic thirst of the spirit.
I am the one who still walks the prairies
inventing my self
speaking the language of things.

—MOISÉS VILLAVICENCIO BARRAS, MADISON, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

Reasons in the Winter

For Erik, Flavio and Gustavo Sosa Villavicencio

I write so our blood speaks
with the river that is this street
here where no one knows about anyone
so that from one corner of the night you consume me
with the force of a drowning boat
I write so the air breathes air
I write so the moss on the path thinks about me
so that the goose and that owl on prairies understand me
I write when I am hungry
when I am about to close the door of my soul
I write so you write me
so that you consider me one of yours
of those who gather seeds and embrace flames
as if nothing happened and only I happened
I write so my sons one day know that I have another voice
not the voice that tells them when to turn on and off their eyes
but rather the voice that you also recognize in the almond trees
and in the movement of the clouds
Voice that was born to me many centuries ago
with rattles and feathers
I write so that you find yourselves before my words
I write for those who don’t write and laugh alone
for those who love and walk among the dust
I write, then, to name the things that we don’t have
to invent them
for those who undo themselves of sorrow
for those who strike us and make us prisoners
for those that are below the water’s roots
I write so that together we are amazed
I write for those who cannot see light and hold it in their hands
like my sons do every morning
I write so that with your laughter you disperse the rhythm, the song

—MOISÉS VILLAVICENCIO BARRAS, MADISON, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author
Justice League

A radioactive sonnet bites me like a spider. Since my name’s not Peter Parker, I become a poet. Exclamation points of light dance above my head, a crown of birthday candles. No one sees them but my English teacher who becomes my mentor like Professor X. Before that fateful day in Junior Lit I wanted to draw comics—spent study halls perfecting Batman’s triceps and Green Lantern’s emerald power ring. One paper cut changed everything. I carry a mask in my pocket. When I look up at the sky, I don’t see robins or planes or red streaks of cape. Now I see lavender whales sounding the stratosphere, weightless and hating us. The world’s full of furious ghosts that need laughing at. By issue five I graduate, find others like myself: Kid Limerick, Lyric Lass, Heroic Couplet. Fridays we meet at the Haiku A Go-Go, where we vow to help humanity and dedicate ourselves to battling reality.

—MIKE KRIESEL, ANIWA, WI

Throwing the Map Out the Window

If I wasn’t so far down this road
I’d do something else.
Draw comic books, maybe—
Superman unbound by gravity,
Batman trailing darkness in his cape.
But I’m fifty and holding a poem that won’t blink, real as a peach stone, the window rolled down.

—MIKE KRIESEL, ANIWA, WI

Secret Identity

Wearing Batman’s mask of flying mice, I whiz above the city like a lunar boomerang or satellite, my x-ray glasses blanketing sleepers in roentgens.

Every block has secrets, basements stuffed full of Victorian porn or 1920s Halloween postcards. As I fly, night perches on my shoulder like the crow that used to be sewn on my sleeve in the navy. Summer wind snapping dress whites, my uniform masked me, closet Wiccan in Ronald Reagan’s military, back when my magical will had training wheels, before I sold my comic book collection to buy time to practice spells by mail: pre-Internet Q&A workbooks from ads in the back of Fate magazine—ego-busting exercises; onionwise, my head unwraps like tissue paper, shedding selves and memories like leaves until the lava lamp behind my face hula dances in the mirror. Shaving’s a bitch. During the day I’m a mild-mannered janitor at a rural elementary school who can’t turn off his vision. That’s the problem with enlightenment—you can’t go back. Spells and spandex mix until it’s all I can do to act normal, since everybody wears a mask except for Superman, and even he can’t help me with this wiggly energy bleeding from my eyes, showing me everyone’s secret identity: black holes floating in the air, or tiny blue tornadoes trapped in blenders where their heads should be.

—MIKE KRIESEL, ANIWA, WI

Two Poems from The Old Poet Says

Sometimes you get a slow truck before you, sometimes a fast one on your ass.

So it is with poetry.

What -

a fellow
can’t get drunk
without getting arrested?
He can’t say something without you insisting it’s poetry?

—TOM MONTAG, FAIRWATER, WI
Crazy Spaghetti House Benefit

A cacophony of voices rang out of control,
children, slithered, wiggled, crawled on the floor,
popping out at impromptu times
when one had a plate of red spaghetti sauce in front of them.
They moved among the feet, legs, chairs of patrons
and wall to wall buffet tables.
Children with big loose hair danced on the stage
alone, with a partner, but always with free child grace.
Sometimes one came crying out of the fold
found its bird mother and then rushed back
into the fray tossing their hands to the side
darting past adults with full spaghetti plates
and maybe a beer or two clenched tight
against the race of little arms and legs.
It was the Riverwest Co-op benefit at Falcon Hall,
the 2nd oldest bowling alley in all of Wisconsin
and a neighborhood gem. It was funny
and hot with all the bodies sliding, breathing out and in,
passing parmesan cheese on the sly,
"Here take this, it’s good, I mean really good."
And then it was over no more red sauce, no more plates
just plain noodles swimming in hot water
the sound had died and with it the heat,
it was time to leave but the memories
and the camaraderie live on still
in the not so distant last night
and the laughs well they’re contagious.

—ANGIE TRUDEL VASQUEZ, MILWAUKEE, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

Splash

for Bob Bradbury

Boys will chuck the heaviest rocks possible
into the smallest streams. Boys live most
in that ka-thunk, that knee-high splatter-splash.
Boys live most in the splinterly creak and release
of dead tree at cliff’s edge, finally letting loose
its century-hold and taking down its portion of sky
with a worldly crash, down the long scree slope.
Boys live most in the fuse of ashcan, cherry bomb,
M-80 as they sputter and flare toward that satisfying
gut punch sound, that flash, that flame, that
acrid sulfur smell that has a boy’s name scrawled
all over it. If no fire is available a boy will settle
for jackknifing balloons, detonating puffballs
in the woods, beheading wildflowers with
a stripped willow whip-stick. Even at age 57,
walking his aging dog down winter-gray sidewalk,
a man will kick an ice clot ahead of him
for a full block, and live a while more in that.

—DAVID GRAHAM, RIPON, WI

A Brisk Ocean Breeze

slips under a beach umbrella,
makes a swimmer shiver,
cools the skin of a gray-haired man,
blows a child’s rubber donkey
a mile up the beach,
knocks over Cokes in paper cups,
throws sand in a small dog’s eyes,
makes it impossible to read,
scoops up straw hats and
tosses them in the ocean.
Flags dance.

—RICHARD MOYER, BERWYN, PA

The Retreat

The poets are talking at the kitchen table.
Hard rain jabs against the window,
A break in the middle of their writing,
and one, an ex-teacher, says she has lost the path
and must find it. She says she feels like
she’s lost in a forest, screaming “Listen to me.”
Another, the man who meditates
each morning says he has entered
the forest and come out again knowing.
He says he is working at changing his life.
The last, an old woman, who has come in late,
says she doesn’t remember
when she wasn’t in the forest—
though she’s not sure what “forest” they mean.
She thinks of it, the darkness most of all,
white pines’ menacing towers,
scrambled branches of undergrowth.
The others stare at her
so she wonders if she got it right.
The first says it’s not enough. She means
what she’s been doing with her life. The man responds
his life knots with ideas and plans
except when he goes to the deep places, stone steps down
into the underground waters. He tries to live there
and fails mostly. The old woman, losing focus,
has left the conversation.
She has become again the small girl other children chased
into a real forest and abandoned.
She is listening to the wind and the rain
feeling the spongy duff beneath her feet.
Faces emerge in the trees, voices.
She may never find her way home.

—PATRICIA FARGNOLI, WALPOLE, NH
VerseWISCONSIN.org

Living in the Future

We are living in the future
I’ll tell you how I know
I read it in the papers
Fifteen years ago
—John Prine

The music of the spheres was always just wind
flushing our ears when we ran,
leaves whistling our faces

and bugs ricocheting harmlessly off our chests
as the swimming hole grew larger and larger

in our splashed minds.
We knew the future in our pliable bones.
We sang its songs in our sleep.

Yet now that the future has arrived, it looks like
the opened lakeside cabin
in June, all the knick-knacks

exactly as we left them
last fall, meek pillows on
the couch, unanswered letter
on the table by a novel

we still might read. Gray
scent of dust and mouse
that no scrubbing will remove.
Ashes in the fireplace

precisely where they were.
In the future we move
across the living room
with mugs of fresh coffee,

newspaper in the other hand, arriving at the couch,
settling down with great sighs.
Sighs so powerful the children

and grandchildren almost
hear, as they very nearly
can make out our gray shapes
flitting across the dust motes

in after-midnight quiet,
books open on their laps,
moths fluttering the screens.
They’re tired. It’s late, and

they certainly don’t believe
in ghosts. So our vaguely
shimmery gray forms must
be a trick of tired eyes,

our long exhalations
just the sound of a moth
weak but frantic against
the dark window screen.

—DAVID GRAHAM, RIPON, WI

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—DAVID GRAHAM, RIPON, WI

Pear Brandy

Gritty gourd, wine-soaked and bottled
from birth to death and some afterlife of infused essence,

the nature of your growth is unpredictable,
but oh those French

in green valleys forged with pubescent fruit
and pullulating notions

lend words like aperitif, and Eau de Vie—
what love to coax a pear to take the bottle’s shape.

German cherries - kirshwasser, Slavic slivovitz for plums,

nothing rolls from the tongue but the framboise,

a raspberry mash of bloodletting—
how does one not swoon with the supernatural?

Yet precious pear, stocked in glass like an intricate ship,
plump little treasure, you are cloistered in amber

destined for this life from conception; tasted through essence
rarely bitten but hardly a frippery
molded, mostly, to become a part of something

bigger than yourself, clearer than yourself. Smooth finish, vigor in spirit
that burns with wishing. Oh, I am wishing.

—LAUREN GORDON, MADISON, WI

Creamware and Old Oval

Teapot collection in Norwich Museum, England

Polished examples of antiquity,
Spode, Wedgwood, Worcester, Derby, Chelsea, Bow,
Once the preserve of the gentility,
Democratised by commerce long ago.
A potted history of the breakfast table
Each with its neat, explanatory label.

Much decorated army, fused in fire,
With chunky lids and handles deftly curved
In Limehouse, Liverpool and Staffordshire,
Quarried from earth to colonise the world,
Surviving long-entombed colonial masters,
In spite of clumsy, parlour maid induced disasters.

Such quantities of spouts! If these should pour
Their fragrant contents simultaneously
Like something out of Wonderland, the floor
Would be transformed into a tannin sea.
Museum staff and visitors might swim all day
Through Lapsang Souchong, Orange Pekoe and Earl Grey.

—PETER WYTTON, GLOUCESTER, ENGLAND
Woman in a Dream

Reader, tell me, are you, like I am, so in love with falling asleep that you could slip there on the hardest floor of the fastest rocking boat?

In love with that moment when arms and legs begin unfastening and lids pull you down until you know you are about to fall and the dark becomes the portrait of a woman whom you’ve never met?

Or are you heir to an inherent restlessness, unwilling to lose daylight? Like my hosts in Williamsburg, Virginia—so surprised by my desire to nap rather than take a tour around the island of Jamestown?

But, reader, it was raining, and just after lunch, and the room I slept in faced a lake, which raindrops dashed with their alphabet so soothingly.

And why do some of us tire so much more entirely than others, and especially when sightseeing?

Why last week, on a visit to Charlottesville, when my husband led me to the school playground where once he thought he was dying, was I ready to take a mid-morning nap on that grass?

And later, as the tour guide who led our group in its timed procession told us the mirrors on the walls of Monticello had never left the house, meaning they had all reflected the face of Thomas Jefferson multiple times into these rooms, how come I could only think of the bed we’d just seen, designed in Paris, enclosed by three walls and a curtain?

Think: what if I could lie there nestled in an island of history, and for a moment not see these sights another person might have been waiting for all of her life?

—Christine Poreba, Tallahassee, FL

Bellies

those mid-west garbage dumps
those cheese seeping sluices
that jelly drum, that thrum
that velvet coat with bone button
that bullshit excuse for emptiness
those empty nests, those dry deserts
those filled-to-brimming buckets
those crustless sandwiches, those hollow armpits, those rumbling volcanoes with nowhere to go
but up, those hula-hooping, belly-dancing, those undulating muscles.

That pizza craver, guacamole dipper, fixer-upper, that spilled milk of magnesia sobber, that red wine, heart
baking for you only you
with the pot of gold waiting
for the rainbow to swing
its sweet belly arc my way.

—Karla Huston, Appleton, WI

Appeal to the Dead Cat in the Road

Scourge me for I have cursed you for the sparrow whose head you took with a grab and snap,
then laughed to see you, smashed in the middle of the street, so stalk me in my dreams, dead cat; plague me
with your eyes dull as stagnant water. Try howling under my window, now, flat cat, or at the moon
or my face, my hands clapping scat and scram.
I have admired your soft coat and paws, felt your coldness to my outstretched palm. No wonder, I’m amused to find you pancaked to a suburban street, everything
from claw to gold/brown stripes—the same stiff package.
And no one, not even those who trusted in your many lives
and let you out to prowl and prey,
missed you, oh, cat-o-no more lives, oh, cat-o-stiff tail,
you’ve been brought to the level of pavement, and not even the street sweeper
or the fire department can save you from the scrape in which you’ve found yourself.

—Karla Huston, Appleton, WI

to confuse my dog
I sometimes bark
like a dog
to confuse me
my dog says
stop it

—Dan Nielsen, Racine, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author
On Their Third Date, When She Bends to Adjust Her Stocking Under the Table

He can’t stop thinking of silk tossed over the shower rod crossed at the ankle, mimicking the legs that fill them.

He thinks of the legs then, where they wander in the week, what they press up against:

- an office chair
- a nightclub stool
- a movie seat
- a church pew, third row from the front.

Maybe even his own legs, soon.

Yes, that is a good thought.

Waking to soft legs against his coarse-haired legs. His ring finger pressed against the dimple of bone, thumb stroking once, twice, the softmeat just before knee turns to thigh.

And then, in the bathroom, when hanging there, like serpent-shed skins, and turned over and over in his callused palms, that length of dormant silk smelling faintly of tobacco-flower and baby powder and Castile,

he figures that could just about put the all in having it all. Says,

Nothing in particular,

when she asks what he’s thinking about.

—BIANCA SPRIGGS, LEXINGTON, KY

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The Farm

So why the farm? With the dead chickens skewered in the trees (a la Dr. Sax), cats leaping from barn roofs to their suicides, dogs just dropped over dead on the grass, puppies without heads mewing at my feet, calves with no strength in their legs rolling down the hillside, opossums squashed under bales of hay, trees with apples rotting on the green green branches, gaping sores in the golden plum tree trunks.

Deputy:

“Christ! What do we get ‘im for?”

Sheriff:

“I dunno, but we gotta get ‘im for somethin’ … Hey! You’re under arrest for having a weird farm!”

Deputy:

“But look, the house has no roof left, and he’s up there racing after the shingles blown by the wind his attic is bare his stairs are dark he ain’t got no home in this world anymore. He’s out on the ridge with a cliff on each side, he has to get across the gulch to where people are happy lazing in the sun beyond green trees at the water’s edge how can he get there he aint got no balance left? but all around him people are doing it they’re just boppin’ along across that gulch and joining the people on the beach with the balloons and picnics and girls in bikinis while he is slung across the wire impossible to hang on.”

Sheriff:

“I dunno, we gotta get the bastard for somethin’.”

—BOB PERSONS, MADISON, WI

Before East Towne Mall

Tractors once crossed the expanse between JC Penney and Sears. Before that humans and beasts in tandem tilled and harvested the land. And before that, natives profitably hunted here.

Some 100,000 years before, the great Laurentide Ice Sheet appeared at the Mall’s doorstep although shoppers were only a mammoth’s dream as the beasts trolled the tundra for sprigs of grass.

Wikipedia will tell you whatever you want to know before that. Or you can ask the few old-timers still hanging around about life before East Towne Mall put down nearly a million square feet of retail space not to mention nicely paved concrete stalls for 5000 horseless carriages. They’ll tell you life was better then, simpler, quieter, but that’s talking like the old men they are, not accounting for the briefs they bought cheap at Sears or the shoes they got ready made at Penney’s. The Mall has been here more than 40 years, which is a long time for them to remember. Soon they’ll be gone. But any damned fool can see East Towne Mall is here to stay.

—DARRELL PETSKA, MIDDLETON, WI

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Coming Home

In places surrounded by mountains, I found silence, on Superior’s open waters, the wind and waves, turning a heavy coat inside out, watching a man beside me, a father or son with the same expression on his face, crossing the dark mine garage to find the office lights.

—JAN MINICH, WELLINGTON, UT

wild

garden
hanging from a cliff’s face
rising out of shale and sand
fans of ferns surrounding
bouquets of trillium
a wren spins in

—ROBERT SCHULER, MENOMONIE, WI
Blown

The place really isn’t a cottage so much
(despite the fancy scrollwork under the eaves
and floral motif painted on the walls) as a
tall Victorian rectangle stood on end with
typical store front windows.

  giant panes
  staring eyes flung
  wide open

Inside, glass and brass shelves where a
careless elbow swipe in narrow aisles could
erase a small fortune. Vases, wine flutes
in varied shades of reds, blue, green with
frosted etchings reflect the slant of late
afternoon sun. Handcrafted crystal from
Bohemia with edges so rag bond thin, a
hasty exhale might shatter them.

  one breath
  creates, another
  destroys

“A person shouldn’t come in here unless
they’ve got a lot of money to spend,” the
clerk attired in folk costume; embroidered
vest and brocaded skirt whispers, deliberate
aside meant to be heard.

  an urge to
  run roughshod, bull
  versus china

Instead, the door only snickers closed,
tourist dollars flutter elsewhere within
this Midwestern ethnic enclave.

—G.A. Scheinoha, Eden, WI

Mixed Array of Stars

She lowers herself into the grasses
and demolishes entire cities;
the sack of chocolate stars near her right hand
turns quickly into towering Babylon
as insects build roads over and around her.
The great swath cut by her two-legged stride
of death is smoothed over by the rough wind.
Absorbed in their parallel world they pitch
tents in her shadow. Little pioneers.
By the time she rises they have built
houses without roofs and floors made of grass.
All around the world statues crumble.

—A’Yara Stein, Chesterton, IN

Watch for Fallen Rock

Cruising the scenic route in Grant County
Grandpa said he would always love corn
the vista, he meant, and not the food.
The hills and waving tassels,
tractors and blood red barns
are the scenes that anchor his nerves.

I replied I felt the same toward trees.
Green, I needed, in my life.
There was silence a moment.
He never plays the radio
when he has passengers.
“You will always love best
where you lived as a child.”

We passed by limestone bluffs
Assembled from the carcasses
of billions of sea creatures
living in a geologic era
far removed from this teal Ford Taurus.
Battered yellow signs warn us
“Watch for Fallen Rock”

When we get back to the farm
I will hike the back forty
to the double track that runs
through remnant forest.

I inspect every promising stone
for tiny invertebrates
immortalized in ancient mud,
scallops and miniature corals
reveal themselves after
brushing off the dust.

It’s curious, these marine fossils
in the middle of farm country
like finding obsidian in boreal forest
or a Yankee living south of Mason-Dixon.
I am a fallen rock.

—Katherine Mead, St. Louis, MO
I Try Not to Mention

how the nights are getting longer,
afraid you’ll think me
an old woman grown tired of living
but still too afraid to die.
My memories are selective now
and the future is somewhere
I don’t want to be. You’ll understand,
spreading my ashes among the islands,
to feel apart is only the spring
adrift in the hardwoods
of falling backward into the water
and surfacing like a fish
for mayflies, an internment
that facing the stars, faces you.

—Jan Minich, Wellington, UT

A sense of place after all

When they come I’m ready
iPod touch in hand
chilled rosé in the fridge
burgers on the grill
It’s summer and the world is a better
place for it
I happen upon a bird’s nest
in the dryer vent
a few bird droppings and down
a small space for a growing family
I wonder what they thought
of the whir
the crackle and hum
the rollicking rock of their nest
dery load after dryer load
Every night I dream in French
and in the morning
can barely speak the words
Spanish is for Spaniards I understand
It’s much warmer this year
in this place one hundred miles north
of Boston migrating birds have arrived
and flung their spring fling
spiders hang in slender threads
from our ceiling and the rodents
have found a home under the kitchen sink

—Marc Swan, Portland, ME

Landlocked

I cursed the lack of water on our acres
as a kid, and ached for Myrtle Beach
or Ocean City, glistering shore and sea-salt.
I longed for gulls—not plaza gulls that greased
their gullets at the Great American—but fleets of white against a field of blue.
My parents didn’t care for water, though.
We weren’t vacationers. We were Makers.
We were Doers. I dug a hole out back
with pick and shovel, filled it from the hose
and watched my sad reflection drain away
before I even had a chance to kick
my shoes off. I scoured the woods, straining my ear
for hidden springs. I dowsed the fields. My mouth
was dry. My hands were plagued by rivulets
of sweat. In town a giant puddle held
me thrall, riveted by swirls of rainbow oil.
My palms began to tingle, as they do now
on springtime trips to town, when, even though
I’ve fathomed the Atlantic, touched the Thames,
I have to stop the car so I can stand
beside a rushing crick, amazed for days.

—Austin MacRae, Freeville, NY

SOLD

Rental Cottage

Twenty years of memories
rustling like bats in rafters.
Ashes in a coffee can
left by his widow last week

rustling like bats in rafters.
How can we throw him out
left by his widow last week
in this place we also love?

How can we throw him out
on our final family vacation
in this place we also love?
We all leave pieces of ourselves
on our final family vacation.
Twenty years of memories;
we all leave pieces of ourselves—
ashes in a coffee can.

—Joan Wiese Johannes, Port Edwards, WI
Summer School

Window open to honeysuckle,
I sit in our garage my grandfather
built when my father was born.
Sunlight steams in the scent
of rain on cement, warms
the sour-sweet of wet peaches.
Our neighbors are grilling
peppers from their garden
and speak Italian to their baby,
who wears rubies dangling
from her pierced ears.
I like being out in this cool
room with its covered barbecue
and vinyl sea-horse tablecloth,
waiting for Donna and Patty,
my two best friends. It’s Sunday.
My mother’s watching an old movie,
my father’s at the tavern
nursing a beer over a game,
my aunts are upstairs ironing
white blouses for tomorrow’s
teaching, typing. I put the lined
paper on the table, take the pencils
I’ve filed to needlepoints, and place
their gold bodies as paperweights.
My friends will race up the alley
on their bikes after fried chicken
suppers, to do whatever the teacher
tells them: mad libs,
a story with a witch,
a trivia quiz. We take turns
as teacher. I face the windows
of our tall house, a few of them open,
all of them shiny and clean, and make up
a series of questions to which
I think I know the answers.

—Nancy Takacs, Wellington, UT

Canoeing the Spanish:
Postcard Never Sent

How quickly stillness comes.
Breathing is even, loose.

The night holds no terrors,
days, only regular sounds:
the paddle dip in water,
a bird’s wings overhead.

So far, no rain and
the bugs are bearable.

Last night, a full moon,
A dream of dancing fish.

—Ronnie Hess, Madison, WI

Canoeing the Spanish: The Voyage Out

Filled the stuff sacks and plastic tubs,
provisions, sleeping gear,
clothes for two weeks.

Took the cheese from the fridge,
the apple and ripe avocado.
Cleared the tabletops.

Left two shirts and shorts on the chair,
a bowl and fork. Please wash and
don’t forget to water the plants.

Decided not to take the puzzle.
Will have plenty to occupy my time.
Carried the canoe up from the boathouse.
Loaded it onto the van and drove off.

—Ronnie Hess, Madison, WI

Kansas

Forever and an hour my headlights swallow
figures not defined enough to wear “tree”
sprouting from a darkness that is not quite nothing.

—John Sibley Williams, Portland, OR

WISDOM is planning:
it’s stuffy, hide-bound, pompous,
powerful; sometimes
it’s wiser to leap before
you look; and walk on water.

—Robert Sonkowsky, North Oaks, MN
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Under the Bridge in the Morning

A fresh sun moves in,
over the horizon.
Tree tops highlighted in gold.
Dark purple and cobalt rule the sky,
orange and red light start filtering through leaves.
Cobalt turns azure and the purple recedes.
Dew glistens on tall grasses,
a small bird chirps good morning to the world,
a wave against smooth rocks responds.
Hello.
Alongshore a dog explores the detritus the water delivered,
last night’s souvenirs.
Watching, a squirrel appears,
wondering if its stash is safe.
A turtle sunbathes opposite shore.
Rustling sounds capture the dog’s attention,
it’s her mother.
In the brush under the old bridge,
a woman climbs out of the box they live in.
She goes down to the water’s edge,
the dog joins her,
although the sun gives no comfort,
it’s time to catch breakfast.
Staring into the water she reflects.

—David L. Harris, Stanley, WI

Facing the Day

Another clean page.
She’d been working at this for years.
She’d revised, crossed out, covered up,
plucked out, glossed over, made up anew.
Hers was an open book
now paper thin from erasures,
parchment sheet-like, oiled by hand,
blemished with smears,
poke-dented, wrinkled.
All earned, all a process,
all attempts at character restoration.
She turned her face away from the mirror,
closed the foundation bottle,
readied herself for morning coffee
with grandchildren.

—Marilyn Zelke-Windau, Sheboygan Falls, WI

Always return with an extra tree for Soyla Luz

whose parents named her I am the light,
who’ll shrug and smile if you ask about it,
and who’ll move to her garden to tuck this
coveted limón into the algae-covered soil
in a corner, behind banana leaves, enough
sunlight coming through holes in the fence,
the tree hidden enough from dogs and kids.
Upstairs, her grandkids hoot and tackle
each other like the wrestlers on TV,
take turns being thrown over your shoulder
and spun. Soyla laughs and stirs soup
on the stove. What made you think
your company was enough? They hand you
a globe and you show them from where
on the map you came and they all point
there, too, to say that’s where they will go.

—Lisa Kundrat, Minneapolis, MN

A Controlled Burn

He touches his match to kindling laid at the baseboard
and cocks back to watch through his face shield
as the first timid tongues lick the crumbling wallboard.
It’s a practice fire,
and he’s in charge. We’re both turned out in full gear,
sucking oxygen from the tanks that ride us like rockets.
I know this man,
know that inside his Nomex suit
his butt and shoulder muscles bunch and flex
taut beneath brown skin
as he hauls hose, wrestles the valves together.
I’ve seen him lounging at the firehouse
in ratty jeans, drinking coffee, ear tuned to the two-way’s crackle,
just waiting for the call to boot up, slide the pole,
get rolling.
Today, however, the danger is nil.
His crew is here to torch this old house, drench it down,
torch it again, over and over,
till all that’s left is to scrape up chunkers
and soak the pile to stinking ash.
He’s invited me here – me and my camera.
We stand together in this airless room.
Inside the heavy, poreless suit, my body is damp,
unable to breathe. Through my own smoky shield
I catch his eye as we wait for that orange-gold flare
to arc across the ceiling above our heads.

—Mary O’Dell, Louisville, KY

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17

Your preconceived notions make me laugh which, in turn, causes liquid to spill out of my mouth. I live in a condo in Wisconsin; you think: rich, fat, snooty, cheese. I am NONE of these things, perhaps a little chubby, but that is all. I do not have expensive silver baubles or an upturned nose. My condo is old and crumbling, and in fact, belongs to my mother. Also, I am lactose-intolerant.

—JessiCa gleason, Lake Geneva, WI

Interstices

The creaking ceiling tells her the neighbor above her is walking across his floor, a quiet considerate man, but there’s no insulation between them.

She is remembering, then, the months in the condo she used to own when the couple upstairs came in at midnight from the third shift at the post office, and started drinking, then the fights, the shrieking voices, and the sound bodies make when they smack against walls,

how even in her own bed below them, she was not safe from her anger and terror, how even the police she called could only temporarily quiet them.

He’d leave, the woman would call him back until finally they left for somewhere else, leaving behind a sort of conditional peace. Our lives intrude on one another.

Now, in her living room, stalled between present and past, she writes about the boundaries of things. Beyond her window, the fog that hid the opposite building begins to give in, and now there’s a clear separation between ground and the gray sky.

—Patricia Fargnoli, Walpole, NH

Request for a Mass from an Innocent Fish
("response to Michael Sharkey: ‘Eating Sin’")

Fish, you lie on my plate free of sin any trespass was removed during the supremely fine job of cooking this café produced for you. Also, because your dying was not your decision a Mass is possible, but

Fish, for now I wish you to dwell in my stomach, rich with oil from Greek olives and the fragrance of thyme. When all that is left on this table is your skeleton, I will take one pin bone to Mass, and slip you into the communion wine.

My plan is to have you stick in the throat of that fisherman who treated you badly. You will have your revenge, I will request forgiveness and do ten Hail Mary’s.

—Jackie Langetieg, Verona, WI

I do not want to make self-portraits I would prefer Bonnard’s L’Amandier en fleurs tiny lavender and golden crocuses rising out of leaves and sand shuddering in the wind the bloodroot ready to pop open their silky white petals in the blue windows of dawn the snowy woven golds of Baltimore Orioles

—Robert Schuler, Menomonee, WI

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I am NONE of these things, perhaps a little chubby, but that is all.

My condo is old and crumbling, and in fact, belongs to my mother. Also, I am lactose-intolerant.

—Jessica Gleason, Lake Geneva, WI

—Jackie Langetieg, Verona, WI
**Emptiness**

There is emptiness, my uncle says,
in the house where he lives.
It grows in darkness, feeding on silence.
Dreams of strange places,
come home every night.
Not only the house, the room,
where he sleeps,
breathes loneliness.
The window looks to the field,
like a solitary monk.
And then the heart,
that carries a train of memories,
of those years, left behind.
It is there, right there,
where it pains the most.

—Nabin Kumar Chhetri, Aberdeen, UK

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**Ebonic Pleas**

The air blackens
only layers of sound.
Pantera drowns out Lil John.
But the human voice is unique,
Even the smallest whisper can be heard.
“If you gonna beat me, motha fucka, BEAT ME”....
Even Killswitch Engage can’t drown these
Ebonic pleas.
Black rod iron bars
cover every portal of home,
Not to cage or confine
(this time)
but to protect me
from this god-forsaken hood.
I close my eyes
wishing,
those bars could shut out
the human voice
of
despair.

—Jan Aubrey, Milwaukee, WI

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**Supper**

Lamb liver, fresh from slaughter.
Technically, mutton. Three-year-old ewe who never nursed a lamb.

The death-man slipped her liver, sleek and warm, into the ziplock bag
you held out like a beggar for alms.

A sacrifice. The barren ewe—no,
ot that either. Ewe who bleated for her lambs, but wouldn’t nurse;

licked their faces, and turned away,
as today we turned our hearts.
The death-man always tells our truths
too late. Mastitis: the ewe could not give milk. So she gave her liver, kidneys, heart into your open hands.

Tonight we’ll feast on our own fault.
Lamb liver beautifully fresh,
warm as if alive, sauteed with onion.

We’ll sip a blood-red Cabernet
and offer brief thanks—all we can give,
eating this day’s-end.

—Taylor Graham, Placerville, CA

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**Food Circa 1954**

The Aunt Jemima toaster cover smiled
on the gold-speckled counter top,
where Mom made pot roast
for Aunt Edna and Uncle Lou.

Sunlight filtered through fruit-print curtains,
like an X-ray of Pete’s Produce Market,
while the twins and I played hide and seek,
and I stayed inside the kitchen window seat
with the vegetables until Donald threatened
to put my turtle Trudy in the oven
if I didn’t come out.

After pound cake with peaches, the radio
played “No Other Love,”
a tango for trombones
that made my parents dance
over the salt water taffy wrappers
we kids had dropped on the floor.

Screens pulsed with moths
yearning for the Chinese lamp in the front window,
and when company was gone and I lay in bed,
I wondered if the next day my clothes
would still smell so strong of peppers and onions.

—John Bolinger, Centennial, CO

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Empty Bottles

Outside the glass where the cars sit in the yard like old friends, sentinels of past wars, of making it home more times than not. Proud companions, they are honored to be left out in the shade, where it’s not too hot anymore. Mice make themselves a nest in the glove compartments and under the seats where those bottles used to lay. Their spirits linger out there in the trees, behind the branches, just out of reach of the imagination: That symmetry found among the stars, their eternal mates. Children know of these things yet forget so easily when it’s their turn to be strong, though it returns as they grow frail, when the wind speaks their names and sleep is forgotten. Out there is the soul of our nation, the Great Mystery ism in rhythm. It beats constant on through the dawn. Yes, there will be another life, another chance to go on with those dreams: The ones we face now and the ones of the past, and make change. But tonight they are kept inside, looking out from this side of the glass.

—TODD NORTON, APPLETON, WI

A Kind Poem

She asked him, just this once, for a kind poem. Not the in-your-face jackhammer rhythm ‘n’ rhyme that made her canary blue. He hadn’t written since the stroke; the lying-flat-in-hospital week. The canary was dead. He didn’t want another, not a poem. Didn’t want anything, he said. Just this once, she asked, a kind poem. He stared into space, the kind beyond stars, black hole that swallows rhyme and rhythm, canaries, cantaloupes sliced just ripe for him. He began to hum with words. Something like a nursery ditty. Ring around the tadpole, pockets full of pie, four and twenty daisies never will die…. Well, he said, it’s a kind of poem.

Isn’t that what you wanted? Yes, she said.

—TAYLOR GRAHAM, PLACERVILLE, CA

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The full color of possibility

Why not a chrome yellow sun or lightning that rips the dark with silver, commanding rain?

Why not the Okavango in season?

Why not let the animals slosh into the lush vegetation that complements the Monterey blue found by the viewer in the soft plaintive pallet of a painting?

Why not the pinked man to feed the blackbird flashing his red epaulet?

—RICHARD MERRILL, KENOSHA, WI

Stranger # 37

Seeing your face throughout the years: the reflective stares in desperate times, always ragged and sleep deprived, murmuring something to yourself, over a cup of coffee and borrowed cigarettes. No one else even wants to look your way when you ask for change, at least in all honestly, you just NEED a beer. Always knowing you’re looking after you, when I can, that is, if time allows.

I pray for warmth when the rain is falling, under some simple roof, I search for a little smile from you, once in a while, to let me know things are okay. But then again, there are no mirrors for miles and miles.

—TODD NORTON, APPLETON, WI
Nothing To Do With Horses

Forget the wind
where it comes from
if it sings or doesn’t—
windows down as the Silverado’s
echo continues sputtering
in time with the rivers swift,
which seems to pick up
the thinner the river gets
carving banks and potholes
like hearts knifed
into a wooden bridge,
dug down deep
should that love be forgotten—
just forget it.
It has nothing to do with horses.
It has no canter or gait,
no fetlock or hooves to end a film
set for striding off into the sunset,
which is why I’m sitting
on this dead end stretch
reading and rereading
a letter you sent
from several states away
explaining to me
nothing about mahogany bays
or chestnut brown mares—
your penmanship that curves
nowhere near the curvature
of manes or napes,
broken horsehairs on a bow,
stilts and flanks.
I’m remembering how in grade school
the Demel girl was bucked off
and never survived the hit,
my eyes a mess at the funeral
never before having to look that close at
death,
how someone told me that her horse
would have to be put down
and how I understood
and felt its raison was spent,
much like your letters
laying inside an unopened shoebox
since the day you left. Your heart
reminding me of the hallway eyes
of horses that I have trouble watching

—Andrew Schilling, Marshfield, WI

Drove My Parents Mad

I don’t always know where I am,
especially if it is snowing,
especially if one shoe is on
and the other shoe is off.

That shoe thing usually is a sign
I am in my bed room,
but sometimes not.

No telling what it means
if there are geese honking
through their overhead flight
heading north
compared to heading south.

I mean, I see it in hindsight:
exactly where I’ve been.
But I notice it is not always
where I meant to be.

And sometimes I was there
a little too early
and sometimes
a little too late.

And my mood swings
always take me back to real swings
on the playground
in what, I fear, is some sort
teleportation trick
I must have intrinsically
because I have not yet figured out how it
works.

The hardest thing is when the breath
I am suppose to take is not the breath of air
that is directly in front of me
and then I scramble around,
all bug-eyed and turning blue
until I locate it, lest I steal
someone else’s air.

—K. P. Gurney, Albuquerque, NM
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Some Afternoons When Nobody Was Fighting

my mother took out
walnuts and chocolate
chips. My sister and
I plunged our fingers
in flour and butter
smoother than clay.

Pale dough oozing
between our fingers
while the house filled
with blond bars rising.
Mother in her pink dress
with black ballerinas
circling its bottom
turned on the Victrola,
tucked her dress up into
pink nylon bloomer pants,
kicked her legs up in the
air and my sister and I
pranced thru the living
room, a bracelet around
her. She was our Pied
Piper and we were
the children of Hamlin,
circling her as close as the
dancers on her hem.

—Lyn Lifshin, Vienna, VA
Northlawn

Surrounded by indigence from earliest memories my youth, blanketed me in ignorance.

The long brick buildings we called home, resembled Iroquois longhouses, outside of which juvenile past-times; ding-dong ditch, statue-maker and kick-the-can seemed inventions of our own.

A cruel nursery rhyme never committed to paper accompanied the ritual beheading of a dandelion.

Each moment captured with no thought of tomorrow.

Childhood survival proved an absurd presumption.

—CHRISTOPHER AUSTIN, MILWAUKEE, WI

Everything Will Be Fine

Listening to talk shows in my neighbor’s garage one of us rises to crush a can as light rolls under the door like dice and

Today all I have to do is un-slash my bike tires and grease the chain, call Mom Re:

A note fastened to the mirror

How some muscled angels will swoop down and lower me gently onto the drainboard.

—JOE GUSZKOWSKI, MILWAUKEE, WI

visit VW Online for audio by this author

Adolescent

Jocks we were, Saturday afternoon in whites, smashing cricket balls around a park.

But then Ron’s killed in some dumb rafting accident and Teddy buys a car, a third hand Holden, and Brian gets a girl and spends his time at her house.

The rest of us discover beer and rings for ear and nose. Some even cut their bad teeth on heavy metal music. Bob says, “I’m gay,” is never seen again.

So what’s the park these days but bodies on shore, skid marks, sloppy kisses, squashed beer cans, the blood from piercing, the drone of amplifiers and closet doors swung wide.

And what are parents but intimate terms with other sections of the newspaper. And what’s Saturday afternoon in whites but ghosts dressed for the occasion.

—JOHN GREY, JOHNSTON, RI

Thirteen

Nights, late August. Sultry, damp. Cicada’s late shrieking in the woods that surround us. No glass on the cabin windows-canvas flaps hooked over nails.

From sixty years later, I bring it back.

One night, something thumps down on my pillow. When I pull the light cord, nothing.

Another night, Susan sees a man’s hand fumbling over the top of the canvas. A few cabins away, a girl screams.

The snake Mimi keeps in a shoebox on her steamer trunk—a small one—disappears. We never find it. In our bunks, before sleep, we hypnotize each other.

Even the days turn dangerous.

Mimi cracks her head on a branch, twists her ankle. No-No, the dappled gray, my favorite, tromps on my foot.

The morning I wake up with hot skin, eyes stuck together they walk me to the infirmary and ring up the doctor who gives me a new drug—penicillin.

I break out in huge hives all over, itch like the devil, my temperature soars, my body drenched in sweat. It nearly kills me. I want that summer back.

Camp Teela Wooket, Roxbury, VT 1950

—PATRICIA FARGNOLE, WALPOLE, NH
Unarticulated Achdut: Lessons on a Mehadrin Bus

Had I grown up among sheitels,
Rolling high my stockings,
Davening in Bait Yaakov,
Knowing the difference between fleisch and milch,
And caring,
Realizing “Ester and Gedalia” meant fasting.
That babies are good,
Pride is not,
Maybe, I’d welcome you,
On my bus.

My bus,
Where the likes of you,
All bosom and thigh,
Frighten me,
Remake men’s minds.
I wonder
How many drugs and aborted
Satin or trinkets captured
Your prayers’ void.
Yield that display
By Haifa’s shipyards.
Cover your hair.
My, oh my.

Oh, my mother abandoned me.
To television and computers.
We dressed the best
We could.
Among the “white bread.”
I leapt from Shabbat goy
To ulpan morah,
Though not in Lakewood.
My kindling light, “kiruv,”
Minus the word.
Friends, neighbors, cousins,
Peopled Shabbat with me.
Where were you
When strayed Jewish children
Visited my sukkah?

My sukkah over all of us,
Includes imperficts
Like myself.
Dreaming, my neshemah laughs.
So many dreary potato days,
When so much soap,
Over the stoop.
Merely wets the walk.
I cry Tehillim, failing to find Brachot.
Your smile is summer’s heat.

Exclaiming “good morning,”
To driver and passengers:
Kiddush Hashem in single syllables.
Sometimes I forget your knees,
And learn.

—DR. KJ HANNAH GREENBERG, JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

Notes for “Unarticulated Achdut”:
“Art” means “being in concert with.”
“Bait Yaakov” is a type of girls’ school ordinarily attended by very orthodox young ladies.
“Morah” means “teacher.”
“Kiddush Hashem” means honoring G-d through actions.

Mom’s Boys

Mornings, Mom lined up peanut butter toast on the kitchen counter, and my brothers and I filed by—docile and half-asleep—like inmates in an asylum cafeteria. Beside the toast waited cold glasses of milk, hot chocolate maybe when arctic winds drifted streets closed, and schools shut down. Locked inside too close those days, we bickered and pushed till Mom exploded and stuck us with whole afternoons coaxing her back to good cheer. Your father’s gonna hear about this, she’d threaten through tears.

Dad roll-called us after work, bent us over his knee and whacked our sorry back sides with a yardstick till we cried. Had enough, he’d say, had enough? As if he could tempt us to beg for more. Mom faced us down triumphantly after that, commanding us at the supper table with smiles both warm and sly, dictating which of us would wash the dishes, which would dry. She’d tuck us in and kiss us as always, and listened close to what we’d pray. It’s back to school tomorrow, she’d say.

As usual, Dad was gone before first light. Mom lined peanut butter toast on the kitchen counter, and my brothers and I filed by. Schools were open and expecting us by the bus load. The skies burned a cruel blue. We shuffled off like we’d been shackled, after Mom tied our scarves and packed us out the door. Told us not to whine. Yesterday was yours, she’d say. Today’s mine.

—LOWELL JAEGGER, BIGFORK, MT
visit VW Online for more work by this author
Bull-Headed

Jerk ‘em, Dad said, when a bullhead tugged a bobber under and swam for deeper bottoms farther from shore. Look at ‘em fight, Dad said, as we heaved from muddy depths a black fish thrashing thin air.

Had to admire the frenzy; fish flip-flopping in the grass, Dad’s hopping hot-foot pursuit, till he’d boot-stomped the fish stupid long enough to rip the barb from its jaw. Or the hook snapped in two like a brittle stick in the fish’s clamped steel-trap smirk.

Don’t touch the bastard, Dad said. We stood close, wincing when the bullhead’s quick spines cut Dad’s thumb to bleed. Had to admire the bastard’s huff, gills gasping in the catch-bucket, his pearl blue light-blinded gaze staring back.

Admired him even worse, when Dad nailed him to a chunk of two-by-six—a twelve-penny spike through his brain — and still he twitched and refused to quit. Dad slit him, grabbed the hide with a pliers and stripped it. Axed the bull’s head clean from the rest of its connections. And still the gills opened a little and closed. Opened and closed. In a heap of entrails, a heart the size of a wart, determined it would not stopped beating.

—LOWELL JAEGER, BIGFORK, MT
visit VW Online for more work by this author

A Speck

We’re craning our necks, foreheads pressed against the glass, watching a glinting speck of shining wings shrink till it blinks out in the big blue sky. He’d climbed inside the plane, our father, the heavy door swung shut. He’d kissed our mother and each of us goodbye. He’d waited beside us on the plastic seats, bought us each a coke, kept checking his watch.

And before that, he’d dropped eight quarters in a machine on a far wall of the terminal—flight insurance—one thousand dollar accidental death payout. A bundle of cash back then, enough to cover funeral expenses, he said, and a car payment or two.

Our mother wouldn’t touch it. So he slipped the papers in her purse and clicked it shut with a snap. As loudspeakers called passengers to board. As the plane’s great props stuttered, then caught, then roared.

—LOWELL JAEGER, BIGFORK, MT
visit VW Online for more work by this author

Roaring Paunch River, Kentucky

Brother grinning an impish freckled jack lantern wants the kayak.

My blue canoe inexplicably smells of toast and grass.

White waves daze and force us towards a red X pulling us in.

Boat and oak collide, I drop to bedrock knocking and yo-yoing me.

A strange chorus of eggs beat at my elbows, hair.

Some fat side branch thumps my gut and it ends.

Ozone metal whips against my teeth sucking in squeezing a limb.

Brother laughs.

Did you know you look like a snapping turtle when you gasp for air?

—SUMMER QABAZARD, NORMAL, IL

Flatware disappears
Through the garbage disposal,
Few dishes to do...

—ELMAE PASSINEAU, WAUSAU, WI

Cookie sale at school—
Fifteen thousand dollars’ worth
Bought by Jean Lang—why?

—ELMAE PASSINEAU, WAUSAU, WI

Grocery store on Sims,
Winter winds and slippery walks—
Dad reaches to help

—ELMAE PASSINEAU, WAUSAU, WI

VERSEWISCONSIN.ORG 23
**Baked Bikini**

She was lying on a tattered towel, anointing her limbs with baby oil. Slick shine blended with sweat, roasting that pale pink body, like a fresh rotisserie chicken, rotating round and round. Browning skin dripped beads of wet, creating a slight sizzling sound, as it slid off tender cooked parts and onto dry, baked earth.

She never heard the sinister words, skin cancer and melanoma. She never gave a thought to, freckles and deep-rooted wrinkles. She never could have imagined, an aging face so leathery, a cow might mistake her, for a two legged kissing cousin. She was the glowing goddess, of Elm Tree Avenue.

It was the mellow yellow sixties. A blaring Beach Boy beat, “Everybody’s gone surfing,” echoed cool California lyrics, from a small transistor radio. No Big Kahuna or soaring swells, surrounded small town Wisconsin. That didn’t stop my sister, who paid her daily toll by taking, a tanning tour of duty.

Nothing could deter the willful teen, from her bronzing ambition, until the last bit of sun dissolved, behind the next door neighbor’s garage; not Whiffle batted balls, or spattered Sparrow bombings, not Frisbee free for alls, or black flies poised, to make a ten point landing, on her slick strip of leg.

Not bees buzzing over teased hair, attracted to the candied confection, sprayed so rigid, piled so high, a small tornado couldn’t have, knocked the wind out of it. Linda was the type of girl, who didn’t know the meaning of “All things in moderation.” Her new blue bikini, barely there, was ready to rock and roll.

One more sun drenched day, and the popular crowd, well-bred and berry brown, would see her at the pool party. Her burning desire, at charbroiled perfection, created a baby oil bathing beauty, with no visible tan lines, My sister would be, the toast of the town.

—WENDY SCHMIDT, APPLETOWN, WI

**Place to Go**

After the tornado I found Mama
All rolled up in her mattress, her hard mattress
The one Aunt Janie made her get because her old one was way too soft.
Nobody could’ve rolled that hard mattress up if they was trying to,
But she was all done up like a jellyroll.
I had to holler over to two guys on another slab to give me a hand
And we wrestled it open. Mama was all quiet.
I watched her breasts going up and down, so I knew she was alive.
She was pale in the face, but breathing all right.

There was nothing of Mama’s on that trailer slab. Only Mama
and her mattress, some odd scraps of kitchen stuff by her feet,
a toilet setting off to one side, upside-down.
Looked like other people’s junk to me I figured.
When Mama felt up to it, we’d go search a bit up the line.

Mama moaned a soft little kitten sound, not like her.
I went over and put my hand on her forehead
She opened up her eyes and saw it was me.
“My, Jerry?” she said. I said, “You all right?”
“No, gotta pee.”

I coulda laughed because of that toilet being there,
But it wasn’t all that funny. I was gonna say, “Hafta use the woods,“
But the woods wasn’t there any more, just sticks and spikes
All naked wood, with rags, that was probably somebody’s clothes,
And plastic bags flappin around.

Mama shifted and got to her feet before I could help her up.
“My head, Son,” she says to me.

I took her home. She’ll stay with us for a while, wheter Beatrice likes it or not.
Gotta take care of Mama. I’ll keep her til we find her a place to go.
She says she wants to come right back, says, “It won’t hit the same place twice.”

God was kind to my mama. I’ll let her live where she wants.
I just hope she’s figured it out right.

—ESTER PRUDLO, MONTGOMERY, AL AND FITCHBURG, WI
**Bird Control**

Do the House Swallows in Terminal D
of the Detroit Airport
dream of the Driftless Area,
burn with vigorously suppressed natural fires?

Does a south wind on the Goat prairie
exist in the heart of a common bird,
whose soul flies the Mississippi Flyway,
scours some mesic floodplain?

I see them, restless against the glass,
nesting in the PVC eaves. All I had to do was look up

listen to their chirruping; not territorial, not distressed,
adapted to LCD fountains, comfortable in plastic
sugar maple basewood oaks, hungry for hamburger
in this private city of industry.

—**LAUREN GORDON, MADISON, WI**

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**Messages from Birds**

This is my heart
back from the rain,
naked as the grass
I was born this way.

The cold on my wing finds
different songs singing.
The warmth on my cheek,
finds hatched ones breathing.

Existence, and the thought
to comeback around.
A year’s turn toward nature,
and this is what I found.

Wind, travel with me.

This is where I go when
it rains.

Watch me restore the world.

—**MATTHEW HAUGHTON, LEXINGTON, KY**

**Ripples**

I awake like a plucked flower
and search the day for my stem.

I’d like to say the world dances
but in fact it’s sitting
satisfied and full
all around me.

Today I am a monster in the grass,
growing fat on captured
grasshoppers,
searching for my stem,
feeling the earth pulse back
between my teeth.

I tend to sing loudest for the wave
that’s bleeding back to sea.

But in my daydream they all sing
back at me
in one voice,
through a single row
of clenched teeth.

Then I wake again
like a plucked flower,
alone, stemless,
seeds scattered all over this tiny
tiny field.

—**JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS, PORTLAND, OR**
While you were having your breakdown,
I re-caulked the Jacuzzi

and afterward, went for a walk. I said hello to an old man with a walker, I wanted to say more but couldn’t. I stopped to count, or look, or admire or just, I don’t know, the green walnuts shining in the late-day sun. I didn’t count them. I worked hard in the bathroom. I walked past people grilling; the last time you grilled was a month ago. It smelled like something I want you to do again.

All this color on
the prairie now mid-September
and I wish you
could hear the wind tonight. Last week there was only a fist of sumac, now the hillside bleeds with it, the compass plants’ tall bodies bow yellow, and here and there a shock of aster, like a paintbrush waiting to take over. I needed something to do with my hands.

And you and I have
always wanted a name for
this, this color, this

entire early evening early fall prairie color. This before the sun goes down color. And tonight, I want a name for the way this prairie, this water garden, this cloud-quilt of goldenrod breaks my heart. I want the name for breaks-my-heart. I don’t want this breaking to end. I don’t want this walk to end, I don’t want this evening to end until it finishes breaking me, until it gives me the name. I know this name will break my heart the way everything does in time: the way black will grow in the bathroom again on the perfectly white edge, the way fall always comes, the way you can’t hold on to bright and shining things.

The edge isn’t perfect but it’ll do
I want to say
to the runners and the dog-walkers and the couples talking, there is a way to hold on to your happiness. I want to say to the bathroom there is a way to stay white. I want to say to the
goldfinches
there must be a way
to stay yellow

—JEANIE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

Crossword Sonnet Haiku Puzzle

1. (Across) &
2. (Down) I want ___
3. A way of saying now, or
4. Moon’s light or, shoulder
5. Weightless, shining
6. It’s ____,
7. Just after August
8. Late at night
9. Simply, the
10. (Sounds like) weigh
11. Across: Same as 9.
12. Down somewhere inside ribs
13. The way the (12 Down)
14. Holds ___ and on

And in this pale light
late September evening the
way the heart holds on

—JEANIE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

A Few Thoughts on an Old Equation

1. Before waking I dreamed of you, smiling, hair across your eyes. 2. You were naming the small towns along the coast, naming the saints, one by one. 3. Holy and un—
4. (Let x be years ago, let y be us.) 5. Years later I’ve learned that holiness is ordinary as the tongue saying Saturday afternoon, San Luis Obispo; and that memory is not history, but geometry. 6. (Ex: the angle of repose) 7. Or the angle of those sea lions draped across continents of stone.

—JEANIE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author
**I shall play unapologetically**

I could just be going crazy. It could also just be the planets. They paint the dome of the earth like clouds so you won’t go crazy. They hang up and blinking lights so you don’t feel bad to be among your kind. And you can always win tickets. You can’t take your tickets to the afterlife. They encourage you to paint portraits so you won’t feel like just a little nothing adrift in the ultimate anti-playzone: the universe, aka your day. You push through the mesh enclosure until you’re face to face with the portrait and then you say: “Hello. This is a condition.” Your parent supervises from behind the crossword.

When I asked to write a poem about you, I felt (feeling you get in a ball pit) When you said ok it was all rocket. But the way you said it was (color) (childhood Nintendo game long lost to the annals of time). Sigh. Another toy chest memory excursion. Another sweet nothing on the back of straight-to-DVD case.

Another dead world. Another portrait of something destroyed. Another What is the universe now to us but a playzone that can’t pay the space rental fee? What is this sweet work with if thou kiss me not? As I collapse into colored balls I shall destroy. Whoa! (exclamation)

Here we go! This town will burn upon atmospheric reentry. I shall the core of this town and rip it. Onto a DVD. Get your best underwear and dance. These are love poems to the world of direct-to-DVD. You were born to this condition. That’s the best lie from your third eye. It’s nurture, all nurture. We learned the calligraphy of the ball pit. This condition is for the direct-to-DVD market in you.

—**Russell Jaffe, Iowa City, IA**

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**Chameleon**

At the tip, cricket sticks. For a moment legs lash, thrash, the air. It’s a fast, sinewy ride, the last hurrah before being hurled into the jaws of death.

It’s all technique. And this tongue’s got it: speed, reach, suction.

And now, for another kill. But wait, what’s this? An intruder stalks your stand, asserts his will, defies your turf! Angered, you change into that noxious little number named Back-Off Black! And once again, you’re boss of branch. Take a bow. You’ve earned this tree. You’re free to take a shot, launch your lengthy tongue, toward a cricket or mantis meal—perhaps even, a locust lunch.

—**Jeannie E. Roberts, Chippewa Falls, WI**
Ci _ _ _ _; or, They-who-must-not-be-named

_The word cicada... stops me in my tracks. Sorry. I simply cannot continue._ —Billy Collins

It’s been a good year for them. Those cigar-stub-shaped insects and their devilish red eyes. With their portly green bodies perched on trunks and limbs they puncture the air above the city with their electric trills. As usual it’s the males who bellow from their citadels at the top of a sycamore or other tall tree.

The female responds to the sycophantic cry. They mate. She makes a precise slit at the base of a stem to deposit her eggs.

Later, the stem falls to the ground leaving behind a cicartrix of her act, a blemish to mark the spot. I’ve known people who thought those calls were not animate but simply electric wires buzzing in the summer heat. For some it’s a sickening chorus. For me, the cries mark the season. Just one more insect doing what it needs to do—has done for millennia without help or hindrance from the likes of you or I or those who can’t even pronounce their name.

—STEVE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI

visit VW Online for more work & audio by this author

Praying Mantis

_Fish gotta swim and birds gotta fly; insects, it seems, gotta do one horrible thing after another._ —Annie Dillard

The horrible thing is not that she eats his head while he’s mating with her. And it’s not that he moves faster without his head.

Well, actually, that is the horrible thing.

—STEVE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI

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Black Flag Motel and Lounge

_for Chuck Ketterhagen

_Roaches check in but they don’t check out_

They’re roaches so they don’t talk but using their pheromones and feelers they agree to no pets and pay up. What’s really going on, this is a secret. Just let’s say the lady roach feels weird and she’s jumpy tonight. Just let’s say the man roach takes the key and tells the desk clerk thanks and goodnight so the two new guests exit the office, take ten steps left and enter 4 C: not great, but okay. But whatever.

Heaving the big suitcase on the second bed he flops backwards on the first, flips the tv to sports. Sports, talk, ad, ad, talk, movie, ad, talk, nothing, talk, travel, pets, movie, nothing, Knock it off, she says, and throws him a beer.

She’s unpacking his new shirt and flannel pants, and then her beige separates and a dozen little slippers, two robes. Well, long day and they’re tired so they undress and turn in and soon enough he loves her up and starts to doze. She lies there. She’s wide awake. She walks to the window: attar of french fry and sour milk and burnt buns. Moonlight carpets the parking lot. Smiling now she takes a long breath and climbs into bed, and in this way, throwing her left legs over his right, two roach souls enter the starry dark.

—MARK KRAUSHAAR, LAKE MILLS, WI

visit VW Online for more work & audio by this author
Parthenogenesis

Female aphids have mostly dispensed with men. They mass together in their feminist world: mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, all living without a guy. No first dates, no courtship. Just wham bam and thank themselves. They don’t even lay eggs. There’s a two-dollar word for begetting their own daughters directly. Inside their translucent green skin you can see their developing young. Out they come, perfect small renditions of mother. Their own daughters already growing inside. They’re not the only ones who’ve gone male-less. Other bugs of course, a lizard here, a salamander there, Some fish. Even a bird or two.

You can see where this is going. As I tell her this, my wife smiles.

—STEVE TOMASCO, MIDDLETON, WI

visit VW Online for more work & audio by this author

Participation poem guts/pet moth Glidy, may you bludgeon the dream of the poem always

My pet moth, amen. I had one. Glidy. Please write what you’d like to say to him, my teacher said when he died the week he was born. The last lines I wrote about him then in first grade were “I will love you forever.” Polyphemous moth, a big one with milky bulbs like the eyes of the ready to die dead. Grandpa died. Your turn: I ask you under a bright lamp outside a strip mall bar about your better nights. You tell me your dreams are a rotoscope of clichés. To repeat is to kill, always, always, amen. There are birds in the parking lot of the Pizza Ranch I threw bottles at, but now my sobriety is the double fisted kind, the flightless afraid but beady-eyed kind. We watched them. Together we are warm beds we call graves. The sun invited the clouds over to tell bunk bed stories. Bla bla bla. Yakkity yak yak. Flutter, flutter, there, there. Please write what you said here: ________________________________

eulogy

The funeral march is so awesome. I can lower my head and sway with it and no one can say otherwise. I don’t know how many times I thought it at grandpa’s funeral, how many times back when I reminded my brother about when the clouds were breaking, when the Are You Afraid of the Dark episode with the dream machine came on that scared him. Fear. Some. I count myself among those who turn away from beaches in favor of sandbox-side swimming pools. Never liked birds. You said I was a poet. But I am forever too bludgeony. What would you like to be? And would you believe the romance of an abandoned walkie talkie in the sand? And I was sleepy. And will you dance to the anthem of my manifesto? Write an apology for every oceanside star or useless streetlight, aggressively catch a bird, tie it to it. This is the way I held you. Curled over we played a kind of family van smooth jazz leaving the funeral. Then, Pow was a joke sound, but pwish pwish was the sound of Ninja Turtle figures punching with tremendous loft. Now I warn you with a mocking bird warble at anonymous pizza restaurants. Grandpa called me generational so I played on his computer and ate most of the food in his house, RIP, amen, amen. Now I have his sweaters. At night when the moths took to the streets we cut the heads off the birds and sent their guts forevermore down the streams of the gutters, amen. May we invade the dreams of our loved ones always.

—RUSSELL JAFFE, IOWA CITY, IA

The Ant Tree

I heard the crack, glanced toward the lake in time to watch a forty-foot red pine topple forward in the wind. In an instant it lay finished, despite its green tufting of spring growth. No harm done, except to the tree and the plans of God-knows-how-many-thousand carpenter ants sent into immediate evacuation mode, Plan B, every which way, bearing in their jaws the pale gold seed of the next generation. I glimpsed among them one larger, reddish-winged, twice the others’ size, fleeing. Later in the day I returned to inspect the riddled core, wrapped around by an inch of slightly more sound wood, a maze-like complexity in which not a single ant could be detected. Until this morning a palace of darkness, intricately galleryed as a Gothic cathedral, that trunk riven and snapped at the height of my forehead had become, for ants and humans alike, a loss to be cut, a ragged ruin under the uneasy scrutiny of the light.

—THOMAS R. SMITH, RIVER FALLS, WI

visit VW Online for more work by this author
Morning, With Insects

Morning still wet behind the ears. Light just over the town’s horizon. Finches somewhere. Sparse traffic.

And these tiny insects swarming up to mate and die. The ones to the east are back-lit by the early sun, bobbing

the one week or so of their adult lives, a loose cloud of gnat-sized creatures, like dust with wings,

this airborne agitation, strange and strangely formal columns moving up and down,

exchanging altitudes, brief collisions.

This moment means the world to them, I guess. Given the sleep of the egg, the sluggish

weeks of larval appetite, and now this day, this coded flight over the wet lawn which might as well be love

for all the aftermath, and me with nothing better to watch

than insects spending everything to dance away oblivion,

and still just early morning here.

—MAX GARLAND, EAU CLAIRE, WI

visit VW Online for more work by this author

Low Life and Blood Relatives

An ode to slugs

Unseemly wet knob of flesh child’s snot ball what part of Earth what Mother loves your facelessness? Oozing where you sit or sleep on seedlings, first buds a vengeance of protoplasm in my garden.

Mud-whale small as fingernails, slick mystery of scum State your purpose.

We live together but is respect due? You, sleazy low-down acrobat passionate to gum holes in my delicate-veined lettuce, crisp harmonious halves of leaf, unbroken peripheries complete, perfect, except for you!

One squish, one flick of my thumb, you die.

My crude neighbor, my low-life third eye, Earth’s balance, wholeness, too, is grounded in our strange difference.

Remind me, with your alien body of startling goo:

We are mud relatives.

We’re family, me and you.

—LOUISA LOVERIDGE GALLAS, MILWAUKEE, WI

The Crayfish

The crayfish scuttle backwards. I don’t think they like the look of us, our big rubber feet, all this uproar of silt. Give them a shadow. Give them a mossy stone to wear like a hat. Claws to snatch a living with. They don’t like this wading in of ours.

Give them a gull to fear like a god. A northern pike to pass over like somebody else’s doom. There’s no honor in death by fisherman’s boot. Give them stealth and hindsight. A muddy version of a mermaid’s tail.

They back-fling themselves from crevice to crevice, from the undersides of sodden branches curtained with algae, to the spaces between the frog-spawned rocks. Give them the fleeing river. Give them the guts to wear their skeletons on the outside. An honest grasp of the ghost of a chance. No use for us at all.

—MAX GARLAND, EAU CLAIRE, WI

visit VW Online for more work by this author
The Old Man Testifies

In the Church of His Throat, every name, every old word’s a testament. Essie and Vince, his grand parents, the little poem Essie remembered for him, the old lamplighter of her baby days, the old man arriving at sundown with a tiny flame.

And O! before you hurry by with ladder and with light;  
O Leerie, see a little child and nod to him to-night!

O Leerie, that was a name she taught him, in the poem she taught him, one day at sundown. By God, that was something to learn, says the Old Man, breath, memory, and dark whiskey congregating in that sanctuary just up from his heart.

(...and that’s the thing, I know those voices – I talk to them, and I talk like them, sweet talkers who taught me my very first words, those old folks who named the colors for me, named the birds and weather, taught my own name to me, where do you think I learned to name a spiderweb or the rain? choo choo train and cherry tree? I hold to the voices that taught me to say sunfish first time in this life, to say walnut and bubble, Donald Duck, O Leerie, and heaven)

Poem at 76

My dead grow younger every year. I’ve grown older than any of them ever got to be, and tender hearted towards them as a grandfather. They went their way, care free. I stayed here. When they visit they play under the catalpa. They look towards the house and ask each other who is that nice old man smiling at us from the upstairs window? Then they play under the big tree till it’s time to go.

John Walser Remembers

James Hazard

I met Jim Hazard on the page before I met him in person: in 1988, as a college senior just accepted into UWM’s grad program, I picked up the anthology Gathering Place of the Waters: 30 Milwaukee Poets. I wanted to see, even more clearly, who it was I was going to be studying with for—it turned out to be—the next decade and a half. Jim’s poems in this collection moved me: songs of childhood, of walking home in the dark, of knocking back a shot glass of Pepsi, of fighters’ names and cuts, of Whiting, Indiana; songs of home, songs of family, songs of a knowing but happy man. These were my introduction to the person I was to think of, at various times over the next almost 25 years, as my professor, my mentor, my champion, my friend.

In the early 1990s, a bunch of us headed over to a now-defunct pizza-joint bar that was across the street from UWM to talk about our writing and about what had happened in class that night. Jim, as usual, had shown up late to class, about fifteen minutes late this time, so we had already started talking. When Jim got there, nothing much changed.

He didn’t take over the conversation. We all just talked, laughed, played. I don’t remember who at the bar said it first, but someone said, “When I sit in Hazard’s class, I think we are just blowing off time, but then we get here and I realize how much…” He didn’t have to finish his sentence; we knew what he meant: an hour, a week, a year, a decade later, you understood what Jim Hazard was subtly showing you: the sacraments of teaching and learning, of living well; Listening, Humor and Love. You simply understood.

In the early 2000s Jim stood at the back of the room, arms folded, as I, after a long absence from the program, took part in a departmental reading at a local bookstore. After I was done, as I walked back to my chair, still uncertain about what I was doing, about whether I was back on the right track, Jim gave me what I had always counted as equal to his laugh, as equal to the glimmer in his eye, as equal to his kindest words: that slow sort-of wink and nod that said to me, “I liked that. You did well. Everything is going to work out.”

I have just re-read again Jim’s poem “In the Bathtub with Erin, Listening to Billie Holiday.” In it, his daughter, who has been studying his scars and listening to their stories (“dog bites, a burn, surgeon’s knives, my own”), asks if they hurt. He replies, “A scar doesn’t hurt.”

And like the first time I read it, I feel the benediction given to his daughter and to us at the end, when he tells her and us about the pains we will necessarily feel: “Erin/looks herself over and can’t find a single scar./ I put my finger on her navel where I saw her be/cut herself over and can’t find a single scar./ I put my finger on her navel where I saw her cut and bleed. Not the least trace of a scar there,/ my finger on her navel where I saw her cut and bleed. Not the least trace of a scar there./ on her or anyone. That tissue grows later on us/and if we are unlucky, no music at all will come of it.”

At the end of his introduction to Gathering Place of the Waters, Jim wrote, “Frank O’Hara, Carl Sandburg, Emily Dickinson, David Etters—writers in their time and place—are great heroes for me. They almost feel part of the family—and I am happy to have lived with them.”

You have left many, many people feeling the same way about you, Jim: happy and lucky to have lived with you, happy and lucky to have heard your music.
**Untangle My Tongue**

1.

Matchstrike, pressed by darkness,  
this is what blesses, crimps you in.  
Insect clicks in the basement

or halftone, cars through the tunnel  
where I contemplate the exigencies of rain:  
Each small scald of headlights, pavement glossed —

Bottle shirred by the mower,  
plastic bag shirred by wind.  
These cars are leaving me, always.

And I can no longer manage  
your gorgeous, unapproachable July—

2.

These cars are leaving me, always.  
In the rain, the stuttering birds.  
Reverberation, shatter

and the grey sky filled with light.  
The sky, pressing out on its cables.  
Cicadas whelm the trees

as the harbor opens like a new balloon.  
I begin to reckon cities. The skill of laundry  
on rooftops, skill of the cyclist

as she risks the bridge.  
Skill of the El on its trestle.  
I begin to reckon trains.

These tables of departure.  
There is nothing in my pockets  
or my hands.

—**Anne Shaw**, Chicago, IL

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**Chopped**

Summer chops memories  
into salad greens, tossed  
and sprinkled with sour vinegar images, a tart tongue, words blended in air conditioner’s quiet murmur at garden’s edge, always a struggle between sun and shadow, running hot and cold, all these things constantly growing only to be chopped down with hoes and lawn mowers, maintaining that balance between past and present, stuffing the rest in garbage bags to be hauled away tomorrow.

—**Rick Dinges**, Lincoln, NE

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**Her face lit up**

but not from joy  
as she received her candle  
at the neighborhood vigil.

Another boy had come home  
in a box  
and this one  
from right down the block.

—**Ed Werstein**, Milwaukee, WI

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**Expectations**

Summer is over  
as short as it is long  
in the scheme of things,  
and as we walk the winding path  
toward the garden pond  
pausing to point out a dead branch  
to pluck a last blossom,  
we already have placed in memory sun-slanted colors  
transient odors;  
of what are we expectant:  
a stream of cool air  
which will lengthen into frost  
solacing silence instead  
of vivid human voices  
the crow on a tree-top  
who croaks like a wind-up toy  
in a Christmas pageant.

—**Ray Greenblatt**, Exton, PA

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—**Ray Greenblatt**, Exton, PA
At the Kitchen Table

An Interview with Douglas Goetsch by Shoshauna Shy

The Ripple in Your Day

I’d like to pull back the hair from your face and ask how you get through the ripple in your day, the one that comes unannounced like a feral animal sitting on the lawn facing your windows— you’d think you’d be used to it by now. It stays maybe a minute, maybe an hour, and doesn’t go away until it does. Do you settle into your favorite chair with the universal remote, spend an hour in the shower, bury your head in crosswords, sleep in your clothes? Do you buy crap on eBay, Google people from your old school, picturing the days they’re having in other towns? Does coffee deliver you, perhaps an early cocktail, a spoon and a half-gallon of cookie dough ice cream? Maybe you scream at Customer Service, or research how to make a bomb. Painkillers would be refreshingly direct. Are you one of those who can stare at themselves in the mirror and pronounce affirmations? Do you pray, or do you put on a certain song and sway empty-handed in the darkening room?

What is it that you do, do every day, that everybody does, even heroes on posters we hung in our childhood bedrooms—athletes, rock stars, Hollywood A-listers who, if they don’t make it past the ripple in their day, end up in the papers, buried in their places—though I did play around with the wordings. Cloistered nuns, Henry Kissinger, people in the People’s Republic of China—everybody’s day, even their best day, has a ripple, when something reverses, dust motes float slowly upward and memories of old wounds trudge into the room like wet dogs. Have you come to believe the ripple is you? The ripple isn’t you. How you get through it—that’s not even you, it’s just your life, your story, the story of us all, each inside our own day, and with you, though feeling so separate and holding on. Holding on.

– DOUGLAS GOETSC, NEW YORK CITY, NY

Douglas Goetsch of New York City joined Shoshauna Shy for a conversation about his poem “The Ripple in Your Day.” Grab a cup of coffee, pull up a chair and listen in.

DOUG: I’ve been a writer of poetry for about 25 years. I got the bug as a young public school teacher in New York, while teaching a unit in poetry to 9th graders.

SHOSHAUNA: Could you tell us, Doug, what triggered the creation of this poem—was it an image, a piece of music, something you overheard in the cereal aisle?

DOUG: “The Ripple in Your Day” was triggered directly by Hollywood—something rare for me. Heath Ledger had just killed himself with drugs, and Owen Wilson, after a suicide attempt, was making a new comedy. Other than the fact that they are people who have what so many in our society want—fame, money, etc.—I knew little about them; though I was overcome at the time with a theory: their disasters stemmed from a small moment, a ripple, that happens to all of us. A difficult interlude shows up on our doorstep, daily, and how we navigate that ripple says more about us than just about anything.

SHOSHAUNA: So, what came first for you, was it the image of the half-gallon of ice cream or perhaps the phrase “wandering nameless in Orange County...”? Did the final line arrive or did the phrase “wandering nameless in Orange County...” arrive?

DOUG: This was one of those rare times when the first draft contained everything the final draft would need. I think I just began with that first image—“I’d like to pull back the hair from your face and ask...”—and ran with it. I knew I’d be getting to the self-destructing celebs, but something told me to start with quizzing the reader about how they get through their day. A bunch of things got rearranged later, though the wet dogs, the wandering in Orange County, and the ending all arrived right on time, and stayed in their places—though I did play around a lot with the wordings.

SHOSHAUNA: So, this brings me to my next question, and it’s more personal, so you definitely don’t need to answer it if you rather not. But what I’m wondering is where is the “truth” in this poem as far as it relates to your own personal experience? I believe that in every poem we write, there is something in it that actually happened to us, even if it wasn’t directly TO us that it happened, know what I’m saying? Like maybe it was your brother who came down to breakfast one morning when he was visiting you, and you realized that he had slept in his clothes, and you thought, “Hmmm, could that be a throwback to when he was seven and our house caught on fire...” or you saw a feral animal on your lawn one evening. Guess what I’m wondering is what’s the “ripple in your day...” If you want to answer that.

DOUG: Shoshauna, you’re wise to put “truth” in quotes. Part of how we can damage ourselves is solidifying our identities as victims, bad people, whatever. I could run down the list of strategies in the poem and say which ones do and don’t apply to me (i.e., cookie dough ice cream: no; yelling at customer service: check...), or I could tell you certain things happened in my childhood and how they carried through into adulthood. But part of what poetry does is it holds everything up to question, and in that flux of questioning is the chance at arriving at the truth without quotes. A poem is successful when it’s a truer arrangement of details than any other way we could have reported them.

SHOSHAUNA: I like that. I’ve always felt that “what really happened” is subjective, and I’m all for changing my impression of “truth” for the sake of a poem. Let the journalist labor over some version of the facts!

It’s interesting to me what feeds into the creation of a poem, and I thank you for sharing that. So, what is it about this particular poem that you are especially fond of, i.e., was there something about it specifically that made you want to give it the limelight right now?

DOUG: What makes me fond of “The Ripple in Your Day” is that it’s somewhat of a singleton for me: a poem that advances a philosophical or psychological theory, but it also has the properties of a sermon; it’s also a catalogue poem, which is how it gets down the page. It’s a fairly public poem—some examples ripped, as they say, from the tabloid headlines—yet it felt strangely personal to write. When I do a reading, it’s the piece that sends the audience into their own lives the most. Once in Oklahoma, when I got to the part about memories of old wounds trudging into the room like wet dogs, a woman in the back let out this exhausted moan. It was more eloquent than anything in the poem.

This is an excerpt from Shoshauna Shy’s interview with Douglas Goetsch. Read the full interview at versewisconsin.org. If you’d like to contact Doug to continue the conversation about his poem, you can reach him here: Doug@janestreet.org
On the Coast in Pedasí

Beached boats litter coves, sails sprawled like abandoned skirts of lovers asleep on the sand.

The empty zocalo simmers in the sun like a fortune waiting to be whispered, Café Tiesto’s shutters and doors anchored open to release its brick oven heat. Through a streaked windshield, you watch a woman sweep the dusty veranda, wipe tables spruced with buds drooping into an afternoon still as a breath held.

If you exhale now, a tornado of bees will careen around the corner, swarm the plaza, blackening its sky.

The woman will drift inside, gently latch shutters as the funnel cloud drones through town, busy with the work of finding home. Once the horizon has swallowed all of them, you will part your lips, release the locks, exit cover. Watch your step. Every migration bears its fallen, those that drop to the dirt. Across the plaza, the woman will push the door open hum as she sweeps.

This is an excerpt from Wendy Vardaman’s interview with Brenda Cárdenas, Milwaukee’s most recent poet laureate. The full interview with video and photos is available at versewisconsin.org.

WV: Do you see yourself as an academic poet, a community poet, or both?

BC: Although Latinos/as are the fastest growing population in the United States with some 48 million people, and some aspects of Latino/a cultures have made their way into U. S. popular culture—certain foods, music, holidays, words and expressions—the American versions are usually watered down facsimiles of the original, detached from their full contexts and easy for non-Latinos/as to consume without understanding their complexities. Worse, we need look no further than the severe anti-immigrant legislation that targets Latinos/as in Arizona or attacks on ethnic studies and the Dream Act, to see the right wing’s malicious attempts to disenfranchise any Latinos/as except the wealthiest in the U. S., regardless of their legal status.

Latino/a writers are similarly often marginalized within the larger literary establishment. It was 2008 before a Latino poet, Juan Felipe Herrera, who had over 30 books published at the time, won the National Book Critics Circle Award. He has since also won the Guggenheim and was just named California’s poet laureate—so deserved and well overdue. It is especially difficult for those who write in Spanish (even if their work is translated) or translingually, but even English-language Latino/a poets who might use allusions to non-Western mythologies, legends, literary texts, and histories, find that it is not uncommon for non-Latina/o readers to view the work as esoteric and inaccessible. A Spanish-language subtext (such as references to an idiomatic expression or the purposeful use of Spanish syntax) may very well exist beneath the English surface of a Latino/a poem, adding a layer of meaning or nuance to the poem and often resulting in witty word play, but this is lost on the non-Latina/o reader who does not wish to do the work necessary to read for such possibilities.

Some Latina/o poets are caught in an internal tug of war regarding when, how, and even whether to write about or refer, at least directly, to their cultures and ethnicities in their poems. For good reason, one might wonder whether the culture in this way and purposefully resists falling prey to auto-ethnography. We are all so much more than our ethnicities. At the same time, a poet doesn’t want to be barred from incorporating cultural elements in her work. And then there are those who posit that one’s world view is so affected by culture that no matter what a Latina/o writes about, she/he is writing a Latina/o poem. In my lifetime, I’ve seen more and more Latina/o poets break through these barriers and see their work published. This is partly due to their own persistence and partly due to the tireless efforts of Latino/a organizations, editors and presses.

One thing we can all do to support Latina/o poetry is to fight against the demolition of ethnic studies courses and programs in public schools, colleges and universities. Another is to apply equal reading practices to Latino/a literature that we would apply to any other literature. If one is willing to look up “foreign” words and literary, mythological, Biblical, and historical allusions when reading a poem by, say, T. S. Eliot or Ezra Pound, then she/he should be willing to do the same when reading the work of a Latina/o poet.

The full interview with video and photos is available at versewisconsin.org.
**Flexible Vitreous**  
(after Harvey K. Littleton’s *Orange and Purple Implied Movement*, 1987)

I.

Bass’s purple tones bend  
our knees, swing our hips  
low, but sax arches backs,  
rolls spines up yoga slow,  
twists our long necks  
toward orange trumpet blasts.

Curls kink and spring  
tendrils loose, sweep the floor,  
spark the air. We lift  
our faces, all bliss and flame,  
in amethyst moans  
glistening hot and wet.

Skin each other’s skin, barely  
touch to twirl, clave keeps  
our feet from landing.

II.

Corazón cristal, por la vena cava,  
solamente salidas y regresos.  
En los canales, canoas de flores—  
aves del paraíso, lirios de agua.  
Y al dentro de la aurícula,  
las rutas de una cueva morada—  
cada viaje, cada descanso.

III.

Bella-  
donna-  
bottoms  
and hooka  
loops, crazy  
queen-of-hearts’  
dream crown,  
black lights,  
electric kool-  
aid looking  
glass. Go  
*ask Alice*  
when  
you’re  
ten feet  
tall.

IV.

Fire bush peeks  
through purple fountain  
grass, hound’s tongue licking  
a Siberian wallflower.  
Bee’s bliss sage stings  
the cosmos orange,  
while wooly blue curls  
around lion’s ear. Poppies open  
to the tease of coyote mint,  
seaside daisies bathed  
in ocean mist. Lupines stretch  
to catch butterfly weed,  
and under nightshade, dog  
violets rest in the glow  
of Chinese lanterns. If only.

V.

Blow the pipe like a pungi, whistling  
et wet scales through its open mouth.  
Medusa’s purple hair will squirm  
from the fire, rise in liquid twists  
to the pitch of your breath. Watch it  
write, dip into cool shadow. Quick,  
charm it back, trap her in glass.

**Brenda Cárdenas** is the author of *Boomerang* (Bilingual Press, 2009) and *From the Tongues of Brick and Stone* (Momotombo Press, Institute for Latino/a Studies, 2005). Cárdenas’ work has appeared widely, including *The Wind Shifts: The New Latino Poetry, RATTLE, Prairie Schooner*, and most recently in the journal *Pilgrimage*, and the anthology *Brute Neighbors: Urban Nature Poetry, Prose and Photography*. She was Milwaukee’s Poet Laureate in 2010-11.
He clasps my hand, eyes
Held, disregarding spouse, who
Will be leaving soon

—ELMAE PASSINEAU, WAUSAU, WI

**Fugue in C# Minor**

I watch my father’s covers rise and fall as fists
of wind knock oleander against the patio door.
The sky darkens when suddenly,
rain pelts the house like shrapnel.
Blue light flickers from the TV, photos
of dead soldiers flash on the “News Hour”
one shot at a time.

His bony body, swaddled in a fleece blanket,
sits in a beige arm chair,
legs lifted to a pillowed coffee table.
In his hand, an orange Popsicle hovers
as a bomb flares across the screen.
Sirens wail in the distance.

Dad’s small voice asks for ice chips.
How baffled he must be with the turn
his life has taken, how the view
keeps changing,

Trudging toward the kitchen, I think how each day
is a fugue, how today the music is impossible
like a cross burning. Point, counterpoint,
complex polyphony, difficult key. No orange blossom scent
or buttercup glaze on the hills, only tension, intensity.
A C# minor day.

I turn off the news, listen to Bach on the stereo. We sit
in silence. The monsoon quiets and my father closes
his eyes. I try to untangle the voices in the fugue,
each distinct, yet inseparable from the whole,
none existing without the other.

—MARY JO BALISTRERI, WAUKESA, WI

**Gaudi Flies in from Barcelona**

From outside my mother’s studio, I sit in a lawn chair
and watch master cloud masons. Arabesques
of entwined vines scroll down the frothy fantasy,
capricious twists to the soaring cathedral of clouds.
The entire concoction looks like a Gaudi creation,
as if he has taken respite from stone
to imagine a softer version of La Sagrado Famila.

Inside at her easel, Mother moves the brush fast
across paper soaked like rain, guides paint
without controlling it. Time turns from amber to mauve.
Slivers of shadow pierce fleeting white spires.
Dogs with their feet in the air and flying fish
freefall in feathers.

Like the train in Turner’s *Rain, Steam and Speed*,
her ethereal church is barely visible.
Clouds carry the canvas.

—MARY JO BALISTRERI, WAUKESA, WI

**Don’t Guess, Count**

The Fugue issues that
proclamation every time,
its tapestry woven with
golden threads of voice,
patterns offset with ingenuity,
shimmering polyphony,
the composer’s favorite child
So when it’s your time
to grab Theme Two
and throw it into the mix,
be sure you’re wearing
the right boots for marching
Otherwise, you’ll cause
your colleagues to stumble,
which can, in front of
an educated audience,
have consequences beyond
the bruised egos of
your fallen comrades

—KATRIN TALBOT, MADISON, WI
Tortoise and the Hare

It’s difficult to figure who’ll go first; mom, with her heart attack, pinched nerve and hip that wakes her in the night—the chemo drip still in her veins, or dad, his mass submersed in slothfulness, who might conceivably sit in his chair and sink into a coma, unnoticed, till the dinnertime aroma would cease to wake him (unbelievably).

My mother swims ten laps a day, hell-bound to ride her bike at eighty-five. She walks and chatters constantly. Father seldom talks, embellishes dessert with cream. The ground moans beneath his widening girth. My mom is trim and neat, her sewing room’s in order; dad’s office looks like he’s a first class hoarder. The winning post waits like an atom bomb, or unseen trophy in the 4th dimension.

My father sitting on the couch, no stress, and mother cooking in her Sunday dress. I watch the finish line with apprehension.

—Karen Kelsay, Torrance, CA
Ronnie Hessel's poetry has appeared in several publications, including Alimentum, Arbor Vitae, and Wisconsin Poets & Idea. She is the author of a chapbook, Whole Cloth: A Poem Cycle (Little Eagle Press, 2009), and a culinary travel guide, Eat Smart in France. p. 15

Karla Huston is the author of six chapbooks of poetry, most recently, An Inventory of Lost Things (Centennial Press, 2009). A broadside is forthcoming from Page 3. Her poems, reviews and interviews have been published in many journals. Her poem “Theory of Lipstick,” originally published in Verse Wisconsin #101, was awarded a Pushcart Prize. p. 10

As founding editor of Many Voices Press, Lowell Jaeger, who grew up in Wisconsin, compiled Poems Across the Big Sky, an anthology of Montana poets, and New Poets of the American West, an anthology of poets from Western states. Recent collections are Suddenly Our One Long Sleep (Arcos Press, 2009) and 100 Days (Whiskey Town Press, 2010). The recipient of fellowships from the NEA and the Montana Arts Council, and winner of the Grolier Poetry Peace Prize, Jaeger was awarded the Montana Governor’s Humanities Award for his work in promoting thoughtful civic discourse. p. 22, 23

Russell Jaffe attended Beloit College in Wisconsin and he loves the state very much especially during the winter months, when he teaches editors of all kinds. It is easily accessed by high speed rail from Iowa City, where he currently lives. He teaches at Kirkwood Community College and edits the small poetry press, Strange Cage (strangecage.org). p. 27, 29

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 Moser Memorial Chapbook Contest sponsored by the Alabama Poetry Society. She lives in Port Edwards, with her poet husband Jeffrey. p. 14

Martha Kaplan lives in Madison, Wisconsin where sometimes cranes fly over her house. She has published with Branch Red Review, Blue Unicorn, Hummingbird, Verse Wisconsin, and Mokhiu, The Poetry Magazine, as well as the WFOF calendar. p. 4

Karen Kelsey is the editor of Victorian Violet Press, an online poetry magazine. She also manages White Violet Press, a chapbook company that publishes formalist poetry. Some of her work can be seen in The Hyperitetts, Rainstorm Review, Mazes Caminos, The New Formalist, Gay String, Poet and Sound, and Poem. p. 37

Mark Kraushaar’s work has appeared in the Hudson Review, Plainsongs, and Alaska Review; as well as Best American Poetry. His collection, Felling Brick Kiln Local Man was published in 2009 by the University of Wisconsin Press as winner of the Felix Pollak Prize. His most recent book, The Uncertainty Principle, was published by the New Press in 2010. p. 28

Michael Kricke's poems have appeared widely. He's written reviews for Small Press Review and Literary Journal, and has won the WFOF Muse Prize, the Litine Niedecker Award, and the Wisconsin Poem and Ideas John Lehman Poetry Prize. Books include Chasing Saturday Night (Marsh River Editions), and Feeding My Heart To the Wind and Mats Math The House (sunyoutwokside) p. 7

Lisa Kundrat received her MFA in poetry from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She misses the Midwest at times, but not Milwaukee, especially the coffee. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin where sometimes cranes fly over her house. She has published with Branch Red Review, Blue Unicorn, Hummingbird, Verse Wisconsin, and Mokhiu, The Poetry Magazine as well as the WFOF Calendar. p. 2

Lyn Lifshin has published over 120 books and edited 4 anthologies. Most recently: all the Poets Who Have Touched Me, Living and Dead; All True: Especially the Lies; and forthcoming from New York Quarterly Books: A Girl Goes Into the Woods, thelillynifish.com. p. 20

Austin MacRae’s poetry has appeared most recently in 32 Poems, Atlanta Review; and Stone Canoe. He is a past finalist for the Morrow Max Poetry Prize and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He teaches English at Tompkins Cortland Community College in Dryden, NY. p. 14

Dennis Mahagin’s work appears in Exquisite Corpse, PARKE, 3 A.M., 42quads, Stirring, Jade, Night Train, The Nervous Breakdown, and many other literary journals. A chapbook of his poems, Farc, is forthcoming in 2011 from Redneck Press in conjunction with the website, Fried Chicken and Coffee (friedchickenandcoffee.com). p. 37

Katherine Mead grew up in central Wisconsin, studied Geography at the University of Wisconsin, and currently lives in St. Louis, MO. p. 13

Richard Merrill does not submit. Much. He has wandered around the edge of the poetry pool self-teaching for years now. He desperately wants to but his truck driving gig stands in the way currently. His work has appeared in Story Garden 7, Nighttrain, and Blue collateral. He lives in Kenosha with his wife Melissa and a Brussels Griffon. p. 19

Jan Minich lives in Wellington, Utah, and also spends time on Superior’s Apostle Islands each year. A former Western American Literature and Creative Writing Professor, as well as Director of Wilderness Studies at the College of Eastern Utah/Utah State U, he is an emeritus professor, and has published more than 400 books, articles, and columns. p. 10, 11

Robert Nordstrom is a poet, free-lance writer and school bus driver living in Mukwonago, Wisconsin. His most recent and likely accomplishment is teaching a second grader that it’s probably best she not lick the seat in front of her. p. 5

Todd Neron is a Native American poet who lives and works in Appleton, Wisconsin. p. 19

Mary O’Dell’s knowledge of Wisconsin consists primarily of her best friend’s husband’s dentist, who lives somewhere there, and whom they visited there some years ago. But it does sound quite a lovely, clean place to live. p. 16

Elmae Passinou has published two chapbooks, On Edge and Beloved Somedred. She is currently a thinker, reader, friend, helper, feminist, and writer. p. 23, 36
Bob Persons has lived in Wisconsin almost all of his 72 years, writing poems, stories, and opinion pieces for 50+ years. He’s been published in Blue Fifth Review, Voices International, Tangerine, Kaleidoscope, and elsewhere, p. 12

Darrell Petska is a Middleton, Wisconsin writer and free-lance editor in the field of adult education. He worked previously as senior editor for the UW-Madison College of Engineering, p. 12

Christine Porecha, a native New Yorker, has a favorite cozy t-shirt from University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, where her uncle Stanley, whom she once visited in Milwaukee, went to school. She teaches English as a Second Language at UW-Milwaukee for Aspire Outreach. Recent work appears in The Southern Review, Alimentum, and The Sun, p. 10

Ester Hauser Laurence Prudlo is a UW alumna and the author of three children’s books. She taught creative writing courses for UW Ex and MATC. A retired counselor, she and husband Tony spend summers in Fitchburg and winters in Montgomery, AL, p. 24

Summer Qabazard is a poet who grew up in Kuwait and now lives in Normal, Illinois where she is a Ph.D. student in Illinois State University. Her poem “All Hands Busy Dead” appears in the University of Missouri-St. Louis’s literary magazine, LitMag. She likes Wisconsin cheese, p. 23

Liz Rhodebeck is a poet and freelance writer from Wyukaer, where she is active in the local arts community. She is co-editor of the project, “One Vision: A Fusion of Art and Poetry in Lake Country.” She has recently published her third chapbook, What I Learned in Kansas from Port Yonder Press. See her website at www.litwaterer.com, p. 5

Dale Ritterbusch is the author of two collections of poetry, Lessons Learned and Far From the Temple of Heaven. He is a professor of English in the Department of Languages and Literatures at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, p. 37

Jeanne E. Roberts won first place in the Green Bay Symphony Orchestra’s Music Alive statewide poetry contest. Her public readings include Weidner Center for the Performing Arts, Wisconsin Public Radio and other venues. A lifelong visual artist, she is also the author and illustrator of Lei Make Fauze, a children’s book (www.RhymeTheRoostBooks.com), p. 27

Chuck Rybak is currently an Assistant Professor of English and Humanistic Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. His length collection, Pine Tongue and Grace, was released in 2007 by Main Street Rag. Poems of his have appeared in The Cincinnati Review, Pebble Lake Review, War, Literature & the Arts, The Lodge, Southern Poetry Review, Verse Wisconsin, and other journals, p. 5

Andrew Schilling is 28 years old and currently hanging around Marshfield, WI, working construction, p. 20

G. A. Scheinolah thought about becoming a private detective, later, a bounty hunter. He never imagined held onto his father’s tracks; a series of blue collar jobs. Where their lives differed was instead of marriage and family, he wrote a million words over thirty years, some of which have recently appeared in Avenue, Believing Art, Bracelet Charm, Echoes, Floyd County Moonshine and Verse Wisconsin, p. 13

Wendy Schmidt is a Wisconsin native who has written short stories and poems for the last 10 years. Her poetry and short stories have been published in Strange, Weird and Wonderful, Daily Flash, 2012, Three Line Poetry, Tainted Tea, Fear and Trembling, and Verse Wisconsin, p. 24

Robert Schuler has been write for fifty years. His fifteenth collection of poems, The Book of Jeweled Visions, has recently been published by Tom Mont’s MWP Books, PO Box 8, Fairfield, WI 53931. Price: $12.50 plus $1.50 postage, p. 6, 12, 17

Anne Shaw’s collections of poetry include Underneath, winner of the Lexi Rudnitsky Poetry Prize, and Shatter & Threats, forthcoming from Persea Books in 2013. Work of hers has also appeared, or is forthcoming, in Harvard Review, New American Writing, Black Warrior Review, Indiana University Review, and Hotel America. Her website is www.anneshw.org, p. 32

Shonshauna 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. Her collection titled What the Postcard Didn’t Say won an Outstanding Achievement Award from the Wisconsin Library Association in 2008, p. 35

Thomas R. Smith lives in River Falls, Wisconsin, and is a Master Track instructor in poetry at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. His most recent collections are Kinnikinnick (Parallel Press), and The Foot of the Rainbow, available from Red Dragonfly Press. He posts blogs and poems on his web site at www.thomasmsmithpoet.com, p. 29

Robert Sonkowski’s first love was his second-grade teacher, Miss Malarkey, in Appleton, WI. She first love was his second-grade teacher, Miss Malarkey, in Appleton, WI. She was a finalist in the 2011 National Poetry Series for her manuscript, Saudade. She is a grant recipient of the Michigan Art Council and the Arkansas Arts Council, among other honors. She’s recently published in The MacGyver, Pomegranate, Pulling Pong, The Journal of the Henry Miller Library, The Delinquents (UK), among others. She lives near Chicago with her sons, p. 13

Marc Swan lives on Munjoy Hill in Portland Maine. His work has been published in Exquisite Corpse, Ratte, Slipstream, and Westerly, among others. Simple Distraction, a collection of his poems from 1989 to 2009, was published in 2009 by Tarr-lighthouse in London England. p. 14

Isabel Sylvan lives along the Raritan Bay where she writes both poetry and fiction. Her work has appeared in numerous small presses throughout the past twenty years. Currently, she is the editor of Poetry Breakfast, a monthly poetry journal, p. 4

N. A’Yara Stein was a finalist in the 2011 National Poetry Series for her manuscript, Saudade. She is a grant recipient of the Michigan Art Council and the Arkansas Arts Council, among other honors. She’s recently published in The MacGyver, Pomegranate, Pulling Pong, The Journal of the Henry Miller Library, The Delinquents (UK), among others. She lives near Chicago with her sons, p. 13

Nancy Takacs’s third book of poetry Juniper was recently published by Limberlost Press: limberlostpress.com. She is the recent recipient of the first-place poetry award in the Utah Arts Council’s Original Writing Contest and the 2010 Kay Saunders Memorial Award in the WFOP Triad Contest, p. 15

Australian-born Katrin Talbot is a violinist, photographer, and poet, whose poetry has appeared in a number of journals and anthologies, and a yearly anthology. WFOP offers Wisconsin poets opportunities for fellowship and growth.

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