If you are going to edit/publish poetry, ask yourself: Am I a hermit? Could I be a hermit? Do I love to spend time alone with poetry? It also helps if you can let other things go—like sleeping, or having a perfectly clean house at all times—or at any time.

—Linda Aschbrenner

Actually, that is all I'm looking for. Brevity. It has to hold up on its own, not just look short or fit the page. A certain tightness of expression and emotion that I don't think is really achieved in a longer poem.

—Phyllis Walsh

Features

Poems for Ellen Kort
Guest Edited by Fabu

2013 Cowfeather Press Poets—
Cathryn Cofell & Moisés Villavicencio Barras

Small Press Poetry Publishing: I Ask Myself What's It All About—
The History of Free Verse and Marsh River Editions by Linda Aschbrenner

Conversations with Phyllis Walsh & CX Dillhunt

Humble Inheritance: Reflections on My Internship with Phyllis Walsh by Trish Stachelski
Editors’ Notes

Dear Sir: As two women volunteers who work long hours unofficially and for free outside of institutional support, either through funded grants or titled academia, we’re used to being listed “second,” or even not at all, in people’s assessments. As poets and scholars, we’re used to being underestimated due to our gender, subject matter and approach. As someone who has no knowledge of our record, or our writing, and who probably hasn’t bothered much to look it up anywhere or seek it out, why should it offend us if you underestimate and misunderstand our project, our attitude, our expertise and our possible contributions to any partnership with you? Our egos would have to be delicate indeed if that were to discourage us from the work we do.

Sarah wrote that to Wendy recently, to get it off her chest without exploding at the “sir” in question this time (another reason it’s good to edit with another person). To which, Wendy responded, “uh-huh.” As Sarah noted, our egos may not be delicate, but our boundaries have needed constant defending. Sadly, we could have written it multiple times over the last few years, at any which moment it would have been appropriate to some interaction or other we were involved in at the time. Maybe that’s not unexpected. We’ve tried something here at VW admittedly unusual: a journal which crossed boundaries in all kinds of ways: print and online, intellectually rigorous and community based, small-town friendly with a wider scope. We know we’re not “prestigious,” and we publish each issue with just enough in the bank to publish the next, but those truths have given us the freedom to experiment. With this issue, we turn the focus to “Women and Publishing.”

 Appropriately, we celebrate two of the godmothers of Wisconsin poetry, our first state Laureate, Ellen Kort, and Phyllis Walsh, the founding editor of Hummingbird. We also explore, in the online issue, the question of women writers and this relatively new form of publishing known as blogging, and we open up a little more about our own experiences as writers, as publishers, and as women trying to balance these activities with our own lives in a collaborative essay, “EveryMom: How and Why to Support Wisconsin Writers.” As we’ve said before, the opportunity to edit VW was a gift from that other figure fundamental to Wisconsin poets, Linda Aschbrenner; making VW a product of our own vision has been invaluable to both of us in our growth as writers, activists and thinkers.

So this seems an appropriate moment to officially announce our plans to exit gracefully from the stage in a few more issues. When we took on this adventure, we said from the outset we'd give it five years. As we have moved through the seasons and issues, that has remained our constant plan. We'll have a good run, we hope, through the end of 2014. And then we’ll be done. Of course, we’ll still publish poetry through Cowfeather, and we want to remain involved in multiple ways in the cultural life of the state. But Verse Wisconsin, as we’ve brought it into the world, will cease. And that’s not a bad thing. Nature abhors a vacuum, after all, and we’re confident other projects, and possibly other editors of this magazine, will emerge to give new voice and vision to Wisconsin’s poets and those of you who have been part of the VW family from further abroad. We hope and expect new experiments and new definitions. We’re looking forward to seeing what happens next.

In every issue, we have tried to remain true to our core beliefs: that great writing can emerge from any community, any place, any kitchen, any office, at any time, and we all need to stay open to hear it. That our connections and conversations should be nurtured and appreciated. And it needs to be stated that you all have backed us up in this and proven what we only theorized at first. We’ll repeat this often over the remaining issues, but we can’t say it enough: thank you to you all, for your poems, your articles and reviews. For your subscriptions and donations. For the ideas, the comments, the complaints and the enthusiasm you have shared with us. We hope you will continue to share all of these through the coming seasons. After all, we’re not done yet—we have three more issues to go, and we’re full of ideas!

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Publisher & author links available online

L. Ward Abel, American Bruise, Parallel Press, 2012
John E. Buckley, Sky Sandwiches, Anaphora Literary Press, 2012
John E. Buckley & Martin Ott, Poets’ Guide to America, Brooklyn Arts Press, 2012
Jamie Buechner, desert poems, A Binge Press Book, 2011
Kelly Cherry, Vectors, Parallel Press, 2012
Rod Cockrum, Immediacy, Author House, 2010
Joan Colby, DRAD Theme, FutureCycle Press, 2012

Books Reviewed & Noted Online

Mary Jo Balistreri, gathering the harvest, Bellowing Ark Press, 2012, by Charles Portolano
Mark Belair, Whole Woke Wastin’, Aldrich Press, 2013, by Tim McLaughery
Alice D’Alessio, Conversations With Thoreau, Parallel Press, 2012, Two Reviews: by Tim McLaughery, and by Jeanie Tomasko
Nick Demanske, Shifty Deeply Deet, Strange Cage, 2012, by Charlie Rossiter
Susan Elbe, Where Good Swimmers Drown, Concrete Wolf Poetry Chapbook Series, 2012, by Linda Ashchner
John Elberg and Eric Greinke, All This Dark, 24 Tanka Sequences, Cervená Barva Press, 2012, by Judy Swann
Gail Fishman Gerwin, Dear Kinfolk, ChayaCalm Press, 2012, by Nancy Scott
Deborah Hauser, Emma: From the Diagnostic and Statistical Field Guide of Feminine Disorders, Finishing Line Press, 2011, by Richard Swanson
Claire Hero, Dollybird, Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2012, by Lucia Cherici
Lowell Jaeger, Wé, Main Street Rag, 2010, by Ramona Davis
Athena Kildegaard, Clove & Honey, Nadin Press, 2011, by Kathleen Serley
Mike Lane, They Can Keep the Cinderblock, Exot Books, 2012, by Elmae Passineau
Micah Ling, Settlement, Sunnyoutside, 2012, by Lou Roach
Diana Randolph, Becoas of the Earth and Sky, Savage Press, 2012, by Hope McLeod
J.D. Smith, Labor Day at Venice Beach, Cherry Grove Collections, 2012, by Carmen Germain
Allison Stone, Walt (Winner of The Brittingham Prize in Poetry), UW Press, 2011, by Susan Delaney Spear
Allison Stone, From the Fool to the World, Parallel Press, 2012, by Tim McLaughery
Bruce Taylor, The Longest You’ve Lived Anywhere, Poems New and Selected, 2013, by Adam Halbur
George Young, Bird of Paradise, Parallel Press, 2011, by Richard Swanson
Timothy Young, The Mississippi Book of the Dead, Parallel Press, 2011, by John Oldki

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 invite the audience for poetry

Books Received May-August 2012
Publisher & author links available online

Charles Bane, Jr., The Chapbook, Carbside Splendor, 2011
Robert Cooperman, The Lily of the West, Wind Publications, 2012
Robert Cooperman, Little Timon in Heaven, Parallel Press, 2011
Paola Corso, Once I Was Told the Air Was Not For Breathing, Parallel Press, 2012
Alice D’Alessio, Conversations With Thoreau, Parallel Press, 2012
Nick Demanske, Shifty Deeply Deet, Strange Cage, 2012
Franki Elliott, Piano Rolls, Carbside Splendor, 2011
Chris Emery, The Departure, Salt, 2012
Dana Gioia, Poet, Poem, Poet, Graywolf Press, 2012
Albert Goldbarth, Everyday People, Graywolf Press, 2012
Natalie Handal, Poet in Andalucia, University of Pittsburgh, 2012
George Held, After Shakespeare: Selected Sonnets, Cervená Barva Press, 2011
Karla Huston & Kathryn Cofell, Split Personality, Sunnyoutside, 2012
David W. Landrum, The Impossibility of Epithalamia, White Violet Press, 2011
Carol Levin, Stunned by the Velocity, Pecan Grove Press, 2012
Micah Ling, Settlement, Sunnyoutside, 2012
Leslie Adrienne Miller, 7 Graywolf Press, 2012
Tom Montag, That Woman, Red Rite Press, 2012
James Pollock, Sailing to Babylon, Able Muse Press, 2012
Jo Sarzotti, Mother Desert, Graywolf Press, 2012
Cynthia Spencer, In What Sequence Will My Parts Exit, Plumbees Press, 2011
Chelsea Tadeyelska, Heelbreaker, Plumbees Press, 2012

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When you look at Ellen Kort’s extensive biography, you read about an accomplished poet who has shared her work worldwide. Her bio is the mere bones of Ellen, and to know her really is to experience the warm flesh of her poetry. Ellen Kort is truly loved by all of us who have written these poems of tribute. We appreciate our kind meetings, her life affirming words and steadfast encouragement to continue with poetry. I thank the Editors of Verse Wisconsin for the opportunity to return to Ellen a little bit of the honor that she has always shown me and my work. —Fabu

We’re pleased to include two previously unpublished poems by Ellen Kort in this issue. Poems for Ellen Kort start to the right and appear on pages 5-15.

The Long Continuous Line
When eating fruit, think of the person who planted the tree. —Vietnamese Proverb

When I was nine my grandpa gave me an apple tree in his orchard This one is yours he said It breathes the same air as you and me Every time you touch a tree you become part of the story of the earth I didn’t know what it meant to own a tree There was something overwhelming about a gift that belonged to the earth but I loved that tree and the past into which it has gone The nurturing fragrance of apple blossoms bees wild with delight my touch-and-know of branches blessed by wind and rain moon and sun My tree My very own tree giving its fruit without me even asking Grandpa and me sitting in the grass leaning against my tree listening to the rustling murmur of leaves watching a flock of geese measuring the sky distant sounds that could be words I loved the quiet unfolding between us each of us taking a bite into the sweet sacrament of an apple its tight red skin hugging a generous white heart and tucked inside a little star-house of seeds The only smell better than those first white blossoms was the autumn tumble of windfalls the warm smell of pie baking in grandma’s oven and applesauce spiced with cinnamon I knew that tree the whole taste of it and all of its luminous gifts like seeds in my pocket So much gets lost in the echoes and loneliness of memory our hunger for roots our need for steadiness the promise of tomorrow Even now when I hold the round red universe of an apple in the palm of my hand I can still lean against that apple tree and the man who planted it

—ELLEN KORT, APPLETON, WI

The Stream of Life
To be great, art has to point somewhere. —Anne Lamott

Point and shoot is what I told my sons when they were little Lift the lid and they did circling it in rhythmic yellow One floated a toy plastic boat in the toilet ocean a perfect aim could make it spin One tried writing his name on the wall stopping and starting in a valiant attempt to dot the I I caught them peeing yellow rivers in their sandbox watering my flowers the oak tree in the backyard My Uncle Pete said some of the best conversations he ever had some of the best business deals he ever made took place while standing in front of a urinal He liked the simple sense of truth the zipping up the closure the handshake

I dressed as a man once for a Halloween party Trench coat hat and shoes from Goodwill a Richard Nixon mask and one cut-off leg of pantyhose stuffed and sewed to the front of a pair of trousers After the party we went to a bar and my friends dared me to go into the men’s restroom I took the dare I pictured all the men I’ve ever known standing in front of those urinals Mr. Success and his perfect aim full stream ahead The jokester who talks non-stop I stayed long enough to read the carefully printed sign above the row of urinals Please do not splash The guy next to you might be barefoot

—ELLEN KORT, APPLETON, WI
If Death Were a Woman

I’d want her to come for me
smelling of cinnamon   wearing
bright cotton purple maybe  hot pink a red bandana in her hair
She’d bring good coffee  papaya juice
bouquet of sea grass saltine crackers
and a lottery ticket We’d dip
our fingers into moist pouches
of lady’s slippers crouch down to see
how cabbages feel when wind bumps
against them in the garden
We’d walk through Martin’s woods
find the old house its crumbling
foundation strung with honeysuckle
and in the front yard a surprise
jonquils turning the air yellow
glistening and ripe still blooming
for a gardener long gone We’d head
for the beach wearing strings of shells
around our left ankles laugh
at their ticking sounds the measured
beat that comes with dancing
on hard-packed sand the applause
of ocean and gulls She’d play
ocarina songs to a moon almost full
and I’d sing off-key We’d glide
and swoop become confetti of leaf fall
all wings floating on small whirlwinds
never once dreading the heart
silenced drop And when it was time
she would not bathe me Instead
we’d scrub the porch pour leftover
water on flowers stand a long time
in sun and silence then holding hands
we’d pose for pictures in the last light

by Ellen Kort, (1994)

Poems for Ellen Kort
Guest Edited by Fabu

By Green Lake

We talked late and long
Ellen and I
Our different stories
Somehow fitted
The poet’s view
Of all things connected
Through life itself
And the many turns
We are
Required to make—
The way lake water
Washes shores
Beyond our sight.

—LENORE MCCOMAS COBERLY, MADISON, WI

To Ellen

Owl woman
you were wise
you knew my words
before I spoke
pronounced them
song
set me on the path
to singing

—KAREN HALEY, WAUWATOSA, WI

Impossible Dreams

This tiny Don Quixote boldly
strides forth, wielding a
crumpled sword of startling
words and jeweled images.
We are compelled to follow.

Courage unwavering,
she tilts at windmills...
ignorance, doubt, fear.
Vision clear, she moves on,
slashes new paths.

Like Sancho and Dulcinea,
we trail behind, fearful,
wanting so much to believe...

This persistent knight
gently guides us onward,
ungainly open
the river

Ice unclenching itself floats apart
While geese, like trumpeters,
Honk “everything is possible.”
The river opens changing as it flows.

—NANCY PETULLA, MERRILL, WI

River Sanctuary

The discontent of a cold late winter
Has already been more than enough.
Now in the early morning, full of hope
The people walk to the river.

We are a people split apart by gods
Of a golden calf who teach exclusion.
We are a people of longing, like Spring.
Hurrying we carry our dreams to the river.

until at last, we can embrace our own quest;
begin to trust ourselves;
tentatively reach
for a star.

—LINDA LEE, EAGLE, WI

I discovered Ellen Kort’s poetry in a rest stop in Door County and bought the
chapbook, If Death Were a Woman. I started classes with Ellen at the School
of the Arts in Rhinelander, Wisconsin, the year she became Wisconsin’s first
Poet Laureate. I value Ellen’s gifts as a teacher and a friend. She has been
instrumental in helping me achieve my “Impossible Dreams.”
Red Chemo Bear

The first one was supposed to be small
the rotten red raspberry nano briar bear
pushing his way
through the open door of my blood
crawling through the mossy quagmires
of intestines, seeking indiscriminately for game,
anything that moves or grows,
growing through my body,
killing willy-nilly,
stomach lining gobbling, hair follicle twanging,
leaving me reeling from an assault
I am powerless to stop.
The circus-peanut-candy-pink chemo nurse
smiles sweet, complicity, Beauty and the Beast.
and all I can think is, “Fucked!”

—SANDRA LINDOW, MENOMONIE, WI

The Brown Box

By hefting the box and the five pound bag of flour,
I estimated that the box weighs over four pounds.
Heaven knows it cost enough to be mailed to us...
$16.45, registered mail.
It won’t do for a bookend or a leveler for an
Uneven table.
And it’s too precious just to empty in the garden,
Even if we used the fenced one where the tulips live.
So I can put it back in the drawer along with
The proclamation of Jennie Mac Rall Day
In Palm Springs, California.
Keeping all the bits and pieces together.
Waiting, still, for the ashes to be scattered
Somewhere, sometime.
And it seems a little fitting to see that box
Still in the place where she last lived
With her pictures and memories.
Only the bed is gone. Just her sketches
Which her Mother saved and framed so long ago.
Happy Mother’s Day, Dear
I vacuumed your room today and watered the plants.

—FRAN RALL, MADISON, WI

The Belonging Song

(for Ellen Kort)

choose the longest leg bone of the poet
place the bone in the clearing on the stump
wet it with your tears bleach it in the sun
for years let mice chew an octave of holes
the wind will whistle through its hollowness
wind from the west makes the saddest music
the east wind plays the laughter of children
hide the bone inside your pocket closest
to your heart feel it vibrate hum and sing
the oldest songs the song of acceptance
tune of inclusion song of belonging
there is no metaphor the poet’s bone
tells you forever you’re no place but home
you’re no place but home you’re no place but home

—BRUCE DETHELFSEN, WESTFIELD, WI

Advice for the Intrepid

(after Ellen Kort’s “Advice to Beginners”)

“Nibble on everything.”
Take up flying or skydiving or skim the trees in a hot air balloon
Trail your fingers in cool water tickling fish from an old rowboat
Inscribe tombstones with pithy epitaphs
Weave corn silk and long-stemmed roses into garlands
Survey the world from the top of a Ferris wheel
Enfold a child in a bear hug
Clamber up a slide before gliding down it
Scatter bath bubbles from a rooftop
Heap strawberries, sweet peas and daisies on Grandma’s porch
Barter a poem for a fiddler’s tune
Capture hail and sculpt a snowman
Crush grapes for wine under a scumbled sky
Steal the wind and make it sigh you to sleep
Mask a stone with feathers and moss
Taste watermelon spitting black seeds chin dripping stickiness
Defy time and if necessary bargain with the devil

—ELMAE PASSINEAU, WAUSAU, WI
We miss her

She is not here
but her spirit is everywhere
and in the candle flame

we see a turtle
she is there and even
under the full moon
so cold and cruel
she is there

she is in the leaves of the aspen
who sing in the wind
in the voices of the poets listen
she is not far away

—Carolyn Vargo, Milwaukee, WI

Every year poets would race to send in their registration to Rhinelander School of the Arts because Ellen’s class would fill up so early. She started almost every class by lighting a candle. Her classes are a spiritual experience. Then one year, she could not be there because of cancer. I wrote this in my yoga class that year.

Grandfather’s Summer
Evening
For Ellen Kort

Ears of corn listen
winds rattling
leaves surrounding
corn silk wave
at sundowns of glistening
workhorses galloping
to join their shadows’ muffled
thunder mist blankets
quieted wind with silhouettes
sheltering livestock awaiting
light of day.

—Charles Trimberger, Milwaukee, WI

We miss her

Fill the Cup

She said, “Spill and share.
We all have stories
that want to be told.
What are yours?”

She said, “Tweek and send.”
Just a little editing,
a few word changes.

Ellen Kort.
She is why I am published.
She is why someone calls me “poet.”

It had been enough
until her beckoning:
a lifetime of words,
kept in notebooks,
on ruled paper
three ring binders,
cardboard separated,
from high school,
from college,
from marriage,
births of three daughters,
career, holidays,
 caregiving, death,
all in a drawer,
shut from others’ eyes.

“You can. You have.
You should. You will.”

She filled my cup,
encouraged me to
refill it with words,
with emotion,
with stories,
with life, to share.

—Marilyn Zelke-Windau, Sheboygan Falls, WI

Rose Sacrament

The white wooden trellis bowed
under their red weight in late May.

My mother rose when it was not yet
blistering hot to cut the clusters,
bind them, fill a dozen coffee cans
saved all winter, covered with tinfoil.

My father drove, Mother and I always
sitting in silence through drought-ravaged
Kansas to the cemeteries of Great Bend,
Hutchinson, Stafford where

one or two cans, topped off with warm
water from the lone tap in brown buffalo grass,
were screwed into the hard, cracked clay
next to each gray stone chiseled with a family name.

I found the roses’ scent sickening,
overripe in the stifling, fenced
enclosures of loss. I would not shed
tears for my sister for many years.

I had never known grandparents.
As I fidgeted and played on stone lambs,
my mother stood silent before her best
offering, pricked fingers wrapped in Band-Aids.

As our car crunched away, I never looked back
but saw the roses already opening
their hidden parts, easy victims,
to the harsh wind. They would never
hold together long, readily offering up
their bared hips, their untethered ghosts.

True sacraments are hard to come by.

I should have paid better attention.

—Kathleen Dale, Milwaukee, WI

Visit VW Online for video by this author
"Rose Sacrament" connects with Ellen Kort's work with grief/therapy groups.
The Morning After Dying, Ellen Calls Me

She calls me one morning and
tells me she died.
For a few minutes, she says,
She told the nurse, “It’s time
for me to go.”

And she did.

Gone. Just like that.
Syllables, vowels, consonants
a new lyric in a single flat line.

She didn’t see lady’s slippers or jonquils
or sea grass or cabbages
or the sweet of honeysuckle vines.

But she did see Heaven.

On the phone, she says,
“I came back. The nurse told me to
and I did.”

And then she tells me a joke
about a man who drops his drawers
in a nursing home.

You need to laugh every day, she says.
Come on, she says.
And I do.

She reads a poem about waving
goodbye to a nurse and then
coming back at her call. She calls it
The Poem I Never Wanted to Write.

I want to ask her what Heaven was like.
If her poems were carved in the gates.
If she grew wings and flew like confetti.
I want to ask her if Death was a Woman.

When she writes the next poem
she never wanted to write, I will
stand by her side on a porch.
Our feet laureled with leaves
and with seasons.

Our ankles will tick, her left and my right,
with sea shells found under the last
low-hanging full moon.
Our fingers thick with salt and
harvest as we string them.

On that porch, in the fall, we will stand a long time,
in sun and in silence, holding hands.
We will pose for pictures in that last light.

She tells me to laugh every day.

Ellen will see Heaven.
And I will say,
Come back.

—KATHIE GIROIO, WAUKESHA, WI

Walk With Me

*All the truth we could ever know
can come on a day like this.* —Ellen Kort

walk with me tonight
and I will feed you
rain-kissed raspberries
show you the tracks
of an elegant fox
and how last light falls
through the feathers
of white birds
tell me what you never said before
how sometimes you’re scared
but till now you never stopped
long enough to feel it
hold onto me
like it was the first
and the last time
while night spreads
her star-spun blanket
over our trembling bodies

—SHARON AUBERLE, SISTER BAY, WI

Remember Me

*On the way to my very first poetry workshop, a Red-Tailed Hawk flew across my windshield. Ellen Kort taught me everything is poetry.*

the morning you died
a red tail scudded past my windshield
its eyes sunk into my heart
like talons not wanting to let go
but knew what it had to do
and burst into brighter light
this morning I ran on hills
you loved like I love
you came back
screeching over my head
wings spiraling out of vision

*Remember Me, Remember Me*

—MARYANN HURTT, ELKHART LAKE, WI
My father died and I struggled to write of him. Ellen told me the poem would come. One night I wrote:

The man who taught me the language of fireflies left quietly, encoding his final goodbyes in flickering dots and dashes.

I ran down the dark path to her room and knocked on the door. “I knew you could do it” she said.

Thank you Ellen.

—KATHLEEN PHILLIPS, MILWAUKEE, WI

A poem first written at the Clearing in 2002.

Antoine-Augustin Parmentier would have liked that line, Ellen, had you too been born and raised in 18th century France. Had you shared a garden plot surely you would have recited the poem to him, about cutting out old eyes, birthing mother poems from plain earth.

I peel back the curtain for a moment and see you both standing on common ground, muck up to your knees. He no crackpot pharmacist, you no half-baked writer, not mincing words about famine, the notion that potatoes are just for the hogs. Together you dice and slice potatoes, concoct classics like potage parmentier and pommes Ellen. Together, you carry potato blossoms to the King. And flower girl that you are, Ellen, you wear one in your hair. Ben Franklin at court falls for you, as does Lavoisier, eyeing your slim ankle peeking out from the bottom of your skirt. But it’s Parmentier you favor, his long intelligent nose, the way his eyes fairly cross when he holds his plants to the light. He draws sketches at his desk while at yours you scratch away with a feather pen.

I bring your poem back from that past in wonder. Traveler through the land of smoke and mirrors, woman of wild rice country, pipe dreamer, you speak of the heart, Ellen, the heart that beats in it. Amazing to me how sure you are that every palm is worthy of being opened, melodies of the heart nurtured, sustained, fed.

—RONNIE HESS, MADISON, WI

visit VW Online for more work by this author

There was a word magnet named Ellen for poets and their hearts she was gellin’ she walked everywhere pulled words from the air now we are poetica a’swellin’.

—PAULA D. ANDERSON, WALES, WI
**Bloodline**

*For Ellen Kort*

When I first found your poetry, dear cousin, it caught me by surprise to discover at this age another member of the family, to discover there had been an unknown aunt or uncle in my dad’s family.

I admit it baffles me how for all those farm visits, all those Sundays with other cousins (none of whom knew of you either), baffles me how we experienced the same things, but separately; knew the same cows and horses, walked the same fields, gathered the same nuts, ate from the same apple trees, yet never met until I opened your books.

But each time I sit with your poetry, dear cousin, I am more convinced that we share the same blood, knew the same grandfather.

—**Ed Werstein, Milwaukee, WI**

**As I Enter Here**

my mother’s womb, full as the rich soil lay heavy with ripened crop

along her path leaves burning red, that match the birthing blood

bending, ebbing road and body rock her to a rhythm of her own

the boundary waters hurry past as her current brings forth life

the raven with its sharp, strong cry echoes my own deep drawing of first breath

...at last darkened hands that work the land, now work the outline of my face.

—**Tara Pohlkotte, Appleton, WI**

**My Grandmother’s Hands**

Grandmother’s hands, I remember fine lines etched back and forth from years of picking up babies and washing dishes and turning the rich dark earth beneath her gentle gaze

Her hands in other women, I see those gone before us crafting words and holding babies and folding hands and working the rich dark earth where once there was only silence

—**Beth Mathison, Brookfield, WI**

visit VW Online for audio by this author

**Ellen Kort**

In my story you are the one whose words are a bridge, words crossing from your heart to mine. You are the one who said don’t be afraid to remember, don’t be afraid to write; the one who said stretch this way, stretch that way, try again.

In my story you are the one who said yes and yes and yes.

—**Wilda Morris, Bolingbroke, IL**

**Before I Understood Metaphor**

there was Ellen Kort, encouraging a class of would-be poets at Rhinelander School of the Arts.

Before I understood rhyme and off-rhyme, line breaks

and endjambs, there was Ellen Kort, crossing my path, celebrating life and death, especially if she were a woman.

Before I understood music and meter, Ellen fed fish at Alburys and walked on water. Before I valued words, she omitted “the” but left room for adverbs like simply, sometimes, and always.

Before I touched a human heart with my verse, she touched my soul and helped me to find my voice and my well-hidden poems.

—**Jan Hasselman Bosman, Woodstock, IL**
Ellen

world wide poet
mother grandmother mentor
survivor

—PATTY MILER, APPLETON, WI

Molasses Cookies

When Grandma moved from the farm
We no longer drove to the country every Sunday
No more walks to the cow pasture before dinner
No rope-swinging from bale to bale
Up in the hayloft with the cows below us

She moved to a red brick two-story
Across the street from St. Patrick’s
Happy to attend Mass every day and
Welcome students from the Parochial school
To sit beside her at the kitchen table
Teaching them reading and phonics

My father would visit at least once a week
Taking whoever wanted to go
And that was usually all the girls
Hardly stopping as we entered the kitchen
where the cookies would be cooling

We’d rush to the living room to claim our spot
Fighting over two mahogany rocking chairs
Big enough to swallow two or three of us
But only one was allowed
Otherwise we’d fight and fidget

Eventually Grandma and Dad would join us
With molasses cookies
Big and round and thin
And glasses of milk

We’d listen to the two of them
Discuss family matters and argue politics
“Oh, go on with ya!” she’d blush
Laughing when he teased her

That narrow living room a cave of comfort
On many an afternoon
Eating molasses cookies, drinking milk
Listening, laughing, and yes
Admiring the regal white-haired beauty
Who was my father’s mother

—MARY RODRIGUEZ, MCFARLAND, WI

The Way I See You

the tree has no wish to stir
it is after all earth standing
on part of itself

but the wind does move at its pleasure
and will occasionally pass through
touching the leaves and roots of the tree

this is how I see you
the beginning of space
where your song invents itself

as it rises through the sky
first touching each finger
then your eyes

and afterward
every part of

you

—KOSROF CHANTIKIAN, LARKSPUR, CA

How Long the Night

(From Ellen’s “The Last Mile Flying”)

When she can no longer see the moon
she rises from bed, pads into the living room
and picks up her fox flute, the one
she bought in Montana the same day
she gave herself the new name—
She with Sorrow in Her Heart.

She plays now, to the vanished moon
the slender flute sad and plaintive.
Her fingers cover and bare the holes;
the melody changes from Prairie Land
to Broken Bow, the low notes trembling
making the flute feel alive in her hands.
She named the flute, Fox in the Woods.

Dawn is arriving, so she will put away
the flute and go about her morning ablutions.
She treads heavily through life but this bit
of connection helps her face another day.
With the rising sun, her face becomes soft and waiting.

—JACKIE LANGETIEG, VERONA, WI

Ellen

world wide poet
mother grandmother mentor
survivor

—PATTY MILER, APPLETON, WI
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In these books, see the world anew—hear wind, waves, trees.
Learn the trajectory of the moon. Feel roots hugging bones. Watch
fiddles being made. the delivery of spring lambs. Follow blue herons,
geese, a turtle. Walk on water.

Cather up Ellen Kort’s images: These four lines from “Wind”:

“A bird flies like
a crooked stick is stopped
for a moment the sky’s
dangling participle

Other images from her poems:

“September editing / dark purple trees plum by falling plum”

Geese as “hang gliders / chalk marks / the season’s laundry /
strung across sky”

“geese rowing the sky / in long shuddering strokes”

“Geese lift like fever / from the lake”

“see where the woodpile / is stitched together by spiders”

“Your hands / stained with sun”

Tomatoes “expand / like balloons / shine like /
 bright / lanterns / in the day’s / half light”

“Bees hyphenated the air over the garden”

“mountains with cheekbones of stone”

“Nothing / I name could match the shiver of light / that peeled back dark skin of night”

Relish verbs, similes: From “Wind” in *Notes From A Small Island*:

   Water rolls
   back on itself like a conch shell
   then floats quietly like two
   middle letters of a word
   spreads sky all over the ground
   douses red fire from hibiscus
   spills seeds throws a palm branch
   against the shed

The books name our world—coffee, cabbages, pumpkins, peppers,
pin cherries, raspberry jam, papaya juice, saltine crackers, lottery
ticket, wild mint, lady-slippers, baby’s breath, daisies, honeysuckle,
jonquils, hibiscus, sea grass, chicory, abyssum, buttonwood,
red bandanna, The Narrows, Corn Bay, Cat Island, island cat.

Names: Aunt Erma, Aunt May, Grandma Isobel, Uncle Laine,
Uncle Harold, Uncle Joe, Uncle Jake, Grandpa. Granddaughters.
My Father. Mama.

Savor the sounds of words strung together:
“applause / of ocean”
“wind-tossed waves raged”
“studies slant / of moonlight on slick rock”
“early frost / unnerving the garden”
“confetti of leaf fall”

Go ahead. Enter Ellen Kort’s word-scapes of scents and colors,
magic, secrets, confessions, family history, whimsy, truth, and
everything you’d ever hope to find anywhere.

“If Death Were A Woman” closes life with “we’d pose for pictures
in the last light.” A surprise ending that’s endearing and perfect.

—LINDA ASCHBRENNER, MARSHFIELD, WI

Prairie Poem for Ellen

Prairie is always
There she says, I know I grow
Live along the edge—

—CX DILLHUNT, MADISON, WI
A Poem For The New Poet  
*(with thanks to Ellen Kort)*

And here we stand—another generation  
each of us trying to engrain  
thick-tongued words with meaning.  
Each of us poignant though unrecognized,  
our fingers clacking memories into an unfeeling  
computer-box, all for the love of our written silence.

As this year calmly flashes by  
for Wisconsin—let us scrawl—let us  
trample our words down, not disheartened.  
Let us sacrifice our memories at least one more  
time. Just for today. Let us believe that  
our words really can breathe into you something different.

—Jessica Gleason, Lake Geneva, WI

Stone Heart  
*for Ellen*

“Tell me,” the shaman says, about  
how you connect to this stone,”  
and I palm  
the translucent egg,  
mirroring at the long work  
of the river’s grinding  
and the elemental shape...  
“But there is more,”  
she says, “inside.”  
Oiled by long caressing,  
it gleams faults, fissures  
and a wandering trauma of oxide  
along which my stone  
may someday split,  
expose its secrets.

—Barbara Cranford, Hancock, WI

For Ellen  
*From “Notes From a Small Island”*

Your moon was a yellow fist  
fighting its way up through branches...  
mine was a narrow fingernail  
going down, sliding below the trees  
before I could seize  
its slender cusp.

But your moon shone bright enough  
for all of us—illuminating  
the dark paths, the slippery stumbles—  
quietly showing the way.  
We held our breath  
and tiptoed forward.

—Alice D’Alessio, Madison, WI

Noon Walk at The Clearing

Objects in nature  
reach out.  
Good friends  
and lovers  
line my path.

I am married to stone.  
a fine flat slab  
warmed by the sun  
tread squarely upon  
feels whole  
caressing my arch  
and solid—  
The comfort of permanence.

The dirt trail shouts  
Good friend.  
Fragrant cedars  
cushion  
like wool perhaps  
a give and take  
deep layers  
there when I need it.

Moss.  
Like showy clumps of sponge  
it sits on rocks.  
Not so easy to depend on,  
I step lightly and test with my toes  
rock back and forth.  
Although unsteady, I smile.  
There is a time and place for moss,  
I decide.

In any path  
roots interrupt  
And in life too  
They jut.  
Unstable  
New acquaintances  
I fear injury.  
I choose to avoid roots.  
Step around  
too risky.

I crumble a handful of cedar,  
lift to my nose  
the smell of  
faint fern  
and nothing more,  
thinking back on days of incense and lessons  
learned.  
The heat of day robs me  
of true smell.  
Pregnant air  
swollen with heat and dust  
sits  
waiting for morning.

—Robin Stuebbe, New Holstein, WI
For Ellen

She came home
from a long way away
following a map
leading everywhere
and nowhere.
She found home
by firefly light,
the roots of trees,
the smell of lilacs.
She knew home
by the sound of its words
and the shuffle of its feet.
She stopped
and drank in
the air of home
and wrapped it
around her
like a long lost love.

—Lisa Vihos, Sheboygan, WI

Midwife to the Poets

for Ellen Kort

She doesn’t fear the sweat of labor
doesn’t shrink back
from blood staining her hands

She wipes the weary brow
her faithful mouth urging onward
encouragement always on her lips

She is ever ready
to catch the fragile newborn
to celebrate each precarious breath

She exults in the joy of creation
lifts each throbbing life
up to the expectant sky

A thousand poems’ hearts beat—a generation she delivered

—Sherry Elmer, Hilmer, WI

In the Time of Daffodils

for Ellen Kort

Her open arms welcome pianist—not poet
offer bear wisdom
and strength
honey light in her eyes

Up and down the poets’ table she goes
searching for nuggets of imagination
unearthing mud-covered gems
Ellen cleans them off
looks for sparks

In the dark soil of my prose
she scratched and clawed
to find the one line of wafting spring
sung by a yellow wind
her hands filled with daffodils—a line of them
bright against the dark

And though I didn’t want the poetry
she watered the seeds nursed the flowers
Little did I know my healing had begun
or that a morning with Ellen would change
my life forever

Ellen my first muse of poetry
harbinger of spring
sower of words
always a yellow daffodil

—Mary Jo Balistreri, Waukesha, WI

Note to Ellen

I smile when I think of you—born storyteller and poet—who loves to stay up talking deep into the night.
You carry the loss of your son, Chris, the members of your “Gruesome Foursome” writing group, and others unknown to me, yet you are not above a drag-out midnight pillow fight or a spontaneous dance in the streets of your beloved Appleton.

Your wonderful creative talent distills stories into poetry—a love of which you carry everywhere you go and always. You have inspired thousands of us—you were the first person, up at Green Lake a dozen years ago, who said that what I wrote was poetry, and you got me to believe that!

A lot of people write poetry, Ellen, but you are poetry. I thank you for being who you are...

—Judy Kolosso, Slinger, WI
Ellen’s Poems

Somehow she detains the words on their way to the page and breathes on them, giving them grace, and shows them how to dance—tentatively at first, but then, always, that unexpected leap that fills the soul of the reader until the world is re-invented, beside itself, taut with longing awash with love and better than before.

—Marilyn L. Taylor, Madison, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

Ways to Begin

dedicated to Ellen Kort

Write. Keep on writing. Put down everything. Teach yourself to lie outrageously. When you can’t find the words, hum, fill in the blanks with colored pencils. Wear rose colored glasses, and stare up at trees. Hug an ancient pine. Make friends with the insect world, watch fly shadows creep across paper. Eat melted chocolate with a spoon. Lean back, observe how birds fly. Walk the magic forest alone, without fear. Stay up late to watch the northern lights, and tan in the rays of the full moon—there’s time enough to sleep when we die. Get intimate with God and the Devil. Go fishing for diamonds. Soak in the sound of falling leaves, outswim the little fishes, sip the errant waves. Invite bees to drink your honeyed tea. Sleep with poems, devour their music when you dream. Run your fingers through the forest floor, stretch your mind like a rubber band. Outline the circumference of a mother’s love, then map it out. Eat at dives and diners, listen closely to the conversation. Taste factotum, simulacrum, and let bygones be bygones. Resuscitate dead words, and catch notes swept alive in a gust of wind. Use them.

—Elizabeth Tornes, Lac Du Flambeau, WI

Spilling

after reading Ellen Kort

October robbed this kettle pond
Only the lone blue heron robed
in slate, eye to throat to thigh, denies it
She keeps her place, her beak a ready spear

Proud sandhill cranes
who paraded babies round our basin
June to September, are over it
They winter in Arizona now
what with the kids grown and gone

But someone still sleeps in those milkweed drops fat with floss
feather seeds ready to roll from mummy bags, unzipped and spilled over this gray space

I sleep here, too, and with you
We align like feathers until
A girl in blue pajamas splits our bed at its seam, delighted
at our tumble and One. Two. (Wish)

—Meg Rothstein, Middleton, WI
I first read Ellen Kort when a teacher gave me a copy of the Wisconsin Poets’ Calendar in high school. I found Kort again in my 20s in Sandra Martz’s and other anthologies while shelving books at A Room of One’s Own Bookstore. I’ve been enjoying Ellen Kort’s poetry ever since.

Why You Write

after Ellen Kort’s “When You Write”

because permanence scares you with its pen on paper pressure and indelible legible fonts Write to catalyst prayer vapor to solid words or to evaporate the irrational sludge and grit of bad days heavy sighs over too slow struggling students This is why you write to trap to praise to weed to frame the insignificant moments as if you can share such interior strain or light away the mildew speckled stains that take hold yellow and gray Write when you’d rather read and write when it’s easier to sleep or sit trance-like in the blue glow of bad T.V. Take a tablet outside and write low where weeds spread roots and fire ants carry sweet crystals and crumbs to their queen Write with the pen pressed hard in your hand Write because thoughts rush manic and hot Write because the short days of winter leave you starved and blocked Write since the modern world conspires against such deliberateness

—Jenna RinDo, Pickett, WI
CATULLUS: Carmina, 46

Now spring brings everything that’s palmy-mild. Again the pleasant Zephyr’s hushed half-wind Has calmed the equinoctial skies once wild. Catullus, leave the Phrygian fields behind; The warm Nicaean farmlands, green and rich. Let’s head for Asian towns. Spring gives the mind, The restless mind, that self-same wandering itch The feet feel too, to be where things are beckoning. Good friends, farewell: a sweet-sad final reckoning. For those who came together once from Rome, A hundred different byways carry home.

—TRANS. BY LEN KRISAK, NEWTON, MA

War and Lunch

Lean words spread like soft cheese and ground ham on rye.
In short gasps we laugh, the sound saves this black May day. We are not versed for war.
Guns doffed by young and old kill old and young. No one knows the facts,
we are not told. Kin kills kin, some live with pork and beans.
War is sold as the way for peace. Do we know where peace is?
We meet for lunch, head to head strife we mix with bread, with beer.
John plays the mouth harp, we hear him blow taps: ... from the hills, from the lake, the soup grows cold.

—MARY ELLEN LETARTE, LUNENBURG, MA

I Sit In the Garden Where No One Goes

I sit in the garden where no one goes, except to go through as a short cut, a way to avoid the longer way around. I want to sit here for as long as it takes for the words short cut to die from neglect, or to find something altogether else to mean.

—J. R. SOLONCHE, BLOOMING GROVE, NY

I Sit On the Piano Bench

I sit on the piano bench in the practice room. I want to see if I still regret not taking the piano lessons I had the opportunity to take as a child. I open the piano lid. I put all ten fingers on the keys and push down. The piano answers, its voice all dissonance, Yet.

—J. R. SOLONCHE, BLOOMING GROVE, NY

Rain, when tempered

Shale faced, untoward, like night my humility was turning blue. Deftly raiding the nightstand, rifling dreams of blotch stained hue. Visions of sun strips, relics of oil, collected upon stern brows. Such as rain, when tempered and speeded does in soil.

Light, confections made sprightly come, lifting top regards through and upon the air.

—CHARLES LIEDL, EAU CLAIRE, WI
Seasons of Extreme

The husband tells her
she can buy the coat when an 8 fits
But her 14 can’t do the math
fast enough for this fashion season
She dreams of the hood’s faux fur trim
haloing the Very Berry lips
she wears to her women’s book club
When he thinks she’s visiting a rest home
He prefers the company of his 1950 Chevy anyway
Craves that control with the flex of one foot
But his hands, how they turn tender
at the touch of steering wheel
Unlike high octane’s stranglehold on the environment
which he considers liberal bullshit
Believes what his bar buddy said in Pepsi
That cosmic rays from the stars cause global warming
He’s as out of touch as the antique tools he collects
Even the apple tree is budding in January
The cedar waxwings already mating
And the mountain bears haven’t yet hibernated
They all know without TV, newspapers
or computers that things are drying out
heating up, bubbling over

There could be Missouri River floods
County water rationing by summer
A winter wheat fire any day now
An ice storm in the bedroom

—ELLARAIN E LOCKIE, SUNNYVALE, CA
visit VW Online for audio by this author

At the Richmond, Illinois Dog ‘n’ Suds

I ordered the 1969 cheeseburger
you know the thick patty seared almost
black on the outside pink as a baby’s cheek
in the center the bun so huge it took
two hands to hold it and the cheese was hot and gooey
and burned your fingers

It came with 1971 french fries
crisp and zig zaggy lightly salted
with that perfect crunch spilling over the edge
of the basket you didn’t like ketchup
which bugged your little sister back then
but she’s not with you today

The young high school girl in hot pants brought
your order how you miss those roller skates straight
to your restored 1965 Chevy Corsair setting the hooks
of the tray on your half-raised driver’s side
window chewing gum and her ponytail slapping
against the red and yellow Dog ‘N Suds jacket

But what you really came for driving
almost one hundred miles from Madison
to Illinois was the root beer served in those
frosty mugs with a foam head so large it made circlets
on your nose taking that first long slurping drink
cold enough to make your teeth chatter

It was Friday night in Waterloo and Mom and Dad
were still alive and though you had two brothers
over in Nam you knew they would come back
for a little while anyway
Friday night and Dog ‘N Suds and
the baseball game on the radio

Now it’s 2012 and the long stream
of traffic on the highway that runs past
the Dog ‘N Suds in Richmond, Illinois
never seems to end and you sit there
with your Texas burger and fries
and that oh so delicious still frosty root beer

You sit there in the hot afternoon
somewhere in July with the ghosts
of Mom and Dad and music on the radio
transported back and forth
with each mouthful and noisy sip
thankful there are still such places for holding on to things.

—JAMES P. ROBERTS, MADISON, WI
Writing a Poem with Monet

It’s April and I’m growing green, but bills bore into my desk. Riches arch in my deposit book like the mineral caves carved by the surf at Pourville, where Monet stood at his easel to paint thundering waves flecked black and white.

I sign my check in the lower right corner as artists will, re-total the balance and turn up a new one. Diamonds a mile down in Monet’s sea crack, chip, erode. A crash and the salty wave spreads geodes on sand. I cross-hatch a sketch on the “payee” line.


and my ledger’s full of emptiness, dark water tipped by snowy zeros. A few more lines and I’m broke, but I think of Monet

as I lick stamps, close envelopes, face the slack tide of pocket, lifted on a new surge. There’s the pen, glowing in shifting, pastel light.

—RACHEL DACUS, WALNUT CREEK, CA

Good Friday

We’d go hungry every year until sundown, all the neighborhood Catholics’ dead-eyed fish thawing in the sink, sequins of scales shining through thin gessos of ice, but in our house, leftovers— Hungarian goulash covered with a taut seal of Saran wrap—in the fridge ready to be heated. Always around noon, the sky collapsed right on schedule, darkness unto, the way the Bible says it did, no heavens opening, just eerie light the color of old nails and a lace of cold rain hanging from the caves, all afternoon myth to mystery, rumbling in our empty bellies—hunger teaching us patience

—SUSAN ELBE, MADISON, WI

Making Butterflies

It must be God’s hobby, Making butterflies, Stooped over His cluttered workbench, A jeweler’s glass Wedged in his eye, With tweezers in Arthritic hands Cautiously placing The stained glass colors In delicate wings, His spit, his glue.

—K.S. HARDY, BOWLING GREEN, OH
Eve in the West

She sets her bucket down.
With each step from
The river bank it grew
More heavy as if filled
With round bottom stones.
She is halfway to the cabin.
Smoke curls like a serpent
From the chimney climbing the sky.
She has felt so alone out here,
A two day ride from
The closest civilization.
It’s as if they were exiled,
Thrown out of the world.
Why did she let Adam
Seduce her into leaving
The comfort of St. Louis.
And yet there is a beauty
Here, a wild garden.
Creation unrestrained.
A shot rings out in the woods.
Crows scatter from the trees.
Adam will be bringing
Their supper in, fresh meat.
She must sharpen her knife.
She picks up the bucket
And begins her toil anew.

—K.S. HARDY, BOWLING GREEN, OH

If Not Now When

So many things
Promised.
The list too long
To list here
In this poem,
It would have
To be an epic
Over multiple
Volumes to
Rival Dante,
Which reminds me
Of the elephant
In the Sistine Chapel,
The Second Coming.
We are still waiting.

—K.S. HARDY, BOWLING GREEN, OH

The Deer

Lay the deer on the shallow ground.
We have carried her miles,
from under the oak
where she was shot.
Pray for the dead,
the young dead,
all of them you remember,
their tendrils of hair,
the noise their legs made when they ran.
Let the wind waft
the papery leaves,
make more leaves,
make a sound of whispering.
Cover the shallow ground
with white winter grass
and flowers,
the pyrocantha,
the chrysanthemum snow,
new and soft between your hands.

—LINDA BENNINGHOFF, LLOYD HARBOR, NY

What the Heart Remembers

Though madness
was a factor
you asked me to love you
and I did.
I remember the heat
of that July morning
the yellow telephone
I listened on
the soft breathing
of my boy and girl
asleep in their tangled sheets.
Such small details
the heart holds onto.
But not the time
you asked me to stop
and I did. Cold
what I remember of that.

—SHARON AUBERLE, SISTER BAY, WI
CATHRYN COFELL
FROM SISTER SATELLITE

The Brain Tumor Speaks

Please, Please. I will wait everything.
The horrible man coming, have you been to him?
They’d come and it would be ok, right? I need
to talk to this people, first thing. I renumber, I sure do:
270-0Nate32.
I have to talk to him before it’s cover.

I saw the invention I was given.
See the thing I saw?
Here it is. It’s all yours.
It’s all now.
We have to give it to me. It will take it.
I promise.

I can still stand if you have to.
I will up with you.
I have Koinonia for the doctor:
here it is. It’s all now.
I’ll tell you in the pinks.
Can we grabble in morning?
Then, we are wonderful.

I will stay. Here.
I will lay by my lay.
From the behind of my heart.
You are my sunshine my only sunshine. Good might
sleep glove.
I live you. I live you.

High-Speed Connections

I took a digital picture of my hand
and sent it away,
emailed to a psychic in West Bend.
At first, it was undeliverable.
Then a suspicious attachment, needs authentication.
A third time she replied,
said my palm was fuzzy.
I became her $20 pay pal
and suddenly she had clarity,
a map quest, a maze of intersections.
She saw a scoundrel’s name,
Lucy or Cin,
a flamboyant but unremarkable life.
Wrong, I said, that was not my life-line she was reading,
it must have been a silver hair
cought on the lens as the shutter closed.
But she held firm,
said it was more than just the palm
she read, she knew me, she saw
how my lines crossed with others,
a flash of pain in every touch.
She saw a future as a circus act
or a hit man and I knew she had me,
cought in her sights, that day.
I let you fall from my slick palms,
that endless Hitchcock drop,
hands forever clutching,
cliffs of straw and chaff.

Appeal for Eclipse

Enough about the damn moon.
Bulimic bitch, four fits
of clothes, all that cellulite
and she still prances,
still tries
to light up the sky
when he wants only to be dark,
to be Johnny Cash and strum
the train ride right out of her.

Enough from the poets,
the artists, the astronomers.
Quit coveting her behind his back.
She needs to learn the ways
of a docile woman,
to be viewed askew
from inside a cardboard box,
her trashy peep show ass
puppeted from the earth,
strung up behind the sun
curtained by this ring of fire.

first appeared in Oranges & Sardines

“With six chapbooks already to her credit, Cathryn Cofell presents her first full-length collection, and it’s wonderful. Sister Satellite has sass and snap, a fresh and entertaining voice, but it also wields a sharp edge, cutting deeper as it goes deeper. Sharper and deeper. Frankly feminist, Cofell’s energetic, unconventional poems tell hard truths with wit and wide-open eyes. Every woman should read this book. So should every man.”—Kelly Cherry, author of The Retreats of Thought: Poems

first appeared in Oranges & Sardines

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Moisés Villavicencio Barras

From Luz de Todos Tiempos / Light of All Times

Torcazas para el Aire

Sale usted de su casa
para encontrarse con la presencia muerta del vuelo:
menos dos torcazas para el aire de junio.

Estoy solo
soy el niño que vimos en la oscuridad de San Bartolo.

En el jardín de su casa,
siembra usted alas y paisajes nunca vistos
en los ojos de esos pájaros.

Yo no crecí con la certidumbre del pan en la mesa
y cuando mi hermano se cortó las venas le llovieron palos.

Hace unos días, sin que usted lo supiera
me robé uno de sus tulipanes y lo puse a la orilla de la carretera.

¿Cuántos vuelos entierra cada día?

Doves for the Air of June

You leave your house
to find a dead presence of flight:
less two doves for the June air.

I am alone
like the child we saw in the darkness of San Bartolo.

In your yard
you plant wings and landscapes never seen
in the eyes of those birds.

I did not grow up with the certainty of bread on the table
and when my brother cut his veins
sticks rained down on him.

A couple of days ago without you knowing
I stole a tulip from you and put it on the side of the road.

Train at Home

Let us let the train come in
and greet from the window
Tía Inés’ lemon grove.
Let us let him come in
and sit at our table
to refresh his throat
with the currents that he usually can’t drink.
Let us let the train come in and see
the memories that we have of him,
not just the images but also the talks
and all the animals’ complaints.
Let us let the train come into our yard
and observe from there his house of rails
among mountains that open and close.
Let us for a moment once on earth
let the train rest under our sheets,
turn off his own light
like our sons after two or three books.

Available from cowfeatherpress.org or by mail—pre-order form on back cover.
Prosperity’s Prison

In prosperity’s prison, managing gadgets is the business of life.

What a price my soul pays, so burdened with stuff that it gasps and wheezes in the lonely dark of packing boxes, plastic bags, and padded envelopes, longing to slip through the cracks to a patch of sunlight in an empty space. Oh for a life of nothingness—my soul says, and I say—rich in drift-potential on currents of air or water, going nowhere slowly, infinitudes of beauty all around me, the life of a vagrant, panhandling freedom from vagabond clouds, allowing nothing smaller than Earth or Galaxy to hold my gaze, or play the mystic music of my nights and days.

—Georgia Ressmeyer, Sheboygan, WI

Wind Song

Wind scething, swirling, rattling snow against windows, rasping stones, bricks, spilling over hedges and fences, flooding roads. Drones, howls, drowns, stacks high white against piers of houseless, footless, adrift. In the black box, fire hisses, leaps, sputters, falls, into ashes.

Wind was is and always shall be: hewer, delver, bone-scaper, wawan, wheel-whirler, bull-roarer, bell-ringer, ear-hammer, huracan, kuklon, tornado, tractor truck-tosser, breast-thudder, eye-raker, spine-shaker, spear-carrier, water-bearer, mystical screamer of songs epic, lyric, sent from ten thousand places, rumbling north into darkness, beyond time and light, gone.

—Robert Schuler, Menomonie, WI

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vision, garden in the wild

How long before you lost it—a scene like this?
—Su Tung-p’o

a pine wind-blown down off the limestone cliff lying plumb within the fork of a two-trunked oak all the way to the river’s edge its limbless trunk encircled by primrose vines and ferns stems cut so you could climb a notched ladder up through shadows to waves of pearl-blue above pause to watch the spirits of the air pass below monarchs and swallowtails raspberry-red purple finches American redstarts yellow warblers gaudy cardinals and orioles modest brown wrens and swallows the rhythms and counter rhythms drummed by hundreds of woodpeckers sunflowers branching above the trail’s dust

—Robert Schuler, Menomonie, WI

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Listening to Shostakovich

Shostakovich’s surreal sad and lovely and frightening quartets the sturdy lady cardinal bold red-billed her crest streaked red in the winter windows blizzarded with snow what is to become of us within these winds these lost suns and moons and stars what is this place why has it been given to us why have we been given to it the valleys the thicketed hills the blue silos blown-out pockets of sand the roads the condos groves of oaks and maples gone the immaculate beauty and idiosyncratic shocks of the violins of Shostakovich bolting through the night I shall not sleep shall not miss the delights the mysteries rolling far past morning and noon into the stone days the prison days hearts tossed into the ditches blood running in the weeds a dimness a vanishing

—Robert Schuler, Menomonie, WI

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Open the lid! if you have to 
use teeth: hailstones 
left over from the winter making room—

inside the can 
its paint spins backwards 
covers a rot that never leaves 

and when the carpenters finish 
rust—you stir till winds 
begin to warm from the rain 

brush against your arm 
pulling the sun closer 
firmly on the sill—

sometimes it takes all Spring 
sometimes a few weeks, the air 
little by little growing mold 

worn out though the year 
that has nothing to do with love opens 
before you can catch your breath.

—SIMON PERCHIK, EAST HAMPTON, NY

Clover Fortune

I smelled clover
For the first time
Waiting on the breeze
Which surprised me.
‘Cause I didn’t know
Clover had a scent

Strong enough to experience,
Especially here, where there
Is so little green, so much brown.
From those rare, green patches
Beautiful clover flowers
Ride the wind
With the nicest scent I’ve found
Since coming to Stanley.

—HARLAN RICHARDS, STANLEY, WI

Kite

The cursive beauty of a kite—
Its flowing flight, its punchdrunk sway—
Calls back the elementary day
When Teacher taught us how to write
According to the Palmer method
Of penmanship, not that we learned
In a day, struggle as we did
To shape our letters for the stern
Woman who stood over us,
Watching as we labored away
For what seemed hours. Wasn’t it play
Time yet? Nap time? Time for the school bus?
We wrote on lined paper in booklets
Made specially for the Palmer method.
If I had any thoughts in my head,
They are lost to time, which always gets
The better of us, but I recall
The fabulous freedom of cursive writing
And how it felt like crazily running,
Wind at my back, kite a seagull.

—KELLY CHERRY, HALIFAX, VA
Video at Thirty Thousand

The angry birds are tumbling from the sky in 7C, beside me. Why such red red rage as censed cardinals are and fall—depth-charge cartoons wrath catapulted from a cage to fire-bomb the city in the night below? The mayhem has her in its thrall launch after launch, with pretty, repetitious, pixeled moons. It’s ruby-thick with ruffled feathers. She flings her furious flyers without pity, glaring as they wamble, plunge, and blow to bits the skyline. From bombardment heights, they plummet to self-immolation, then re-compose at every Total Score—the sure and certain image of some terror. Our modest jet survives all that it weathers, the scarlet suicides live out their flights, and on she games, the laptop free of pilot error. On rigid wings, I wonder what her fear is for. The angry birds rise from their devastation.

—LEN KRISAK, NEWTON, MA

A Cabin Cruiser in Late Afternoon

You sketch the scene just now into how it will look in the night when you hear that car again spinning its wheels in the snow slowly at first then faster and faster into a smoke that beggars prayer.

The light will be peach-colored then turning slowly into the purple of a very ripe plumb, the waves from the boat frothing white on one side, ruby black on the other—and no sign of a coming storm.

The boat will be going nowhere very fast nor will anyone be seen on the fantail or in the wheelhouse, and only later will the chug-chug of the engine under no strain echo as the boat nears the point.

You will have this scene with toast and coffee, your thoughts annealed to the one at risk in snow so late no one could help if they would, until the boat’s quite well out of sight, its wake just now kissing the shore.

—WILLIAM FORD, IOWA CITY, IA

Flying

I flew from the roof, at nine, an angel into a welcoming snow bank.

I flew at twelve over the handlebars of a Schwinn Flyer, my collar bone snapping like a dry twig.

At sixteen I flew into the woods to hear the whisper of woodland fanfare.

I flew into despair at eighteen over a cheerleader named Claire who twirled as if bewitched.

I flew like a dandelion through adult life, catching a breeze to college, and a job back in a humdrum hometown.

Bound to earth by the ordinary, I no longer fly off the handle.

—DAVID BLACKEY, LA CROSSE, WI

Flight 006

I did not really believe the stick-thin porteño seated next to me on the flight from Santiago to Buenos Aires when he leaned into me with an elbow-tap and voluntarily confessed to me that, in all his years as an air traffic controller, only once did he experience a UFO, one that five months before had hovered above the glass tower of the main airport in Buenos Aires for what seemed like a frozen minute before shooting a laser-like beam that cleanly pierced the glass tower just seconds before it flew off and became instantly invisible. I noticed the peculiar way the man with the pencil-line mustache nodded as he narrated his tale, as though he were trying to convince himself of what he had just related. After all, grabbing a stranger on a plane to tell all that to was, I thought, marginally bizarre if not downright so. And to add to the strangeness, we later parted with just a handshake as we exited the plane once in the land of the porteños.

This life is undeniably full of enigmas, not to mention quirky people, so flake is the word-impression I had as I glanced across the carousel as he appeared to be in a deep state of impenetrable thought, oblivious to everyone and everything around him. I retrieved my bag and exited through Customs never to see the man again.

As plagued as I was at the time by what might be described as the Peace Corps Volunteer wanderlust syndrome, I arrived about two weeks later in Buenos Aires after my travels up to Uruguay and Brazil with just about enough money to pay for a flight over to Mendoza, just over the Andes from Chile where I needed to return like three days before. It just so turned out that there happened to be a U.S. Air Force base there where two pilots adopted this feckless wayfarer for three days before paying for a taxi-van up over the Andes to Santiago. As they were driving me to the taxi, I related the story about the man on the plane, and, as I was doing so, they looked at each other and grinned. They both flew “missions” over South America, and they seemed to know of what I spoke.

—STEPHEN ANDERSON, MILWAUKEE, WI

visit VW Online for audio by this author
On a Wet Weekend

we haul out the board games, playing with our ten-year-old grandson, showing a fourth grade Capitalist how he should manage his money.

I sit across and watch him, a youth with innate avarice become a Wall Street titan, a cutthroat, ruthless landlord, a blond Scrooge collecting rent, fees, taxes and penalties in a simulated life adventure, the game called Monopoly.

Time passes in the kitchen, hours meld into another day, it’s marathon Monopoly as he acquires both utilities, buys railroads, Boardwalk, invests in pricey Park Place, builds houses and hotels, a bona fide Capitalist, a younger Donald Trump.

Landing on Park Place often, I mortgage all, go belly-up. Being railroaded into poverty, content with a go-to-jail card, I sneer at the gloating winner, skimming around the table, clutching his money overhead.

—JOHN L. CAMPBELL, BROOKFIELD, WI

Success Story

I loved and owned Visal Steel, computerized the production line with an IBM system. Sheets of strong light steel rolled off onto another line where they were cooled by purified water. Next they went to the rolling plant where they were molded into a fine metal skin for use by the US ARMY in the SCALLIWAG, one of the most mobile helicopters ever invented. It made two billion dollars for me.

I moved onto the Forbes 500 list of The Wealthiest Men in America. I spent three years making speeches about Being an Entrepreneur in America. I taught a class on the subject for a year at the Harvard Business School. I appeared fifteen times on CNBC.

I was never at home. My wife divorced me.

—RICHARD MOYER, BERWYN, PA

Free Harry

He possessed much that inspired. A personable likeable man, Grandpa. But somehow Grandma, a woman who loved to hear sweet whispers from others about what a lady she was (she never hung out her underwear to dry during daylight hours), kept him as her pet poodle who would heel wherever she strolled, speak at her every command.

Her taunts were many:
Harry, there’s a car behind us.
There’s a stop sign, Harry.
Pull over, Harry, and let me drive.
Harry, is that jam on your cheek?
Who’s been playing in the butter dish, Harry?
She once even led him by the ear to the cupboard after he had brought her a soup bowl instead of a saucer.

Such ridicule was borne well by turning the other cheek, or more often than she knew it by lending a deaf ear.

Yet on this cold November night he was bucking a different headwind, struggling to clutch what was left of his life that cancer had not slighted that Grandma had not tainted.

The candle flickering on the table might well have been the moon; his face shown so pale—one tallow-ossified sphere day by day swallowed up by his fat pillow, his body now a framework of broom handles smothered by a patchwork quilt.

Only after Mother checked his pulse did the flame become restless irregular, his breathing began to lapse. Gasp.
Now a raspy groan. Then eyes transcendent, the eternal yawn that set him free.

—GERALD D. BAHR, MENOMONIE, WI

My Name is G, G-7

My name and number are not in my grandson’s cell phone. I take charge. Enter them but I can’t seem to get those letters after the Grandpa “G.”

I try. It comes out 7,7,7,7... Then I think, there are several sets of grandkids all with two grandfathers, “Grandpa,” to some, “Poppa” to others. Confusing for older men. But now I am agent G-7. “G-7 reporting.” “So what’s my mission, kid? G-7, yes G-7, got a problem with it?”

—JOHN LEHMAN, CAMBRIDGE, WI
**Elephant String**

They say an elephant can be controlled with a piece of string tied around one leg – just start early with hard enough steel.

Before long, it’s all about eating peanuts, walking in circles with strangers on your back and getting hosed down for the next day’s show.

Deep in my brain where I cannot reach, I hear her whispering and there is no need for string.

—DANNY EARL SIMMONS, LEBANON, OR

visit VW Online for audio by this author

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**I kiss you on the forehead as you sleep in your chair**

Does everything become brilliant before it dies? White birch leaves do. They capture goldenness and exude it until the sky sulks into grey. They fall so hushly.

How do they stay moist and shining on the ground?

Maybe they are brilliant because they are together. Maybe they are brilliant because they finally got it right.

As a girl I un-created Hell because I didn’t know anyone who deserved to go there. Maybe some of us have been here on earth before. We are only trying again and again until we feel the surface.

I watch as the sky darkens behind you. You are hushed and not-quite-falling. We breathe in the same air and I clutch it in my chest the way we clutch all things when we are scared.

Will you become a birch tree?

I will look for you, lives later, in another September.

You will be a kokanee salmon in New Mexico, silvery with shining crimson on your sides. You will build a nest on the shoreline of a stream and spawn before you swim away to die. The eggs, thousands of them, stay behind, hush and moist.

—KIRSTI LEY, SANGKHLABURI, THAILAND

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**The Rabbit and the Tulip**

It happens every spring, I should be ready. I’m not the only one who waits for this. The earth erupts in beauty, green and freighted with a thousand petals folded into wands – pale umbrellas waiting for a fall of rain to spring them open into bloom again. And every one will call to mind our garden days, when you first gave me that green patch of earth, and tulips were the first bulbs that I planted (and later they grew wild beneath the trees). So now I wait for them and, waiting, think of you. And when they bloom, I celebrate with you until the rabbit (waiting too) eats every one and only stems remain in dawn’s sweet light. What would you do?

I spray. I gate. I fence in spring but, really, I can hardly bring myself to chase the rabbits who are tulips now or the bold and crazy tulips that are rabbits now.

—MARY MERCIER, MADISON WI

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**Earth Day**

Just today thinking about how to save what’s left I realized I had expected too much of one humble landscape artist reclusive and content to paint the sunsets and moonrises over his tropical backyard garden. He just didn’t foresee things around the edges of his estate evolving further. How could he come close to divining that those pests he had kept in check were going to steal his scenes and trash his “little acre” as soon as they could stand on their own two feet?

—MARGARET SHERMAN, BEAVER DAM, WI
**Door**

We arrive to the sound of water dripping from the eaves onto the hostas and the lilies and the occasional thin clang of sailboats in the bay.

The seagulls’ cries are a blade slicing through the veil of apathy we’ve donned, their shrieking, something that wants.

How everything now, since the world is so determined to destroy itself, seems draped in the clothes of mourning—

the call of geese so painted with nostalgia, they themselves are nearly a recollection:

*yes, once there were birds--
birds that dove to catch fish--
*yes, once there were oceans filled with fish--
*yes once--*

The sun is nearly gone, and an outboard motor purrs in, buckles down for the night.

A lone gull calls one last time, and still the dripping from the eaves. Then from a nearby house, an air conditioner’s hum.

—HEATHER SWAN, MADISON, WI
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

**My Song**

Let me light in your private melody and be your twilight whippoorwill.

—GERALD D. BAHR, MENOMONIE, WI

**After the Rain**

They hardly spoke to each other afterwards. He gave himself over to drink and patriarchy and writing things down.

She moved through the hours busy with the usual things. But, the hours weren’t the problem for her. It was the minutes of remembering and knowing exactly what had happened.

So, she’d hum.

Otherwise, her mind flashed with tree trunks and boulders riding waves into skulls and abdomens and babies whose final babbles were drowned by the tardy pleas of their now believing parents.

She used to wonder how the fine young man they’d hired to help tar the ark ended up feeling God’s love. Was it as quick as God’s wrath? Or did his smile fade slowly in a crush of mud against his chest or after a final deep breath right before his lungs made room for the wet holy cleansing of disobedience from earth?

At the beginning, her husband mistook the gentle buzz from her chest as the acceptance of grace, asked her to read his sheepskin account.

She read it and insisted upon one revision, “You take my name out of there.”

—DANNY EARL SIMMONS, LEBANON, OR
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

**Where Does Time Go?**

Into the mouth of summer veins of leaves forgiveness building a tree from rings.

What enters into time’s path is eaten alive though none will admit.

We like time since we haven’t a choice. Here’s a heart ache, here’s some joy like weeds and perfect flowers arranged in vase.

It’s all very beautiful. We have convinced ourselves of that. Tell me something different and I will follow.

—ANN IVERSON, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

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—GERALD D. BAHR, MENOMONIE, WI

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—DANNY EARL SIMMONS, LEBANON, OR
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*
**Constellation Yoga**

I.

Three women
dressed in leotards
and sitting on blankets
begin their forms.

They make a perfect triangle
with legs crossed
and hands resting
on bony knees,
palms up.

When they lie down
on their backs
and raise their legs to kick
I see
Orion’s belt
and know
that an arrow has been
loosed.

II

One calls herself
a “Pescatarian,”
while stretching forward
to touch her
painted toes.

A fish jumps
and the talk
turns to tacos,
hot and heavy
like Venus
in transit.

But now
the women cluster
thick as the swarm
of Pleiades
seen through a telescope.
I hear
suppressed grunts
as they solemnly rise, hands
thrust to the sky
following Andromeda’s
wavy lines.

III

Down once more to Earth,
on hands and knees
and with limber back
humped toward Ursa Minor,
supple thighs crease
as the stomach
inhales breath,
exhales molecules.

The session concludes,
blankets are folded
and in the darkening,
firefly lit night
a soft voice intones
“same time, next week.”

“Let’s do the Big Dipper.”

—James P. Roberts, Madison, WI

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**What You Are Doing**

You reside in some tall office building.
Spend prime hours of the day locked
in a padded eight-foot square cell with
a computer, telephone and e-mail...

searching for clues of where you really are.
Impulses from one part of your brain
to another. Flying sparks by day. But at
night, they flame, become stories.

Each burning: A trash barrel on the corner
of a street. Fiery blades marking faces
of curious passersby who at times stop to
warm their hands. Look into your eyes.

—John Lehman, Cambridge, WI

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**Vexed View #234 (in 4 voices)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>XIT (1938-54)</th>
<th>XON (1955-70)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>we left the train</td>
<td>I was TDY in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>station &amp; walked</td>
<td>kissengen &amp; as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the nearly 5 miles</td>
<td>a postal clerk was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to our place</td>
<td>often alone, &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the country.</td>
<td>worked under pressure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the road, an endless</td>
<td>one day the wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>black snake, slidered</td>
<td>of a colonel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thru scattered acres</td>
<td>snapped at me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of acorn lives,</td>
<td>as i hurled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weakened me,</td>
<td>her package.</td>
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<tr>
<td>the sun chipped</td>
<td>i go without</td>
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<tr>
<td>my dime face.</td>
<td>stripes into rebirth.</td>
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<th>char(true)se</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tar, as if ink,</td>
<td>on the skeleton side</td>
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<tr>
<td>on feathers of raven,</td>
<td>of this day i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as i pitch</td>
<td>take a chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to my soul,</td>
<td>&amp; dance on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concerning script about</td>
<td>a drum. its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>central park, &amp;</td>
<td>sound recoils in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the night i</td>
<td>my dark ear,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crossed it from west</td>
<td>&amp; crossed over into</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to east, lighting up</td>
<td>a field of my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all the trash cans.</td>
<td>sleep, hitting all the edges.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

—Guy Beining, Great Barrington, MA
Set 4:
Xitonorus wipes at the color of life

CAST:
Xit: thoughts covering (1938-54) (youth)
Xon: thoughts covering (1955-70) (adulthood)
Xor: thoughts covering (1971-86) (middle years)
Xus: thoughts covering (1987-present) (ripened)

Scene:
A paperhanger comes on stage and takes out of a briefcase four different sections of wallpaper. He gathers them up and climbs the ladder that slants over Xit, Xon, Xor, and Xus, who sit on the floor handcuffed. The ladder rests against a billboard mid-stage that holds a brush and a bucket of paste on an extension to the side. As the dialogue continues he slowly pastes to the billboard each of the four different bits of wallpaper, and labels each one in large chalk letters. Sample one is of a yellow design and he marks it Antique Yellow. It covers the area just above Xit. He goes down, adjusts the ladder where it will serve Xon’s spot, and continues the process. He covers the section above Xon with a drab olive design and marks it Army Green. Above Xor he pastes on a rude rose pattern which he marks Prostitute Red. Over Xus he inserts a smoky grey strip over which he writes Burnt Chalk.

Xit: (Crisply.) lots of what we do are packed within dreams. from those we peruse when awake and asleep.

Xon: (Carefully.) There were strange markings on that hill, so black in shadows, with one long line of light like chalk marks on a blackboard.

Xus: (Dismissive.) Lame boy having fallen off a log or was it a roof?

Xor: (With passion.) Life isn’t very level. The forum of outer weeds in the head is what you must shake well before they have grasped your mind.

Xus: You drunken fool, there are always sinews in sentences that fall from your lips.

Xon: The kitchen of academic life holds rows of glistening knives and a professor is going to grind them further down in order to make deeper cuts.

Xit: (Mocking.) We’re no more than crows on a fence, flapping and cawing; perhaps pulling out tufts of hay that could be taken for wigs in the market place.

Xus: See how youth jumps about so quickly with not even time to wet the toes, but (gravely) that look of being in the coffin haunts all of us, and there need not be ginger light spilling from a windowpane. Why not just measure the pain of being a pain-ter!

Xor: You grew into a painter in order to leave the pain of being a poet. Now you wear each day quite well. Each minute is a chime.

Xus: That’s an effrontery, for being in verse of square wall takes gravity out of ones digs. Don’t tear at my sky quite yet!

Xor: When there’s only grease coming out of the poet he falls on himself, swallowing all regrets of the world.

Xon: Martyrdom is the mold created by a drunkard.

Xus: Bravo! It strains me to say, speaking off the top of my skull that shadows now invade my bones. All those dandy days of yours walking through a maze makes my form feel dislocated.

Xon: Words clinging to ribs makes a good anchor.

Xit: Windshield wipers smear prints set by the eye that goes beyond connecting dots of rain, making a code for words.

Xor: (As if alone.) I had a candy eye and the sentence was as long as the back of the woman that stood before me.

Xus: (Frazzled.) Wipe her, wipe out not white out, cutting through a design as it was meant to be, from the furthest corner of the eye, looping over a torn brown hill.

Xon: (Excitedly.) My hill… I see it as I turn my head into something that begins to wear better.

Xit: (Concerned.) Again on the outskirts of a dream, rubbing chalk of sleep from its borders.

Xus: Let’s try to escape the words.

Xit: Getting a radio show out of air waves, and unpacking objects and characters in my room; playing in long, staged manners that was worth stuff!

Xor: (Loudly.) Frolic licked clean, frozen pocket watch in vest, florist fudges pretext. We go wee around the corner and smell connections of Needle Park and Lincoln Center.

Xus: (Wearily.) I try to ride the brightness of each day, yet all my sketches don’t make one act. The fabric of us grows from our surroundings, and I feel enclosed within a tent.

NET SET.

—GUY BEINING. GREAT BARRINGTON, MA

Q: One hundred issues of Free Verse were published from 1998 to 2009 in addition to 17 chapbooks with Marsh River Editions (marshrivereditions.com). How did you start publishing poetry?

A: Innocently. I did not intend to start a poetry journal. The first issue of Free Verse, March 1998, featured six poems by four poets from our newly formed regional poetry group, MAPS, Marshfield Area Poetry Society. Our writing group rapidly expanded, and I kept publishing our monthly output of poetry. To my surprise, poets outside our group learned about Free Verse, submitted poetry, and asked to subscribe. By May 2001, Free Verse was twelve pages, monthly. It expanded over the years to 40 pages. I set out stacks of Free Verse at the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets conferences, at poetry readings, etc. Free Verse then had hundreds of subscribers, most from Wisconsin, some from various parts of the country. Submissions even arrived from corners of the world.

Q: What advice do you have for poets who would like to start a small press poetry journal?

A: If you are thinking of starting a poetry journal, think finite—a poetry journal restricted to sonnets about solar flares, for example. Or, how about villanelles about elephants, odes to cats. Restrict the submission period to two weeks out of the year. I am only slightly kidding. What is manageable? Frequently small press poetry journals fold due to heavy time demands.

Vital to the process, at least for me, proofreaders! I acquired two proficient proofreaders, Sherrie Weber and Kris Rued-Clark. They caught my typing errors and other blunders (or as many of my blunders as humanly possible), and they also contributed book reviews and interviews. Serendipitously, Sherrie and Kris were long-time friends before I started Free Verse.

While still in high school, our son Nick submitted poetry and wrote book reviews for Free Verse. Later, he developed and maintained a website for Marsh River Editions. It was fun to have poetry as a family project.

One also needs adequate space—which probably nobody has, not with a poetry journal published out of a home. I worked mostly with paper, not email submissions. Bins multiplied—bins for incoming poetry, bins for outgoing, bins for contest entries, bins for new subscriptions and renewals. In addition to poetry, Free Verse published book reviews, essays, interviews, articles, photographs, news items, letters, cartoons, and ran four contests each issue. I searched for Free Verse cover quotes from the many poetry journals and books that filled our house. (Eleven years of the cover quotes provide an excellent poetry education.) We lived with files and bins, stacks of mail, and poetry books. The office had limited walking space, sometimes just a tunnel to the computer.

Q: Are there courses in “The Small Press Poetry Journal: Editing and Publishing”?

A: Perhaps. And no doubt such courses would be helpful. On the other hand, it’s liberating to jump in: just publish who you want, when you want, with the design you want. Computer skills help. In 1994, Nick (still in grade school!) and I both learned QuarkXPress for desktop publishing and basic Photoshop skills. (I learned how to use a mouse at this same time.) Nick helped me with our computer crashes and other computer-related problems. We had ancient computers during the early Free Verse years; we didn’t have high speed internet until after I stopped publishing Free Verse. It could have been worse. At least it wasn’t the era of publishing poetry journals on a mimeograph machine.

Q: Why did you start publishing chapbooks?

A: Poet Louis McKeen (1951 - 2011) of Philadelphia submitted his poetry to Free Verse. After I had published several of his poems, he insisted I publish his chapbook, Loose Change. He was an editor/publisher himself and talked me through the process. Without his persistence (and because I liked his poetry), I might not have created Marsh River Editions in 2001. Nick volunteered to do the layout and design of the chapbook which became the pattern I followed. Of course, once you publish one chapbook, you will be inundated with manuscript submissions. I found I enjoyed editing and publishing books. (I am working on our family books now and for the foreseeable future.)

Q: What type of temperament or personality seems to coincide with this type of work?

A: If you are going to edit/publish poetry, ask yourself: Am I a hermit? Could I be a hermit? Do I love to spend time alone with poetry? It also helps if you can let other things go—like sleeping, or having a perfectly clean house at all times—or at any time.

When I’d walk Free Verse letters to our mailbox, I’d sometimes be surprised to notice it was spring or autumn—I’d be oblivious to the seasons. Darn, did I miss summer again? If I’d glimpse a football or baseball game on TV with thousands of people cheering, I’d wonder why these individuals had time to travel to a game and then just sit there for hours—why weren’t they at home working on their poetry journals? Had they read all their piles of submissions? Responded to them? But no, we poets are a tiny minority on this planet. We poetry editors/publishers are an infinitely smaller group. We’re the people not going anywhere—just to our computers. Dust settles on us and on the stacks of papers surrounding us.

Q: What are some of your favorite memories from publishing Free Verse and the chapbooks?

A: I enjoyed Free Verse related poetry outings with family. Sometimes my husband and Nick would tend the Marsh River Editions book table at the Wisconsin Book Festival in Madison while I attended programs, or we’d attend events together. My husband and I went to numerous poetry readings throughout the state and delivered boxes of newly printed books to poets. I also enjoyed corresponding with poets over the course of each year. Letters and emails grounded me to the living world.

Great fun: getting an issue of Free Verse to the post office! I stuffed Free Verse into envelopes on our kitchen table—and sorted and bundled issues by zip code, sometimes with the help of my husband. Outgoing bins filled our living room—all the bins barely fit into our car. I loved driving home from the post office knowing an issue was done and out! The euphoria lasted one night, and then it was back to tackling incoming mail, etc. I also enjoyed driving bins of Marsh River Editions review books to the post office. Books going out into the world.

I also appreciated that I was learning. I learned something with each poem I read, with each issue I published.

I felt grateful to the many poets who submitted poetry, wrote book reviews, essays, did interviews, submitted cartoons (John Lehman, Lee Kisling, and Ed Galing), and to those who entered and judged contests. It’s difficult to mention names because I’m sure to miss many, but frequent book reviewers/article writers included: Sarah Busse, Robin Chapman, Karl Elder, Karla Huston, Michael Kriesel,
John Lehman, Charles P. Ries, Lou Roach, Thomas R. Smith, Richard Swanson, and Wendy Vardaman. There were numerous poets who submitted excellent reviews and articles.

And of course, the subscriptions and donations were essential to the entire process. (But one never publishes poetry for financial gain.)

An aside: I love the cartoons in The New Yorker. I wish I would have had crates of cartoon submissions. Another ideal occupation: wouldn’t it be fun to be a cartoon editor?

Q: Was it easy to select poetry to publish from the submissions?

A: Oddly, yes! Fresh, unique poems stood out, stood up, begging me to publish them. Editors develop their own sense of what they want to publish. It could be a danger, I suppose, to fall into a comfort zone. You have to be open to new voices, styles, forms, ways of thinking. Then again, it’s the editor’s/publisher’s prerogative to select what she likes.

An editor/publisher of a small press poetry journal is unlikely to relinquish poems to a selection committee. Why would one? Reading and selecting poetry is the best part of the publishing process. It’s endlessly absorbing. (I wonder why all poets don’t rush out and start their own poetry journals for this reason alone.)

Q: What were the time constraints during the publishing years?

A: Time always seemed in short supply. During many of those years, I also published two business newsletters from our home. I subscribed to and continue to subscribe to a number of poetry journals—unread articles, pages of poetry, and entire unread issues haunt me. I’m counting on heaven as a haven for reading. There I’ll finally get to read everything I’ve missed.

I also spent time organizing a monthly poetry reading series in our community that ran for four years—from 1999 through 2002. Poets were invited to be featured readers, and we found grants and funding for those coming from Madison, Milwaukee, etc. Glory! Money to poets!

An unexpected outcome: I was so occupied by publishing deadlines that I stopped attending the meetings of our local poetry group that I had started. Sadly, four members passed away. A few moved to other cities and joined new poetry groups. Alas, our local group that inspired Free Verse ceased to exist. (I could always start a new group. I could offer to publish our poetry monthly….)

Q: How did you feel after your decision to relinquish Free Verse?

A: After 11 years, I felt ready for a change. I was delighted to find two poets to take over Free Verse. I asked Wendy Vardaman and Sarah Busse if they’d be interested. I knew from their poetry, book reviews, academic degrees, and interest in Free Verse that they would be ideal candidates. It helped that they lived in Madison, an area receptive to poetry. To my joy and gratitude, they accepted. They have accomplished miracles with the publication now known as Verse Wisconsin. They seem to have unlimited energy to do separate online and print issues, start a book press (Cowfeather Press), edit the 2013 Wisconsin Poets Calendar, and serve as Madison Poets Laureate (2012-2016), along with keeping up with their own writing and busy families. I think of Wendy and Sarah as higher beings from some advanced planet.

Q: What are you doing now?

A: Besides talking to myself in this dialogue? (Typical behavior for a hermit, however.) I’m doing more reading and writing (including writing book reviews for Verse Wisconsin), and I’m spending more time with my family and friends. My husband and I travel to visit our adult children and they visit us. My two sisters and I are writing a book in poetry and prose about growing up in a Finnish American home. I’m collecting my poems and writing new ones for chapbooks that I plan to self-publish. I even have time now to exercise and tackle house projects neglected during the Free Verse years. I notice the seasons. Wind chills are 30 below tonight. I noticed that.

[Eds. note: This is an interview of Linda Aschbrenner by Linda Aschbrenner.]

The Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, one of the oldest American poetry societies, sponsors local poetry events, semi-annual conferences, contests, and a yearly anthology. WFOP offers Wisconsin poets opportunities for fellowship and growth.

See wfop.org for further information.

The Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets.

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VERSEWISCONSIN.ORG
Poem-Free Since May

No notebook. Phrases on the back of gas station receipts. No rhyming words that won’t let me sleep. Yet birds still tweet, people wash cars, there are fried onion rings in bars, like the one in which a droopy eyed girl who looks like Emily Dickinson in a tube top asks, “What do you do?” “I’m a poet,” I lie, “And I think you should be one too.”

—JOHN LEHMAN, CAMBRIDGE WI

Saturday, March Roundabout

A week of work, working the weak, the weak work of the working week.
O for the day of done, the done with a day, the day for the weak done working, for the day, yea the day, the day of the book, the broken book and brook breaking and the day of the walk and the walk breaking by the sun baking on the brook, the jangling of grass like a green guitar, the condoning glance of lilies and crows, all the stops and the gos, the pushing of sap, the pop and squdge of new leaf, while languishing away in the mild and the rote without even a note or nod of explanation.

—JEFF BURT, MOUNT HERMON, CA

Midsummer, 1961

Dostoevsky, Raskolnikov, brain fever, write a letter, walk barefoot up a dusty road to mail it, laze in a Guatemalan sling strung between two oaks, doze with a mildew-scented book across my chest, dream of writing classic novels popular with fungi, emerge from the hammock as if from a chrysalis, pull a damp swimsuit off the line, wear it as skin, run to the beach, drop towel and book next to my sisters’ things, dive in, dive in, the water’s clean, the chill bracing if I keep my limbs churning, swim as far as I can, then float on my back, let the sky show me how large the world is, while the sea roars with the hum of all creatures breathing as one.

—GEORGIARESSMEYER, SHEBOYGAN, WI

April seventeen-year-olds

are daffodils, intoxicated with rain. It’s not always pretty to see. Imagine those yellow headed flowers unable to hold their petals up, flapping around in the thunder and lightning, their pistils and stamens all askew. Just like those pansies, so colorful and innocent, edible too, but watch out—one of them threw up on my lawn. There are days when I am surrounded by tulips talking: It’s always me me me me all the way home. When they get home they forget how to be human. What’s for dinner? I hate chicken. That’s when I dream of those soft, fuzzy chicks protected under heated lights. I tell you, raising a chick is not difficult—it’s a little later on, when it turns into a stubborn rooster that thinks he can fly—he will peck his way out of your chest cavity, thrashing you to the ground with his wings—leaving you with a hole in your heart and a mouthful of feathers.

—KRISTIN LAUREL, WACONIA, MN
Dear Tree,

I stand in your presence
and confess my own cruel acts:
sawing and shivering timber
for books tenting loneliness.

O tree, don’t lend to likes of me,
who once thought you simple,
moved by wind and rain and bird.

Dog-cared, margin-scribbler,
I hereby render back to you
all words, for study in situ,
night moths, my bookmarks.

You, my tome of knotted thought
etched in inner rings and bark,
your bower, my reference book.

—Zara Raab, Berkeley, CA

Rachel Carson

The heart of nature saves nothing in the name
of sentiment. In the sea, it all comes down to
eating, one flashing life ingesting another
and in turn becoming food for some larger life.
Where many see only the red rule of tooth and claw,
Rachel Carson recognized a beauty better described
than defined, and in writing about it conveyed
the mood of a vast dynamic energy exchange
more than the sum of its constituent organisms,
behind that glittering, shifting tapestry, Kali
both devouring and giving birth to herself.
From the view of a single, limited mortal life,
it’s as alien as the self-replenishment of the sun,
phoenix-like life-giver, in its burning. Rachel
Carson understood, and that understanding
strengthened her against the relentless, horrific
attack on her body by the cancerous forces
she exposed in Silent Spring. It must be that
the bravery with which she faced and named
her destroyers helped her write with such fearless
elegance and empathy of the myriad sea-lives,
of which she was one—and you and me—bright,
fugitive as reflections of stars in water.

—Thomas R. Smith, River Falls, WI

Turtle Amour

Morning in the backwater pond
around the old railroad trestle footing.
An archaic armor tilts, tail-end up, then slides heavily down
against some unseen resistance
in the shallow, mucky water.

We can’t take our eyes off
the snappers rolling slowly sideways
in their black, turning embrace,
a head suddenly visible or
a clawed flipper raised
dripping in air, as if waving
not drowning, thank you,
but loving in their splashy manner,
knocking up against each other with
a clacking of shells, serrated tails
whipping, reddish-yellow throats
glistening, their pleasure such work
to get at each other through that
bony encumbrance, though managing
as they’ve done even in the scummiest
sloughs for millions of years, that
there may be turtles in springtime
 tumbling in the waters of the world.

—Thomas R. Smith, River Falls, WI

St. Francis in April

Ferns came thin this spring,
spiny aesthetes, almost transparent.
I’m pulling weeds, an easy answer. Cold
stains my knees, this wind-stung soil,
how we choose, how we enter.
But not you, Francis,
blind-white and pedestaled,
their fire split
your heart, your palms. Even these
loose-stitched roots are hunger—
April relentless in its reckless hope.
Bless us with fervor, Francis.
Watch over us with your empty eyes.

—Diane Unterweger, Nashotah, WI
Center Stillness: Conversations with Phyllis Walsh & CX Dillhunt

Phyllis Walsh was the creator and founding editor of Hummingbird: Magazine of the Short Poem, which is in its twenty-third year. These conversations took place in December 2011 and January 2012 at Phyllis’ home in Greendale, Wisconsin. CX Dillhunt is a poet as well as the editor of Hummingbird.

CX Dillhunt: Phyllis, I remember finding my first Hummingbird tucked away on the very bottom shelf in the poetry section of the University Book Store on State Street—almost on the floor, flat, and there on the cover was David [Kopitzke]’s hummingbird, wings out, hanging there with its beak in flower, alive as can be…

Phyllis Walsh: A long way down for you!

CX: Yes, I’m surprised I noticed it at all. I didn’t know it was there. It was the only thing on the shelf. But I got down there, sat on the floor and read the first two issues cover to cover. I also took out and sent you a couple haiku the next day.

Phyllis Walsh: I guess no one knew where to put it. I’m glad it caught your eye.

CX: Yes, eventually the bookstores began placing it up front near the registers, like candy and gum in other stores—hoping for an impulse buy!

PW: Well, I’ve given up trying to explain. I suppose those are the ones who never submit their work, unfortunately, never read it. Perhaps they misunderstand the form or intent of the magazine, see a haiku or any short work as too limiting? But, haiku or not, the poem I’m looking for might be more haiku-related than not. I’m not sure we’ve all decided on what a haiku is…

CX: So, let me rephrase the question: what is it that makes a good short poem, one that works? I mean other than just being short and fitting on the page? What would you say is the nature of the form?

PW: Yes, ready each time you read it, I guess I learned somewhere along the way that that led to the best poetry. ‘Poetry should be condensed. I didn’t have a name for what I was writing, I was just trying to write poems. It’s what I preferred. So, as the editor I get to choose. I hope the magazine speaks for itself in the sense that it encourages readers and writers to consider what works.

CX: Short and ready.

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CX: So it’s not just brevity you’re looking for?

PW: Actually, that is all I’m looking for. Brevity. It has to hold up on its own, not just look short or fit the page. A certain tightness of expression and emotion that I don’t think is really achieved in a longer poem.

CX: When did you start writing?

PW: Probably first grade. Trying to write a poem. I didn’t keep any—my mother didn’t encourage saving. I had a poem file. I threw them all away. I remember her saying, “You don’t read this anymore.” So I didn’t keep anything for that long. They were mostly short things—something that needed to be expressed. My first grade teacher. I was really close to her—Miss Kahl. I ate lunch with her every day.

CX: Shortly after you found Hummingbird, you started subscribing. You wrote, “I’ve gone more in the direction of haiku—something that needed to be condensed. I didn’t have a name for what I was writing, I was just trying to write poems. It’s what I preferred. So, as the editor I get to choose. I hope the magazine speaks for itself in the sense that it encourages readers and writers to consider what works.

CX: So, let me rephrase the question: what is it that makes a good short poem, one that works, when it doesn’t?

PW: Yes, ready each time you read it. I guess I learned somewhere along the way that that led to the best poetry. ‘Poetry should be condensed. I didn’t have a name for what I was writing, I was just trying to write poems. It’s what I preferred. So, as the editor I get to choose. I hope the magazine speaks for itself in the sense that it encourages readers and writers to consider what works.

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Phyllis Anne Vosburg Walsh
November 4, 1928, Fort Atkinson, WI
September 4, 2012, Milwaukee, WI

Phyllis was, in many ways, a role model for me. Despite the exhaustion that comes from a long and challenging work life— and despite the considerable obstacles created by a severe aneurism, Phyllis was determined to make a success of her retirement years. “Success” for her meant poetry—the highest quality, spare, moving, funny and wrenching. And then she decided to involve me in her efforts by way of challenging me to illustrate poems. Long before the printing of each issue of Hummingbird, I would get a phone call or a note. She would have chosen a poem to be illustrated—always along with a precise deadline—and always with gentle or quite pointed promptings to produce the best.

So she taught me to make the most of the time given to us, to use our creative juices to their utmost, and to aim high. Thank you, Phyllis.

David Kopitzke, Art Editor, Hummingbird: Magazine of the Short Poem

CX: What did you talk about?
PW: What was going on in our lives. She tried to influence me to be more outgoing. I kept going back through sixth grade. I'd just stop by to visit. Sometimes I'd show her some poems.

CX: Were there any other teachers or authors who influenced you?
PW: My sixth grade teacher, Miss Lance. She taught poetry. Before that as I said, I just wrote because I wanted to. She had us read poetry. And I forget his name, but I had a freshman English teacher at Milton who read poetry. And I forget his name, but I had a freshman English teacher at Milton who encouraged.

CX: I know you're a letter writer.
PW: I started that at an early age, too. I like to write.

CX: I know we corresponded for almost twenty years before we met.
PW: And we still write to each other. I think there's a connection…

CX: How so?
PW: I mean between poetry and letter writing.

CX: Do you think there's more of a connection to the shorter poem?
PW: I never thought of that; maybe it's the focus. Paying attention to that person, to what's going on, knowing you should be succinct, more to the point.

CX: Yes! Your letters, too, are always short, but carry the news,
PW: That's it. And it's a pleasure to write, to keep in touch.

CX: Perhaps how a poem keeps us in touch.
PW: Especially that short poem!
CX: I enjoyed the years when Cid Corman appeared in Hummingbird. I hear you corresponded.
PW: Oh yes. For years. I miss hearing from him.

CX: He died about seven years ago?
PW: That sounds right. We shared poems. He suggested it—a magazine like Hummingbird, I mean. We talked a lot about haiku and short poems.

CX: Did you ever meet?
PW: Yes, at the Lorine Niedecker Centenary in 2003. We were all fortunate to have him there. I think he died shortly after that, in 2004.

CX: And that's another connection, you and Lorine both being from Fort Atkinson. Did you know her?
PW: We both worked at the Fort Public Library. I was a librarian there for a short time before accepting a position at UW-Richland Center. We were acquaintances, our families knew each other. Everyone did.

CX: Yes, in your small book of essays about her, you comment: "My awareness of Lorine Niedecker began in my childhood when I glimpsed her recluse figure in our hometown, Fort Atkinson…a town of 8,000 situated in the midst of rich dairy country…townspeople whispered that Niedecker wrote poetry, but I never knew anyone who read it. Since she seemed to avoid interaction with other people, it was generally assumed it was of little consequence."

PW: That was such lesson for me.

CX: It seems your study of Niedecker influenced your work.
PW: I suppose.

CX: Well, in the introduction to your essays [Lorine Niedecker: Solitary Poet, Juniper Book 56, La Crosse, 1992] you say: "Although LN is becoming recognized as a poet who made a major contribution to American literature, her work can reward a poet who made a major contribution to American literature, her work can reward. Her genius lies in the clarity of vision she brings to the most common objects and experience."

PW: That's it. That precision. I felt I got to know her that way, through her poetry.

CX: But also, the comment on "scholarship." I think your statement about her works as the motto for Hummingbird.

PW: Yes, very much so. I finished that collection of essays just as Hummingbird was getting under way.

CX: And going back to Fort, You grew up on a farm?
PW: Yes, I was born there. I think that influenced my sense of poetry and love of down-to-earth poetry. My grandfather loved to tell me stories for hours at a time out on the porch. He had a great sense of humor. We also went to the river to fish. It was a great small-town atmosphere. That was my life. After Milton I went to UW-Madison for my degree in Library Science. I worked at the Madison Public Library downtown for a while.

CX: Hummingbird is in its 22nd year. Any advice for writers?
PW: Not really, other than to be yourself as much as you can.

CX: What have you learned from editing Hummingbird?
PW: Not to make instant judgments about poems or poets.

CX: What do you mean?
PW: First time through on submissions don't make a major decision to take something or to dismiss it. I think the same goes for the poet, don't immediately embrace or reject your work. It's that going through that decision-making process, knowing you've eventually achieved something.

CX: What's the most difficult part of the job?
PW: Turning down someone I know and see regularly. Correspondence is a bit easier. There are some I think of very highly as people, but who write poems I don't want to accept. That's very difficult. I try to do something else once in awhile—like lunch or a play or a movie. I try to do something together that has nothing to do with poetry.

CX: What's been the role of correspondence for Hummingbird?
PW: Significant. Some of my best friendships. But even there, it's up and down. Something works for a while and then it falls apart. I suppose that's the nature of all relationships, even though the friendship may remain.

CX: Any regrets?
PW: No, not that I can think of. Not with Hummingbird. It's one of the most important things I've done in my life, not only for my own pleasure in doing it, but for the feedback from others.

CX: Would you say it's been "fun"?
PW: Yes, fun for the most part. One of the most positive experiences in my life. And I can't imagine it ever ending.

CX: I'd like to end by reading you one of your poems from my favorite collection, Center Stillness [Phyllis Walsh, Scythe Press, Dakota MN, 1989]. For the sake of our readers, I want to point out that it's a small, hand-stitched book, about the size of Hummingbird, with ten poems, each on its own page.

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canoing closer
driftwood branch
eron

PW: Yes (chuckling), I can see that to this day.
CX: Thanks!
PW: Oh, how can I thank you?

December 2011 & January 2012, Greendale, WI
Humble Inheritance: Reflections on My Internship with Phyllis Walsh by Trish Stachelski

In 1979, I moved from Milwaukee to Richland Center to pursue a degree in education. I was drawn to the farms, the cows grazing in the coulees and an opportunity to attend the friendly, supportive environment of the University of Wisconsin, Richland Center. I remember walks along streams looking for deep pools where trout dwell and labrador tea, the ancient medicinal plant that grows in bogs. I remember a swimming hole accessed by jumping off a train trestle and long walks in the snow to get to school.

At the University of Wisconsin, Richland Center, Phyllis Walsh was my instructor for Library Science and Children's Literature. I knew Phyllis was a poet, as I had seen some of her poems in the local publication The Ocooch News. Later when I transferred to the UW-La Crosse, I was delighted that Phyllis enrolled in the same poetry class taught by John Judson, editor of Juniper Press. Years later as an MFA student at Hamline University in St. Paul in 2006, I applied for an internship to work as an editor with Phyllis on Hummingbird, The Magazine of the Short Poem. This was a wonderful opportunity to learn more about Phyllis the editor and Phyllis the poet.

My responsibility as an intern was to help with the decision making process for the June issue of the Hummingbird. Phyllis published haiku and nontraditional forms. We read 54 poems out loud and evaluated them for sound, imagery and meaning. Most importantly, we considered how each line contributed to the whole. Subjects of poems included animal and human activities with objective, critical, humorous, playful and satirical tones. She believed the short form was the truest form because it captured the moment. Long poems were not poems, she said. They were stories.

Hummingbird Press is considered one of several fine small presses that fills a niche in the publishing world. Publicity is based on word of mouth. “It’s a plum to be published in Hummingbird,” Phyllis said. Dedicated followers include poets living overseas on a shoestring who devote their lives to writing poetry. Phyllis often published H.F. Noyes of Greece, “the barefoot priest.” Phyllis was proud of him for not being part of academia or any formal organization in the mainstream literary scene. Hummingbird Press also published chapbook collections such as Charlie Mehrhoff’s A Farewell of Sorts, a high quality publication using the Heidelberg Windmill at Swamp Press.

Cid Corman (1924-2004) poet, translator of Basho and mentor for Phyllis lived in Japan for many years. He provided advice and encouragement for her as an editor, and he sent many poets her way. The letters between Phyllis and Cid are personable and engaging. On July 6th, 1991, he writes to Phyllis: “(I am) always delighted when one of my people connects with you...I’ve steered someone in your direction. He is hopelessly bad mannered. Don’t take his palaver too seriously. But his shorties, as I call them, have a little jump to them and are worth letting others see.” (Letters of Phyllis Walsh) Many poets have praised Phyllis for her sharp editor’s eye. She was the kind of editor that would return work with cryptic comments. “Keep writing!” She often told me. Though I sent her many poems, it was years before she published any. I asked Phyllis why she named the magazine Hummingbird. She told me it is not that she knew a lot about hummingbirds or particularly liked them. Once while putting out a sugar feeder, one attacked her. “They are feisty!” She said.

Phyllis’ love of poetry began when her aunt gave her a small collection of poetry when she was 12. Growing up in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, Phyllis would occasionally see the mysterious poet Lorine Niedecker. Phyllis admired Niedecker’s work and later became influential in evaluating them for sound, imagery and meaning. Most importantly, Phyllis the poet. While living in Richland Center, Phyllis experienced a ruptured cerebral aneurysm. She had to have surgery to have it clamped. The surgery caused a slight stroke which temporarily affected her speech and caused her temporary paralysis of one side. It was a difficult and long recovery. After this life-threatening experience, Phyllis vowed to put poetry first. In her hospital bed, she began writing all kinds of poetry. Emily Osborn, publisher of the Ocooch News in Richland Center, was the first to publish Phyllis’ poems. Phyllis’ work also appeared in Frogpond, Haiku Quarterly, Instone, Ko, Modern Haiku, Northwest Literary Forum, tel-let, White Hero, Windless Orchard, and Woodnotes. Midwestern Writers Publishing House published Like a Dream on Waking in 1981. Hummingbird Press published the collections To Find a Rainbow and Center Stillness.

During my internship with Phyllis, she repeatedly admonished me to never tell anyone I was a poet. What an odd thing for an editor of a poetry magazine to tell a poet friend, I thought as I drove up and down the hills and coulees of Richland and Vernon counties journeying from my home to her home. I considered my identity as a poet. I considered the influence of the natural world and the medium of the short poem for expressing this poetic vision which draws from the ancient verse of China, Korea and Japan. There is an understanding that the job of the poet is to discover the inner voice of its subject. Phyllis’ Hummingbird acts as a medium for this voice. The image of the hummingbird suggests vulnerability and surety, the unselconscious bird going about its life.

Fast Tracks

In their cloud haste, they sped across the landscape, unfamiliar horizons where they left neither shadow, glimmer or sound in passing. States reeled by like the clink of slot machines.

Each location gave off, grew out of its own value. The glow from big city lights might’ve been a jackpot, replete with all the dings, bells, and whistles of a huge win, should they pause to collect.

No time for counting markers. Eighteen states, one foreign country and less than fifty miles from another were stakes nobody lost, a bluff you just couldn’t fake.

Luck might be a lady tonight. Or a pair hurtling down the turnpike, she eager to stop, sniff, listen, gawk. He on the other hand content to merely log the miles behind them, cover as much in as little as possible. All this—and at a steady, reliable 35 mpg.

—G. A. Scheinoha, Eden, WI
Everyday is a gift

so says the plaque on the bathroom wall.
Of course, there should be a space between
every and day. It is each and every
day that is the present.

But the everyday is a gift too,
wrapped in plain paper
addressed in Papermate blue,
bound in time and string,
left on the doorstep
near the mat, common as dirt and dust,
ordinary as tap water, easy to miss.

When you return to the table at the restaurant
it may have taken your seat
—look before you sit. It rides there
with you in the car, built in better
than cup holders. You can see it
out your windscreen—big sky
country and rainy day commuting,
broken shoelaces and loose teeth,
salty as canned soup
and just as remarkable
unless you have specific recall of the mundane,
all happenstance and chicken fingers.

It wouldn’t be special
to get a gift every day—what greedy
children we’d be. No matter; it hangs around
with your clothes and tags along after breakfast
like a balloon from the carnival,
or the toilet paper flagging your step,
constant companion, sometimes making you self conscious.

A gift. A prize. A favor
cheap as the tchotchke in the Cracker Jack box,
cute as Monopoly’s Scottie dog,
succinct as a vanity plate and vague as a bubblegum fortune.

It’s the balled tissue in the toes of new shoes,
oticeable only when you put your foot in it.

Or it’s a bitter process, tough-as-gristle work,
comforting as an I-told-you-so but iridescent
like a pearl, and dirty as a root vegetable.
After all, some gifts we’d like to return.
But whether it is as vexing as catsup,
frivolous as confetti,
or hard and gleaming like the cold comfort
we take from still being alive, it
will not to be denied but remains
obvious as the banner
that boasts “sanitized for your protection.”

Sure, everyday is a gift.
Unwrap it carefully
and save the paper.

—ELLEN WADE BEALS, GLENVIEW, IL

Contrast

A white cloud
drifts thru the blue sky.
I struggle with my car,
stuck in a ditch.

yo yo

in the mall
there is this man
on a stage
in center court
playing with a yo yo
he makes the yo yo do
all kinds of tricks
people watch and applaud
i do too
its been a long time
since i played with a yo yo
a small round wooden disk
with a string
the man says
here is walking the dog
he makes the yo yo
hit the floor and walks it
across the stage like a dog
everyone cheers
once the yo yo was so popular
now it has vanished
like the hula hoop
when the show is over
i buy a yo yo from the man
he thanks me and says
hope you enjoy it
you are very good i say
he says
well, i am disabled
i see for the first time
he has no fingers
i am disabled
i see for the first time
he has no fingers
only some kind of imitation
he nods
yeah, he says,
i was in iraq, got blown up
thanks for your help, sir
as i walk away
with the yo yo
i feel like crying

—ED GALING, HATBORO, PA

travels with esther

the old ford knows
the way
summer time
the woods beckon
the air is invigorating
my wife beside me
we follow a languid
stream a few ducks cross the road
the trees sparkle
my wife says
too many trees
yes, there are a
lot of trees, i say
too many of them, she frowns
don’t you like trees, i ask
she shrugs,
the doctor said it
will get worse,
she will have flashes
in and out of reality
but not yet
i love you, she murmurs,
and pats my hand,
i love you too, i say
we are two old eighty
year old people
travelling to eternity
the ford keeps
chugging along
want a pizza i ask her
she smiles and says yes
we head for the pizza parlor
the ford knows the way
still time left

—ED GALING, HATBORO, PA
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verse wisconsin

APRIL 2013

For the Fall 2013 online issue of Verse Wisconsin, we seek poems that explore “parents & children” from a variety of viewpoints. We are all someone’s child. Many of us are also someone’s parent. How do these identities feed our poetry? How do they fight our poetry? We are also open to verse drama, essay and more experimental or hybrid forms.

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