

# VERSE WISCONSIN

FOUNDED BY LINDA ASCHBRENNER AS FREEVERSE 1998

## POETRY BY

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Embracing, engaging with transience, rather than resisting it, allows us to do other kinds of work, and to ask other kinds of questions. Rather than worrying about and trying to create / maintain an institution, buildings, permanent infrastructure, we can emphasize process, relationships, and transformation, asking ourselves: Who will we invite to the party? What sort of gathering will it be? Does everyone look like us? Think like us? Sound like us? Is that interesting? What other parties are going on around us that we might think about attending?"

—Sarah Busse & Wendy Vardaman  
 (di) Verse Wisconsin:  
 Community & Diversity

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WISCONSIN FELLOWSHIP OF POETS

In case you didn't know, this is Sarah Busse & Wendy Vardaman's last issue of the magazine known as Verse Wisconsin in both print and online forms. No one is "taking over" this behemoth, though many would like to see it continue to swim or sprout wings or portage itself across land on its way to sea. Whatever. We say we've had a fun time but are happy to move on as well as back to writing. Poetry in Wisconsin remains in very good hands. For starters, take a look at the double online edition, "Midwest Remix," where 10 fantastic in-state guest curator-editors introduce you to talented poets and performers from Wisconsin / the Midwest that you've probably never heard of. Poetry is huge, even close to home. We encourage you to check out a reading series, performance venue, political action, small press, or gallery that you've never gone to. Likely you will find something there to inspire you. Our guest editors, each of whom organize such things, will give you some new ideas about where to look for poems and poets. Read/ purchase their books and magazines. Go to their events. Mix it up and make something.

Editors' Notes

The website, versewisconsin.org, and its content will remain online. Next fall, we'll create a permanent archive of print & online issues so you can continue to read (for free) what you missed. We also plan to bring out next fall a Cowfeather Press anthology of prose that the magazine published, ordering info below.

We have many thank you's from five years in no particular order...

thank you to numerous proofreaders. thank you to advisors listed in the masthead. thank you to the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets and other donors and supporters. thank you to Wendy's neighbor Dave, a non-profit tax accountant, who laughed when we said we wanted to become a 501c3 & so we didn't. thank you to poets & poetry. & also to art, graphic novels, theater, music, science, literature, cake decorating, sewing, coding, dancing & every other creative thing that people do to pass time. thank you to reviewers. thank you to our husbands and children for putting up with all of this for five years. thank you to chocolate. thank you to Barriques and to Crescendo (aka Gallup/Ancora) on Monroe St. thank you to Victor Allen's where we started meeting (or maybe not, their wireless was always too slow). thank you to purple. thank you to Bodoni & Garamond. thank you to Adobe CS4 & continuing ed. classes. thank you to laptops. thank you to Facebook. thank you to our 14 runaway senators. thank you to Wisconsin. thank you to barn raising. thank you to Linda Aschbrenner & all the other

Wisconsin poetry editors/ publishers who have done similar work, some of whose names we learned doing VW & some we don't know. thank you to subscribers and poetry gift-givers. thank you to Thyse, our printer. thank you to the many people & organizations that made & provided "Wisconsin Poetry News" online, all of which inspired us. thank you to all the people we've gotten to know and to work with the past five years.

And now to the chatter of cups and saucers...

We're mostly in agreement. A few you said yes to I was a "no" -- would reconsider if any of them are ones you really want me to take another look at. --But for now at least, nope. Why do I feel sorry for him? I don't know, just do. Sorry ... We have been so good to him. no haven't read this one yet nope that's fine Already have YES yes yes okay you have this one...for print or for online? either way-- okay, let's take it I said no to this one fine yes Did not come through for me. I said no. I really like these. maybe they're not Midwestern per se but they are American.... ok either way re-reading, I'm fine yes yes I said no to these fine, though I do like I can add that one in I said no to these fine with photos Yes take this with photos yes yes yes to first one. I prefer third to second. I think I invited the second-- Sorry didn't realize Okay. Let's take all three? I didn't say yes to this, but could reconsider. feel a little uneasy about saying no. print? Okay I went back and re-read. I'm good yes I didn't say yes but could reconsider. as... Okay that is fine with me, to add in. do not have her submission. just sent hers over good with both of these. yes yes yes shall we take all three? fine by me, though also good with two yes I said no to this fine all 3 yes I was a maybe, not a firm yes on this. fine with saying no--very like what we just did I said yes to this and the other one too... fine okay. I liked the last one I like that one too--want that one instead or all three? yes NICE, BUT NO I said yes fine I said yes to fine I said yes to not sold on this one--

VERSE WISCONSIN #113 (April 2014) is the last regular issue of the magazine. An anthology of prose about poetry from the print and online issues of VW will appear in Fall 2014. Purchase the anthology for a special pre-order rate of \$15. Current subscribers only can purchase the anthology for \$10 (through June 1). Don't know if your subscription is current? Email sarah@versewisconsin.org.

\_\_\_ My subscription is paid through Issue 114. Send me the anthology for \$10/copy (a \$10 savings off the cover price), includes free s/h (through June 1).

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Let's keep thinking--

Thanks to volunteer proofreading by intern Marina Oliver. Lingering errors are, of course, the responsibility of VW's editors. Contact us: editors@versewisconsin.org.

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## Books Reviewed Online

James Babbs, *disturbing the light*, Interior Noise Press, 2013, by R.A. Davis  
 Heather Corbally Bryant, *Lottery Ticket*, Parallel Press, 2013, by Caroline Collins  
 Robin Chapman, *Dappled Things*, Illustrated by Peter Miller, Revue K, 2013,  
 Two Reviews: by Estella Lauter and by John Olski  
 Barbara Crooker, *Gold*, Cascade Books, 2013, by Margaret Rozga  
 Dallas Crow, *Small, Imperfect Paradise*, Parallel Press, 2013 by David O'Connell  
 Ann Curran, *Me First*, Lummo Press, 2013, by Nancy Scott  
 Abbot Cutler, *Say Dance, Say Night*, Slate Roof Press, 2013, by David Gross  
 Philip Dacey, *Gimme Five*, Blue Light Press, 2013, by Lisa Vihos  
 Sherri Felt Drahtfeld, *The City*, Finishing Line Press, 2013, by Kathrine Yets  
 Anna M. Evans, *Forgetting Home: Poems About Alzheimer's*, Bare Foot Muse Press, 2013, by Lisa Marie Brodsky  
 John Gosslee, *Blitzkrieg*, Rain Mountain Press, 2013, by Noel Sloboda  
 Grace Marie Grafton, *The Jester*, Hip Pocket Press, 2013, by Cherise Wyneken  
 Jessica Greenbaum, *The Two Yvonne: Poems*, Princeton U Press, 2012, by Zara Raab  
 Robert Haight, *Feeding Wild Birds*, Mayapple Press, 2013, by David Gross  
 Estella Lauter, *Transfiguration: Re-imagining Remedios Varo*, Finishing Line Press, 2013, by John Olski  
 Janet Leahy, *Not My Mother's Classroom*, Poetry People Press, 2012, by Richard Swanson  
 James P. Lenfestey, *Earth in Anger*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2013, by Estella Lauter  
 Emelie Lindemann, *Queen of the Milky Way*, Dancing Girl Press, 2013, by Lisa Vihos  
 Liu Xiaobo, *June Fourth Elegies* (trans. Jeffrey Young), Graywolf Press, 2012, by Margaret Rozga  
 Kathy Nelson, *Cattails*, Main Street Rag, 2013, by Estella Lauter  
 Cristina M.R. Norcross, *The Lava Storyteller*, Red Mare 7, 2013, by Kathrine Yets  
 James Pollock, *Sailing to Babylon*, Able Muse Press, 2012, by Richard Merelman  
 Zara Raab, *Fracas & Asylum*, David Robert Books, 2013, by Kathrine Yets  
 Liz Rhodebeck, *Here the Water is Deep: Poems of a Middle-Aged Bride*, Orange Hat Publishing, 2013, by Anjie Kokan  
 Jeannie E. Roberts, *Nature of It All*, Finishing Line Press, 2013, by Estella Lauter  
 Jane Satterfield, *Her Familiars*, Elixir Press, 2013, by Adrienne Kalfopoulou  
 Penelope Scambly Schott, *Lillie Was a Goddess, Lillie Was a Whore*, Mayapple Press, 2013, by Sherry Chandler  
 Katerina Stoykova-Klemer, *The Porcupine of Mind*, Broadstone Books, 2012, by Lucia Cherciu  
 Moisés Villavicencio Barras, *Luz de Todos los Tiempos / Light of All Times*, Cowfeather Press, 2013, by Judith Barisonzi  
 Frank X Walker, *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*, The University of Georgia Press, 2013, by Margaret Rozga  
 Ed Werstein, *Who Are We Then?* Partisan Press, 2013, by Richard Swanson  
 Marianne Worthington, *Larger Bodies Than Mine*, Finishing Line Press, 2006, by David Gross

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## New from Cowfeather Press 2013-14

### Available Now

**Sister Satellite** by Cathryn Cofell  
**Luz de Todos los Tiempos/ Light of All Times** by Moisés Villavicencio Barras  
*Echolocations, Poets Map Madison*  
 ed. by Sarah Busse, Shoshauna Shy & Wendy Vardaman

### Forthcoming 2014

**I Didn't Know There Were Latinos in Wisconsin**  
 (3rd edition) ed. by Oscar Mireles

&  
**An Anthology of Prose from Verse Wisconsin**

**All Books Available in print & Kindle editions.**

**To Order:** Visit [cowfeatherpress.org](http://cowfeatherpress.org). Questions?

Email: [cowfeather@versewisconsin.org](mailto:cowfeather@versewisconsin.org).

**Additional supporting materials** (audio, video, book group questions, and information about authors) available at [cowfeatherpress.org](http://cowfeatherpress.org).



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Cowfeather Press PO Box 620216, Middleton, WI 53562

## Books Received September 2013-February 2014

*Publisher & author links available online*

Heather Corbally Bryant, *Lottery Ticket*, Parallel Press, 2013  
 Gary Busha, *Frog on the Bay*, Wolfson Publications, 2013 [gbusha@wi.rr.com]  
 Robin Chapman, *Dappled Things*, Illustrated by Peter Miller, Revue K, 2013  
 Robin Chapman, *One Hundred White Pelicans*, Tebot Bach, 2013  
 Cathryn Cofell, *Sister Satellite*, Cowfeather Press, 2013  
 David Cope, ed., *Song of the Owashtanong, Grand Rapids Poetry in the 21st Century*, Ridgeway Press, 2013  
 Barbara Crooker, *Gold*, Cascade Books, 2013  
 Heidi Czerwiec, *Self-Portrait as Bettie Page*, Barefoot Muse Press, 2013  
 Darren C. Demaree, *As We Refer to Our Bodies*, 8th House Publishing, 2013  
*Echolocations, Poets Map Madison*, Sarah Busse, Shoshauna Shy, Wendy Vardaman, eds., Cowfeather Press, 2013  
 Anna M. Evans, *Forgetting Home: Poems About Alzheimer's*, Bare Foot Muse Press, 2013  
 Reginald Flood, *Coffle*, Willow Books, 2012  
 Eric Greinke, *For the Living Dead, New & Selected Poems*, Presa Press, 2014  
 Derrick Harriell, *Ropes*, Willow Books, 2013  
 Roberta Hill, *Cicadas, New & Selected Poems*, Holy Cow! Press, 2013  
 Lita Hooper, *Thunder in Her Voice*, The Narrative of Sojourner Truth, Willow Books, 2010  
 Joan Wiese Johannes, *He Thought the Periodic Table Was a Portrait of God*, Finishing Line Press, 2013  
 Lee Kising, *The Lemon Bars of Parnassus*, Parallel Press, 2013

Jackie Langetieg, *A Terrible Tenderness*, Ghost Horse Press, 2013  
 Estella Lauter, *Transfiguration: Re-imagining Remedios Varo*, Finishing Line Press, 2013  
 Emelie Lindemann, *Queen of the Milky Way*, Dancing Girl Press, 2013  
 Charlotte Mandel, *Life Work*, David Robert Books, 2013  
 Mary Ann B. Miller, ed., *St. Peter's B-list: Contemporary Poems Inspired by the Saints*, Ave Maria Press, 2014  
 Cristina M.R. Norcross, *The Red Drum*, Lone Gull Press, 2013  
 Zara Raab, *Fracas & Asylum*, David Robert Books, 2013  
 Charles Rossiter, *Cold Mountain 2000: Han Shan in the City*, Foot Hills Publishing, 2014  
 Chuck Rybak, *</war>*, Main Street Rag, 2013  
 E.M. Schorb, *Manhattan Spleen*, Aldrich Press, 2014  
 Maxine Silverman, *Transport of the Aim*, Parallel Press, 2014  
 Angela Sorby, *The Sleeve Waves*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2014 [Winner of The Felix Pollak Prize in Poetry]  
 Alison Stone, *Dangerous Enough*, Presa Press, 2014  
 Turn Up the Volume: *Poems About the States of Wisconsin*, Margaret Rozga, Wendy Vardaman, & Ching-In Chen, eds., Little Bird Press, 2013  
 Moisés Villavicencio Barras, *Luz de Todos los Tiempos / Light of All Times*, Cowfeather Press, 2013  
 Ed Werstein, *Who Are We Then?* Partisan Press, 2013



## Hulga As Sara in *The Book of Tobit* Who, Possessed of a Demon, Was Given Seven Husbands and Killed Each on Their Wedding Nights

In the mirror is not a beautiful woman.

Hulga looks for Hulga elsewhere. Hulgaheart stumbles,

falls, picks Hulga up, stumbles. It is the picking up

which is the worst. *Stay down*, Hulgaheart hisses

but Hulga wants up *up*. Wouldn't it be easier to marry?

to stay down? *Yes!* Hulgaheart says. *Yes!*

Hulga's family says. Hulga does. Puts on the dress

and swims through the mud of the smiling day.

But on the night's shore, the question is waiting:

*Does he love Thee for thyself alone?*

Hulgaheart is a bloody bird in a saint's hand,

a bat caught in Groom's hair a knife

they tried and tried to keep away.

—RITA MAE REESE, MADISON, WI

## Reading My *Antonia*

It was the Geminid asteroid shower:  
80 or so streaks of light per hour!  
It was the Mars moon. I was reading  
*My Antonia* when the word "cart-wheel"  
rolled off the page and became itself.  
I could see bare-suntanned legs,  
my friends' and mine, more than  
Shiva's arms, in the air, like spokes  
turning towards earth. We were  
at Big Bay, on the border  
of wet sand, between lake and land,  
between childhood and girlhood. Our legs  
were in the air as often as our heads.  
We were turning cartwheels. Our legs  
gave off sparks of light,  
like the Geminid shower  
that each year light spikes  
the December night sky, like  
"the moon...in the east,  
big as a cart-wheel."

—SUSAN FIRER, MILWAUKEE, WI

## Under Water

We didn't anticipate rust. How it could climb walls, eat eaves, chew holes in the roof. That blistering July, we submerged mom's vintage tin Colonial, flooding its retro rooms, 40s suburbia sinking like a submarine to the bottom of our plastic pool. We never imagined the splotches of red-orange dust splashed like an action painting above the mantel. Dripping down the lithographed curtains.

Ours was the era of hula-hoops, Ouija boards, and twisting limbs across a mat of giant polka-dots. After *Lost in Space* and *Hello Down There*, why not play underwater sea family? Pink crib and playpen floated about the nursery while plastic parents swam from room to room trying to catch their bobbling toddlers. Then the mom drifted downstairs to load her wringer washing machine. Dad to the john, always overflowing. Neighbors thought nothing of diving through open windows to deliver seaweed pie or return baby brother whose lullaby had carried him off in the current when we were busy holding down the refrigerator, stove, and six kitchen chairs. Underwater sea kids would never have to dry dishes or scrub behind their ears. No dusting, sweeping, mopping: Paradise in 2.5 feet of water. *Way down below the ocean, where I want to be, she may be*. Even decided to use our goldfish for the family pet, but when chlorine killed Fido, we settled for a rubber barracuda. The proportions weren't right—sort of like the Flintstones with a dinosaur for a dog. But the ocean made monstrous claims anyway: prehistoric hagfish, mermaids, selkies. Who knew what might be possible?

In November, when the first snow fell and mom stormed the garage for a shovel, she found her cold war childhood cracked and leaning like a Mississippi shack in the corner. Ruined. In the gloom of all our soggy faces, who knew we'd grow up to live in a whole neighborhood of underwater houses? That crustaceous sea people would emerge from the waves with their fins tucked in and walk away, as if occupying land for the first time?

—BRENDA CÁRDENAS, MILWAUKEE, WI

## Everyday American Magus

*For Christopher Harter*

Harry Smith claimed he once held the philosopher's stone, but lost it in the boroughs of New York.

He described his adventures in self-drawn comics, also currently lost.

Somewhere along the way he collected paper airplanes.

He collected them from street corners, school yards and trash cans.

He collected lots of them.

His collection is now at the Smithsonian Institute, 600 Maryland Avenue, Washington, DC 37012.

He loved music, especially the found kind.

His *Anthology of American Folk Music* made him famous, but not rich.

He recorded birds in central park, the oral histories of jump rope rappers and the favorite jokes of six-year-olds.

He did all that with hand-held recorders.

Of course, he liked to paint.

He painted urine stained oil portraits and destroyed them.

He made magic silent films and threw them away.

He wrote masterful, surreal formalist verse on unsent postcards, bed sheets, collection notices, hotel room walls and Chinese take-out menus.

No one ever published a collection of his poems.

He liked to drink and take drugs and did both and well.

He never had sex with either a man or a woman.

He often scratched his old records while playing them.

He gave most of his records away.

Allen Ginsberg once took a photo of Harry Smith transforming milk into milk.

Such are the gifts of alchemy.

—MIKE JAMES, DOUGLASVILLE, GA

## the bus ride

from the window of this bus i see  
a church  
and a drug raid  
i smell something awful  
is it this big guy  
or this old woman?  
the agents rush in the brown house as  
a janitor comes from the church  
holding a rake and a cigarette  
it's got to be this big guy  
i have to change seats  
the grizzly man stares at me  
i see children playing with dogs  
and people riding bikes  
i should get a bike  
the music in my ears takes me away  
a lady sits next to me  
of course  
bags of groceries  
and an overstuffed purse  
i pull the line to get off the bus  
another church  
with another janitor smoking a cigarette  
only a few more blocks  
i'll walk from here  
as i light a cigarette.

—ENRICO LOPEZ, EAU CLAIRE, WI

## I Get Up at the Open Mic

and say, "I bet no one ever says 'suck my dick' to Dracula."  
My grandma's in the audience. She goes to church regularly,  
Amsterdam too. She sees no problem with that. No,  
my grandmother isn't in the audience. It's my ex-  
girlfriend. My grandmother is dead. My ex-girlfriend is dead.  
I say, "I bet if a fire starts in a wax museum, they're screwed.  
Especially if it's close to a wick museum." My ex-girlfriend  
tries to light the stage on fire. Her name is Julie. No,  
her name is Michael. I'm making this an LGBT poem  
in hopes that it will increase the odds of it getting published.  
No, I'm making it a conservative poem in hopes that it won't.  
Sarah Palin is in the audience. She's next to Michael Palin.  
God, what went wrong with this poem? I go back up  
on stage and grab the mic, saying, "My favorite thing  
about people is when you get to have sex with them.  
That rules. Especially if they don't have syphilis."  
My grandmother and ex-girlfriend and Sarah Palin  
all light me on fire. No, they just sit there. No,  
I just sit there, alone in my room, typing on a computer.  
There is no grandma, no ex-girlfriend, no Sarah Palin,  
no open mic. There's just this poem and my hands.

—RON RIEKKI, NEGAUNEE, MI  
*visit VW Online for audio*

## Nonsensical Abundance

She would prefer nothing  
Collapsed star, locked cage, his  
Soundless back  
Instead...  
His second-hand store of lies  
Leave her looking for  
Words that fit

—JENNIFER RUTH JACKSON, ANTIGO, WI

## Icicle Trickle

Melting icicles  
reflected  
in a mirror....  
One drip every second,  
one drip every two seconds,  
one drip every three seconds,  
One drip a minute, one drip an hour,  
one drip a day, one drip a week,  
one drip a month, one drip a year,  
One drip a lifetime, one drip a life,  
one drip a world, one drip a universe,  
one drip a....  
How does it feel  
to melt drop by drop  
till nothing's left?  
Boys dueling with icicle swords  
shattering them laughing  
into translucent chunks....  
The blind girl tells her mother  
she can hear  
the icicles melting...  
Icicles on crosses, weathervanes, tombstones,  
statues, cannons, telephone poles  
and red wheelbarrows....  
Icicles inside icebergs  
where penguins boast  
their secret homes...  
10,000 year old icicle with frozen white ermine inside  
in 10,000 foot high ice cave in the Pyrennes  
discovered in 1937....  
When the faucet drips you call the plumber  
but when the icicle drips  
you call no one....  
If you remove the water  
from a 150-pound human  
only 4 pounds would remain....  
If you remove all the water  
from the human brain  
what remains weighs one ounce....

—ANTLER, MILWAUKEE, WI

## As If It's Up to You

Prepare for their deaths. Be ready.  
Make acquaintance with a church.  
Pick up bad habits and shake them  
a few times,  
so you can find them again  
at the foot of the bed, waiting.  
Cram old photos in the pockets  
of disused coats.  
Plan for revelation.  
Tune your ears to their music.  
Squint your eyes to see, finally, it,  
what they've been talking about  
all these years.  
Stuff up every crevice of your unfed heart.  
Be ready.

Or  
don't be ready.  
Take every day as if there are a hundred more,  
a thousand, a century.  
Don't prepare.  
Don't take a tape and measure  
the places that they fill.  
Don't learn the recipes. Don't iron the suit.  
Don't get things in order.  
Don't be ready.  
Let them  
be  
still  
alive,  
to feel,  
to know,  
to protest  
that not everything about today or yesterday is also  
about tomorrow,  
about you.

—JENNIFER MORALES, MILWAUKEE, WI

## The Hipsters

With prescriptionless glasses these hipsters came quaffed and soul-patched in faux-effervescence to Bard with the townspeople on brownstone stoops perched like rush hour pigeons ignoring the mass Migration in droves of the Prius driving commonwealth invaders. They came with organic vegetables In canvas sacks and babies in designer frocks eating from compostable bags dripping of Earth.

These hipsters migrate with knee-jerk movements of bebop played on pristine turntables atop Mahogany tables beside decanters and crystal glasses from weddings in pairs like doves but pigeons Are what arrive outside loft windows from converted carpet factories that were made chic by an adman Complete with doorman to assist when the wind has their hand on their poor boy that only the rich got.

Unafraid of the dark, unafraid of the alleyway howls at midnight, these hipsters set out to claim The town theirs. They open coffee shops with imported designers from Paris. Who cares where the Coffee comes from? They open boutiques for dogs that used to ravage the dumpsters outside Chinese Food restaurants. They open bookstores where you can only buy obscure works for obscene prices.

The hipsters came to conquer in a maelstrom of gentrification to remove shuttered windows from Duplex front windows and claw hammers to remove the nails from the boarded shops that once housed A community. The misaligned get driven farther to the margins of a city unwilling to care as long as Tax dollars roll in. They call it progress and do so with a slang created by the people they pushed out.

—MATTHEW LAFFRADE, MILTON, ONTARIO  
*visit VW Online for audio*

## On the train

I pass a field on the train each morning where cows mill about, steam rising from their hides. I want to join them in lazy grazing in cool morning fog roll grass hilly terrain. There is a small river, Or probably a creek I guess, that runs through their field where they drink and do the things That cows do with water I suppose. They don't watch the train although I would if I were to join Them in sweet dewed mornings. I would watch the commuters going to work and I would wave With a sweet smirk letting them know that I know that they know I know it is all for show and all for Wanton need of a life without grazing the plains of farmer's brow sweat. And in moments like this I Look around me and no one else notices the cows or they do and don't care or they do and fiend For burgers and leather couches but when I look at them they do not show these under their morning Facades. The man across from me that must eat a bowl of cream of wheat each morning when I want to slap him and ask him to wake up five minutes earlier and eat it at home like a normal person Or the woman beside me applying her mascara briskly as though she has a meeting in Another train car a few stops away. Is she one of the woman who liaises with men in the neverland Oasis of no speaking accordion bliss between train cars? I don't ask because we don't speak On the train. On the train we are silent unless we are speaking to unseen people through handheld Devices designed to keep us in contact with people not around us because who surrounds us does not matter.

—MATTHEW LAFFRADE, MILTON, ONTARIO  
*visit VW Online for audio*

## Street Violinist

Today I came upon a slender man  
standing on a steep sidewalk  
playing a violin concerto—  
his case open for money.  
An officer with a soul  
more for order than music  
asked to see his permit.

Mozart stopped in  
mid-phrase, while the man  
holding his violin and bow  
dug into his pocket.  
Not finding the card  
the cop growled  
Pack up and leave.

Yet beauty like that  
isn't easily quashed.  
Later this afternoon  
the alder outside my window  
sang with little gray birds  
who bounced among the branches  
like quarter notes.

—LEN TEWS, OSHKOSH, WI

## Address To a Bank Robber

I can offer no excuse for my sudden speaking  
to that bank robber in the window—seven waiting line;  
encumbered as he was with keeping the cashier calm.  
I am not brave and should have stayed silent.  
Yet, in these made and manic times of  
suicide bombers and ground zero,  
I felt obligated to query:

“Sir? Have you ever tried to swim the Hellespont  
in winter after dusk? They say Leander did.  
And ages later, George Lord Byron.”

He quickly turned around...to gaze at me or bark a warning.  
“Shut your mouth, fool! Or take a slug between your eyes!”  
I thought he'd yell. But only moved his lips as if he meant  
to softly speak. But found no words.

Then the bank cashier ducked behind her counter.  
And somewhere near the far revolving door,  
and old security guard pulled out his gun  
and yelled, “We're being held up!”

And I resumed my earnest briefing.

“Sir? It might interest you to know that there was a cavalier  
named Angelo Mengaldo who swam the Danube to escape  
Napoleon.”

I can't forget the way he gazed at me as if to plead:

“I am just a low and helpless hold-up man  
trying to trick and scratch his way across these nightmare lanes.  
While you stand here with your fat check book  
and recite the history of Europe?”

Later they cuffed his wrists and tugged him  
to a waiting sheriff's cruiser parked  
up on the pedestrian walk with  
its top-mount beacon lights  
pulsing.

—JERRY HAUSER, GREEN BAY, WI

## You told me to check the facts and read the numbers.

You burn 26 calories every minute  
that you spend kissing someone. It doesn't  
matter if their mouth tastes like hot chocolate,  
those calories will still be lost.

And women have more taste buds  
than men do, so that chocolate  
is extra bitter, extra sweet.

And on earth there are roughly 265  
people born every minute while  
115 die. So, really each loss we feel is a  
gain to someone somewhere.

Half of the people who die  
at the blast of a bomb  
are the ones who were trying  
to make a bomb and 40% of murders  
occur during arguments and both of  
these statistics are sad in  
different ways.

1 in 5 marriages end before the  
fifth anniversary and more than 99%  
of species that have ever lived,  
over all of time, are extinct.

The longest kiss on record  
lasted almost 31 hours. That's 213, 900  
people lost. And still we keep kissing, passing  
our hearts back and forth like playing  
cards, Go Fish.

—CHLOE N. CLARK, NEW LISBON, WI

## praise for the music of the joy of life

*Exuberance is Beauty.* —William Blake

if you are lost  
in the social-political-commercial fog  
surfeited with the absurd  
listen to Arif Lohar and Meesha Sharif  
music is joy *ecstasis*  
but I have never heard or seen  
anything like this  
Sufi music a la Punjabi rock  
singing *Chambey di Booty* Bullah Shah's  
poem song prayer  
the keyboard artist coloring all the verses  
with fresh sprightly lilting flourishes  
in their sensuous resonant voices  
Meesha's lithe body dancing  
rocking with every note  
three gorgeous women backup singers  
caressing each word with their eyes and mouths  
I adore all these of these ladies  
their brown skins shining black hair  
all the musicians truly uniquely beautiful  
vigorous physically and spiritually  
the spontaneous delight of their wide smiles  
their eyes brightening  
the crescendo driven by the rocketing drums  
accented by the backbeat thunder  
struck sharply on the two handed drum  
the keyboard's silken phrases weaving in and out  
the haunting oracular power of the singers' chants  
the joyous force of the call and response

kuka lee jee kuka lee jee kuka lee jee  
kuka lee jee kuka lee jee kuka lee jee  
*may you live long*

every body any body every body any body  
every body any body every body any body

dama cuta coo dama cuta coo dama cuta coo  
dama cuta coo dama cuta coo dama cuta coo-o  
*may the dove call*  
*echo the Lord's praise*  
*with every breath*  
and your soul swirls  
heart-pounding  
breath lost  
body riding air  
into the hummingbird world  
beyond the nonsense  
we have manufactured to fool one another  
hate lies wars despair  
dissolve into pure blue air

—ROBERT SCHULER, MENOMONIE, WI

## Infusion

Infusion changes the essence, the flavor of  
ordinary things: garlic-tinged oil,  
jasmine-scented chocolate.

Consider the rebels who  
plucked and infused leaves of  
ruby-flowered bergamot after  
tossing their British tea.

Like smoke seeping under  
shuttered doors, infusion is stealthy.

It is not a July raspberry  
proclaiming crimson tartness on your  
tongue, nor a winter mandarin  
declaring, at first bite, splendid juiciness or  
cold-storage mediocrity, or the onset of  
teal-scented rot.

It is foxglove, narcissus  
steeping into your pores,  
your veins, just enough to produce  
slight nausea, shortness of breath—  
perhaps you've always felt this way.

Infusion is the first act of forgetting. You are  
mesmerized by the specious, unfurling  
plume slowly darkening your glass;  
cloying warmth softens your  
memory of deep snow, crisp apples.

I have lost my taste for tea.  
Our cup has grown bitter,  
tannic, astringent;  
tongues swell,  
memories constrict.

Resurgence dwells in the raspberry, in  
cold, crystalline water.

—CRIS CARUSI, MADISON, WI

## In June

The ferns burst forth.  
Odd to find jungle  
So far north.

—BARTON SUTTER, DULUTH, MN

## Water

### Madison, Wisconsin USA

Madison:  
43° 07' North in latitude  
and 89° 35' West in longitude  
is the city's absolute location  
from the center of the earth.

Wisconsin:  
positioned in both  
northern and western hemispheres.  
This is the state's relative location  
and double minded politics.

USA:  
as a part of North America  
in the East North Central region  
it is bordered  
by states, lakes and coloreds.

Madison, Wisconsin, USA  
knows exactly  
where it is geographically  
but ignores all that is not as white  
as milk and frozen winters.

—FABU, MADISON, WI

Down mirage-shimmer paths of this  
sterile edifice, I search for what I thought  
was a given: drinking fountain.

Silver stainless heads—stallions rearing up  
in twos and threes out of enamel troughs  
in the corridors and schoolyard, 1950s. Water

buoyed me from class to recess, the latest  
lesson, newest knowledge, I was  
drunk on drinking-fountain water. Aren't

we 80 percent or thereabouts?  
All of us mostly water, and I'm thirsty  
as soil in drought, as wife in search

of husband lost in alkali desert;  
his precious minerals mined, somewhere  
in these too-bright halls where he

swims on saline drips. I'm so  
thirsty to take his hand, to lead him out  
of here. To walk with him on water.

—TAYLOR GRAHAM, PLACERVILLE, CA

### After Watching Afternoon Autopsies, in August, I Read Chu Shu Chen's "The Old Anguish"

Some days, in the late afternoon,  
We might nap in our cool jungle  
With the Panama fan slowly  
Moving across the two of us.  
Outside tiny birds perch within our reach.  
Inevitably, someone slashes the neck  
Of someone we've never known,  
Darkening our bluey screen.  
What happens in our sleep  
Never quite seems the same.  
I'm still so relieved when we  
Do awake from dreamed death.  
In the evening we sit with  
Forest creatures until we're quite frightened.

—DEWITT CLINTON, SHOREWOOD, WI

### Alone in My Study Near the Lake I Read Chu Shu Chen's "Alone"

On our street with so many houses  
I miss the moon rising on our  
Lake. By late evening we're  
Already nodding off with old TV friends  
Helping us through August.  
Every day a new body's pulled  
Floating down or up in one of our rivers.  
At sunrise coyotes hunt for grass hideouts.  
Our sky is filled with hungry dragonflies.  
It's only now that I wonder  
Where all that I've done  
Has gone. Tonight we hold  
Each other so we will remember each other.

—DEWITT CLINTON, SHOREWOOD, WI

## The Milwaukee Bridge War (1845 to Present)

My Milwaukee  
home is built out of bird bones  
and beer cans along the murky Melloke  
which wraps the city in a bow  
of beige or brown—some argue  
it divides the city, and in a way  
it does—otherwise color would  
not matter in this case.  
Every morning I down  
some foundation and stack  
my house a little higher—almost  
as if competing against the black  
smoke pillars that taint the Lake  
Michigan sunrise—twisting out  
towels of clouds dripping  
acid rain against ice-  
cold water which always smells  
something awful like dead fish  
or sewage from plant-  
ed dreams withering  
in the shadow of the US Bank  
building—but we the people  
are the darker side of this  
never-let-you-leave city.  
Maybe if it wasn't  
for angled bridges and home-  
grown hangovers we could break  
free from the river  
tied into our name, slowly  
painting us separate shades  
and distorting our image with its  
distinct city limits and abstract ways.  
But that's probably just my morning  
buzz still rambling, and I know I  
will always be stuck here, pissing clear  
streams into the river while watching  
the other side perched historically  
apart—stacking cans using broken wings  
and glaring back, as if in dis-  
agreement with the colors I see.

—MATTHEW FARR, OAK CREEK, WI

### Rock Tripes

Rock tripes are lichen, like an old couple  
who depend on each other to live  
out their black and white lives. Though  
neither will ever admit it. He  
traipsing all over the rock they live on. She  
cooking up greens for eons.  
But O how they liked to polka.

—JIM JOHNSON, DULUTH, MN

### Gift or Wish?

at the beach  
a gull watches  
a man bury  
his flat-chested wife  
in the sand  
he gifts her  
with large breasts  
smooth rosy pebbles  
for nipples  
the man squats low  
to take a picture  
precocious gull  
watching  
yellow  
shutterless eye  
warning

—ROBERT NORDSTROM, MUKWONAGO, WI

### Much Rhyme, Little Reason

The morning tastes sour  
Starting off, as we did, dour  
Talk of dollars and cents  
Who spends what on what we vent  
Our opinions on whose debits most worthy  
Making us both feel surly  
Though as usual me doing most of the talking  
And you expressing your opinion by walking  
Out the door and into the day  
While I go my separate way  
To scour a dollar store shelf  
Then offer my best self  
To a gap-toothed clerk  
Who receives the perk  
Of my smile and cash  
As I walk out with my trash.

—ROBERT NORDSTROM, MUKWONAGO, WI

## The Day Nobody Died

### Rutabagas

Because in the country once known for its: in the city  
once known for its: in the cellar no one goes down  
into: rutabagas.

Because one in pasties, mojakka, and hot dishes; in  
steel lunch boxes shaped like barns, a thermos  
clipped to the loft; on Thursdays at the Blue Note Café  
with the special, even then in season only. Because  
life was, now isn't without rutabagas.

Because the old holdouts—musk oxen, Tecumseh  
and Crazy Horse, narwhals, petrified wood, Joe Hill  
and Woody Guthrie—never compromised, and

because the old Finns, the winds, wolves, coelecanths,  
Old Believers, boreal owls, and snapping turtles  
never gave up.

Because a life is life enough  
the taste of rutabagas. If lived only to taste

—JIM JOHNSON, DULUTH, MN

It is 2:30 in Milwaukee the Monday  
before Thanksgiving, yes  
it is 2012 and I get drunk on weekdays  
because the world is going to end  
in December, or so I hope,  
otherwise I am an alcoholic  
I step outside for a Camel Menthol  
and remember I quit last week for my 20th  
birthday and 47th time because  
I want to die healthy  
I turn around to go inside  
and Mrs. Kay (my elderly next-door neighbor)  
must know I'm drunk since she waved for once in her life  
and in my garage I find an empty Taco Bell bag  
which makes me want food, but Kenzie doesn't  
like me driving drunk, so I debate it over a Mason jar  
full of Admiral Nelson's Spiced Rum and Coke  
that Maj. introduced me to last year  
while living in the dorms at UWM  
and I check my phone to see Rostik texted me  
asking if I'd put him in a poem, but I don't  
respond because I'm looking for my car keys  
lost somewhere in my room under piles of clothes  
next to my bed where I notice  
the *Oxford Book of American Poetry* opened up to a man's bio  
and I am swaying a lot by now and thinking  
it's not that great of an idea to drive  
while he and a dune buggy scream in my ear  
from Fire Island, and my liver and I decide to stop drinking

—MATTHEW FARR, OAK CREEK, WI

### Mallarmé to Degas

1 *Poems*: Contradicting everything since before the invention of contradictions. Always  
changing with the exception of when they stay the same.

2 *are*: Existing—currently and continually—never ceasing to stop, as far as we know. The first  
tool of deception: the trust (more in itself than us) that we'll believe said truth to be true.

3 *made*: Manufactured and/or fabricated—depending on the use; like words or poems, but not  
ideas.

4 *of*: Expressing a relationship (with clear attachment issues—hinting at underlying problems).

5 *words*: Victims of bullying and subject to judgment of appearance rather than personality—  
only as tough as the ideas that raised them. 'All are beautiful in their own way' does not apply.  
They *are*.

6 comma: Pause. Reread, rethink, reevaluate.

7 *not*: Forming the negative. The second tool of deception: the trust (more in us than itself) that  
we'll believe said truth to be untrue.

8 *ideas*: The DNA of subjective reality—disregarding truth, but truth itself until believed  
otherwise. See *Poems*.

—MATTHEW FARR, OAK CREEK, WI

## Near Harmony Grove

The round bay of Wisconsin Lake was shallow,  
wide enough so the waves pounded the shore  
with white fists, old faded tattoos on watery arms.

Some years early spring would crack and roar  
and pile up cubes of ice on the windward side  
and the world would seem glassed in until June  
relented and summer revived, a comatose patient  
who's remembered everything that's been said.

We like memory, how it helps us pretend we once  
were, frozen in ice is better than nothing at all,  
and the thaw when it comes, well what then?

Way out from the bay, the lake deepens,  
sturgeon lie in wait, their moustaches quivering,  
and deeper down the moon feels safe enough  
to catch a few hours of sleep, snores burbling  
from this crater or that. If mankind ever steps  
on the dark side, a few drowned fisherman,  
frozen in the airless cold, will be a surprise.

—GLENN HALAK, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

## Letter from Italy

1.  
Too young, they charged,  
to have a grown son. But Michelangelo  
defended his work—

*All virgins in their innocence  
retain the purity of youth.* How else  
to quiet the critics? He knew

she was no simple woman,  
and the marble trapped her there,  
son collapsed in her lap.

Behind plexiglass, the “dialogue  
between the two faces” bounces  
light. But I remember the first time,  
the New York World's Fair.

Like a winter month sprouting lilies,  
the Madonna's beauty, a star spill  
in jade light. Broken

open, like the billions of nights  
I'd never get to live.

2.  
The pantheon celebrated Jupiter,  
who has since converted, and at Pentecost  
the fire department drops red rose petals  
through the oculus like tongues of fire.

An ancient billboard stares  
from a building in the piazza.

Carved in Latin by a caesar's order,  
a public service announcement,

*The people of Rome abhor  
Any vulgar commercial displays  
That corrupt the beauty of art*

3.  
Galileo loved to talk,  
and Pope Urban. Intellectual equals  
up all night  
parsing Copernicus or the Greeks.  
Imagine dinner with Galileo  
as he laid the physics out.

What's it like to know the right fork  
to use in conversation,  
and which is the wine glass,  
which is the water?

—CARMEN GERMAIN, PORT ANGELES, WA

## Street Scene in Venice

*All humans stream at night...  
into the loving nowhere.* —Rumi

Late on Sunday, we unpack  
our bags, locate the A/C switch  
then walk the canal,  
search for a place to eat and have  
some local wine.

The breeze off the water  
smells of lime trees.

We are in no hurry.

The fish market is closed,  
a few stalls hold discarded items:

a rusty kerosene lantern,  
a busted orange crate stamped Valencia.

A clay pot catches my eye,  
one handle missing,  
decorated with mud-frogs and delicate plants,  
things that would thrive in a pond.

I want to take it home  
but your knee stiffens.

In a fuchsia sunset, we drink our wine  
near the Rialto Bridge.

That night, I dream of an altar  
somewhere near the Aegean,  
perhaps the west coast of Turkey.

On a turquoise fresco, a woman  
watches a man looking  
down at her. He whispers  
of strange flowers, rare amphibians  
and waters erupting cool  
and fresh from icy streams.

—JEANINE STEVENS, SACRAMENTO, CA



## The Black and White Photo

There was a rumor once that there was a photo of Marilyn Monroe's vagina in this Mexican town where I lived. My drinking buddy Jimmy said "Leave it." But I wouldn't. Jimmy was a mentor and an icon down there. Like Hemingway he was only sixty-one but looked eighty-one. He also had Parkinson's, forcing him to drink coffee through a straw and mighty struggles to get beer bottles to his lips. Jimmy was once an Arizona attorney, now on the lam. During a divorce, he had transferred his assets to his daughter who stole everything. He wouldn't press charges against his own daughter and later, the IRS was on his tail. So, broke, he crossed the border. Like me, he was a lapsed Catholic, asking me if suicide was still a mortal sin. "Beats me," I said. My Spanish is pretty good, so for fun, I'm hitting the Mexican bars looking for the photo. Finally one day, Jimmy orders a taxi and takes me to this cantina: wooden doors falling off the hinges, five bar stools, two ex-pat regulars drinking heavily and a bored Mexican bartender. Jimmy orders the drinks then says, "Go check out the room upstairs." This small room over the street is plastered with about a hundred old photos of Marilyn Monroe. I realize Jimmy had been holding out on me. I check out the photos, return. "Satisfied?" he asks but I won't talk to him. One of the ex-pats leaves, the other is a Vietnam Vet. We talk, exchange a war story or two. Jimmy sits quietly. Then, Jimmy says to the Vet, "Ok; show him." "If you say so, Jimmy," the Vet says. "Anything for a brother in arms," he says to me then moves a picture of Elvis aside and hands me a black and white photo. She came to Mexico in 1952 for a quickie divorce. She mounted a platform in Mexico City to grant a courtesy interview. As she crossed her legs, a Mexican photographer caught her with her thighs open and, under that great, great innocent smile, a glimpse of her black pubic hair, or black panties. "Satisfied?" Jimmy says. We were talking again so we drank the afternoon away. The Vet leaves. The Mexican bartender shares his dinner of rice and beans with us. After dark, we catch a cab back. That night I'm feeling special, privy to a secret and a Vietnam guy helped make it happen. It was the only payback I ever got from Vietnam. Life was Ok. The next day, Jimmy says to me quietly, "you know, seems to me, everyone took advantage of that girl. Not in a million years would she ever show us her pussy. Never. It's like stealing ain't it? Just leave it; best to just leave it as just another Goddamn rumor on the street." Jimmy was right, as usual. I can't tell anyone down there what I saw, the name of the bar, what street it's on, nada, zip, nothing. Later, I know a girl works at the pharmacia across the street where Jimmy lived. Those pills are legal down here. I figure keep his suicide and the photo of Marilyn Monroe's vagina as just a rumor, just another Goddamn rumor.

—W. FRANK, MILWAUKEE, WI

## Snow Flies When You're Having Fun

*For Gary Snyder*

Snow flies  
millions of snow flies  
freezing cold  
swirling fill the air  
leaving drifts of albino scat

Like their warm blooded  
cousins  
the rainbugs  
that swarm through here  
in a storm of summer  
peeing all over everything

—JAMES BOTSFORD, WAUSAU, WI

To be and not to be  
That is the agenda

—JAMES BOTSFORD, WAUSAU, WI

## The Story

*Just leaning toward someone  
is part of the story.*

—William Stafford

But that's not where it begins.  
It begins before the corduroy  
jacket on loan. Before tracks  
through snow to an unlit house.  
The dust of blue chalk and crack  
of pool balls. Archie Bell & the  
Drells on the radio three AM.  
It begins before the scent of Old  
Spice through the window of a car  
with Kentucky plates. Before  
a southerly wind pushing an  
empty porch swing. A Hershey bar  
broken into thirds. A deck of cards  
shuffled on August afternoons.  
But even before that. Before a boot  
comes loose at the sledding hill.  
Buffalo nickels traded palm to palm.  
Crawling through a field after  
the other side wins. That's when  
it begins. Long before sprawling  
on the floor to watch Hitchcock.  
Way before you place your leg  
gently on mine.

—SHOSHAUNA SHY, MADISON, WI

## The Boxer at the Bonfire Sits Quietly Listening to My Story

He is punch drunk. The elves are punch drunk.  
The elves are in a reading group. They get high  
like a motherfucker. I wear hats in libraries.  
The elves don't. The elves go skating. I like  
to go skating, but it reminds me of twelfth grade.  
I probably should talk about Tiananmen Square  
at some point. Although you do realize  
that now this poem will be banned in China.  
And I have so much to say to the Chinese!  
If the Chinese are listening, if this poem  
somehow gets through—and I'm not holding  
my breath that it's going to happen—I want you  
to know that when I was in twelfth grade  
I used to go skating and I'd look like the moon,  
I mean just like the moon, like if you could see  
the moon right now and you probably can  
as long as the night has fallen on your day  
like a fucking lightning quake, but there are all  
these French songs stuck in my head  
with lyrics like, "Non, non, non," and "Non, non,  
non, non" and on and on and on and on and on.  
It's sort of like the population there where you live,  
all you troublemaker Chinese reading poems  
that could get you killed, get your computer  
confiscated. When I was leaving the library,  
I always took my hat off. I did it to piss off  
the librarian. I'm a dick.  
I'm like that guy  
who stood in front of the tanks. I'm exactly  
like that. Exactly.

—RON RIEKKI, NEGAUNEE, MI  
*visit VW Online for audio*

### Thus Ends the Fairy Tale

"And the dish ran away with the spoon"

Perhaps grief sent the cow leaping over the moon  
conjectured the dish ladle to the spoon.  
The fork just wailed, "Oh! Bloody thieves,  
Taking off after a meal so soon."  
Such are the opinions of those  
who converse behind cupboards' closed doors.

Meanwhile, spoon and dish  
were filled with glee they'd never be  
again surrounded unwillingly  
by food they'd never taste.  
And laughter was the tune

—DANIEL BRANDT, OREGON, WI

drinking  
the creativity  
of autumn

—MIKE WEAVER, MONTELO, WI

### Doppler Doppelganger

We like to think we know about storms  
long before they arrive,  
nod sagely as the TV waves its magic  
wand of Doppler,  
its arc issuing swaths  
of Red, Yellow, Green—  
like the spin art vendors at the county fair.  
Now it's late November  
and across my flat screen  
a lime-green rain trails a fire-engine red,  
northwest-moving storm, a monster,  
dotted with purple indications of snow,  
weather powerful enough to erase county lines,  
preparing me for the worst,  
telling me that just living now  
is a courageous act.  
And life before Doppler, before forecasts?  
Was not the blue sky bluer, the wind more furtive?  
Did not the first shading of the sun  
by grey-bellied bulls of clouds unsettle our well-being,  
touch on a bittersweet memory of loss?  
And that dark curtain of rain heading up the valley:  
a 'weather event' or bold visit from an old relative?  
Did we prepare for the worst  
or simply stop raking the leaves  
sniff the air, nod silently to our neighbor  
as they too stood in their yard?  
What did we know anyhow  
beyond the acrid scent  
raised by the crack and patter  
of wet rain on dry leaves?  
And finally making our way to the garage,  
was it not habit to leave the door open a while,  
settle down on a wooden crate,  
light a cigarette, a mix of smoke and steam,  
while we listened, attentively,  
to a season fulfilling  
its unforecasted future.

—GUY THORVALDSEN, MADISON, WI

## A Letter From The International Organization of Never Wrong Science and Scientists

Dear Tony,

We are delighted to inform you that your claim to belong in the top 2% of society's premium minds has been positively verified by the International Organization of Never Wrong Science and Scientists (IONWSS). After taking perfect analysis of your brain cells (as reconstructed genetic fiber swabs grown in our own Petri dishes) evidence concludes with 0% variability that your:

1. Total Grey Matter Mass and Fat Content
2. Problem Solving Synapse Count
3. Preservation of Existing Factoids
5. Big Ego Distribution Mechanism

all measure above the average "better than average Human Adult." Unfortunately, like most geniuses of your caliber, there are some compensatory losses accompanying your superior intelligence scores. Most notably juvenile is your interpersonal intelligence. In all three key categories of:

1. Kindness
2. Empathy Consideration
3. General Love Feelings

you scored lower than the average "below average adult male." We at the IONWSS are very concerned for you. Men like you consistently demonstrate a 67.2% higher likelihood to murder a baby chimp in our laboratory studies. Men like you are 99.788421821735111% more inclined to hold public office. Most of Washington D.C. shares in your range of overall intelligence and interpersonal stupidity, also known as "vanity." Vanity succeeds in making the world a more inhabitable place less than .321% of the time—according to our Historical Records Averaging Surveys.

Luckily Tony, you have hope. Your wife scored well above average in her interpersonal intellect, so we highly recommend that you take note of her exemplary behaviors and mimic them. Mimicry of kindness and love has proven to work for all of our on-staff genius savants in the enhancement of their health, love lives and popularity amongst friends, neighbors, colleagues and some strangers. Even psychopaths are benefiting from mimicry therapy—good news for the world as a whole. And certainly good news for brutes like you.

Sincerely,

The woman you call "The Wife."

—ANJA NOTANJA SIEGER, MILWAUKEE, WI

## A Request From Rjailphl, resident WILD ANIMAL

Dear little boy,

My affectionate nibbling of the lily shoots and dandelion greens could hardly be called "savage." And if it is savage behavior then I would like to be enlightened on the full and proper definition of that title. By savage, do you perhaps mean "naturalist," or "local tradition keeper?" By savage, do you perhaps mean, "not brainwashed?" For when you say that I am not tame I think you are overlooking my self-respect, family responsibilities and the right to mind my own dam building business.

To be frank, I am a sensitive and utterly exquisite sort of creature. You call me a 'savage beast,' but when you carefully examine my lifestyle of chewing, hiding, swimming, sleeping and providing for my young, you'll see it is not all that different from yours, human. "Savage beast" reduces me and my family to hurtful stereotypes, because it assumes in an undertone that we are violent, dangerous and cruel. Stereotypes are hurtful because it is only a matter of time before the eviction notices, murder and then rodent genocide begins. It is only a matter of time before the forest is ripped "clean" and the creek polluted beyond redemption.

But to call me savage is not the worst name you have labeled me. No, "Walking Pelt" is by far the worst and most vulgar slur you've pitched in the past month. Do you truly wish me harm? Why? I have no such hurtful words to noun you with. Also, my teeth serve to cut and collect timber. They are handsome! Well, I can handle light giggling, I suppose, but when that laughter is paired with coarse language and name calling, I am saddened and frustrated. It is enough for me just to survive in my habitat each day without the added worries of your unkind and suspect behavior. Can we live in peace my friend? I certainly intend to.

Respectfully yours,

Rajailphl.

—ANJA NOTANJA SIEGER, MILWAUKEE, WI

## Women Are Persons

(from *Brown v. Phillips*)

The language in this part  
Of our state constitution  
Does not say “that the legislature  
may at any time extend, by law,  
the right of suffrage to” other  
“male” persons, but  
“to persons.”

The power to extend  
the right of suffrage, that is,  
the right to vote,  
is certainly not in terms  
confined to males.

Had it been so intended  
it could have been  
very easily so expressed.

Thus the legislature’s power  
to extend the vote to other “persons”  
is not prohibited  
from being exercised  
as to females,  
unless by implication of a  
remote and argumentative character.

We must hold the act in question,  
giving women the right to vote,  
to be a valid law.

—JESSICA SLAVIN, WAUKESHA, WI  
*also appears in VWOnline, Issue 113 - 114,  
Midwest Remix*

## Butterfly Children

And when  
the tornado came  
the butterfly people  
descended from the sky  
and swept the children  
into the bathtub  
with a thick blanket  
and they survived  
the house crashing  
above them,  
the car dashing  
past their head,  
they were alive  
amidst devastation,  
and this is true,  
though forgotten,  
this is what  
the southern children said  
who were interviewed later,  
who survived the tornado,  
the butterfly people  
had covered them  
with their bodies  
as the debris  
hurtled overhead,  
or wrapped them tight  
in a carpet but only  
the little children  
saw them,  
they were closer  
to birth I guess,  
closer to where  
we live before  
being born,  
before taking form  
in this skin,  
this time,  
this plane  
of existence.

—ANGIE TRUDELL VASQUEZ,  
MILWAUKEE, WI

## betrayal

guilty hands  
forbidden places  
acting  
like a lover at night.  
my body has betrayed me.

you leave  
looking satisfied  
i stay  
feeling ashamed.  
my body has betrayed me.

i am guilty  
i deserve this pain  
i never said no  
not loud enough.  
my body has betrayed me.

i was lost  
you gave me  
love  
affection  
i wanted it to be ok  
i knew it was not.  
my body has betrayed me.

i run to the bathroom  
to wash off the scars  
but i can’t wash away the fears  
i can’t ever forget.  
my body has betrayed me.

—PETROVNIA MCINTOSH, MADISON, WI

# (di)Verse Wisconsin: Community & Diversity

by Sarah Busse & Wendy Vardaman

my feathers  
sailing  
on the breeze  
the clear sky  
loves to hear me sing  
overhanging clouds  
echoing my words  
with pleasing sound  
across the earth  
everywhere  
making my voice heard

—Ojibwe Dream Song (unknown date/ author)  
in *Winter Nest: a Poetry Anthology of Midwestern  
Women Poets of Color*, ed. Angela Lobo-Cobb, 1987

*This essay was originally presented at the Society for the Study  
of Midwestern Literature, May, 2013, in East Lansing, MI.*

In 2009, we inherited an independent poetry magazine named *Free Verse* from Linda Aschbrenner, who had published it on her own from her living room in Marshfield, Wisconsin, for 11 years and 100 issues. *Free Verse* was born out of Aschbrenner's writing group and its frustration at the lack of publishing venues for members. Aware of the biases against poets who did not belong to the academic community and who did not necessarily have degrees or awards behind their names, Aschbrenner collected poems from the group and photocopied them, handing out pages to friends. Poets being what they are, they shared these simple monthly documents, and Aschbrenner started to receive submissions from others as well. Thus began a magazine which became something of a fixture in the indie press scene, and a means for Wisconsin poets, particularly, to feel part of a community, as she shared not only poems, but also the knowledge of poets with one another.

Belonging became important to both of us when we moved to the state in 2000 and 2005, respectively. As writers know, especially when unattached to universities or other institutions, it can be difficult to find community in a new place. At home with children, writing independently and isolated from peers, contacts and adult conversation, we recognized on a personal level the important role that an academically unaffiliated venue like *Free Verse* could play. When we became its new co-editors, we didn't want to lose that sense of belonging, even as, in 2009, we discussed other changes, including a new name, *Verse Wisconsin*, that referenced our identity as a place-based community of poets, even as we sought to extend our reach by creating a new, online component for the magazine. We wanted to cross boundaries in all kinds of ways: print and online, intellectually rigorous and community based, small-town friendly and artistically and creatively ambitious, and to accomplish this goal we added another key concept: diversity. Community and diversity are the twin poles by which we navigate, and although there is at times an uneasy relationship between the two, we believe the tensions inherent therein help us to create a richer publication.

But what do we mean by diversity? *Verse Wisconsin* strives to include variety with respect to age, race, class, gender (and all its contemporary complexities), geography, occupation, poetic genre and aesthetics. If the mix we seek isn't exactly (or only) urban, we could certainly call it polyglot, a heady, giddy, slightly anarchic endeavor that feels many days like juggling, or running a three-ring circus.

How do we know if we're achieving our goal, providing a space for truly diverse poets and reaching out to diverse audiences? Well, like any conscientious editors, we count, we track, we compare our poet pool to the broader populations in the state, in the region, and see how we match up. We study. We research. If we find we receive content from, say, 60%

women, but accept them at the rate of 40%, we would ask ourselves why and launch an investigation. When we are aware that some other kind of poetry has a base in say, Madison, we try to find out more about it and its practitioners and understand why our publication isn't drawing their work. Maybe we make changes. Maybe we attend new events created by other groups. It doesn't always work, but we make attempts, reaching out to a variety of organizations, as well as *in* to university groups that may exist apart from the community.

Beyond inreach and outreach, comparison and measurement, we also question whether diversity, like justice, is something that can be "achieved" or is better thought of as a goal, an ideal, something on which we fix our eyes and frequently stop to ask ourselves: How are we doing? Can we do better? How do we do better? With whom do we engage in order to help us do better? Perhaps, for us, "diversity" has become a code word for a questioning stance, a willingness to listen to others' stories, divergent narratives, experiences, other silences, for that matter. By remaining open to interaction with others—poets, artists, organizations, we gain greater awareness of our own place in the community: two middle-aged white women with advanced degrees, families, privilege that we are aware of and no doubt sometimes fail to register, and too many volunteer jobs.

As important as the what of diversity for *Verse Wisconsin* is the why. Why not, as poets and artists, stick with our own groups, whether that is a university-based creative writing program, or a different socially-defining characteristic like youth, or some aesthetic principle, such as "plain speaking" or experimental? First, we believe that diversity complicates narrative. As poetry itself insists on complexity of language and thought, working against the simplifications of the marketers, the dishonesty of mainstream media, and the voiding of meaning common in political speech, true diversity works against the corruption of cultural narratives by offering internal critiques through multiplicity. We also believe that diversity—of ideas, of style, of aesthetic, of voice—helps us to grow artistically. The creative poetic work of those we don't normally encounter—whether that is hip hop or postmodern theater or *The Onion* or performance art or people in nursing homes—can, if we take it seriously and engage deeply with its aesthetics and artistry, provide a means to see what we do differently and to change through the encounter. That this artistic encounter has, we believe, a further role to play in creating a less segregated, less stratified, more democratic society as well as a more interesting one is perhaps idealistic, but we wouldn't do what we do if we didn't believe that.

These multiple voices are welcome to us as individuals, as well as artistically: writers need community. We need the support of fellow writers as well as the challenge. We provide audience for each other and produce each others' work, making place and space for our collective words and texts. In the current political landscape that is Wisconsin, we are particularly aware of the importance of a thriving grass roots community of producer-writers, or publisher-editor-poets, because that is all we have. With no public support at the state level, those of us outside of academic and other institutional frameworks have precious little to keep us going.

Steering by these twin stars, community and diversity, we developed a mission statement with our advisory board. *Verse Wisconsin* publishes poetry and serves the community of poets in Wisconsin and beyond. In fulfilling our mission we:

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

We're aware that each of the terms in that statement can be complicated,

and we try to do that work, asking with each issue we publish: Who counts as a “Wisconsin” author? What counts as “Wisconsin” poetry? What is a poem and who gets to be called a poet?

We are all too aware, for example, that there is a certain nostalgia, even nostalgia, sadness about the loss of places with which we are familiar, connected to the very idea of Wisconsin or Midwestern poetry, but we resist the notion that these are inherently pastoral categories, even as we include poetry responding to rural themes and images within our pages. And poets writing about rural places do not, necessarily, write with any one style or agenda, with one set of connotations, any more than Midwesterner poets writing about urban spaces do. If anything, we look to incorporate work from both populations that thoughtfully engages with a range of places, or with multiple or mediating places, and may have more in common than work of either rural or urban poets that relies on either easy abstraction or unexplored assumptions. We are uncomfortable, for instance, with projects like “Our Wisconsin” (<http://recollectionwisconsin.org/stories>) that don’t actively problematize nostalgia and define, before engagement, the terms of the writers’ experiences as an idealized past. We are likewise uncomfortable with events meant to suggest an open door that skew towards younger work or academic work, on the assumption that those poets best reflect contemporary poetry.

At *Verse Wisconsin* we have been open to various definitions of poet and poetry, from spoken word and visual work, to video and verse drama, to prose that incorporates poetry or that is poetic, to dance and musical collaboration. We are also aware that the writers who often need the most support, from those in prison, to those who are homeless, to the young and those in assisted living, have access to the fewest resources, and are literally invisible to most of us. How do we support and recognize these writers? How do we find them?

As we have diversified the notions of Wisconsin, of poet, we have diversified content by increasing the amount and types of prose we publish, right in among all the poems: our online “Wisconsin Poetry News” column promotes the projects of groups (rather than news from individual poets) and pays attention to service and activism of poets across the state; we include interviews, craft essays, personal reflections; we encourage (though we don’t often receive) hybrid prose-poetry work; we encourage readers to become book reviewers, and we mentor new reviewers, creating, we hope, readers akin to Virginia Woolf’s “Common Reader” and a group of reviewers whose backgrounds, opinions, and types of expertise are as diverse as the poets they read. Our interviews allow us to reach out to poets inside the state who don’t always see themselves as participating in a community, as well as those living out-of-state who are nevertheless connected to Wisconsin in substantive ways, inviting them to share their work, their vision of poetry, and to think of themselves as connected to the region.

As a hybrid print-online magazine, *Verse Wisconsin* creates print, as well as a virtual, space, and its community occurs within, and across, those spaces, as well as in real time. The print magazine uses a larger, 8 ½ x 11 format inherited from Aschbrenner and places multiple poems (3-4) on each page, which means that 6-8 poems typically occupy a 2-page spread, an unusual decision in poetry publishing. During layout, we ensure that poems sharing space also share themes, imagery, or some other commonality, or even difference, which will create conversations among them. It’s not a minimalist aesthetic, instead stretching toward something like “maximalist.” Another community-driven feature is the inclusion of every poet’s name on the front cover. Rather than choose two or three or four “big names” to feature, we prefer to print a visual representation of that issue’s community.

Online, we offer different, but related, content. We include poems around a specific theme or call, news, essays, interviews, reviews, special sections and features on projects, partnerships, and creative reactions or reflections coming out of events such as the annual summer Hip Hop Educators’ Institute at the UW-Madison. Publishing online allows us to embrace a wider diversity of formats, including visual poetry, songs, music/text mashups, audio and video of poets performing their works. We have published poems and prose around a wide variety of topics, too, and

our online calls range from poetic form to political poetry, verse drama to ecopoetry, and are often designed around a particular collaboration, or to try to create new partnerships. Our political poetry issue #110, for example, was timed in conjunction with a Wisconsin Book Festival at which we coordinated an event involving community- and university-based poets responding to dynamic work by poet-performers in the First Wave Hip Hop Learning Community.

Social media likewise offers more possibilities to reach a wider audience geographically, while simultaneously, we hope, building knowledge of each other and community: both Facebook and a YouTube channel enable us to feature content, to draw a larger group of readers to our site, and to give poets and writers yet another platform for their work. During the protests in Wisconsin, we simultaneously published a protest poem issue as “notes” on Facebook and as a special online “Main Street Issue” ([versewisconsin.org/mainstreet.html](http://versewisconsin.org/mainstreet.html)). We’re able to engage with a broader audience of poets and thinkers through social media, to learn from them, and hopefully to participate in such transformational interactions online as well as in person, as was the case with the Main Street work.

Around the edges of the magazine, increasing in frequency, we have held readings, panels, presentations, conversations, and other kinds of events, which invite people to engage with poetry and questions around poetry in person. These events have, themselves, driven both our thinking and the content of future issues, and have evolved from marginal to central features of our process and product. Along the way, we’ve come to believe in the importance of face-to-face conversations, with and without poems, as a means to bring people together, discovering new ideas and questions, while building relationships and promoting public poetry, and we also believe in the importance of attending a range of events conducted by other groups in various spaces, from slams and festivals, to symposia and lectures, all of which are also part of the discovery, the research-driven process for locating and connecting poets.

Our mission has undergone a parallel change, as our emphasis has shifted toward conversation, activism, and transformational circles, and away from traditional publication. But publishing is itself another word to stretch, re-interpret, and to reinvent playfully and thoughtfully. Increasingly, we have been involved in efforts to publish in new and unexpected places and spaces, putting poems into our Verse-O-Matic vending machine, on buses, bicycles, shoes, postcards, & road signs, on Twitter & Facebook, as well as in magazines and books, as both *Verse Wisconsin* and Cowfeather Press. We have created colorful broadsides of all shapes and sizes, co-edited a Wisconsin Poets’ *Calendar*, and introduced poetry into Madison’s City Council meetings. Current projects bring poems to an art gallery for a celebration of art about protest; to a playhouse for display in response to a production; and juxtaposed with composting demonstrations and lectures on soil science in readings and a poetry “(de)compos(t)ing station.” Over the past five years, we have found that we do our best, most interesting work in partnership with a wide variety of groups, and to date we have engaged in a variety of joint endeavors with over thirty groups, including Wormfarm Institute, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, UW’s Office of Multicultural Arts Initiatives (OMAI), Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf, Forward Theater, Writers in Prison, the Wisconsin Humanities Council and Book Festival, Madison Metro, and the Dane Co. Watershed Commission, as well as literacy groups and libraries, retail spaces and other nonprofits.

As we discover the centrality of collaboration to our operational method, of partnership to our process, we explore the relation of word and world, and realize that, at its most interesting, the role of editor allows us to be—rather than gate keepers or canon makers—event planners: even a print magazine or book has an ephemerality about it. Embracing, engaging with transience, rather than resisting it, allows us to do other kinds of work, and to ask other kinds of questions. Rather than worrying about and trying to create and maintain an institution, buildings, permanent infrastructure, we can emphasize process, relationships, and transformation, asking ourselves: Who will we invite to the party? What sort of gathering will it be? Does everyone look like us? Think like us? Sound like us? Is that interesting? What other parties are going on around us that we might think about attending?

## Dreams

What you see by looking at US  
Untalented, Uneducated  
Delinquents dress unsophisticated  
Getting faded  
Gang affiliated  
Their jail cell dated  
Living a “gangsta life” because the media says it  
Road to failure and teen parents  
Growing up to be the criminals of tomorrow  
Throwing fits at one another  
Our own brothers  
Using only their code language Spanish  
Not knowing a pinch of “proper English”  
Because they are too busy drug trafficking to educate  
themselves  
If they cared they wouldn’t be drawing, drooling, texting,  
snoozing or doing other things in class.

You see Us  
The wetbacks, Beaners, Swine-flu  
Illegal aliens destined to  
Fail under the laws of the government  
Working harder than the average human  
Making less than what you’re assuming.  
Being amongst the most misunderstood  
We know we are not defined by the neighborhood  
In which we live in.  
Who we really are will come to a shock  
To those who think they know who we are  
Just as Martin Luther King Jr., We all have a Dream

A dream to end the chain of poverty  
To not work at jobs that will damage our bodies  
To make for a better society and to  
Have a voice in democracy

A dream to get a higher education  
Surpass the American tradition  
To fail under the system of no determination  
Of no end, no hope and imprisonment  
Take a breath mint  
Speak cleanly about my people and the real history  
Here we are telling the true story  
Not the censored version  
Our lives and views corrupted by another person.

How much control do we have on our own identities? None  
I’m not Considered Mexican in my own country because I’ve  
been too “Americanized”  
Not considered American because I’m not the right pigment  
I don’t deserve to wear that Mexican Flag while I’m living in this  
country  
I don’t deserve to be in this country because I was born in  
another.

My rights as a human have been corrupted on both sides  
There is only one world and I don’t know where the one I  
belong in, lies  
The real me, slowly dies  
I become two faced. It’s a challenge  
Knowing in the end it won’t matter but I still manage  
To keep both worlds in balance

People degrade us and say we can’t make it  
We get fired up and prove them wrong. Make them eat their  
words and have them sit in silence reflecting on their own  
ignorance.  
We’ve been through enough struggles in our life for your words  
to take any affect.  
They say that those who’ve gone through the worst become the  
strongest  
We’ve been broken down till it no longer hurts  
And yet we’re not dying, not lying but trying and striving to  
make it through, alone  
Parents are foreign to this country & still have much to learn  
Getting through by paying for a family and taxes  
While trying to learn English and struggling to do so with their  
sixth grade education. It’s tragic.  
Now top that with being the first born, unborn in a country of  
“opportunities”  
Having younger siblings watching us break down every barrier  
in our way  
People have their ups and downs in life but when you are a role  
model you just hope that those looking up to you don’t see  
your train as it wrecks.

Pulverized into dust  
Our struggles become a thing of the past.  
But as we look back we see our barriers being re-built  
The kids following behind us can’t see the same path we took  
Unable to apply for financial aid, or student loans, better yet  
Not being able to get the same benefits because their parents  
made love in a different country,  
The fact that we have lived here for as long as most others has no  
meaning in this society.

If only the world were blind  
Our ears would be the most used sense to determine the future  
of a life.  
Of a being wanting to make change  
Not for just ourselves but for those marching right behind us.

Humans go through struggles. But when you have humans  
vs. humans and laws vs. humans it feels as if there is no way  
around it.  
Dreams have a goal, goals have barriers, barriers are broken  
down by people, people have a passion for change, and change  
is what will happen.  
We won’t stop until we get what we want and need.

Now, can you SEE US?

—MARÍA GUADALUPE AVIÑA HERNANDEZ, MADISON, WI

## Miona's Chest to the New Jim Crow

You done got a facelift, boy.  
Got your skin thick,  
                  think I can't see through it?  
You ant hill with too much rock  
                  I hear your wolfing in the dark.  
Song a morose phantom melody  
                  Of black bodies stolen mornings.  
Who de black spook now?

Still I  
          strange fruit.

You  
          All too familiar tree.  
          bent on bruising, burning,  
          tearing the humanity from flesh.

How many breaths must you take  
          before the wind knows their gone?  
I can't heal the air with my stroke alone.

We  
          menace.

You  
          Monster.

We  
          Hide between folded hands and bowed heads.

You  
          Mark of a god  
Who de black spook now?

—MIONA SHORT, MADISON, WI

## Flying Above Wisconsin

Right now, up here  
in the thin, dawn air,  
the eye a small porthole,  
the east barely a pink city,  
the September landscape is snow.  
Fog rolls through valleys,  
trails across lakes, looks like  
spun sugar at a fool's carnival,  
a closeted damsel's veil,  
gauze my mother wrapped  
around wounds.

—RONNIE HESS, MADISON, WI  
*also appears in VWOnline, Issue 113-114, Midwest Remix*

## Senescence

The season of decay has arrived.

Hairlines mar the graceful necks of  
butternut squash that once—not long ago—grew  
plump on the vine, sultry rays darkening  
greenish skin to a fleshy tan.

To prolong youthful vigor,  
I obsessively monitor temperature and forecast,  
heft bushel loads indoors on frigid nights and  
pluck greying fruit, lest rot ruin my harvest.

“Aren't you sick of doing that?”  
my husband asks as I haul cumbersome bins  
down the basement stairs.

“I'm maintaining bone density,”  
I snap back.

My bounty will not decompose quietly,  
unfulfilled, in November gloom.  
It will succumb in the kitchen,  
reborn as pie, curry, soup.

This assault on decrepitude is an  
impossible task. Soon the snow-chilled  
garage and the tepid basement will offer no protection  
against time. Creases will deepen, furrow.

Sweet flesh will grow fibrous. The forgotten  
bin stashed in the drafty closet will infuse our shirts  
with the scent of earthy fungi, and  
I will give in;

freeze the withered  
remains of my summer glory,  
dreaming of seeds and the  
unfurling possibility of tendrils.

—CRIS CARUSI, MADISON, WI

## Information

*The time is currently*  
in someone else's voice

### My Cotton Pickin Story

After a lavender scented bath  
I pick up a new purple colored panty  
And read that it is 93% cotton  
And 7 % spandex from Sri Lanka.  
Who knew that drawers could make  
Me international?

Cause I am from the South  
Eating a midnight piece of out-of season  
Watermelon in February in Wisconsin  
I question why this cotton was grown overseas.

Ever since slavery ended in the US  
With our free labor and their massive profits  
Cotton feels better to capitalist bottoms spun  
From cheap labor outside the USA.

Reminded me of a bumper sticker I read  
That stunned my mind  
"If I had known what would happen,  
I'd pick my own damn cotton."  
Well poor white man, you did pick  
Your own cotton. Poor folks couldn't afford slaves.

When I raced my car and strained my eyes  
To see who owned that bumper sticker, I saw  
The familiar baseball cap over brown hair  
And a white skinned man driving a beat up truck.

I can't tell if I'm down South  
Or up North or right smack in the middle  
Of the cold Midwest, he looks the same  
As all his scattered cousins.

This is my cotton pickin story  
From a global thinking woman  
Brought chained to this country  
To pick another man's cotton and make him rich  
But who is now free to tell what really happened.

—FABU, MADISON, WI

or pocket. Like a five  
in the bottom of the wash,

it's never mine.  
I haven't seen a phone

with a cord in years and easily  
resolve mysteries for my son—

explaining a phone jack  
on his bedroom wall,

a spool of cassette tape  
unwound in the road.

The cow's been replaced  
by the milkman, milkman

by plastic jug, and milk  
by colors and corn syrup.

I order Indian (Northern or Southern)  
without talking to anyone.

Someone leaves the food  
on my porch beside boxes of books,

and it's still hot when I get home.  
My son will peel back the lids,

have korma and naan on the table, and  
delicious as it is, I sometimes long

to open my door for the pizza guy  
and pay him in cash. I still cling

to the phone booths of my youth,  
find it difficult to think of children

in a future museum room  
touching paper and feeling

something like memory  
itch beneath their skin...

a sensation I imagine  
the yellow pages have

when, after dancing unbound  
and abandoned through windy streets,

they're pinned against a tree.

—ANGELA VORAS-HILLS, MADISON, WI

## La Casa Donde Somos Fantasmas Es La Nuestra

vagamos por los corredores  
en medio de la noche  
en horas pequeñas

me retuerzo  
ella se voltea  
en la cama sacudimos brazos y rodillas  
pateamos las cobijas  
las arañas nadan en su espalda en una alberca

todo lo que necesito es tiempo para escribir  
algún tiempo para pensar  
para preparar mi manuscrito  
tengo que mejorar mi escritura  
esa es la respuesta  
escribir mejor

ella nunca pensó que no tendría familia  
vivir sin casarse  
sin tener dinero  
ser infeliz  
las monjas tienen mejor vida sexual

ella regresa a la cama y me levanto  
y luego regreso mientras ella se levanta  
así nos pasamos toda la noche  
trabajadores de turno en un molino de sueño abandonado  
la casa habitada por fantasmas  
somniaientos entramos  
somniaientos salimos

separados descendemos la escalera que cruje  
flotamos de un piso a otro nadamos de un cuarto a cuarto  
vagamos y escribimos  
checamos nuestro correo miramos televisión  
quemamos palomitas con barras de mantequilla en un tazón  
caminamos en el pavimento  
buscando nuestro carro las llaves  
en el estacionamiento vacío iluminado por una luz amarilla  
afuera de la fábrica silenciosa

las horas  
las horas que se arrastran  
las horas telaraña  
parpadeando en la oscuridad

pocas palabras pasan entre nosotros  
cuando estamos en la entrada de la cerca  
ningún gesto  
despedidas  
ninguna insinuación  
chiflo y mezo mi bolsa del almuerzo de regreso al trabajo  
ella vuelve a la casa a la cama tibia  
somos fatasmas en la horas pequeñas  
que pasan por la noche

—BRUCE DETHLEFSEN, WESTFIELD, WI,  
TRANSLATED BY MOISÉS VILLAVICENCIO BARRAS, MADISON, WI

## The House We Haunt Is Ours

we wander through the corridors  
inside the middle of the night  
in little hours

I toss  
she turns  
we flail our arms and knees in bed  
we kick at covers  
spiders do the backstroke in a pool

all I need is time to write  
some time to think  
to get the manuscript together  
I have to write better  
that's the answer  
writing better

she never thought she'd have no family  
live unmarried  
have no money  
be unhappy  
nuns have better sex lives

she comes back to bed and I get up  
and I come back then she gets up  
we alternate like this all night  
shift workers at the abandoned slumber mill  
the haunted house  
sleepily we punch in  
we punch out

separate we descend the creaky stairs  
float floor to floor swim room to room  
we roam and write  
check e-mail watch tv  
burnt popcorn treads butter in a bowl  
we stroll the blacktop  
looking for our car the keys  
in the yellow lighted empty parking lot  
outside the silent factory

the grinding little hours  
the crawling hours  
the cobweb hours  
blinking in the darkness

so few words pass between us  
at the gate in the chain link fence  
no gestures  
waves  
no overtures  
I whistle and I swing my lunch pail back to work  
as she heads home alone to warm the bed  
we haunt the little hours  
that pass for night

—BRUCE DETHLEFSEN, WESTFIELD, WI  
*appeared in Unexpected Shiny Things, Cowfeather Press, 2013*

## Elegy and Aubade

If 5 a.m.'s blue hour sweeps your  
brow, if after your daughter's cries  
are soothed by glass of water or tuck

of rose duvet beneath her chin  
you dip your head over a mug's  
ghostly vapours, unable to sleep

again, if you long for more, if you feel  
yourself go under for the eighth time  
already today, go under the black wave,

if you long to depart for a boarding  
house room, just to catch the bass drum  
of some couple next door arguing

or agreeing or really, be honest,  
talking about anything at all, weather  
or gossip, to hold it in a cochlea's spiral

labyrinth, if you know you'll never  
leave, if this is both elegy and aubade  
and there are those who would

wish you the very worst or, worse,  
wish nothing for you at all, and if  
you can't even tell twilight from twilight,

then let the particular cast of this  
day's light flow blue, let it blanket you  
and the slope of your shoulders like

the scilla in spring, and know the heave  
of your lungs, of your breath, makes  
a song of itself, one that's worth being

sung, not unlike the awkward pizzicato  
of a child pinching the gut's strings,  
a theme of praise only you can sing.

—REBECCA DUNHAM, MADISON, WI

At the table across from me  
young deaf people laugh  
and speak in sign language.  
Their hands flutter like doves  
and I live in a silent world.

—LEN TEWS, OSHKOSH, WI

## Music in the Night Closet

Good for you, Judy. Haunt the hell  
out of your old house. Melt your favorite  
brandy glass on your basement bar.  
Toss down books. Drop platters.  
I don't blame you. I'd do the same.

You should be here in body  
baking your cardamom cinnamon rolls,  
planting your red tulips, planning that trip  
to Hawaii you never got to take.  
Go ahead and rage.

Judy, so much has changed. I'm always  
crossing out names in my address book.  
We have more family dead now than alive.  
But you know that. Do you welcome them?  
Do you reminisce, reappraise?  
Giggle with plans to reappear?

Bam! A shelf lets go in your house. Lost keys  
reappear here and the cuddly toy musical bear  
you gave us starts to play Christmas songs  
all by itself in the dark closet. My hairbrush  
sails across the floor the night of your  
mother-in-law's funeral.

Judy, you're a saint, angel, prankster.  
How often I think if I just phoned your number,  
you would answer.

—LINDA ASCHBRENNER, MARSHFIELD, WI

## Writing in Ink

I have never been all that good at sleeping through the night. It's easier to sleep at work where nothing truly interesting ever really happens and much, much easier to sleep in church, especially if it's Protestant. No. I wake at all the odd hours of night and early morning: Two forty-seven, thirteen past three ... four seventeen's a particular favorite. Perhaps you've been there with me one or more of those long nights; perhaps I awakened you with the way I shouted your name or even not your name into the widening gyre of my own darkness. Perhaps you answered me before I dove back under the comforters I heaped upon my mattress like a princess who got the story line wrong: Did you? Would you? That would be so awfully kind if when I screamed out "NOOOOOO!!!" into the night, you calmly answered, "Maybe." When my baby died, I just screamed into the nights: I had no words left, not one syllable. The night was slashed into slivers with my awakenings then; knives and razors glistened and hissed in the black draped like shrouds around that bed. "If you can't sleep, could you please at least let me?" my husband (then) would quiz me, rousting my limbs in the direction of the guest room. And so I became a guest in my own house; I became something of a boarder, paying for my room with favors of a non-material nature if you know what I mean and I mean what I say: I paid for my passage like a woman does, has always done. It had nothing to do with sleeping, or really, for that matter, with what some might call sex. Eventually he tired of me. And now I am free to wake myself up in the middle of any night I choose, with shouts of joy (yes) or fear (still) or longing (oh sweet Jesus)... or just to grope toward the bedside table for the pen and paper there and write you the few bare scratchings of this poem and my heart's baleful midnight song of how I once lost my life and my words and then found them again in the night's silence and this page.

—SUSAN HERING, MADISON, WI

the animation  
of silence—  
autumn moon

—MIKE WEAVER, MONTELO, WI

## Interior Landscape

In the window, hung on fishing line, three prised crystal globes catch and refract whatever rays dive down between apartment blocks: kaleidoscoping stars of rose, blue, saffron light dance crazily across the walls, the quilts, the shelves of novels bookended by cast-iron cats, the canopy of her window-sill bonsai forest rooted in a glen of celadon pots. Each afternoon,

she murmurs home from school four hours before her folks come in, the gold spill of her hair tangling in backpack straps as she throws the deadbolt, slips off flowered sneakers, stretches on the bed among stuffed bears and kittens, humming *sotto voce* to her room, her world.

How perfectly she tends it! Word by word, she fills the journal tucked beneath her bed with secrets, longings, lies for her eyes only; drop by drop she measures rainfall, mists each bonsai leaf, completes the composition with an inch-high herd of sika deer, so fine their porcelain hooves almost click among the roots, ambling tree to tree, grazing the grass-green moss. The scene is beautiful as it was yesterday, as it will be tomorrow, every element a thing she treasures.

What would I see outside, eleven stories down? Let's say it's autumn. Say the park's a ruckus of bare limbs and mud. Say kids are calling, shoving at their games and winter's breathing down the necks of muffled people waiting at the bus stop as day fades into a stormy dusk, wind rising off the Hudson to her windows

like a shake of bones. Alone, inside, she flicks on lights, draws blinds, bends low to peek beneath the leaves of tiny white oaks, poplars, sugar maples, green and stunted stars that never bloom and never have to fall.

—JUDITH HARWAY, MILWAUKEE, WI

## Sable House

Lumber town. So many lumber houses. That's me, half-caste in the backseat. Mother, let's go for a drive after fishing, to the upper east side. The hills that are over there, where architecture is for the golden. I am little & I still believed dreaming about a big house supports a big life,

like the dollhouse kits at Pope's Hobbyland. We could not keep it together, mini chifforobes in my childish mitts cost money & we have no insurance in town where there are also many insurance houses in the stacks. The heart doctor's house is rumored to have its own elevator.

It feels like a landmark siege. The gargoyles skimming from the dentist's piazza to light my mother's cigarettes. We've seen how their owners are winning the discussion in closed conference, but I don't think I've seen anyone open the door at night, heads of fortune space

the negative inglenook of family we are not allowed to muss. But he's allowed to tap my teeth & she's allowed to shock my heart & the neighbor next to him can draw up legal papers in case any teenagers are ambitious for an early emancipation. Surely I cannot afford a lawyer when

he owes us so much money that he's become untouchable. I wonder if their house has an indoor pool. Grandma used to reupholster furniture for the couple that lives there now. Ming things in the foyer that you push boulders in front of before having company, their family

secrets sewn into the livery at the bottom of the hill. That summer a man started cutting up women's faces in the laundromats next to the trainyards & gravel roads. The man who lives nearby is shabby with downtown financial goals. We named him War Pig since he plans for

"undesirables" – we latchhook the velvet pillow for their flinty business feet. Years later, I saw one of the women who survived. Sipping coffee where she belonged at Burger King, the one by his office where a man was sitting naked in a booth & refused to leave. The cops left her alone.

—NIKKI WALLSCHLAEGER, MILWAUKEE, WI

The legacy you leave is the love you have given.

—KIMBERLY A. BLANCHETTE, JANESVILLE, WI

## Debate

"After Auschwitz writing poetry's a mortal sin," says Adorno, a man.  
"After Auschwitz it's a Judas betrayal not to write poems," murmurs a kiwi, quietly going extinct.

—MICHAEL BIEHL, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

## Just me hold me again

Hold me again  
I missed you today  
You left this morning to school and I stayed all day here on your bed  
Your drawings were all I had to remind me that you were coming back  
I could see your clothes left on and off in the places of your room.  
I remember when you took me on your bike and we flew down the hill.  
I was wearing the pink butterfly outfit and you had the new dress  
momma bought you.  
Hugging you  
and you telling me stories and  
me being in your stories  
are the moments where I come alive.  
Without you, I am a toy, a donkey with a pink bow, possibly flammable soft plush toy.  
Even through others know me as Eeyore you named me Lumpy and  
have decided that my blue outside is no indication to my gender.  
You call me she.

—ARACELI ESPARZA, MADISON, WI

## Interlopers

Her profession: commenting on the commentators.  
His: watching the watchdogs.  
So between them both they licked the platter clean—  
And then repaired by helicopter  
To a Himalayan eco-lodge  
in the land of yaks and yetis.  
What a thrill to be holy and fulfilled!—  
each his own Dalai Lama,  
healthy and organic,  
with a portfolio wonderfully diversified,  
like the flora and fauna  
of an unspoiled biosphere.  
Teeth white at sixty as at six,  
unstained by plaque, or blood  
of beef.  
The snowy mountains outdo Aspen  
or the Alps. Pure Zen.  
One annunciatory morning,  
as they posture behind a pane of glass,  
they glimpse a snow leopard,  
like the bluish ghost of a ghost,  
slip behind a lip of rock.  
Tracks in the snow later confirm the sighting  
to their plangent satisfaction.  
But the Sherpa is not so sure.  
The prints look old,  
like a dog's undergoing melting, he opines,  
for he is not paid for this:  
to make them feel at home.

—MICHAEL BIEHL, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

## An Ugly Blouse

She made a short-sleeved white cotton blouse in high school sewing class and wore it only when every other white blouse she owned was in the wash.

The front and back of the blouse didn't matter—they were covered by a navy blue jumper—the same one she'd worn every school day for four years and her sister had worn for four years before her.

The collar was winged and bunched and the short sleeves had cuffs that wouldn't lie flat no matter how long they were ironed.

It was an ugly blouse and she wore it on the Friday of the “student of the month” assembly.

She did not know that she was to be named student of the month that day—the award was always a surprise bestowed by the tidy becomingly-creased nuns—who took one look at her misbehaving blouse and gave the award to someone else.

—ELMAE PASSINEAU, WAUSAU, WI

## Yellow-Billed Cuckoo

Just a couple clucks  
From the deep green shade. Shy people,  
Too, get sort of stuck.

—BARTON SUTTER, DULUTH, MN

## Fading Dreams

Childhood dreams are multitudinous.  
As we look up on a clear summer night,  
we see an ocean of twinkling stars  
populating the every-present darkness.

The clear summer skies of night  
bring memories of you  
populating my captive darkness  
evoking comfort and a little sorrow.

As I meditate on my memories of you,  
I recall the life plans we made  
with little comfort and a lot of sorrow.  
Tears stain my pillow.

O! Remembering the plans we made years ago,  
the abundance of childhood dreams,  
salty teardrops streak my face  
twinkling like an ocean of summer night stars.

—ANONYMOUS GUMP

## Listening to confetti

I paint my nails and face to covet the war  
Wear heels that serve as weapons  
Push up bras to validate the arch in my back  
And I dare you to say something about it

THIS is authentic  
Constructed of a flux of realities  
Pieces hidden in blurred expectations  
While someone celebrated their power inside us  
Because of the wrongness of standing upright  
Walking with confidence

We learned to dangle from situations  
Hoping maybe they won't see clearly who's security was shred and  
tossed  
So we place "This is our secret" into poems  
Tributes to how "We" never asked for it

We...  
And that seems to be where the poem is left

Poem after poem like a woman's mantra  
Swallowed victim after victim in each word  
So many times, I have it memorized

... He begins to hate it

He, too, is dangling amongst pain  
Frozen in space once called masculine  
Punished for wanting to stand upright  
Too young, too small, too something to defend himself  
Maybe he stood center and caught too much attention  
Now hears the screams where he once spoke  
So he remains silent  
Voice emasculated

He has learned to stretch, expand and swing, like I have  
Moved into a second language  
Hoping to find the movements that will create a free form  
Hoping to release an echo of his former self

In my poem  
In THIS poem  
IN HIS POEM

Let me stretch this paper into origami safe spaces  
Where we can have the conversations  
Talk about why he hates this poem  
Has heard it before, written pieces of it

Talk about how he isn't a woman  
But this is still his poem  
Didn't want to be part of it  
But is still sorting through debris  
Looking for a stolen identity

He explains to me that there is no definition of man here  
Just perpetrators

So, we search for erasers  
Because this isn't the right outline  
Rubbing the paper so hard we tear it  
Then shred it  
Tossing it like confetti  
Debilitating words fall off the paper  
Perceptions trickle into the form he chooses  
Because right now, this is his poem  
Empowering the validation of his personhood  
On a new piece of paper  
Making room for his poem

... and it's my turn to sit and listen.

—FAUSTINA BOHLING, MADISON, WI

## A Long Way Down

A young woman sits  
at a sewing machine  
the needle stitches  
her hours into days  
days into years.

They work long hours  
in the Ashulia district  
international buyers,  
decrepit factories,  
high risk violations.

When the smell of smoke  
alerts them to a fire,  
when the heat rises  
and flames lap at the locked door  
the only exit—

a fifth floor window.  
The young woman  
remembers  
her mother telling her  
*if there is a fire ...*

*jump  
then at least  
we will  
have  
your body.*

—JANET LEAHY, NEW BERLIN, WI

## Ethos

My father's life was ruled  
by odd, late morning to early  
evening shifts, overtime,  
sometimes  
Sunday intake hours.  
Milked cows never  
take a day off,  
cheese production  
never stops.  
Often, we his  
family, wife and  
eight offspring waited  
impatiently, hung  
breathless on his arrival,  
overdue when the last truck  
hadn't come in yet, the  
driver running late.  
Such is the nature of  
the dairy industry.  
That and the  
almost requisite bruises  
he bore, inflicted  
by smacked elbows and  
knocked knees,  
too intimate brushes  
with tight confines  
while he scrubbed,  
sanitized  
slippery stainless  
steel insides of milk  
haulers and bulk  
storage tanks.  
Teased mercilessly by  
other students  
about the factory's smell,  
wafted in through  
the open bus windows,  
"Pew-wee! Your dad  
works there?"  
I cried, but also  
realized it was the  
scent of money,  
learned early on  
just how much it cost  
to keep a roof over  
our heads and  
food on the table.

—G. A. SCHEINOH, EDEN, WI

A million things to do on Monday  
but nothing really for the rest of my life

—JAMES BOTSFORD, WAUSAU, WI

## Bus Called Eden

I grab a seat on bus number seven  
beside a woman. I've never seen the bus  
so crowded, I yell. She smiles, not understanding.  
I try my Spanish, Mucho gente. She nods.

A man is selling tickets for Armageddon.  
An elegant woman sways from a strap.  
Students fill the aisle with chatter from school.  
A disabled man in a pink dress gets on.

The lift beeps and beeps as he backs his  
wheel chair on. Front seats are cleared  
everyone pushes to the rear.  
The windows steam up. The driver puts

the bus in low gear and shouts, I'm not  
taking on any more passengers.  
You don't have to pay, just get off.  
He shuts the door on a man standing in rain.

Pobre hombre, I say. She nods again  
without speaking, she takes out a knotted  
handkerchief and hands me a piece of  
Juicy Fruit. The bus suffers its way

up Pine Street. Naked, we two innocents  
don't have to get out yet so  
we grin and chew the gum. Suddenly  
we feel so wise, riding along in paradise.

—LEN TEWS, OSHKOSH, WI

## What We Must Preserve

To hear each other, what  
we must preserve  
is the dignity of trees,  
obstinacy of rock,

the patient way a book  
occupies space, its voice  
less than a whisper,  
its light as dim or bright

as the sky. And like  
the sky and trees and rocks  
the way the book belongs  
right where it is and

holds you there even  
when it speaks openly  
of somewhere else—the quiet  
of all those voices

leaning so calmly together  
on the shelf.

—JOHN KAUFMAN, WAUWATOSA, WI

## B-boys of Green Bay

Asian b-boys in Green Bay  
breakdance in Boys and Girls clubs  
in Madison gyms they session, too  
Menasha, Minneapolis, and Milwaukee

story re-writes itself in those who move  
cultures fuse to dream anew  
right foot lifts and steps aside  
followed by the left  
yet the center always holds  
mid-western cyphers ground this dance  
gravity partners with defiance  
they fly in the placid face of it

South Bronx lynched in '70s style  
freeway strangulation  
fuels spontaneous combustion  
Kafka jives to a Latin beat where  
all that fly are colors  
two turntables spin to just one song  
layers of loose linoleum whirl helicopter legs  
dizzy headspins on cardboard sheets  
remnants of desire  
windmills shrug off concrete floors

far to the west a mountain people  
also lived on slash and burn 'til opium  
smoked their crops to cash  
alchemy of imperialism bespoke a  
golden triangle secret  
war and hidden trail  
hunger's flight through clicking steps  
of landmines and helicopters hurling souls  
scattering winds  
extended clans gone nuclear

b-boy flies up off the floor  
released from footwork, spins, and one-armed stands  
statues himself to a landing freeze  
integrity gestures to the ground  
because all your pieces and all your steps  
and the way in which you rock the beat  
dance the very math of funk so that  
two against three adds up to One

—SYLVIA CAVANAUGH, CEDAR GROVE, WI  
*also appears in VWOnline, Issue 113 - 114, Midwest Remix*

## Oconomowoc

O where does the emphasis go  
on the scrapped storefront doors  
or the million dollar homes

O why the random roundabout  
circling to lakefront gelato  
or the fishermen casting for trout

O how the yawning 50s ranches  
miss farm boy Harry S Truman  
and tire of weathering glances

O when did the city split  
an overpass to big businesses  
and downtown a new abyss

O come on and walk with me  
again across the red bridges  
to hear the currents talk

—JENNA VILLANOVA, WAUKESHA, WI  
*also appears in VWOnline, Issue 113 - 114, Midwest Remix*

## By the shores of Gitchee Gumee

*for Tess & Gayle, Cousins in Family Archaeology*

By the shores of Lake Superior,  
the Ojibwe's *Gichigami*,

Perhaps there lay the region  
the origin of my people.

Mr. Stroud recited Longfellow  
a poem for 2nd graders,

Hiawatha delivered  
by a poet of color

took on a tone of something known,  
not a white man's notion.

I think I may be Cree or Ojibwe, I  
gather artifacts, weaving

family trees which lead  
to Gichigami, to a permanence

in my family's sojourn  
in North America after all,

by the shores of Gichigami,  
by the shining Big-Sea-Water.

Or call it *the Ojibwe's Ocean*,  
*Anishnaabe Gichigamiing*.

—LYNLEY SHIMAT LYS, JERUSALEM  
*also appears in VWOnline, Issue 113 - 114, Midwest Remix*  
*visit VWOnline for audio*

## Voicing the city strange

What sound should I throat you?

A rustling map, rain on the windshield, roar of wind rushing over lake water until surf sounds on the shore as if ocean lived here.

The moon over Monona  
(the lake) bellows tonight.

Do you hear the music of Jenifer street?

A blue porch railing, bicycles tethered at the entrance, an un-mullioned window scanning the lake. Wet wheels on pavement or a thousand leaves ripping in liquid air.

Monroe Street is chiming a Bach. Wind over Wingra. A flute.

At Victor's the coffee is crying.  
A white crane is flying over my red house.  
The old oak, limb pointing down, has fallen from the Mound.

Where was wind on Bascom Hill? *Look for it at the Chazen.*

A violin, a mandolin, and a briny lemon  
sang for a pterosaur in a Permian Sea. They  
were on their way to Brasserie V.

Can we sing of the Capitol?

*Not today, my lady.*

Well then, where is beauty in this city?

Once on Spaight Street where it intersects with Few, two white-lacquered men sat on a bench, arm over shoulder, ghost men, fleeting, gone to a park in distant city; a Segal and a gallery that flew away.

But the coterie at Brasserie V?  
What did they order? A dark ale,  
a Vichyssoise, and two *moules frites*.

What were they reading?  
Poetry. Books colored like rainbows,  
available at Avol's.

Will there be shelter in this city?

Perhaps, in a house on Jenifer Street as winter comes on, as the lake ices, and the wind is a blade that cuts through a thin pair of blue jeans on the legs of a southern girl. Look for the dream of a revolution, curled in the hope of an equal future, where time lives under a skull.

—MARTHA KAPLAN, MADISON, WI

*also appears in VWOnline, Issue 113 - 114, Midwest Remix  
& Echolocations, Poets Map Madison, Cowfeather Press, 2013*

## Wisconsinese

If my state was a tree  
I'd be a cheddar branch  
eager to leave  
fall free real good  
like buck's horn in winter.  
I am not camouflaged  
brat fries, Wal-Mart  
thighs and fried wings,  
can't sling bullets at deer  
and don't drink beer.

I can never fully  
detach the last bit of the tick's mouth,  
bail hay without breaking  
out, don't see a need to shovel near  
summer-seared manure.

I don't give a goose  
fart on a muggy day  
if it's a *fountain* or *bubbler*,  
free throw or punt. I hunt  
plane tickets, not turkeys.

I live to breathe  
and don't breathe work,  
reach my accent and branches  
towards a cloud-covered sun

but you bet a curd  
in the beer-cheese soup  
the stem of a word  
is in its root.

—ANDREA REISENAUER, GREEN BAY, WI  
*also appears in VWOnline, Issue 113 - 114, Midwest Remix*

## A Little Day Muzak

Too soothing for words,  
this infusion, this audio balm,  
but souls ascendant  
find other-world solace and calm  
in its plinky tempos, and in its  
sly symphonic swells  
one comes to a certain composure:  
No pink slip today. All's well  
that hums well. Perhaps  
on occasion its lilting probes  
have Valiumed the airborne psyches  
of cornered claustrophobes.  
Did he think, the one who wrote this,  
his fingers ambling the keyboard scene,  
he was birthing an opus grand as Mozart's,  
a "Gloria, Gloria for Floor Fifteen?"

—RICHARD SWANSON, MADISON, WI

## Crime: a Book of Days

Bring them on, the opiate sagas:  
Monday. Soaked shirt corruption meets bad-breath  
conniving in the Cajun Delta. Phew!  
Tuesday. Routine murder, L.A., a starlet strangled,  
Asian hemp her farewell necklace. Follow the  
fraying link through Vancouver and Oregon.  
Wednesday. A war of generations: *Nouveaux riches*  
Bostonians splitting the sides of attic trunks.  
Brahmin owls hooting out in the orchard.  
Thursday. Villainy center stage: drug lords (Señor  
Cauldrón), Russian oil CEOs (Tolstoy Petro-  
vich), and street thugs (Toothpick and Squish).  
Friday. Return of the good guy sleuths: nerdy lab  
guys, gun-toting babes, on-the-wagon precinct  
lieutenants. Who would have thought a Cornwall  
librarian could bring down the British government?  
Saturday. Breathing space. Surely by this time next  
week Interpol will have tracked down Cauldrón,  
and those sniping, ill-paired NYC cops, Elise and  
Maury, will be tearing off one another's clothes.

—RICHARD SWANSON, MADISON, WI

## Tales of Hoffa

Don't even bring it up, that bar stool crap  
that good ol' Mafia J. looked chic  
those days in his Buddhist monk robe  
in that Outer Mongolian monastery.  
You want to compete, too, with some small time  
doper seller who heh-heh'd to the feds  
that Martha (that's Stewart!) and he,  
The Man, were long-time lovers?  
One of the psychics was nothing more than  
a right wing preacher transvestite.  
Three of us knew the story, all of it,  
and how we knew it, and one another,  
would make you wallop your thigh.  
Its gritty details would spring your jaw:  
a diner, a Beltway babe, a jealous husband  
then—bang!—a midnight omelet  
of spleen with jalapeno.

—RICHARD SWANSON, MADISON, WI

## Variation on *The Outdoors Survival Manual*

When all else fails  
You can always "pitch a tent" at an old circus camp

(That certainly sounds like fun)

There aren't too many circuses around these days  
So the old camps should be empty

Once you settle in  
Look for a trough full of big red shoes

Those won't take the place of firewood but  
At least they will keep you busy for a while

—MIKE JAMES, DOUGLASVILLE, GA



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## The Second Plague

### Getting His Goat

He had built a new house  
scattered the offal and debris  
at the edges of the lot.  
Spring arrived, turned things green,  
pigweed, ragweed, cocklebur,  
sparrows did their part  
spreading pokeweed, poison ivy.  
By June weeds were out of control  
neighbors complaining.  
He considered a Bush Hog  
but they were so expensive  
then a buddy at work suggested,  
“Goats, tie them out there, they’ll  
clear out them weeds and as a  
matter of fact, I’ve got a couple  
I’ll give you.” So he tethered them  
out back and let them do their thing.  
It worked like a charm until one  
Saturday after a session at the  
saloon when he turned into his  
drive marveling at the progress  
they’d made, parked, walked  
around to the backyard and there  
on the cab of his beloved El Camino  
one of the little buggers knelt,  
trailing rope, chewing strips of  
black vinyl. Next weekend the  
housewarming party was great,  
live band, lots of ice-cold beer  
and the barbecued goat  
was pretty tasty.

—DAVID GROSS, PINCKNEYVILLE, IL

### Chickens for Christ

They took their calling seriously. First of March they’d start  
fattening them up with table-scraps, high dollar feed. The  
impeccability of their henhouse was known for miles, too clean  
or dangerous for rat or rat snake. Their hens were cleaner and  
healthier than many of the townships residents, free-ranging the  
sunny yard, feathers shiny as satin robes, scratching dirt, clucking  
quiet invocations, roosting through their dark nights of the soul  
and finally the Judas-kiss of a cold axe.  
After morning worship the faithful gather in fellowship hall,  
bow their heads in prayer, stomachs rumbling in anticipation.  
Everybody knows that Easter is all about the  
Shepard sisters’ chicken and dumplings.

—DAVID GROSS, PINCKNEYVILLE, IL

She often dreamed of frogs. She didn’t know  
Why—too much Russian music—one of those  
Childhood triggers—loaded, tough to dislodge  
As popcorn kernels or a dull boyfriend.  
When she noticed it, she wanted it to end,  
That’s all. It’s only abandoned luggage.  
Then came that morning when a sunrise croaked  
At her and she ribbeted back. A float  
Of fear slid down her cheek. She didn’t cry.  
She rose, calm as a dandelion, cool  
And soft. All her frog dreams were slightly blue—  
Sad and dirty. Night let this one slip by.  
She closed her confused mouth and wrapped knowledge  
Around each sound. She knew just how to nudge  
The residue dreams left. It wouldn’t show  
In day light. Her tongue might snap at a fly,  
Her feet might jump a little. An awkward stride  
Could mask that. She’d speak in pale quarter notes,  
Ignore questions. It worked in her college  
Captivity. She was sure she could dodge  
Daylight for a while. She’d learn to defend  
Memories and mutations. She’d deny  
Biology. She’d find a way to hide  
In the open. There was no one to fool.

—MARK J. MITCHELL, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

### Don’t Worry,

they said, sheep are stupid.  
So we cornered her in the under-space  
we call a barn, and in dust and dark  
I grabbed for rank wool  
in need of shearing; noose her  
with a horse-lead—  
how huge she’s grown on God-  
given grass; how heavy-muscled,  
strong as life raging against the rope  
snubbed around a gate-post;  
how she charges—leaps—flings  
herself for life.

But of course we win—being  
human, and graced with  
mechanical advantage. We drag  
her panting to the pen  
where now she waits speechless  
as sheep-fate.

—TAYLOR GRAHAM, PLACERVILLE, CA

## Figment Six

Seize the day, live in the moment, suck  
all you can out of the dripping teat, that  
was his answer to the inevitable, but hey,  
his eighties, nineties, the end didn't seem to  
come, and the teat withered, and living  
had less and less to do with seizing and  
sucking, and at his 100th birthday party only  
assisted-living techs showed up because  
he'd outlived family and friends, and his  
doctors were busy elsewhere helping other  
people gain long life, and his health  
prohibited cake and champagne, which  
made him wonder a bit, especially after  
he went blind and deaf and couldn't  
watch TV ball games anymore, but hey, at  
one-hundred-and-five he could still play a  
sort of shadowy croquet within his inner  
cranium and—oh yes!—take up the  
pleasure of thinking that, just possibly he  
might become the oldest man still living in  
his home county or maybe even ever anywhere  
—yes, seize on that!

—GERALD GEORGE, EAST MACHIAS, ME

## Ordinary Grief

When the farmer, who has brought his pair of dachshunds  
in from Kalamazoo because he believes them to be  
infected with West Nile, mentions putting down a horse  
with the Big "K," for a moment you misunderstand,  
riffing through the sediment of terminologies  
from years of veterinary school in search of a drug  
that both euthanizes and begins with the letter "K."  
Of course he means cancer, now so unspeakable that he  
falls silent, the word he has divorced from its letters,  
a party to all of his interactions. A neatly kept  
brown mustache, khakis and a plaid shirt,  
he defies you to repeat his error as if it were a joke,  
as if he could possibly misunderstand an animal  
to the degree that he might mistake the disease  
that took it from him. You have to remind yourself  
how ordinary the farmer is in his grief, one ignorant  
little dog tucked under each arm. The conversation  
recurs often. The cancer they took out of your mother.  
The one you tried to take from the golden retriever,  
whose insides blossomed with tissue. As a child  
you refused to let your hamster go in spite of blindness.  
You think of it now as a self love, so exuberant  
that it can't help but spread. Even when  
it broke through the surface of her body,  
you had to keep telling her how beautiful she was.

—KEVIN OBERLIN, CINCINNATI, OH

## Schrödinger's Poet

Trash can clanks.  
Garbage scuffles.  
From my bed on the picnic table  
I carefully glance.  
The black shape in the shadows  
moves, snuffles the trash.

My hand slips under my pillow  
to my impotent knife.  
Pointless I know.  
I'm either alive or dead  
at the paws of this bear.  
I accept my fate.

Which I imagine from now on—  
Some day I am to be eaten  
by the bear. I see it  
out in front of me  
a hologram of black fur  
and silver claws  
and ruddy teeth  
and I am

Simultaneously alive and dead,  
or neither alive nor dead.  
The tooth sinks in  
and settles it all.

—BOB PERSONS, MADISON, WI

## Forgetting Lessons I

Forget everything that matters,  
the way a snowflake forgets  
it was once a cloud.

Like snow banks  
we forget  
how to be  
snow  
gradually,  
until we remember  
only the damp, dark  
and cold.

—DANIEL BRANDT, OREGON, WI

## *Spring Rarely Comes*

yet we get slightly  
mild less than frigid days,  
the light lingers a little  
longer and layers of snow start  
to reveal an anthology  
of litter in ditches and railroad  
beds. The blaze orange glove  
dates back to the T-Zone,  
does only hunt. The splintered  
sign once in the yard of the house  
with nippy dogs, urged us  
to keep Christ in Christmas.  
A fat raccoon festers around  
the edges, thawing after  
freezing solid, mouth parted  
eternally, incensed at  
high beams hitting the icy  
curve in the road not at all like the  
light from the full moon that cast  
a crave on him to end  
his hibernation.

—JENNA RINDO, PICKETT WI  
*also appears in VWOnline, Issue 113 - 114, Midwest Remix*

### **“We Eat”**

Polish sausage in the spring,  
spiced and slippery with grease  
that burns your tongue before  
you get a chance to swallow.

Sweet corn barreled in bushels,  
and baklava, yes, brushed in  
ribbons of honey that  
glow in the fading daylight.

Sodabread and shredded beef,  
sauerkraut and brats with beer.  
Cream puffs and crepes shoulder  
up to soul food on Juneteenth.

August means *sandia y*  
*churros*, the watermelon  
wetness lapping up all  
those sugary flakes on chins.

Fall is fry bread season here:  
lumpy like the moon, it goes  
with tiramisu, and  
cannoli, and gefilte, too.

Maple syrup poured thick and  
slow, over lingonberries  
licked free of summer sap;  
crunchy winter artichoke.

December, then: venison  
drained in the garage rafters,  
and one Korean pear,  
round and full and supple, and—  
crisp.

—BRIDGET APFELD, WILMINGTON, NC  
*also appears in VWOnline, Issue 113 - 114, Midwest Remix*

### **Zen Baptist Beset By Exploding Cobbler**

hot rubies scatter-shot  
glass pan on the stove  
wrong burner turned on

Which indicates a certain lack of mindfulness.  
The strangest, biggest, most dangerous mess  
I've made—smoldering chunks of glass,  
In every corner, pitiful globs of cobbler.

glass kernel, kidney stone  
shiny spar lodged fast  
jagged rock in my foot

I guess I could have left it in. I am less attracted  
To penance than repentance,  
However. So I dug it out.

narrative of our wood floor  
charred spots, berry-brown  
distraction, my besetting sin

It sounded like a shotgun blast.  
It smelled like burned perfume.  
I'm so glad I had seconds before it all went away,  
Strawberries and rhubarb and June.

—MARNIE BULLOCK DRESSER, SPRING GREEN, WI  
*also appears in VWOnline, Issue 113 - 114, Midwest Remix*

## Contributors' Notes

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

Though currently a resident of Wilmington, North Carolina, where she is a student in the University's MFA program, Bridget Apfeld is a native Wisconsinite and has spent her life in the Milwaukee area, living on the lakefront. Her previous and forthcoming work can be found in various literary journals, including *Dislocate, Better: Culture & Lit, Prick of the Spindle, Able Muse, and So to Speak.*

Linda Aschbrenner, publisher of Marsh River Editions (MarshRiverEditions.com), and founder/editor of *Free Verse*, 1998 to 2009, now collaborates with two sisters on a book, in poetry and prose, about their Finnish American childhoods and family.

María Guadalupe Aviña Hernandez is a student at Madison College and part of ExpresARTE, a grassroots collective of youth of color activists in the large Madison area, a movement from youth to youth that uses creative art expression and storytelling as a tool for social change and social justice.

Michael Biehl's poetry has appeared in *Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion, Callaloo, The Comstock Review, Snail Mail Review*, and a number of other magazines. He is a retired instructor of English as a Second Language and pension benefits administrator.

Kimberly Blaeser is the author of three collections of poetry: *Apprenticed to Justice, Absentee Indians and Other Poems, and Trailing You.* A Professor at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, she teaches Creative Writing and Native American Literatures.

Kimberly A. Blanchette, public speaker, artist, photographer and activist, has three poetry books: *Layers of Moments, Naked, The Master and the Student*, and poetry CDs.

Faustina Bohling grew up on the East side and has a strong affinity to the Williamson and Winnebago neighborhoods, and currently resides on the West side/Middleton. A graduate from UW-Madison, BA Sociology, a mother of three wonderful sons and one daughter, she has read at Genna's spoken word scene, the Wisconsin Book Festival, UW-Milwaukee and other venues. She has also hosted The Speak Easy open mic at the Cardinal bar.

James Botsford recently retired from a 30 year career as an Indian rights attorney. In 2011 he published a book of stories called "You Should Write that Down" and is working on a book of poetry. He lives on the banks of Big Sandy Creek near Wausau, Wisconsin.

Daniel Brandt is a man who likes to write words on paper. One day, very much to his surprise, he noticed that occasionally the words seemed to become poems. Although he has been previously unpublished, it seemed to him a shame not to ever share these words gone poem. He hopes the fellow readers of *Verse Wisconsin* will enjoy them.

Brenda Cárdenas is the author of the poetry collections *Boomerang: Poems* (Bilingual Review Press, 2009) and *From the Tongues of Brick and Stone* (Momotombo Press, 2005). Cárdenas' work has appeared widely, including in *The Wind Shifts: New Latino Poetry, The City Visible: Chicago Poetry for the New Century, RATTLE, Pilgrimage*, and most recently, *Mind the Gap: A Portfolio of Poem-Print Translations, Cuadernos de ALDEEU, 2013 Wisconsin Poets Calendar*, and *Verse Wisconsin*. She served as the Milwaukee Poet Laureate from 2010 to 2012.

Sylvia Cavanaugh has a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She teaches African and Asian human geography and is the advisor for Sheboygan's District One breakdancers and North High's slam poetry team.

Cris Carusi is an amateur chocolatier and poet. Professionally, she works with organic and sustainable farmers across Wisconsin.

Chloe N. Clark grew up in Wisconsin. Her poetry and fiction has been included in a variety of publications including *Rosebud* and previous issues of *Verse Wisconsin*. She is currently at work on a novel and can be followed on Twitter @PintsNCupcakes.

DeWitt Clinton has just finished a long career of teaching and mentoring students at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. His essay on travelling in Poland has just appeared in *Cultural Studies & Critical Methodologies*. His newest poetry collection is an adaptation of Kenneth Rexroth's *100 Poems from the Chinese*.

Bruce Dethlefsen plays bass and sings in the musical (he hopes) duo Obvious Dog, the name taken from Wisconsin Poet Laureate Marilyn Taylor's description of a poem "beyond resuscitation." His most recent collection is *Unexpected Shiny Things* (Cowfeather Press, 2011).

Marnie Bullock Dresser grew up in Southern Illinois, where the South tended to creep up into the Midwestness of things. Marnie has lived and taught in Wisconsin since 1991 and misses Southern Illinois only in late February.

Rebecca Dunham is the author of three books of poetry, most recently *Glass Armonica* (Milkweed Editions, 2013). An NEA recipient and former Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing fellow, her work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *The Southern Review, FIELD, Alaska Quarterly Review, and Verse Wisconsin*. She is a professor of creative writing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Araceli Esparza is from Madison, Wisconsin; her parents were migrant farm workers from Guanajuato, Mexico. She is pursuing her MFA studies with a focus on Children's Literature at Hamline University. She is currently working on a picture book collection and is the proud parent of two kids and wife of a tattoo artist. Her work has been on display at the Overture Center and in the Grady Alexis Gallery, in New York for the 50th year anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech exhibit. [www.araceliesparza.com](http://www.araceliesparza.com)

Literary artist, innovative educator and culture columnist, Fabu served as poet laureate of Madison from 2008 – 2011. Her books include *Journey to Wisconsin: African American Life in Haiku*, which was named an outstanding achievement in poetry for 2011 by the Wisconsin Library Association, *In Our Own Tongues* and *Poems, Dreams and Roses. Remember Me: Mary Lou Williams in Poetry* is her latest manuscript. Her website is [www.artistfabu.com](http://www.artistfabu.com).

Matthew Farr grew up in Oak Creek, WI. He is currently a sophomore at UW-Milwaukee majoring in English Education. His poetry has recently appeared online in the *Shepherd Express*.

Susan Firer, author of five full-length poetry books, has published poems in *The Chicago Tribune, The Chicago Review, The Iowa Review, Best American Poetry* and many other places. She is a former Poet Laureate of Milwaukee and the editor of the *ExpressMilwaukee's* online poetry column.

W. Frank is a produced playwright and published poet from Milwaukee.

Gerald George's uncle ran a general store in Wisconsin near a lake in Waupaca where Gerald fished, swam, and roamed in the woods in the summer on vacations. Many years later (in 2010) he won the Donn Goodwin prize, given in Milwaukee, for writing "which best reflects Irish or Irish-American poetic tradition."

Carmen Germain grew up a free-range child on the outskirts of Black River Falls. Cherry Grove published *These Things I Will Take with Me*, and work has appeared in *New Poets of the American West, The Madison Review, and Natural Bridge*, among others.

Taylor Graham's ties to Wisconsin include a cousin in Wonnewoc, helping instruct at a search-and-rescue dog school in Osceola, and appearances in *Verse Wisconsin*. Otherwise, she lives in the California Sierra with a husband, a dog trained for SAR, an untrainable cat, and four sheep.

David Gross lives in the foothills of the Illinois Ozarks. His work has been included in numerous literary and small-press journals and in four anthologies. He is the author of four chapbooks of poetry. The most recent, *Pilgrimage*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2009.

Anonymous Gump is a pseudonym.

Glenn Halak started writing poetry and painting very early, inspired by his great-grandmother's poetry and painting. He loves images that carry him up into the dark, to paraphrase Tomas Tranströmer. He's had a book of poems published by a defunct online publisher, writerswebpress, back in 1998 and has had poems published over the years, three children's books, some plays produced and lately two one-acts published, and some short fiction as well.

Judith Harway's first work of memoir, *Sundown*, will be published by Branden Books in late 2014. She is also the author of three collections of poetry: *Swimming in the Sky* (forthcoming from Finishing Line Press), *All That is Left* (Turning Point Books, 2009) and *The Memory Box* (Zarigüeya Press, 2002). She is Professor of Writing at Humanities at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, and two-time recipient of the Wisconsin Arts Board literature fellowship.

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

Susan Hering writes, "Whenever I'm asked to write a bio, I wonder whether my poems, plays and paintings don't speak clearly. I live in Madison now, after spending most of my adult life out West, and here you have to make your own sunshine. For that, it's nice to be able to whittle an occasional poem or elucidate oils onto canvas, so that's what I do."

Ronnie Hess' poetry has appeared in several publications, including *Alimentum, Arbor Vitae, and Wisconsin People & Ideas*. She is the author of a chapbook, *Whole Cloth: A Poem Cycle* (Little Eagle Press, 2009), and a culinary travel guide, *Eat Smart in France* (Ginkgo Press, 2010).

Jennifer Ruth Jackson can't draw or act so she writes poems and short stories. Her work has been published in *Star\*Line, Flashes in the Dark, and Kaleidoscope Magazine*. When she's not writing, you can catch her playing video games or making jewelry. She lives in Wisconsin with her husband and their houseplant, Huber. Visit [everythingintales.blogspot.com](http://everythingintales.blogspot.com).

Mike James lives in Douglasville, Georgia.

Jim Johnson is the former Poet Laureate of Duluth, MN.

Martha Kaplan has published with *Branch Redd Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Hummingbird*, *Verse Wisconsin*, *Hospital Drive*, *Möbius The Poetry Magazine*, and *Feminist Collections: A Quarterly of Women's Studies Resources*, among others. She was the 2011 winner of the Dr. Zelda Mapp Robinson Award, two Editor-in-Chief's Choice Awards, and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2012.

John Kaufman's poems have appeared in *Kentucky Poetry Review*, *The Progressive*, *Plains Poetry Journal*, *Long Island Quarterly*, the anthology *Poems and Pictures of Long Island*, and other publications.

Matthew Laffrade's work has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous publications including *The Coe Review*, *Requiem Magazine*, *The Rusty Nail*, *Hitherto*, and *The Wilderness House Literary Review*. He is also the recipient of the University of Toronto's Harold Sonny Ladoo Book Prize for his novella *Past Present*. He currently resides outside of Toronto, Canada.

Janet Leahy's most recent collection of poetry is *Not Your Mother's Classroom*. She participates in Margaret Rozga's poetry class at UW-Waukesha and in several critique groups. She serves on the board of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets.

Emilie Lindemann is an assistant professor of English at Silver Lake College in Manitowoc, WI. She has two chapbooks from dancing girl press: *Dear Minimum Wage Employee: You Are Priceless* (2011) and *The Queen of the Milky Way* (2013). Emilie and her sister, Bethany Lindemann, run an art rock and performance poetry collective called Villainess.

Enrico Lopez is Native American, Puerto Rican and Mexican. He was born in Chicago and raised on the LCO Indian reservation near Hayward, WI. He currently lives in Eau Claire.

LynleyShimat Lys is a poet, playwright, and essayist living in Jerusalem. Lynley's mother grew up in Oshkosh and went to college in Wisconsin, and most of her side of the family lives there. Lynley also does social media work for H\_NGM\_N and tries to stay connected to the literary world online. Recent work appears in the chapbook *Turn up the Volume: Poems about the State of Wisconsin*, a project of Poets for First Amendment Protection, and in the journals *Verse Wisconsin*, *Deep Water Literary Journal*, *Leaves of Ink*, and *Flashquake*.

Petrovnia McIntosh is a social worker who enjoys exploring the world through poetry. Writing has been a part of her life since she was able to hold a pen. Originally from Queens, NY she now lives in Madison, WI with her partner and son.

Mark J. Mitchell's poetry has appeared in the anthologies including *Good Poems*, *American Places* (Viking/Penguin), and *Zeus Seduces the Wicked Stepmother in the Saloon of the Gingerbread House* (Winterhawk Press). He has three chapbooks available: *Three Visitors* (winner, 2010 Negative Capability Press International Chapbook competition), *Artifacts and Relics* (Folded Word Press, 2013), and *Fishing in the Knife Drawer* (Fowlpox Press, 2013).

Jennifer Morales is a poet, fiction writer, performance artist, and a member of the board of the Council for Wisconsin Writers. Her collection of short stories about race relations in Milwaukee will be published by University of Wisconsin Press in spring 2015.

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

Kevin Oberlin was born and raised in Michigan, writes in Ohio, and peregrinates through Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula every summer to reconnect with Lakes Michigan and Superior. His chapbook, *Spotlit Girl*, won a Wick Poetry Chapbook Prize and was published by Kent State UP.

Elmae Passineau has published three chapbooks, *On Edge*, *Beloved Somebodies*, and *Things That Go Bump in the Night*. She is currently a thinker, reader, friend, helper, feminist, and writer.

Bob Persons has lived in Wisconsin almost all of his life, writing poems, stories, and opinion pieces for 50+ years. Some of these are Wisconsin-specific, but virtually all have some tincture of his home state in them.

W. A. Reed's poetry and short fiction have appeared sparingly in small press literary arts magazines and literary journals, most recently in *Free Verse*, *Bare Root Review*, *Third Wednesday*, and *Blue Moon Literary & Art Review*. He has published several chapbooks of poetry including *Collected Poems: 1990-2009*, and excerpts from an online daily blog (BUZSPEAK) documenting his struggle with prostate cancer. Poetry forthcoming in *Plainsongs* was selected as a 2013 Plainsongs Award Poem.

Rita Mae Reese is the author of *The Alphabet Conspiracy*. She has received numerous awards, including a "Discovery"/The Nation award. Currently she's working on a book about Flannery O'Connor entitled *The Book of Hulga*. Visit her at ritamaereese.com.

Andrea Reisenauer is a University of Wisconsin Green Bay student from the bratwurst-eating town of Sheboygan, Wisconsin. She will soon be graduating with majors in English and Spanish. In her free time, she enjoys traveling everywhere from the trails Wisconsin's state parks to the streets of Germany, both of which coincidentally involve bratwurst consumption.

Read Ron Riecki's previous work in *Verse Wisconsin* 104, 106, 108, and 110. Riecki also edited *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works* (Wayne State University Press), <http://wsupress.wayne.edu/books/detail/way-north>. Follow him on Twitter @RonRiecki. BLOG: [rariiecki.webs.com/upbooktourblog.htm](http://rariiecki.webs.com/upbooktourblog.htm).

Jenna Rindo lives in rural Pickett WI, with her family, Shetland Sheep, and a small flock of chickens. Her poems and essays have been published in *Shenandoah*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *American Journal of Nursing*, *Sow's Ear*, and other journals. She has work forthcoming in *Moon City Review* and *Bellingham Review*.

G. A. Scheinoha thought about becoming a private detective, later, a bounty hunter. He never imagined he'd follow in his father's tracks, a series of blue collar jobs. Where their lives differed was instead of marriage and family, he wrote a million words over thirty years, some of which have recently appeared in *Avocet*, *Bellowing Ark*, *Bracelet Charm*, *Echoes*, *Floyd County Moonshine* and *Verse Wisconsin*.

Robert Schuler has been writing persistently for fifty years. His fifteenth collection of poems, *The Book of Jeweled Visions*, was published by Tom Montag's MWPB Books, PO Box 8, Fairwater, WI 53931. Price: \$12.50 plus \$1.50 postage.

Miona Grae Short is a native of the South Side of Chicago and is currently a freshman at UW-Madison in pursuit of an undergraduate degree in physics and astrophysics.

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

Anja Notanja Sieger, La Prosette. Anja is pronounced (ON-JUH) and 'Notanja' (not-ON-JUH). Anja is the person-conduit and Notanja is the spirit writing the letters. Both currently reside in Wisconsin, USA. Visit <http://laprosette.com/>.

Jessica Slavin was born a dairy farm girl but grew up to become a lawyer, a teacher, and a writer. After living in Seattle, Tennessee, California, and Minnesota, she has resettled in her home state and lives near Waukesha where she is a researcher and writer in the state court of appeals.

Jeanine Stevens was raised in Indiana. Her mother was born and raised in Wisconsin. Her poems have appeared in *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Tipton Poetry Review*, and *Pearl*, among others. Her collection, *Sailing on Milkweed*, includes the poem, "Milwaukee," and will be published by Cherry Grove Collections.

Barton Sutter is the author of seven books, the most recent of which is *The Reindeer Camps and Other Poems* (BOA Editions, 2012). His poems have appeared in many magazines and in such anthologies as *Sixty Years of American Poetry*, *Sound and Sense*, and *Strong Measures*. He recently retired from the University of Wisconsin, Superior.

Richard Swanson is the author of two collections *Men in the Nude in Socks* and *Not Quite Eden* and a chapbook *Paparazzi Moments*, Fireweed Press. A frequent reviewer for *Verse Wisconsin*, he is also the Secretary of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets.

After Len Tews' retirement as a biology professor at UW-Oshkosh, he took up writing poetry. He lived in Seattle for fifteen years but has now returned to Oshkosh where he is participating in the poetry scene in his home state. He has several chapbooks.

Guy Thorvaldsen is a journeyman carpenter, a dad, and a writing teacher at Madison College. His poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction has appeared in *Madison Magazine*, *Wisconsin Academy Review*, *Flyway*, *Wisconsin Poet's Calendar* (2014), *The Barefoot Review*, and on Minds Eye Radio.

Angie Trudell Vasquez is a poet, writer and activist currently living in Milwaukee, WI. She has self-published two books of poetry, *The Force Your Face Carries* and *Love in War Time*, under her own label, Art Night Books, [www.artnightbooks.com](http://www.artnightbooks.com)

Jenna Villanova is a senior at Carroll University. A 2013 Best of WI Undergrads for poetry, she currently participates in a cross-country verse exchange with HASTAC scholars. She is an Akron native.

Moisés Villavicencio Barras is a Mexican poet, fiction writer and co-founder of *Cantera Verde* a magazine, which has been one of the most significant literary publications in Mexico for the last twenty years. His first book of poetry *May among Voices* was published 2001. His second book of poetry is *Luz de Todos los Tiempos / Light of All Times*, Cowfeather Press, 2013.

Angela Voras-Hills earned her MFA at UMass-Boston and was a fellow at the Writers' Room of Boston. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Kenyon Review Online*, *Best New Poets 2013*, *Haydens Ferry Review*, and *Linebreak*, among others. She currently lives in Madison, where she teaches poetry workshops through UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies and Madison Public Library. Find more at [www.angelavorashills.com](http://www.angelavorashills.com).

Nikki Wallschlaeger's work has been featured in *Decomp?*, *Esque*, *Word Riot*, *Spork*, *Likewise Folio*, *Horse Less Review*, *Storyscape Journal*, *Deluge* (forthcoming), *Coconut* (forthcoming) & others. She is also the author of the chapbook *THE FROGS AT NIGHT* (Shirt Pocket Press) and the chapbook, *I WOULD BE THE HAPPIEST BIRD* (forthcoming from Horseless Press). She lives in Milwaukee, WI and you can reach her at [www.nikkIWallschlaeger.com](http://www.nikkIWallschlaeger.com).

Mike Weaver has been composing haiku for six years and has some success gathering credits in small press magazines. "Haiku is the breath of my imagination."



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