from The Book of Walker—

—Blessed are they who do make it more costly for the sick to be healed, the blind to see, the lame to walk uprightly.

—Blessed are the nine in-state billionaires, for their portion of tax shall not be increased, and they shall sitteth at the head of the table, and the front of the bus.

—Blessed are the out-of-state billionaires, for they shall inherit Wisconsin.

—Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst to deny the rights of the worker, for they shall be called Americans for Prosperity.

—Blessed are ye who seeketh to plant trouble-makers among the peaceful, for ye shall be called Governor.

—Blessed are ye who accept lavish vacations in California from the one ye believeth to be the richest of the rich, for ye likewise shall be known as Governor.

—Blessed are the backroom deal makers, faith-breakers, takers from the poor and middle-class to replenish the coffers of the rich.

—Blessed are they who do vilify and demean the people of learning, for they shall be known as the legislative majority.

—Blessed are ye who traceth not the names of corporate donors.

—Blessed are they who do bar the doors of the common meeting place of the people, for they shall be called the children of Koch.

—Blessed are the de-funders of art, for they shall diminish the beautiful and true.

—Blessed is he who turneth his ear from the pleas of the prison guard, the nurse, the minister, the priest, the rabbi, the keeper of the peace, the fighter of the fire, the driver of the plow, for he hath already received his earthly reward, even one-hundredfold and more.

—Blessed are the mighty.

—Scott—3:16-28

Max Garland lives in Eau Claire.

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Ambidextrous

We rise with signs—Kill the Bill, Save Our Rights, picket in protest, sometimes loud, sometimes noise-less.

Passion takes form in chant-rants birthed from (oh!) pressed chests, Egypt on the right, Wisconsin on the left, the water cleft now shut, a piercing needle of common theme pricking holes so little it hardly seems visible— but when the craft is complete, multitudes bleed, sporting bright red tees, standing straight in the knees, spines strong, backtoback on the multitudes of leaders’ fallacies.

Nichole Rued is a creative writing student at UW-Green Bay.

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Relying on Your Imagination to Discern the Question, a Prose Sonnet
(at the Capitol, 2/25/11)

Because what’s the point if you’re not enjoying your life. Because neither of us is getting any younger. Because it is an unseasonably warm February day in Wisconsin. Because it is an unpleasantly seasonable February day in Wisconsin. Because my children are with me. Because who needs all this stuff this house these plates this bed these chairs. Because it all comes down to backstory: who we & why we. Because there is free Ian’s pizza from Finland and Arkansas at the top of the hill where we listen to Rabbi Biatch.

Because you can read the news on Avol’s Bookstore windows and on Facebook and in poems and on people’s faces. Because Tammy Baldwin, my congresswoman, and Beth Kiser, my children’s grade school cello teacher stand on either side of me. Because “ROTC Kills.” Because my husband writes Solidarity on his sign in seven languages while my teenagers get out their magic markers. Because poetry and plays come from one place, and theatrical gestures aren’t stunts or tricks or mere or even just. Because 14 senators are just enough to make a sonnet, if you’re careful, and I am letting go of perfect all the time and sometimes the performance is the poetry.

Wendy Vardaman works at a theater company in Madison & co-edits Verse Wisconsin.

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The Children Must Learn to Read by Third Grade

The children must learn to read by third grade.
Those words aren’t going to read themselves!

Or do much else for our economy.
The prisoners must lead the third graders who can’t be trusted who can’t be invested like money can be in greed ing. And what about the money?

The teachers have hidden it where no one will look—inside the prisons, inside the books.

Jill Stukenberg is a writer in Wausau.

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**Before Unions**

Grandpa showed me his crooked hands that he said were from playing baseball without a mitt, but I think it was from all the hard work.

He showed me the B B under the skin of the meat of his left thumb that he got during a hunting accident. “Still there,” he said.

He let me feel it myself and roll it around.

When I sat on his lap he would let me listen to his Hamilton railroad watch. “It’s the most accurate watch there is,” he bragged. And I guessed it was.

Then he took down his small cap with a candle holder on the front: “It was about eighteen eighty-six I wore this cap in Hurley when I was twelve. To climb down ladders hundreds of feet into the dark iron mine. All I had for light was a candle,” he stated without self-pity or boast. “I never went to school, I couldn’t understand English, and Ma and Pa needed my earnings.”

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**To the New Student Protesters**

(Wisconsin protests of February, 2011)

Best of all is to see the young and meditate on the law of unintended consequences: the Governor’s hardline arrogance mobilizing a new generation to learn one of democracy’s most glorious lessons: that there is not only duty but joy in the combining of voices.

Though now we’re grey and you’re the vivid ones, every cell in us resonates to your bullhorn. Standing today less for ourselves than for you, we lean easier into aging bodies and visions, loving the early spring wind wafted by your lithe, shining spirits.

Our old romance with hope stirs again, that we might yet establish the Beautiful Community, and that you may still lift the dream forward to places we’ve only imagined, greyhairs, who like Moses, won’t live to see the Promised Land but will be carried in your hearts toward that fulfillment.

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Len Tews is a retired biology professor at UW-Oshkosh.

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14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: LEN Tews

Thomas R. Smith is a poet and teacher living in River Falls.

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14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: THOMAS R. SMITH

Brent Goodman is a copywriter in Rhinelander.

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14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: BRENT GOODMAN

I am not political, but even the Capitol’s bathroom windows are bolted shut. I wish this were a metaphor. One in, one out, no signs, flags, or books, no announcements, people’s houses through a secret tunnel system. The officials I didn’t vote for once only rumored to exist. My copywriter job.
There’s an Immediacy in the Situation That Prevents Us From Perfection

[Author's note: the title is taken verbatim from an email message to VW Feb. 21, from Madison poet Gillian Nevers, thanking us for the poems we’ve been publishing and commenting on the rawness and subsequent power of the drafts. As I am a writer who usually strives for perfection, or close to it, her words sparked my imagination.]

Yes. There’s an immediacy for almost a week now, here in my living room, two kids home from school because the teachers the teachers are marching and there’s an immediacy. “Why aren’t the teachers at school?” Because the governor is trying to take away their voice.

Even in my armchair, humming to facebook, /post/ to the Ed Show / link/ to Youtube / share/ and the various emails from neighbors and friends / reply/ / reply / reply /

There’s an immediacy, and I hear there’s pizza from Ian’s. There’s an immediacy to this, this need to be heard. Won’t you listen, you on the other side? And damn my binary thinking, why do I think there are only two sides? Think of a pizza, round or wedge like, depending on the angle of your vision, your experience. There could be more than two sides. There could be a circle?

There could be a circle here but we

we are prevented from perfection, by our need

and we need to share our words, to share our experiences, our voices. This is a poetry flip cam, not a documentary. /share/ / link/ / heart /

Our chants may sound silly, years or even days from now. Our poems, drafted in heat, may fall flat. Are they worse for that?

What do we require of them?

What is required of us?

We are prevented from perfection. We are human. There’s an immediacy in the situation.

Sarah Busse is a homemaker and co-editor of Verse Wisconsin. She lives in Madison.

Cahoots: Wisconsin Makes a House Call

We enter the brawl of voices, a mob of signs the cameras flare, the sirens thrum and howl around the press of people—

It’s a clumsy chore of taking it to the streets leaning against the beaten door of arson or the plate glass of breaking and entering and then prepare for what’s ahead: joining the stream of total strangers, we are in cahoots with a common indignation, a despair we declare as our own, climbing step and stair to wait, we aim to find a place to stand together for days if we must.

And you. While you memorize your lines, and a smug buttress of millionaires smoke fat cigars and reassure you, we jam the corridors and crawl through windows. We don’t ask for the man of the house, we don’t leave when told to go. By now, this much you must know: We are coming in.

But this is not the house of corrections where we surrender ourselves, this is not the house of striking out, this is not the house of bums, of aimless punks, or derelict junkies tying off on the marble floors amidst high-collared, learned men. No. This is the house that we have built and come to declare our own this time each stone and stair, each frame and border Whose house? Our house? And we expect the doors to open to the glare of hunger to the bone-struck wind of resistance to the change in furious weather now—

And you over there? Pull up a chair it’s time we had this talk.

Denise Sweet is an Anishinaabe poet [White Earth] and former WI Poet Laureate.
The birds were twittering again at first light today, and you were out there floating in the early clouds of morning, doing a backstroke, I believe, through the pale skies of this February mourning. The bells up high in the campus carillon ... with the round window set in front. The crowds in the State Capitol chanting the mantras of democracy swarmed like Sufis in a kaleidoscope or a mandala swirled into tinted sand on a windswept Tibetan mountaintop. Spring is not ours yet, but she did let...with just the slight arch of one of your perfect eyebrows, “Shouldn’t we go home together now?” and I say, “Yes, please.”

Susan Hering works in the Economics Department UW-Madison.

Supporting the Troops

We will send your poetry and music in your honour:

We will write poems and music in your honour:

Socrates, teacher, take up your toga hem.
Sit at the foot of marble capitals on the stone ledge in the agora. Question and debate with your followers, your students, so eager for your next word. Amidst shouts of sardine sales, olive oil reservoir bargains, impart knowledge not to flinch but to the forty-five, who come now to your class with thoughts of suicide, with knowledge of abuse, with shakes of epilepsy, with allergies to peanuts, chocolate, test taking, with knives, handguns concealed, with latent anger, and muscle memories of drive-by, trigger power.

Socrates, teacher, in this age of reason, see through faulty argument to truth, to right, to justice. Your time again has come to make a difference in education, in civilization. Wisconsin, in its void, beckons.

Marilyn Windau teaches art to elementary school children in Oostburg.

Supporting the Troops

We support you, our heroes on the front line. We, who cannot be there daily. Who cannot brave the cold and snow. Who cannot spend the night on marble floors protecting the rights of us all. When we know that the right on our parade loops we can no longer allow the old and young, men and women, to stand outside. We support you.

Ed Werstein is an employment counselor in Milwaukee.
Dancing with Liberty
(Madison, Wisconsin, February 19, 2011)

My friend called to say, “I’m waiting at the top of State,” but I was across the square, so I kept walking with the crowd past the media stands where a few angry men screamed through bullhorns while we answered the call: Show me what Democracy looks like, singing back over and over, This is what Democracy looks like—

the marchers slowing to let parents with strollers cross to the Capital, past the costumed onlookers, past the sax player giving us “Solidarity Forever,” past the Harley-jacketed family, past “Queers from Chicago” with raised fists,Show me what Democracy looks like—This is what Democracy looks like—

but at the top of State, amid thousands of marchers, my friend and I could not find each other, so I called and told her, “Look for the man dressed as Liberty,” and cut through the crowd to stand beside a young black man in green silk and a plastic-foam Lady Liberty crown—Show me what Democracy looks like—

This is what Democracy looks like—and he told me he was from Milwaukee, and that his mother was a teacher, and I told him I was from Alaska and my father was in the service, and all the while music was pounding out from the Capital steps, and after a few minutes we were dancing to Michael Jackson, swaying and pumping our arms, Show me what Democracy looks like—This is what Democracy looks like—and somehow, my friend never did find me, and none of us who are hoping for justice know whether we will find it, now or soon or never, but what the heck, my friends, isn’t this what Democracy looks like: each of us, all of us, dancing with Liberty?

Patricia Monaghan is a writer, teacher, and tender of vineyards who lives in Black Earth.

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14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: PATRICIA MONAGHAN

From the Principal’s Desk

bullies are unhappy people who come from sad and sometimes violent families where the rules change all the time. Here’s how to deal with bullies:

1. Ignore them. Go about your business. If that doesn’t work, tell someone in charge.
2. If that doesn’t work, travel in twos. Become a friend to make a friend of the bully. If that doesn’t work, stand up taller. Be as big as you can.
3. Respect yourself and never use violence.

Bruce Dethlefsen is Wisconsin’s Poet Laureate. He lives in Westfield.