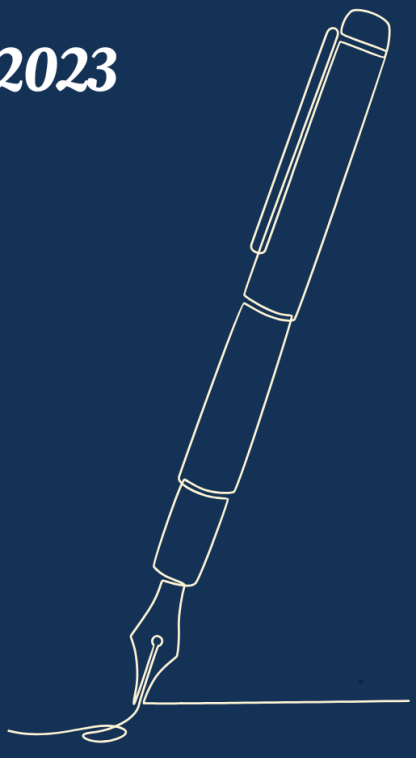
COMMUNITY POETRY SUBMISSIONS

LAKE OSWEGO PUBLIC LIBRARY

2023



This April, in honor of National Poetry Month 2023, the Lake Oswego Public Library invited local poets ages 18 and older to submit 1-2 of their original, unpublished poems to share with the community. We've compiled them here for your enjoyment.

Thank you, local poets!

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“Fata Morgana” by Tiffany Baehr

She laughs,
Like all the better
To eat you with-
Wide and full of teeth,
Head thrown back,
Abandoned,
With a fierceness
That dares him on.

She beckons,
With sweet danger
On full lips.
Something not understood
On the surface,
A parlor trick with
Primal fight or flight
Dangerous like crushing waves.

She shines,
Like a half-shaded
Revelation.
A promised half something for an answer,
What he didn’t know he sought
Crashed upon the rocks
Not yet sighted,
With his mist-laden eyes.

She calls,
Soft silvery, siren,
And he is lost.

“Fairytales or Nightmares?” by Tiffany Baehr

Ah, You wish for,

A monstrous beauty

In the telling,

Held upon the edge of

A last breath,

Drawn from

A wicked depth,

And shaded by the brilliance of the moon.

Or, mayhap, the story of the lost,

Those Far flung to the starless sea,

At the edges of your periphery.

A dark bit of complexity

To catch the breath,

Far more than a story told.

Or, perhaps the narrative,

Of a girl who fell

Through the sky,

A lone casualty

Of some crueler beauty.

Ah! Yes! You seek

Those Fairytales,

And those Nightmares,

Held in the catch

Between breaths.

“On Pointe” by Molly Burack

For Mom

It’s the flitting yucca moths every third season
or updraft from the sea
that smacks your face clean, late night
rub my feet or popped corn
merging you two with hope
kernel, flight, salt, you name it—

maybe it’s the cheek hug with her who mostly runs
hot, the warm fleshy press
you never prepared to miss

maybe you will see a swan and remember her
pouring coffee or drawing a bath
for you no less
and the only feet which creak the ground are yours
but maybe you wear her socks

or write about the scent of her hair
you happened upon in a pillow,
and ask the growing sky
if she is near?

And the trees
if she is in them?

Rooting in heartwood all you
wouldn’t forget; *push your foot through the ground*
so the other one flies.

“Tracing Anamnesis” by Molly Burack

I opened my eyes to see
the river palpating, sign
of a deeper pulse swelling
to the unfused fontanelle

river, your silver sheen
flecked blue black, wiggling
mallards who arrive
in twos, I speak
to greet the hen, who in return opens
her feathers

how did I forget to feel
her heart?

Not the globulous purple
thing we splice to know
it is there— left beating
to trace its purpose or relation
to wing: *I want to know*

why I forgot the feeling of her
gaze upon river, her breast, the way
she belongs in this place
as we must, somehow, belong
to too— how her timid glance could touch
mine in the air and we might, together,
stay awhile

before her orange palmate reveals the way
through mud to river, a triangle
growing in her wake, she remaining
apex, floating
as we

will to touch the very body of a tree
whose moss has engorged with rain
a cushion for my cheek

I feel your strong heart

felt this once with a mare
lids half fallen, fluttering

in some light as I
a kid yearning for something to feel
me, holding her
meaty chest slightly
  risen to collapse
 forehead propped on her
warm neck, bristles to skin

 and the slow salt dew
forming between
us, opening
a mandala in my stomach

tail whip to fly, a sudden wind,
chain clanking over there, here
shiver of pink dusk

 tiny plumes of moth
lifted from wheat, each wing blooming
through thorax dentritic, velveteen,
to feel this world
                as its seams—
                made with a curve

        made to return
        to the body, so quietly like everything

you ever remembered but more
like remembering.

“Daughter on the Water” by Justin Jude Carroll

Where the bay’s braids meet
    green silt a sway archipelago
of slipper steps and slate blue
    inlets rests. A brown lab,
chest huffed up, coughs his
    warning over soggy lawn.
“Come get your dog,” the girl calls
    too loud. Too far out she hopsteps
the map beneath this seeping flood.
    She crosses a foreign channel
unknown to us. The cloud’s wing
    shadows our skins but leaves
her revealed, alone, ringing.

“Someday” by Justin Jude Carroll

Someday somewhere there will be a door in a wall.

Tied to its knob is a thin string.

If you pull the string the door won’t open,

same if you turn the knob.

But if you wait. If you try

not to try

to solve the problem

you may notice

after some time, maybe days or years,

the rust that’s grown on the hinge and the one loose screw.

And if you pry the metal from the frame

it may be

that you see the wall is no wall.

The door was the wall.

The hinge is brown powder in your palm

and you’re already through.

“SNOW” by Gabi Corsaro

Snow,
falling gently

dancing with gravity

lilting,
teasing

promising wings

“Tapestry” by Gabi Corsaro

‘Seasons and Reasons
seduce our eyes,
weave intricate patterns
entwining our lives.
*Be*Cause is the answer*
to all of our Why’s,
and we are somewhere
Between’

“Pivot” by Marilyn Despres

Mount upon the page my passion
Inseminate with words pale parchment
Tattoo me in the latest fashion
A bower of roses until we’re spent

“Night Fishing” by J H Fenner

(with a nod to C D Shanly's "Walker in the Snow,” 1856)

Not far along the river had I angled on my way,
When I spied a fellow fisher in the dusky evening gray.
Across the stream fished—alone—this gentleman in black:
Casting out, then reeling back.

The stranger noticed not, but knew that I was there;
I bothered not, for, at first, I did not really care.
He spoke no word, nor gestured as to say,
"Hello! Any Luck?" in the usual way.

We fished along, each on his water's side,
For the river ran here both deep and wide.
He caught no fish, nor did I;
He just fished along, as silent as I.

The night wind whistled as along I trod,
In happy harmony to my swishing fishing rod.
We fished that way through part of the night;
We both fished along, but without a bite.

Only riffles splashing and birds' whooshing flight
Broke the silence on the stream that night.
Then a high mud cliff my path did block.
"To camp," I thought, "for 'tis late of the clock."

Then up rose the moon, waning gibbous, still bright;
I could see clearly now, first time that night.
Then crossed I the pool at its shallow end,
To greet this stranger, make a new friend.

Still no nod of recognition gave he by sign or look.
I plopped a cast at his feet;
He turned a half as if to greet.
Gooseflesh crawled across me as I crashed across "The Brook."
My casting caused rings and ripples;
My striding made a thud.
The stranger's casts were ringless,
No boot prints marred the mud!

Gooseflesh spread still further as I did stare
Into a face that was not there!
He turned again and strode away—
Right through a tree, into the gray!

I slumped against the mud bank, and sank into its mire.
Death fear raged within me; I seemed to be on fire!
Gasping, heart racing, me all pale and spent;
Shallow, rapid my breathing—then out I went!

I awoke at bright first light, surrounded all in white:
Sheets, walls, satin sheers—all a wonder-sight!
Washed and dressed, I scurried down as breakfast guest,
And told my tale to gasps and groans, but with zest.

Oh, I shall fish again on mornings fine, crisp and bright,
On windy days, and those with temperature just right,
Or—best of all—in evening's soft, warm afterglow,
As swallows skim low, and shadows creep, and longer grow.

I shall fish when zephyrs kiss the cheek, caress the glade;
In sunshine shimmering bright—but me in shade;
Or under puffy, pillow clouds of gleaming white.
But never, never, ***never*** will I fish again at night!

“Pride” by J H Fenner

Muscles failing, his flat tongue flutters,
Flaps from weak and hanging jaw.
Lowered head, drooped, pale eyes;
Slow, stooped and stumbling gait.
A weak and weary, near toothless one,
Replaced from famed years' pinnacle,
Reflects on dwindling power and pride,
Unleashes feeble roar.

All males, wistful, pine to procreate:
One by one, all—save one!—
Enter fertile females' lair:
Fifteen clawing females fend them off!
In flight in failed retreat they sport
Ripped coats and bitten ears.
Ladies loathe deceit, they find,
As knows the aged sage.

Laying food at his failing feet,
Coming when he calls.
Propping him on either side,
When he takes his staggering strolls.
The ladies do his bidding now,
Again, as in his prime.
An old and "useless" circus lion,
Released, regains his Pride.

True event of a "retired" circus lion's unexpected acceptance at a "wildlife haven"

“Spring on Steens Mountain” by Mimi German

~~ o the sparse trees the split trees the half trees and the burrow trees the one arm trees and the old crag trees o the lone tree ~~

in the afterbirth of winter
we rejoice at last and open the windows wide
to breathe a deeper breath of sky

winter’s paper grasses turn to fertile stalks of green
snow still clings to mountain crags and peaks
the songs of coyotes fold fields to clouds
and on the open slope of thighs
spring rides in unbridled

velvet auburn robes swath the new born fawns
wild flowers and balsa root shake their blossoms loose
to remind us what it is to earth ourselves in such tambourine divinity
redwing blackbirds sweep the tongue of sagebrush fields
rabbit peaks from his namesake brush
we drink the running waters in pronghorn country

“Blossom” by Mimi German

in your palm
sunday is wet

burning yearns
in the wood stove

burst open !

yellow fuchsia
bellows spring

“The Cat That Got Fat (A Mostly True Story)” by Shari Getz

The cat in our house has grown notably fat.
He grumbles and tumbles, he leaps but falls flat.

He thinks he is svelte like he was in his youth,
but he’s wobbly and topply, to tell you the truth.

He’s gotten quite lazy, as one might assume.
He watches his toys as they fly ‘cross the room.

He rarely makes effort to run or to play.
He sits, sleeps, and eats through the night and all day.

We know it’s unhealthy, unkind, and unwise,
It’s just that he doesn’t stop growing in size.

We worry his legs won’t support his great girth.
He’ll paddle and waddle, like nothing on earth.

When he wants affection, he’ll roll to one side.
Then flop on his back just because he’s so wide.

At this rate if he doesn’t get out of bed
He’ll just be a tummy, four paws and a head.

His health and well-being is our main concern
Advice from an expert is where we should turn.

The doctor took one look and said, “This won’t do.
Your cat is too fat and it’s now up to you.”

He wrote a prescription and we all agreed
To follow three rules which were sure to succeed.

The first rule was diet, we measured his food.
The cat was dramatic, ungrateful, and rude.

The second was exercise, movement, and play.
We tried to engage him, but he’d walk away.

We almost gave up when we tried number three.
A playmate was just what was needed, you see.

We’re pleased to report he is well on the mend.
Besides feeling better, he loves his new friend.

“WHO IS HE” by Linda Healy

My love is
An artichoke.
Wild thistle.
Tenacious roots
Adapted to arid soil.

Natural.
Sun-drenched.
Tough.

Prickly spines defending
Green, nutritious leaves
Layer after layer,
After layer, after layer.

Then, suddenly,

At center,

Tender,
Incredibly delectable
Heart.

Unusual.
A delicacy.

“OF ANCESTORS AND VOLCANOES” by Linda Healy

Out of the crust
Of rambling ruins,
Through the dusts of
Eoned age,
Throaty voices
Harshly whisper-
Mutter, spatter--
Spewing klinkers
On our **NOW**
That’s grassed and paved.

“What do you know of suffering!”
They rage;
“What have you felt of pain!
“Of tumult and
Struggle and mountains
Upended,
Molten rock falling like rain!”

“Violin Lessons” by David Hedges

Joe cringed when Nana bought The Violin.
He leaned more toward the alto saxophone.
The fabled Eichenlaub sought discipline.

"Why won't you practice?" Eichenlaub would moan,
And Joe would look perplexed, and scuff his heels.
He thought he worked his fingers to the bone.

The neighbors thought so too, from brusque appeals
To keep the ruckus down. But Eichenlaub
Was unimpressed. He'd weep, "A stuck pig squeals!

Not so a violin!" Joe'd tweak a knob,
Rub rosin on his bow, and pluck a string
Whenever Eichenlaub began to sob,

His way of saying, "I'll do anything
To stop the tears." But every chord he played
Caused Eichenlaub to tear his hair and wring

His hands. One note went sour, another strayed,
A third resembled "Streetcar wheels! The screech
Of chalkboard fingernails!" His patience frayed,

Poor Eichenlaub would check the hour with each
Assault upon his sensibilities
As waves of shock troops landed on his beach.

He'd journeyed from Berlin across the seas
Before the madness caught him in its net.
For what? To let Joe bring him to his knees?

He tried to reconcile a fumbled fret
By harking back. If he'd foreseen his fate,
He would have taken up the clarinet.

The clock pealed off twelve strikes. "You're doing great,"
He fibbed, his face locked in a silly grin.
"Next Saturday at ten, and don't be late."

“Another Wednesday Morning, 1959” by David Hedges

8:00 a.m. I’m at my desk upstairs in the newsroom
when Reveneau rolls in looking like day-old roadkill.
Fresh from putting the *Sandy Post* to bed, no sleep, he
plops to his swivel chair so hard the spring goes *sproing!*

The thin hair he combs over his bald spot bears striking
resemblance to a run down the front of a nylon stocking.
One pant leg of his tan gabardine slacks covers a scuffed
half-boot, the other’s tucked in. His cowboy-style shirt,

splotched with mustard, mayonnaise, and catsup, looks
like an early work by Jack the Dripper. He stares straight
ahead, eyes recessed in dark tunnels, gaze unswerving.
I wave my hand in his line of sight to make sure he’s out

before going back to pounding my rickety Remington,
a relic from the Inquisition. I’m wrapping up an exposé,
“Oregon City dumps raw sewage into Willamette River”
as my suggested headline. One pic I shot shows pipe

and underpinnings of a McLoughlin Boulevard overhang
in silhouette, with the blue heron rookery downriver in
the distance. A close-up shows sewage hitting the fan
of frothy effluent from the pulp and paper mills upriver

at Willamette Falls. A couple of quotes and it’s a wrap.
9:00 a.m. I skip down the squeaky stairs, sticking to high
center between grooves in the worn wood. Pressmen
wearing square pillbox caps folded from newsprint gear

up for the day’s run with three-foot-long box wrenches.
Oiled and inked, the old Heidelbergs clank and grind.
Breathing sulfurous air, I trot up Singer Hill to City Hall
to catch City Manager Strohmeyer off guard. Only way—

he’s always out when I call. “Business or pleasure?” he
barks. If I’m dropping by to shoot the breeze, he pushes
back his felt hat, clunks his brogues on the blotter pad atop
his desk, and points me to the percolator on the hot plate.

“Business.” He tilts his hat over his eyes and scowls. “No
comment!” I ask him anyway. “How long have you known
about the illegal sewer?” He feints. “What illegal sewer?”
I thrust. “The sewer that empties where Singer Creek runs

into the river." He parries. "Who the hell says it's illegal?" Riposte. "The state." He slumps. "Off the record?" I nod. "First I heard of it. For the record . . . the city is taking steps to correct the situation. A crew will begin work in a few

days to divert the flow." 9:45 a.m. Thirty-dash. I drop my piece in the copy editor's in-basket, along with my daily humor column, written on my own time, for no extra pay, but what the heck, it's a labor of love. Several small articles

to write before deadline, so I clickety-clack away until I spot periodic waves dancing in my coffee cup. The rumble grows louder. The old building shakes. Dust filters, glittering, from the rafters. The 10 o'clock freight. On cue, Reveneau snaps

awake, grabs his Teeny Poker, a cut-down oil measuring stick with a handle carved in one end, and heads for the next room, where Police Reporter Tenny hangs her hat. There's a ruckus, replete with guffaws. Pretty soon Tenny, plump

as a ripe blueberry, bursts in, squealing like a bobbysoxer every time Reveneau pokes her in the ribs. She reaches her limit and pins him to the wall, a variation on a theme—usually she picks him up and slams him down on his desk.

Shaking it off, he strikes his Managing Editor pose. "Let's put this baby to bed!" Ad Manager King, dapper in checks, pops from the wings with his page layouts, flashes his teeth, palms his wavy black hair, and disappears down the stairs.

Historical Columnist Creitser, a gray-haired granny, peeks from her cubbyhole to make sure the dust has settled before dropping by her weekly musings on Oregon's pioneer past. The editors huddle over layouts, galley proofs, stereotypes.

Another Wednesday morning, and the only sound is the *click, click-clack, click* of an ancient Underwood hovered over by the city editor's one-eyed nephew, an unemployed auctioneer teaching himself to type on the *Enterprise-Courier'*s dime.

—30 —

“Hiking at Mt. Rainier Last August” by Linda K. Hoard

Avalanche lilies were past bloom, their white flowers crinkled up like paper straw wrappers. Still vibrant were scarlet paintbrush, blue lupines, and pink mountain heather close to the ground which months ago was under 50 feet of snow.

I heard so many languages that day as folks from all over photographed the 14,410-foot tall mountain against azure sky, cascading waterfalls, chickadees clinging upside down to fir cones, fuzzy marmots sunning themselves on giant boulders.

I focused my binoculars on roped climbers ascending across a snowfield, still a long way from the summit. I’ve never yearned to attach myself to others, cross a glaciated slope, and ice-axe my way up to the pinnacle view. Just thinking about it my feet feel unsure, and I imagine with one wayward step, I’d tumble thousands of feet down.

Sometimes when a climber dies, they do find the body, perhaps snuggled in a sleeping bag like in a cocoon, dangling by a snagged rope or wedged in a crevasse. Sometimes they find a camera that tells us the climber made it to the top.

I don’t like to think of the frozen bodies up there who searchers never retrieved. Maybe a hundred generations from now, when all that’s left of Rainier’s glaciers are small, gray silty puddles scattered in a boulder field, researchers will find a body mummied in a synthetic bag.

Will they have the tools to develop our centuries-old photographs? Will our pictures encased in little silicone and metal rectangles be condemned to a life without light? Like songs inside an 8 track cassette with no player to unlock them, will our words and images be trapped in magnetic tape? Will they be able to decipher a QR code with no Rosetta Stone in sight?

There will be no mountain climbing for me. I’ll stick to walking the alpine meadows, pausing to photograph pearly everlasting, purple shooting stars, blue butterflies clustering above puffy white bear grass, and the occasional lenticular cloud curving over the glacier-domed peak.

“Singing with Grammy” by Linda K. Hoard

By the window view of the silver maple, we’d sing “Itsy Bitsy Spider,” do the hand motions together, her demented synapses still finding their way to the nursery rhymes she taught her preschool classes seventy years earlier.

In the assisted living lunchroom, she’d sing every line of “Amazing Grace,” “Hark the Herald Angels Sing,” no matter the season, her aged hands beating time on the padded arm of her wheelchair.

She’d ask if we were going to have lunch, as the tray of mashed potatoes and softened turkey she just ate sat before her, yet she wouldn’t forget a single stanza of “Go Tell it on the Mountain,” elbows bent, arms swinging to the rhythm.

What is it in the brain that resonates with music long after other memories have dead-ended in a cerebral maze? Notes and lyrics attach themselves somewhere in the auditory cortex. We hear songs long after the violinist places her bow in a velvet-lined case, after the concert lights go out, after our parents forget who we are.

Why did early humans start rattling seeds inside dried gourds, rub sticks for raspy rhythm, stretch taut skin for a drum, dangle stone and shell into chimes? Did patterns of rain on forest canopies inspire percussion, thunder the cymbals, bird song wind instruments? Forty thousand years ago people carved swan bone and mammoth tusk into flutes.

Deep in our cerebellum, some ancient DNA is etched with chord, pitch, tone. We’re coded to clap in unison, sing harmony and melody, tap our feet to a beat.

Some sunny fall afternoons, we’d wheel Grammy to the 4th floor window overlooking a Minneapolis lake lined with cedars and cottonwoods. We’d sing together and be transported with her to the Blue Ridge Mountains, almost heaven, along some lovely country roads.

“All Things Considered” by Rosalyn Kliot

Consider what seems real in your life.
Is it memory of a past long gone,
Or events not yet done,
Or a dream floating on air or drifting in wind
And dissolving in dust.....?

Ponder on thoughts as beliefs.
Are they rock hard solid and dark
Or deep with Light and Joy,
Fire red heat enflamed,
Or waves of a cool emerald blue?

Consider all things as they are,
And inhale the meaning of Truth,
Ephemeral and illusive they are
Like Gossamer blurring the seen.
Silence remains to be heard.

“WHAT IT IS (from Pandemic Journal)” by Rosalyn Kliot

We pick through the bones of our culture…we weep for what was
and what could have been
We are here and there and know not where
A book falls from the sky, lands on a stump that was a tree
Where are we now
A people that seeks for clues among the bones
Turning clear, transparent as sky
A bit of green pokes thru
A bone with life
A tiny sign
That shines with sun.

“Around and Around and Around” by Luke Marshall

Change.
It's inevitable.
Cliche,
Though the truth.
So what’s the point of me writing this?
Well, it’s the change in my life
For which is pertinent at this time and place
And it leaves me spinning
Around and around and around
As if I’ve lost control;
I want to tell you that I’m unwell
But life moves ahead despite how I tread the water around me alone.
The water slowly morphs into tar and the pain outweighs the pride.
I limp toward liberation, but I ache inside and out.
This leaves me spinning
Around and around and around
As if I’ve lost control.
Will the past live on?
Will I see it all again?
Change.
It’s inevitable.
Cliche,
Though the truth.

“Ragazzo Siciliano” by Luke Marshall

Ragazzo, ragazzino adulto di anno ventidue,
Guardami per favore!
Io voglio vederti in persona.
La cosa è che ho avuto bisogno di te solamente da aprile, così una data recente per certo, ma posso vederla finalmente la cosa speciale dentro di te–
La tua magica anima grazie all'aspetto sulla tua faccia.
Tu sei così bello e carino.
Posso vedere questo specificatamente nei tuoi occhi siciliani;
Sono oscuri e profondi, pieno di storie importanti.
Abbi pazienza con me in relazione della vita mia.
Non sono una persona perfetta e devo prendere il mio tempo con tutto durante questa bella vita.
È una necessità che tu mi ami nonostante che io ho niente da offrirti.
È veramente possibile per te di amarmi solo per me e semplicemente perché ci sia una ragione in sé?
Aspetto…Non vedo l’ora finché non luglio.

“The Etymology of Us” by Sarah Grace McCandless

Scholars trace it back to before the 10th century,
to Old English of German origin,
an efficient homeland
for such a seemingly efficient word
originally intended to simply illustrate
the objective case of we.

There is history here
that predates
the formation and collision
of our own DNA.
An us before us, a foundation
in existence long before
we took our first breath, one
that will continue
well after we take our last,
together, or
alone.

Deeper research will reveal a further truth;
the rule that there is no us
without the me and at least one other person.
Without the you.

You
love origin,
the way in which roots have changed with time;
I love definitions,
the meanings of now,
and together,
we are a dictionary of possibilities.

But oh, how
and why
we are so determined to pull our words apart;
a flurry of fluorescent orange traffic cones
to place between this
us,
the patterns we manifest
to divert
to safety.

"I Am a Butterfly" by Penny McDonald

To my grandchildren, on Earth Day 2023…

I am a Butterfly.

I am poetry.
I fly on behalf of the next generation.
I am hope. I am change. In fact, Transformation.
I am everything a poet loves.
Symbol, metaphor, simile, hyperbole.
Tiny beauty holding mysteries.
Perfect words on the page and on the tongue.
Metamorphosis. Glimmer, dart, shimmer.
Mariposa. Monarca. Esperanza. Cambio.
I am fragile and so very strong.
I am solitary. We are gathered. The distance is great.
We fly for you.
🦋 My dear grandchildren, I need to say I love you.
You need to feel it always.
I love you. I believe in you.
Be what you are. Be what you will.
I see your struggles, your fears.
I see your kindness, your sensitivity, your talents.
I see the attempts to repress young people and deny their truths.
I see your courage.
You are behind me and ahead of me.
You and me, we're limitless. In possibility and in love.
Grow strong in your chrysalis. Restore our milkweed.
Know all is connected.
SkiesLa lunaThe starsPlanetEarthFieldsofflowersSeasandwetlands
ForestedmountainsTigers,Orcas,ButterfliesYouandme…

Become

Follow

Emerge

“Tiny Golden Bird” by Penny McDonald

Earth Day, April 22, 2023

I saw a tiny golden bird at the Poison House today

We worry about icebergs, polar bears, rising seas where indigenous people live, the wildfires and and and…

But nearby, today I saw a tiny golden bird at the Poison House

Espero

I call it the Poison House, because it’s the sad worst of the worst--abandoned trashed graffitied broken into, with vegetation growing wild wild wild ugly ugly ugly. The very earth seems poisoned.

I used to go and cut some holly by the garage at holiday time

But have become scared to even walk that small distance

Scared to just lean over for an early daffodil

Scared to tiptoe to some of the small grape hyacinths growing in a river of color

Yes, I think, Poison

But today I saw a tiny golden bird at the Poison House

And then I saw a partner for that tiny golden bird

And they flew off together

Espero

“Touching Sight” by James Merrill

Touching sight to summer grasses – brown hazel stalks seep into my blue eye. Driving by the mottled grey mailbox under a slate sky, washboard gravel road bumps jostles up to steering wheel in my hands. Grip tighter for the steering. Coming out on the boulevard, birch and aspen white wisps float on the retina. Color bleeds like oil stains on water, attracting ants to old candy on the sidewalk.
The smell of sky is azure, smell of these trees is green, grey and white cotton puffs. The flavor of water is silver, and the sound of this grass is spice, chirping like birds; a pace of wings, crickets and the taste of cars is a humming of tires on oil-smooth skin.

“These Hands” by Linda Morris

Many years ago, these hands were new.
Soft and smooth, curled around my mother’s breast.
Tiny hands pulled the end of my father’s shirt collar into my mouth
To soothe the pain of a first tooth erupting.
Young hands held a baby duck, a skipping rope, newly chopped wood,
Coca cola, coffee, my first purloined Pilsner.

Breast exchanged for steering wheel, a new intoxication.

Eager hands clutched a ribboned scroll;
The paper giving shape and meaning to a working life.

Enamored hands caressed a lover’s face under a sizzling summer sun,
My nervous hands encountered my father’s calloused ones as he gave me to another.
Held each newborn daughter as I stared into a reflection of my soul.
Competent hands changed diapers, cooked, cleaned, counseled children.
Wrestled with the minutiae of daily life.
My adventurous hands gripped luggage, passport, camera, phone
As new cultures sang their siren song.

My fingers lightly skimmed a stone, stoic witness to a civilization's collapse.
A young guide's hand took my aging one,
His strong and warm grip steadying my rickety limbs,
Our hands now locked in a forever friendship.

Senescent hands wiped my tears at weddings, reunions, funerals.
Clapping, clutching, connecting, reaching out in joy or grief.

My experienced hands welcomed the familiar weight
Of a new generation, stroking the tiny hands clutching my finger.
Soft wrinkled gnarled newness entwined. The promise of continuity.

My stable, solid hands wrapped themselves
Around a bundle of sobbing raw adolescent anxiety.
Smoothing tangled hair, wiping tears,
Holding tight, calming, soothing, murmuring the reassuring refrain,
"It's OK. I've got you, kidlet. You are safe in Grandma Bear's hands."

These hands have done the dance of life, crossing centuries,
Belonging first to maid, then to mother and now to matriarch.
The once taut skin has released itself from its underpinnings,
Falling in fine ridges as they lie still, waiting for my signal.
They hold three-quarters of a century of human experience.
Their mission now is to write the story.

“Running” by Ruth Reno

Eyes closed, body as still as a log, but my mind’s eye wide open.
I yearn to pull its shade and sleep, but can’t shake endless chatter,
like cacophony of birds, an 8-millimeter replay of the day,
reexamining, redoing in 20/20 hindsight, and odd thoughts fade in and out:
neighbor’s chickens loose, forgot the blue poo bag today, Snark batteries need
replacing, are they home for the night, enough shoes at the bottom of the stairs
before I went to bed? Pressing my head into the pillow offers no relief.
Soon my still body joins my sleepless mind, tossing and turning.
Unable to release, I chant “be anxious for nothing”
like counting sheep, and tirelessly pray to unplug thoughts
and worries of my private world until somewhere
between then and now clock hands dim and morning light winks,
and I show up for a new day.

“When the Going is Gone” by Ruth Reno

We laugh, holding our tears behind the dam
as we speak of our strain and pain in the neck,
soreness in the shoulders and knees, aches
like sneak waves knocking us down when
we thought we were back.
We’ve traveled Europe, UK, Portugal, Norway,
Canada, walked up and down narrow
cobbled streets, hopped on and off buses, trains,
subways, climbed stairs to second, third floor ferries,
carried overstuffed luggage to top floors,
added souvenir weight to our carry bags,
followed historic trails through cities and villages,
reached for mountain tops on gondolas,
stepped on glaciers, photographed fjords,
turquoise waters, sunrises, sunsets,
goats, moose, bear.
What will our ticket to travel become now?
Buttons on the remote: going abroad with Rick Steve’s
travel show, I’m Eating What Phil’s Eating,
Wilds of Nature, or beyond earth with NOVA?
Or will we resuscitate our wanderlust for
a Henry Thoreau look-no-further than where we are
to see what we have missed and
become sensory agents where we live, stand, or sit?

“Skin” by anne richardson

ragged human skin ≈borderless portal≈

in comes tide of moon wave song salt kiss

our bodiless skin has abandoned bones

cells merging with sea stars fall into mouths

hungry to cartwheel in ancient galaxies

desiccated skin ≈borderless portal≈

myths poison-kissed when skin clung to bones

seeking microbial essence of earth

our wandering skin has abandoned bones

pores wilding on wind listen for sky to

rent for rocks to crack for seas to foment

rending human skin ≈borderless portal≈

myths rise in flames scuttle though pores leaving traces

kairos’ reminders dwell on psych’s shore

our silken-ash skin has abandoned bones

mouths reach for sounds tonguing river swallowing

cricket’s last call pouring meaning into

humming human skin ≈borderless portal≈

scattered beyond & below what does it

mean to rummage among origin's bones?

our bodiless skin seeking homeless poems

to weave the unweaveable into being

sentient human ≈borderless portal≈

our bodiless skin discovers its bones

“Cupped” by anne richardson

hands lifting skyward
a chalice receiving sunlight’s
sacrament pouring over
flesh dripping down bare
limbs seeping into
this body’s hungry soil

hands dipping into
high mountain streams
a chiming bowl filled with
dreams of deep earth
spirits trembling against
palms igniting soul into being

hands of a child digging into
dark loamy soil decay
filling lifelines with story
worms dancing
across palms reciting the
language of creation

hands forming a nest
cradling stunned fledgling
thumbs stroking rapid-beat
chest to calm our bodies
receiving grace when wings
flutter and we both explode
skyward

“Marsh Story” by Cynthia Guenther Richardson

The calling is likely not meant for anyone

but you even as I pull it close.

I recognize its sweet-rough song,

how it ascends like a banner to fly

over the river and marshland that I love.

It's an awakening as I walk along weedy banks,

plucking warm leaves and holding them

to my lips, forehead, chest.

I let my fingers graze grasses

even if their slender edges hurt.

I imagine I can discern you there,

and there.

It can be fifty things that give me pause-

white butterflies, gargles of cheeping

from spring peepers, sunlight signals

that are sent to flowers as a memo:

open in glory and grace.

But I wait as the earth shimmers.

There, it's the song of a redwinged blackbird,

common, sharp in the clean air

and yet it pulls me from heft of earth and

swings me high to you.

“certainty” by Andy Rocchia

sprawled in my favorite chair

the other morning, looking down--

to the riverbank

where the largest tree on the acre--

an old maple

was losing its leaves, one by one...

no wind,

but a leaf would become -

unhinged-

approximately every 30 or so seconds....

individuality...

every single one;

a unique flight plan.

“GO FOR IT!” by Andy Rocchia

CAPSULE POD SAMARA
SHELTER/SECURE
PROMISE/HOPE
LIVING ENTITY…….
MYSTERY/WHY, WHAT, WHERE & WHEN?
MILLIONS, THOUSANDS, HUNDREDS ….DOZENS
AND ….
MAYBE THERE’S
ONLY ONE……..
THAT MAKES IT…
CAMELLIA
PEAS
POTATOES TOMATOES….
WATERMELON
GO FOR IT!

POLLINATION FERTILIZATION
INSEMINATION GERMINATION
EJACULATION GESTATION……
ALL FOR WHAT?
DAMNATION?

GO FOR IT!
SEED/SEMEN/SURVIVAL
CHANCE!
HOT COLD….
TOO MUCH WATER
NO WATER
HUMIDITY?..
SUN? YES
AND NO…

TOO MUCH LOVE
NOT ENOUGH LOVE…….
RAIN FROST FLOOD FUNGUS

GO FOR IT!

SNAILS SLUGS…SQUIRRELS?

BIRDS!
AND
ROT!
THIS IS WHY
FARMERS
GO
TO CHURCH
ON SUNDAYS

“Sunshine was Plentiful” by LeeAnn Rooney

Sunshine was plentiful
I sat on a bumble bee and she stung me twice, yes on my ass, the audacity
Sharp pain, I jumped up and turned just in time to see
Her tumble over and take flight, zigzagging around me and then departing.

The beauty was worth it
Twice I tried for love, or was it lust?
The wet wince upon my eyes, not enough to roll down my cheeks
Zigzagging my way through life.

It was my hill, my spot, overlooking the greens, blues and whites
Waves cold, but sands warmed by the orb
Toes curling, castles ephemeral
Life full, seemingly everlasting, too young to know.

Making a home and filling it with comforts
Filling it with people, family, friends
But some depart with tragedies and some depart with adventures
This too ephemeral, my castle slushing and fading, years slipping.

Sitting on my hill, green blades swishing
I found a fantastical tiny oval, gray with speckles
No larger than my pinky, a soft marble from nature
Warming, it squiggled and tore open and out they came

Thousands of tiny eight-legged creatures
I jumped back just a little, yes, but then my curiosity held me
Watching as they frantically departed into the brush
How many will go on to create a web, an egg, or be nourishment for a bird or a lizard?

Like Pandora, I have released energy into this world
Thoughts and acts, touching hearts and minds
Some will grow, transforming into extraordinary wonders
Some will wither, be forever wondering, lost.

Yes, You and I will not see; alas, we have but one generation, no crystal ball
Our actions will ripple with reactions
So hold that childlike wonder in your bosom, be stung, be scared, be
Let the orb warm you and then share and spread the wonders.

“Untitled 1” by Abigail Anne Smith

I know where the sidewalk ends
it ends in a field of weeds
past the last signpost and friendly host
where the elusive prairie dog feeds

I’ve been past the edge of nowhere
and heard how the mourning dove grieves
where the only sound above the ground
is the whisper of aspen leaves

I’ve stumbled along the dusty trail
and gazed at the lonely pine
so I tell you true that whatever you do
you can’t get it out of your mind

I miss that forever sky
sometimes when the air is thick
I can close my eyes with quiet sighs
and try not to get heartsick

I know that my day will come
when I bid farewell to home
I’ll shoulder my bags all dressed in rags
and walk that trail unknown

“Untitled 2” by Abigail Anne Smith

a glowing orb
is sinking fast
into the eastern sky
can this be the sun?
my world is upside down
one day I walked
down a dusty dirt road
and found the sky
beneath my feet
this new world
is probably impossible
and I can’t remember
if there are any rules
does the spinning
occasionally stop?
I’ve been looking
to the west in hope
I find the rosy hue
was at my back
what happens next
could be wonderful

“Untitled” by V’Anne

I FLEW TO BRUSSELS TO TASTE
CHOCOLATE AND FEEL LACE

I FLEW TO HAMBURG TO SEE
ROMEO AND JULIET

I TOOK A TRAIN TO LUBECK TO WALK
A MEDIEVAL TOWN

I TOOK A TAXI TO BRUGGE TO FLOAT
DOWN A CANAL AND WALK AMONG
CATHEDRALS

I FLEW TO LONDON TO VISIT
THE QUEEN’S GALLERY, TO STOP AT
BARD’S GLOBE, TO SAVOR SWAN

I EXPERIENCED VERMEER, REMBRANDT,
HALS, VAN DYCK, MEMLING, MICHAELANGELO

I TOUCHED LIFE’S REWARDS!

“Should I?” by Donald Witten

In my little blue ’68 Volkswagen,
heading north on I-5,
summer, 1969,
she smiled and laughed next to me.
I smiled too – I liked her –
but inside, a battle of nerves rolled.

Should I hold her hand? I thought.
What if she doesn’t want to? I worried.
What if she doesn’t like me? I considered.

But she’s smiling and laughing. I remembered.

And just like that I reached out,
took her left hand with my right,
She didn’t even look at me,
she kept right on smiling,
and her blonde hair waved across her cheek.

Her hand was soft and warm,
and her thumb moved across my palm.
An AM radio song serenaded,
and we smiled,
holding hands,

in my little blue ’68 Volkswagen,
heading north on I-5,
summer, 1969.

“Afternoon In Powell’s” by Donald Witten

From a distance I saw you across the crowded room,
sitting on a bench, reading, back to the store window,
while outside, the city moved. Your face was darkened
by the backlighting, but I could still see your kind eyes
moving across the page.

You looked like an Eddie Bauer model,
your natural beauty the same, in garden,
on a mountain, in a city bookstore.
From behind a book display, I snapped your picture,
so you will always be just feet away,
and we will always be together.

People will always see that,
if they know where to look.

“City Planning” by Robin Woolman

Scrawny arms of blackberry
stretch across this cracked
section of sidewalk
catching the hem of my jeans,
pointing out potholes in
Boonesferry.

The planners can’t tame
these blocks of town yet.
“The Gap” is a shambles
of vacated lots awaiting
neighborhood input, zoning,
design charrettes, infill
mandates, another
bond measure…

Meanwhile, scruffy kids occupy
this untidy wildness and rusted history
of their grandparents’ past.
They make mud soup, build cardboard forts,
feed feral cats, watch finches construct
homes without permits, brave thorns
for sweet, staining
blackberries.

I’m a bramble myself, bowed but sharp,
dragged here by parents: R.V. pioneers.
I’ve uprooted a few times, but always returned.
My kids did too, trailing their kids…
It’s hard to get rid of such
blackberries.

On the fancy end of town, the extra broad
sidewalks have quotes imprinted in
tidy squares like this one:

When we try to pick out anything
By itself, we find it hitched to
Everything else in the universe.

John Muir

Maybe next neighborhood meetup, I'll wander on in
with a grandkid hitched to my side and a blackberry cobbler
to share and ask:
What can it hurt?
A little unruliness, a dash of decay?
Plan for it. Plan around it.
'Cause when you tangle with
blackberries,
there will always be a thorn
in your side.

“Venus of Suburbia” by Robin Woolman

(After painting “Venus of Urbino” by Titian)

A broad-leafed tree--
a siren of luxury,
plump spring foliage amassed
on her moss-stockinged branches,
reclines on a neighbor’s
green, well-kempt lawn.

Bare roots point skyward,
crooked yet delicate,
intentionally cleansed
of the earthen clods
that pinned her to this landscape.

What event? What storm,
what scrum of muscular boys
tipped her to this new seductive
angle of repose?

Unperturbed, her glory persists:
bees hum among blossoms,
birds nest, squirrels chase spirals
around her trunk, an old dog
rests in her recumbent shade--

just another goddess
toppled in the gardens of men.