



2015

MID RIVERS REVIEW



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2015

St. Charles Community College
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VOLUME XVI

Editor
Assistant Editor
Art Editors
Readers

Cover Photo
Layout Design

VOLUME XVI

Virginia Guneyli
Christina Gant (*Coffeehouse Organizer*)
Kathleen Sanker and Alison Ouellette-Kirby
Joseph Baumann, Lindsay Brand, Bryonie Carter,
and Sarah Jones

Maggie Jackman
Thanaporn Prasobchoke and Stephen Schuknecht

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**TO CATHERINE COPELAND
AND ALL STUDENTS**

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FROM THE EDITOR

The first *Mid Rivers Review* graphic design student intern, Thanaporn Prasobchoke, was in a car accident and suffered a leg injury, among others. Through the pain, she worked. To some degree, all who worked on this issue encountered life's obstacles; however, we later identified these impediments to art as inspirations for it. We were inspired and consumed by school, family, friendship, community, injustice, birth, or mortality – without which we would have the time but no material for *Mid Rivers Review*. We did so because this issue encapsulates what is extraordinary about our time and place.

Artist, department chair, professor, wife, and mother Kathleen Sanker provided artists with the confidence and expertise they needed to publish their work, making this issue both interdisciplinary and beautiful. Also, she identified Ms. Prasobchoke as an ideal pioneering intern to collaborate with our graphic designer, Stephen Shuknecht. Stephen is a St. Charles Community College alumnus and former student of Kathleen's and mine. He is a husband and father of three.

The graphic designers had a wealth of photography and writing to typeset and lay out, in great part because of Dr. Joe Baumann. Joe returned home to St. Charles, Missouri, after finishing his doctorate in English in Louisiana. He embarked on his career at St. Charles Community College by pushing through a creative writing certificate program that resulted in the college offering more

creative writing classes. Sarah Jones, Bryonie Carter, Christy Gant, Lindsay Brand, and Jacqueline Gray collected work and read drafts of this issue. Professor and author Michael Kuelker anointed it with a powerful introduction. Together, we have given the ninth edition of *Mid Rivers Review* life.

We continue to honor poets with The James Haba Award. Poet and Professor Jim Haba, "changed the way we teach poetry," as my colleague and friend Jacqueline Gray aptly explains when she tells of the history of the award's creation. This year's winner, Dana Delibovi, fittingly, is a poet and professor. Last year's James Haba Award winner, Harleigh Heck, is the first recipient of a new award for prose, The Daniel Woodrell Award. Woodrell's poetic prose is startling and concise, imaginative and familiar. While he is internationally renowned and his work translates across cultures and generations, he belongs to Missouri. Like him, Harleigh is a Missourian whose colloquial yet poetic stories, characters, and language live and breathe.

This issue is a convergence of modes that appeal to the senses. For the first time, thanks to artist Professor Alison Ouellette-Kirby, we are honoring a contributor with The Editor's Choice Award for Visual Storytelling. The award goes to Maggie Jackman, whose photographs, the cover photo, "Balloon Travel," and "Starlit Path," celebrate ethereal and mystical aspects of everyday Missouri landscapes.

All the artwork in this issue evokes the significance of time and place – 2015, St. Charles, Missouri, a previously rural community, now widely considered a suburb of St. Louis. Sue Wolf captures the unity and divisiveness of the community just minutes across the river in Ferguson. Philip Padilla, Alison Ouellette-Kirby, Alli Keisker and Maggie Jackman convey various aspects of the relationship between people and nature in their photography. Scanning the QR code on page 52 will release the sound of Julie Varwig’s voice as she reads her poem, “Weatherman.”

The creators of issue of *Mid Rivers Review* are the heart and soul of St. Charles Community College: the students, faculty, alumni, community members, Board of Directors, staff, and readers. But none of us would even be here if not for our students. Therefore, I have chosen to dedicate this journal to St. Charles Community College students and to one in particular: Catherine Copeland. Like many of our students, she knows about gaining momentum after great loss, about how one can acquire and exhibit unimaginable strength because of (not in spite of) a painful history of powerlessness. A brave and brilliant returning learner, Catherine has said that some of her experiences as a student at St. Charles Community College saved her life, brought her “Out of the Darkness” described in her poem. She is a light to those who have cared about and heard her powerful life story. This journal (and the college that publishes it) exists because of Catherine and all of our students.

My handsome and kind husband, Bulent, and our children Nuri and Nora (named for the light they brought to us) endured moments of stress and encouraged me along. Eight-year-old Nuri asked if he could give people copies of this book when we are finished with it. He is one of so many who feel a sense of ownership and pride about *Mid Rivers Review*. It belongs to the college and those connected to it.

Those who have ushered this book into the world have done so in the spirit of what matters most to us: the power of art, words, and ideas. This college and this journal provide students and community members with access to the world. I want you to know that you are the reason we are here. You are awe-inspiring and worthy. This is your school and your journal.

- Virginia Guneyli

INTRODUCTION

A love of language is innate in humans and apparent by late infancy. But somewhere between happily babbling the syllables of Dr. Seuss and learning about the world through rhyme, repetition and image, people change and the more intricate endeavors of the word belong mostly to those of us who acquire tastes for it and respond to language with something between the sweaty glow of lovers' passion and a simple nagging sense of what's next?. It's always there, a commitment we don't remember making but always remember having.

We relish words and like to sniff 'em when they bloom. Language lights up our minds, and if we are writers, we long to hold the light close to us, focus and shine it in many directions, make the light bend if we can or reflect it against the images we erect in our mental landscapes simply so we can write what we see.

It's about being there, in that densely special place language takes us, and beholding just the right turn of phrase. We go to that place again and again when the words are good to inhabit a scene, to reacquaint ourselves with that which is strange or familiar about a character, to experience the turn, jolt or snap in the arc of a story. And if we are moved – as the scribes of *MRR 2015* so ably demonstrate – we are writing writing writing, pondering and revising, being a writing self, forever desirous and momentarily satisfied.

I invite you to the latest edition of *Mid Rivers Review* with the assurance that it

will light a fire. Read it closely and *MRR 2015* will be that thing that sits on the bookshelf with a particularized presence, a small steady radiance, reminding you of _____.

That blank is something each reader will fill in with personal choices. For me, it will be revisiting the moments of transcendence so luminously evoked in Dana Delibovi's "Washing Out a Blouse in Florence" and the intricate layers of relationships within a kitchen of "pungent greasy crispness" where a memorable family meal preparation takes place in Harleigh Heck's "Of Flesh and Raisins." Something in me recognizes the isolation and estrangement of "You Will Not Fit" and marvels at the personal voice Emma Vonbecker calls forth. I imagine the child's uncertainty as his or her parents are on the run in Sammi Wyss' spare "Innocence" – "so far this is my least favorite hotel room" – and imagine a film script. . .

The stories and poems and visuals in these pages are exquisitely wrought. They affect us with sound and sense right down to the tasty, chewable syllables (and the picture that emerges) in Vonbecker's "Lackwits they wallow and close their drifting eyes, / Gorge their pop tarts and warm their hearts with ryes." Where we are afforded multiple selections from single authors, we get an especially rich portrait of the writerly self as in the case of Callie Daniels, whose poetry captures the universal ("Karma"), the personal ("Mom and I") and the historical ("Virginia Louisa Minor").

We touch the beautiful-intangible such as the “ghost of your name” in a poem by Kyle Walsh and a millisecond of thrill-and-wonder in a skateboarder photograph by Micah Plummer. We reconsider old certainties in the unsummarizable poem (in a good way) titled “This World and Us” by Meghan O’Keefe. In another case of the sublime in the kitchen, we see the familiar in a fresh way in Mary Kane’s wonderful “The Kettle: A Sestina” where “The cookery rasped and rattled at the lady” upon the entry of a new suitor in the house; a poem where personification engorges and the self-interested cookery soon exclaims, “We’ll have no squatters on this range.”

We come into contact with the indelible-specific in Sarah Myers’ “Ferguson” especially when she writes of this galvanic local historical moment –

A pastor woman, bold,
fierce as the night’s movement, commands
to the world with her hands
in the air,
her God-like vocals, bellowing
to stop.
Stop.

Myers is describing a moment in time in the Ferguson demonstrations marred by a militarized reaction by police.

It’s a poem worthy of the best equal-rights-and-justice poems post-Ferguson 2014, concluding with the personal voice saying,

Must we stop?
And might we
start?
To join
together.

These voices and many more make up *MRR 2015* – good literature to turn to when we need to fill in the blank.

- Michael Kuelker

POETRY AND SHORT PROSE

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DANA DELIBOVI

Book of Wings

I sat on the 3-train that summer day,
stopped in the hot, smelly station, mid-way
and we rode with windows down, sweaty,
Wedged between a Walkman-wearing man
beneath the bank of underarms that ran
crackle out a “3 to Lenox,” then bray
but as it left the station, staccato
roiled an underground sirocco,
a Bible dive-bombed right into my lap.
of the woman, gasping, to my right
So I read it. Not when I got home that night,
but later, in despair, it lifted me

done with my work and thirsty for beer;
through 1985, when trains had no AC
cherishing our luck when a seat came clear.
and a woman deep into her book,
the length of straps above, I heard the PA
“Watch-a closing doors.” The train shook,
flapping, like the wings of alighting birds,
as through the open window—Smack!
“Listen honey, you betta’ read that!” came the words
who clapped her hands, then holy-crossed the air.
I probably got drunk instead,
against my will, without a prayer.

RECIPIENT
OF THE 2015
JAMES HABA
POETRY AWARD

On the Right Track | Philip Padilla



DANA DELIBOVI

Washing Out a Blouse in Florence

One summer morning, at a rust-rimmed sink,
alone in my rental at the Pension,
I washed out a peasant blouse. As the pink
of sunrise soaked the whitewashed room,
ropes of water slapped the gauzy cloth.
Olive soap bubbled through my fingers, while
that carnelian city poured a bath
of light through my window. Mile upon mile,
I had traveled from my sunless childhood.
I'd outrun the crumbling crevice at my heels,
to stand with my hands in water, to flood
with stillness in a house of ancient stone.
Soon again, I'd jump back upon the mind-wheel.
But a moment's lustrous rest—this I've known.

Townie

Then, I used to ride for hours. How I cycled
on the byways of that town, I, banished daughter on the roasting
asphalt or gravelly trails, a dirt-flecked soul verging
toward the beach, to the dunes that bristled with grass.
There, with sand in the fold of my sketchbook, I drew cartoons—
always hands with long nails, holding hypodermics.
I scribbled plays where nothing happened, in a French way.

Late in the day, I rode home. In the village, I'd watch mothers
yank the kerchiefs from the heads of their cheeky girls.

The skin of children,

better children, took on the afternoon's gold. Blondes
would toss their hair, jingle their bracelets. Hidden in my
unimportance, a sullen rider on her dusty Humber Sport,
I prowled relentless sidewalks for those tokens of love
that other families mysteriously gave each other.

A Slow Death by Capitalism 25 | Given Zane



DANA DELIBOVI

The Sari

Reeds and spinnakers,
long shadows on the beach,

summer's gallant end,
the last families on the shore.

A woman held
her fuchsia sari high aloft.

She'd swept it up
from the iridescent sand.

One arm hoisted the silk,
let it snap in the wind.

The other arm cradled her baby
— mother's hand

splayed across his crinkled eyes
to block the flying grit—

as the scarf billowed,
borderless as touch.

HARLEIGH HECK

Of Flesh and Raisins

“Hannah Marie can cook; don’t let her fool you. She plays dumb so she doesn’t have to do anything at the family holidays,” my mother said, shedding the dried orange layers of an onion over the garbage can. I turned on the faucet and let the bits of dirt wash off of the mushrooms. She moved to the butcher block, onion in hand. “She skipped out on her chores to flirt with the neighbor’s boy when it was her turn.”

“You’ve told me,” I replied. The potatoes sizzling on the stove drowned out my voice. She chopped the onion into pieces to sauté.

“Me and Cassandra Leigh did her chores. If they weren’t done, all the siblings would get in trouble. We did them so no one would get in trouble by the time we made dinner. Except when I stayed home for a week after I moved out, then it was just me taking care of everyone.” She had mentioned my grandfather many times throughout my childhood and teenage years; I knew by her voice that she was leading up to yet another story of him.

“When was that?” I asked, this story was new to me; she’d never told me this before. I peeled the outer layer of the mushroom off, revealing the soft, velvety flesh beneath. I dug my nail under the lip of the cap, just shy of the gills, and ripped away the flesh like a painful hangnail. It was a technique I had learned at the grocery store where I worked. It would keep mushrooms from browning in the seafood case before I filled them with week-old stuffing and shoved them on ice next to fluorescent orange crab dip. Now I did it to take off the dirt, dents, and bruises that had occurred before we bought them. I imagined mushrooms traveled the same way pears did, jiggling within their styrofoam and cellophane packages, bumping into one another from the jerky turns of the mushroom truck.

“Right after daddy died, Mom and Pete went to Florida. The day they came back I made dinner ‘cause they wanted to sit down and tell us all something.” My step-grandfather, Pete unknowingly gave a wonderful impersonation of an English bulldog. My grandmother had bestowed the title of “dumber than dirt” to me at a young age, though loved my red hair enough to dye her own hair clown red, a poor imitation of my own color.

I popped each one of the mushroom stems out of the caps, leaving just the heads to be sliced and chopped. “Cynthia June and Bob were there.”

My mother always called her siblings by their first and middle names. She had ten siblings; it probably made it easier to remember. “So was Hannah Marie and Bruce, Cassandra Leigh and John, Tom Henry, Nolan Patrick, Susan May, Michelle Kaye, Cookie Dee and Tanya Jean. Not Hellen, though, she was in the Air Force then.”

“Did you want the stems?” I interrupted. She stared at the separated stems and caps that laid on the marble cutting board before me.

“Doesn’t matter. Might as well throw them away now,” she said, cupping one hand and sliding the cut onion into it before stepping over to the hot skillet. I was grateful that she wouldn’t use them; the stems gathered slime and decomposed the quickest.

I picked up her steak knife, pressing the blade into the caps, piercing the meat of the mushroom and hitting the marble below. I didn’t want to disappoint my mother, so my cuts had to be precise and quick. Moments passed as my mother stared down at the onions sizzling into the pan, seeping their sweetness into the yellow potatoes. The kitchen was filled with the pungent, grassy crispness.

“Well, go on,” I said. She turned towards me.

“They were over three hours late. Just like that. Remember there was no cell phones”

“I know.” If I hadn’t had one until I was thirteen, chances are they barely had landlines in their farmhouse.

“So we ate and had cleared the table by the time they came home. They went to a restaurant instead.” I carried the floppy bits of fungus over the counter behind my mother and sprinkled the chopped bits into the pan, finalizing our mound of fried potatoes that would eventually ooze grease onto my toast and scrambled eggs on my dinner plate.

I scraped the browned bits from the bottom of the cast iron skillet, rolling them in the heat with the pancake turner while my mother shuffled to the refrigerator. I could barely hear my father’s airy laugh over the sizzling of the potatoes. I glanced over to him through the haze of the cooking, as he watched Steve Harvey putting his own comedy shtick into Family Feud.

“Mom and Pete sat us all down and told us: ‘We’re going to be living together.’ Pete went on some speech about how he’s wanted to make my mom happy for some time and the rest of the family were fine with it. Some of them said, ‘Okay, dad,’ right afterwards too.” My grandmother was found in Pete’s bed the night my grandfather died nearly three decades ago.

Pete and my grandfather were friends, yet Pete thought nothing of sleeping with his friend's wife before and after he passed away. I still think it's odd that the tractor trailer didn't see him, and his pickup truck was smashed perfectly underneath the wheels. "I guess they were smart to kiss up, because then they could stick together," she said.

My mother had never liked Pete, and I knew that she didn't trust him after she had looked on the ground of Pete's computer room and found old army papers stating that he had been the center of numerous sexual misconduct charges. That and he allowed his teenage daughter to walk around the house naked in front of him before my grandmother, aunts and uncles moved in with him, and even sleep in the same bed. To this day, we have no idea where his daughter is, but she's the only step-sister my mom has.

I grabbed seven eggs from the tan holder in the fridge and lined them up on the other wooden cutting board's groove. One by one I tapped the eggs on the counter, splitting them apart with my fingers so they would crack evenly. No eggshells would fall from my hands. Mom turned to me, gripping the corner of the butcher block table that acted as our island counter.

"I'm exhausted," she told me. Seven years ago a tick bite gave her a disease that slowly ate away at her leg veins. She no longer drove, and the pain kept her awake. She told my grandfather - on my dad's side - that she had raisins in her, and no amount of medicine or water would make her veins turn to plump tight grapes again.

"I got this. You relax," I told her, grabbing a fork and whisking two percent milk into the eggs. I made them like she would, even though I preferred them dryer.

"No, I'll finish dinner." I couldn't tell if she was stubborn or she just didn't want to sit from antsiness.

"What did you say to them?"

"To who?" she asked.

"Your mom and Pete," my dad finished before I could. I hadn't the slightest notion that he was listening in on the conversation, but my mom turned to him instead of me.

"Mom and Pete? I asked both of them, 'Couldn't you at least wait until he was cold?' And they told me I was no longer welcome in their house," she said. I poured the eggs into the egg pan. With a wave of crackling they already started to turn white. I poked them with the green silicon spatula, using the metal one would have scraped the pan.

(Continued pg 21)



“I didn’t just lose my father. I lost my whole family that day.” She heaved the skillet filled with potatoes away from the stove onto a blue octagonal honeycomb-patterned pot warmer. My stomach turned as I stared at the honeycomb pattern; it reminded me of tiny holes filled with ants. I looked away.

“Three weeks later, My friend Tucker told me we needed to talk. Tom Henry called him and told him that Mom and Pete were trying to have me committed to an insane asylum because daddy died.” I poured shredded cheddar onto the gooey eggs solidifying in the pan. I knew this was both of my parents’ second marriages, but neither of them spoke about their ex-spouses. I scooped the eggs into a measuring cup and stuck the spatula in them, carrying the eggs so they could be splayed onto plates in even portions. Mom got butter, toast and her homemade jelly out to go with the meal, while I sat down. Three jars sat before me. “I didn’t know what to do, until Tucker told me who was legally in charge of committing me. If Mom, Pete, and a few of my siblings signed papers they could have me put away because they had legal rights over me still. But if I had a spouse, he could stop them.”

I read the sharpie marker labels on the canning lids, strawberry jam, - for only my dad since both my mother and I were allergic - peach preserves, and my favorite of the bunch, red raspberry. The raspberry jelly was clear, like liquefied rubies, polished with fine cloths and boiling bath water, as my mother called it. It was boiling, just not from the tub.

She would simmer the fruit, mashing it into one of her many stock pots on the stove before straining the jelly three or four times through different gauges of cloth that turned pink from the berries’ pigments. She added copious amounts of sugar and pectin, then boiled them twice to make them seal. If the jars did not make a pop noise and vacuum seal the lids, the jelly would have to be eaten immediately or pitched. Some of my relatives - Uncle Tom and his fiancée, Carrie - ate the jelly whole with just a spoon. I smoothed a small lump upon buttered toast.

“I only had about a week’s notice until legal action was taken. And it took Tucker two days to convince me to marry him.” I knew my mother had made up and spoken to her mother, only to fight once again and start the process over many times over the years. It’s why I had some contact with my grandparents, though sparse. I knew the pain and unforgiving confusion my mother had been through. I could not feel remorse for the past. Even though our grudge was too high for them ever to reach. I had less of a grudge for her siblings - my aunts, namely - who were wrought with the guilt of wanting their mother’s love, at any cost. Everyone wanted their mother to love them. Few on my mother’s side have ever felt it.

I had to wait until the toast had cooled, turning the surface into a soft, wet towel-like texture before applying the jelly or else it would be fruitless, literally.

My mom canned salsa, green beans and tomatoes in the same manner. Though her favorite jarred food - which she never made nor told me what it entailed - was called "The End of the Garden," the kind like her mother, and her grandmother made. Someday, I suppose, I would make it too when I learned what it was.

"Carrie is still riding my ass to make up with mother. I'm sorry, but Pete, while he may make my mom happy, is an asshole. If Franklin hadn't been there Christmas Day, he would have hit me with his cane." My mother never liked calling my father by his middle name, Eugene, because of his family calling him 'Genie' so she instead said his whole first name, Franklin. He was my dad and we called him such when he wasn't around, but because after twenty-two years he still wasn't used to being a father and didn't respond when I called him "Dad," my mom called him by name.

"I thought that was Aunt Cassandra?" I asked carefully selecting only the crunchier potatoes from the plate, the ones slightly translucent with grease, the chunks of ambrosia.

"No, no, that was at Cynthia June's funeral. Pete said he'd rather see Cassandra Leigh in the casket than Cynthia June. And she said only if she saw Pete in there first. He raised his cane but didn't do it." I chewed the eggs, blocking out Steve Harvey's laugh through his chicklet teeth on the television. "Mother said just about the same thing to me at Nolan Patrick's as well. 'It should be you instead of Nolan in there.' I wish she would have just backhanded me instead."

Being backhanded was a normal part of my tenacious and sarcastic mother's childhood, and sometimes, she was also smacked. The difference between being backhanded and smacked was significant. She confronted my grandmother about who was the father of the youngest five siblings, and my grandmother smacked her, once for asking and twice because of the shame of the unspoken answer. My grandfather asked my mother never to ask again. He loved his wife enough to sign his name on the last five birth certificates, even though he knew they hadn't had sex in years. My mother's questions, and her very existence, would not let my grandmother forget my grandfather's love.

"When me and Tom Henry had to identify daddy's body, he didn't look like him at all. He didn't even look human. But Tom Henry had a much softer backhand when he had to calm me down. I kept saying, 'It's not daddy!', and he smacked me so hard I thought I might faint."

"Didn't your mother faint at Nolan's funeral?" My dad asked.

"Franklin, she faked it. She did the same thing at Cynthia June's funeral," my mom said through tiny mouthfuls of rye toast.

I remembered running to get my mother after my Uncle Tom had told me that someone fainted. By then the show was over and my grandmother was fine, especially once they offered to get her an ambulance. My grandmother was one for acting, she loved attention, and if all the eyes weren't upon her there'd be hell to pay. If she had taken care of her teeth and taken care not to marry a misogynist, she might have made a career of it.

"That sucked too. Having to drive them from Highway Double D to Aunt Cynthia's, God knows how many times in the course of a day," I said.

"You know they chose to go out to eat when we told them Cynthia June was getting close to passing?" My aunt had passed away a few years prior, bringing the family together in a solemn final few gatherings. It's how I grew closer to a few of my aunts, but not all of them. Everyone had helped clean her house, as she was bedridden from cancer. She had four cats, and my uncle let them use the carpeting as a litter box. "Mom's been calling me again recently."

"And you answered?" I asked. My mother nodded.

"She acts like nothing happened. I think it was me asking about Tanya Jean that got her started again."

"She wants something from you again doesn't she? What is it, yard work?" my dad asked. Evidently my mother wasn't finished talking as she jutted her lip forward in irritation."No. She just asked me how I was. Three times of course," she replied once she had calmed down. My grandmother had Alzheimer's, and Pete refused treatment for her ever since she started showing signs, insisting that she was fine. Instead he fed her twisted toxic versions of truth and lies that favored certain members of the family depending on who pitied him the most.

She could remember the older memories, but nothing new was coming in, aside from what Pete wanted her to know. I sighed, content and full of eggs, fried potatoes, and toast.

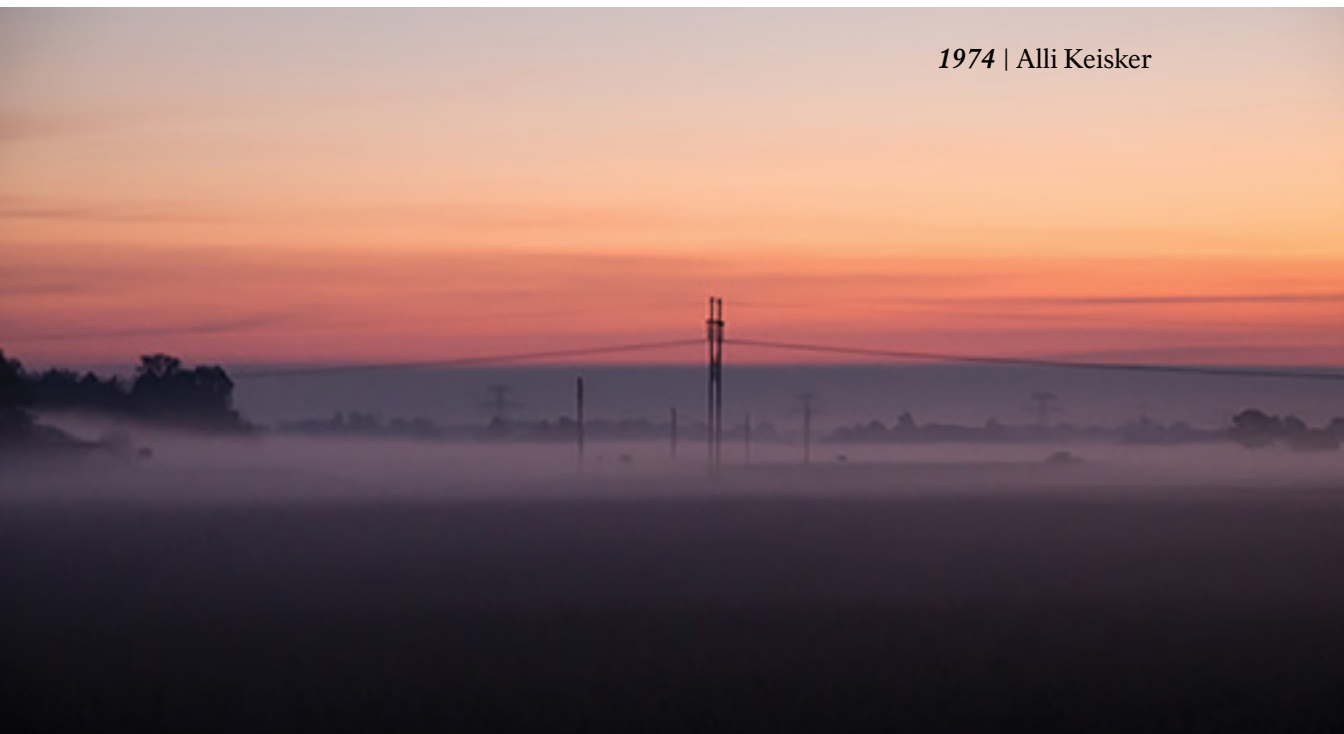
We all sat silent as the final round of Family Feud played; the family had nine out of ten answers for the timed questions showing, and less than twenty points were needed. They were three shy of the two-hundred points that was needed to gain a new car. They were so close to winning, but I knew they would never own the car. How many taxes would they have to pay, or how much paperwork would they have to fill out? The same car had been offered for three weeks in a row to them, yet they kept throwing out the least intelligent family members. They kept repeating their mistakes for everyone to see.

"I'm going to lay down," my mother said, staring at her plate.

Her gaze was filled with exhaustion and lack of sleep. I knew she was tired from the disease that ate at her every day; tired of lifting her legs that she constantly wanted to lop off with my father's craftsman saw. I lifted her plate and took it over to the sink that still held the mushroom stems in it, waiting for compost pile just outside.

RECIPIENT OF THE 2015 DANIEL WOODRELL AWARD FOR PROSE

1974 | Alli Keisker



HARLEIGH HECK

Restoration

Scribbled all over, pages torn out
cover ripped, water damage
and many pages filled with doubt,
another book taken advantage.
Cut up with scissors
that I had handed you.
Scars showing up like tiny wars
upon freckled and rosy hues.
‘Thought I’d be condemned
and sold off to auction.
Perhaps all of this stemmed
from my spine’s deconstruction.
My story was no longer pretty,
The words covered and rotten,
As I sat on a shelf stared at with pity,
My binding’s stitches would tauten.
I was not saved, instead renewed.
Cover to cover my pages turned
from prefix to where I would conclude.
I am something new to be learned.
Slowly, the scribbles and shame
were faded away by care
and new confidence was gained
as my pages were repaired.
I’d found my eraser
the one who could undo
All the lines wrought by a tracer
and made me new.
I didn’t need my pages to be removed
I just felt beautiful once more.
My theories and existence proved
I am a legend of literary lore.



Flying Words | Rachel Pogue

HARLEIGH HECK

You're Late

Loudly my boot heels kissed
the stony ground beneath me
grinding against the rock and schist
echoing into the grass and tree.

The gravel had melded into two,
worn away by wind and wonders,
I watched the way the birds flew,
Into the gray together and then asunder.

The cold had bit my cheek,
And the ground turned uneven,
I stumbled, my legs turning weak,
There in the distance stood the beacon.

A grand palace of warmth and comfort
Awaited a line of cars as far and I can see,
Straight and narrow a simple arrangement formed,
Everyone had arrived, I the only absentee.

The festivities had begun without further ado,
Not waiting for my arrival, late as it was,
It was a miracle I had pulled through,
With the car in pieces and my face wrapped in gauze.

The doors closed against the winter gale,
I quickened my pace, my boots stuck in loam,
Relief in my breath as I ran the trail,
For I knew I'd made it safely home.

EMMA VONBECKER

Do Not

If you think that you can add up my mistakes
and call me equal to the scarlet gals on the corner
or the scar-faced strangers on the curb
you should know that my heart runs deeper than that.

If you have taken me at face value, take again:
because you cannot size me up the way you do your dinner date.
I flow too many ways, I am the Rich Delta that the poor man's poetry
could have warned you of had you only grasped it sooner.



EMMA VONBECKER

You Will Not Fit

“You don’t fit in”,
people told you after your outburst that night.
And now, all your life
you never fit in anywhere.

I was younger; thirteen
when you tried to fit into an attitude
that you had formed when people told you
that you didn’t fit in.
I remember in Sunday School
you were put in the “naughty chair” continuously
but they could never keep you there,
because you just didn’t fit.
Your limbs poured over the armrests
and your feet clipped on the edges of the other kids stoops,
trying to fit yourself into a place more suitable for your mind.

The judge knew you wouldn’t fit in a cold prison cell,
he could tell by the way your clothes seemed to hang off your body
as if they just didn’t fit.
So he condemned you to probation and community service.
They took away your license
and forced you into the shape of isolation.
But he didn’t realize
that you wouldn’t even fit there.

I watched you in all of this and I never understood
the way you twisted and turned
and yet did not fit in.
I watched people take you
and like children,
attempt to shove your abnormal shape
into the respective holes.

(Continued)

Circle, square, triangle
Circle, square, triangle.
Maybe they didn't know that they were hurting you.

At seventeen I watched you
interacting with cookie-cutter faces
and I could see you spilling out of their orbits everyday.
They would tell you to be
and you would not be
because you were.

You noticed me then
and maybe because I didn't fit either.
Only you noticed the way my bones stuck out
and the way my heart encased itself in my ribcage
and maybe you noticed the way my smile shut people out
and maybe I noticed the way your smile
never did reach your eyes.

So neither of us fit
but I was better at it than you
and people would always comment
on how well I fit on your arm
thinking, that maybe the way your arm draped over my shoulders
or the way I conversed shyly with everyone you introduced me to
would somehow help you fit in better.

We did not fit in
and we did not fit together
as well as we had hoped.
But we tried, just as they had,
to fit ourselves into each other.

You told me then, "you will fit in",
that you were the growth blocking my way.

But you're gone and I still don't fit
and I think you smile to think of it
and we think, that maybe
our future selves will learn to fit in together.

But it may just be,
that your future self will never fit
and secretly you smile at this.
Maybe one day, you will have a daughter
and she will see, as I did,
the way you've been crammed into small spaces.
She and your wife, who is not me,
will watch as you are placed into your coffin
and they will see, that you do not fit
and they will wonder if you ever did.

EMMA VONBECKER

A Party

Lackwits they wallow and close their drifting eyes,
Gorge their pop tarts and warm their hearts with ryes.
Once forgotten, the purpose of the night,
their ales will leave them lacking any sight.
Look, they lie in corners empty-- ah! Oh thoughtless groups.
There is a fire burning and no one sings
for water, water! and so no water he or she brings.
A boy is in the bathtub -- must he die
By our in-humane society?
No, no; A gaggle takes his arm
Drags him through the door and on! Swarm,
The little minded man, pulled from a perilous bath,
Stumbling across the rug, vomits a mysterious path.
Wake up! take sanity by the hair
There's a girl in that tree if you even care
A white sheet in the wind, ah me! Now in the bushes
To the neighbors and everyone pushes.
My friends! Their coats sit lost. Oh well.
Where do we live? Who knows? Who can tell?
Excuse me -- I am over here! Now over there!
Where do I live? I must ask, it's only fair!
I still cannot tell, please let my sight stop teasing
He lives in Malibu, might that be more pleasing.

Forged Heart

I remember the first boy I kissed after you.
I wish I hadn't.

As he was moving over me I thought about you
and how these were not your hands nor your lips
and how he didn't know how to navigate my body
into the familiar orbit of limbs that I had come to know,
How to trace my face with his hand like he meant it
while looking into my "fucking beautiful green eyes".
He didn't know what color my eyes were
but his obligations told him I was beautiful
and I have never felt less so.

I tried to breathe, but I couldn't help but choke
on the scent that was not yours.
I would know, because I've kept your shirt
behind my pillow for some months now.
It's starting to smell like me, but that's okay,
because some days I still smell you in my skin.

He probably mistook my cringing for a smile
but you never had to wonder.
I didn't want to look, even in the darkness
and maybe that made it easier,
because I can scarcely remember his face.
I do remember yours the day I left though,
and I remember that I had sworn this time,
I would not waste myself on careless company.
That after you, I would not rush to fill the void.

But I sit here
and can't recall the color of his eyes.

EMMA VONBECKER

Road Trips

The car shakes in the wind.
I'm sitting in the passenger seat,
I have not showered in two days.
This trip was worth it though.
I sit quietly, listening to music
and my friends gentle voices singing along.
We are headed home,
but this feels like a home that I won't find elsewhere.

Perspective

What is he thinking,
When he casts his eyes
Down to the floor
For only half a second.

Where does she go,
When she stares
Into her hands
Folded so neatly in her lap.

I wonder
As I laugh and look at my feet
And I smile into my hands,
if I will meet them
In this oblivion.



Inchworm | Laney Janicke

EMMA VONBECKER

You Told Me Not to Worry

“Don’t worry about me,”

I hold you

in my arms

as you shake.

“Don’t worry about me,”

We’re holding hands, laughing

and my fingers

trace the scars on your forearms.

“Don’t worry about me,”

You sit across the room,

with hardly a glance

your eyes tired and glossy.

“Don’t worry about me,”

you say my name,

it’s carved

into your thigh.

“Don’t worry about me,”

it’s 1 A.M. in the ER waiting room

I’m shaking

my eyes are tired

and I’m worrying about you.

On Sex and Apathy

I've held many hands in mine, traced many palms
and twisted many cigarettes in between my fingers
contemplating the many prints that have aligned with mine.

I've graced open mouths with a language I am not even fluent in
and sipped from the rim of glasses that do not help me see
any better the words that I fantasized from ghostly mouths.

I've bent my spine inside out for pleasures I did not experience
and wallowed in the smoke houses where I am to be enlightened
but I don't think I'm any closer to "beating the system."

I've curled my body into a mold that does not deflect
I've contorted my mind into a silent vacuum
I've taught myself
that I was meant for this.

EMILY JOSHU

Angel in a Treehouse

Suspended from school and grounded yet again for her third fight this month, Peri spent her afternoon locked in her room, where she could escape from the worried creases in her father's forehead and her mother's bulbous, pregnant belly. With Harry Potter playing on marathon, she lay stomach first on the itchy carpet, feet in the air. The rumble, like that of a giant's belly, from an incoming storm brewed from the cracked window, and a gentle breeze paged through her sketchbook. Favorite blue pen between her chewed fingernails, she sketched anything and everything. Giants laying in flowerbeds, dragons drinking tea, angels with milk mustaches. Lots of angels over the past three months.

On a day like this, Grandpa would open the windows wide and breathe in the smell of spring rain. Even with his crackly joints, he would lay with Peri across the floor and draw little rain gremlins in the corners of the pages. He would turn on CNN for the news update and tell Peri to stay eight years old forever, because being a grown-up is harder than it looks. He'd poke the tip of Peri's nose with his wrinkly finger and say that bright-eyed little girls like her could make the baddest bad guy fall to his knees.

On a day like this, she would pull her out her box of disguises. Grandpa's hands would tremble as he clumsily placed bows in Peri's auburn hair, and he'd struggle to fit his feet through a pair of knee-high, rainbow socks. They were just like hers, and he always said how pretty they were. Carefully, she would place his military cap atop his lack of hair, then top it off with a tiara that only he could wear. Though she didn't know the words, the two of them would spend a day like this humming to Frank Sinatra with the rhythm of the rain.

But now Grandpa's laugh lived within his mementos atop her dresser. His military portrait from Korea, stacks of scratched records, a pocket version of poetry from a man named Whitman that Peri couldn't even understand. Looking down at her, it was almost as if he was with her.

The gears in Peri's head stopped turning as another gust of wind blew her polka dot skirt. Staring out the window, her eyes wandered to the blackening clouds as she wondered who had made God angry. A whistle in the wind circled around her like an old tune, like a message.

Consumed by curiosity, she gathered all of her strength, pushed the window up, climbed out the first floor and ran toward the property's wooded sanctuary as she often did after being grounded.

The stomp of her feet on the ground and the rustling of the leaves made Peri feel as if she could fly. Stopping at the tree that held her treehouse, hardly used since the funeral, Peri stretched her thin arms to her sides, waiting for the breeze to sweep her up to the clouds.

"Thrusters, activate!" she called to the wind, hoping that maybe she could really fly like a falcon, or Iron Man. She could see the white puffs from behind the tree branches; they weren't so far away. Though she could hear the words of the wind, Peri's ears perked up when she heard something else. Actual whistling from what seemed like an actual person. Her heart shivered inside as she climbed up to the treehouse. That's when she saw him.

A young man, dressed in dirt and blood-stained fatigues from head to toe, stood in the corner of the treehouse, whistling a tune that Peri often heard in her sleep: Track Eight from Frank Sinatra's Greatest Hits. Built tall and slim, like a noodle that had been working out, his yellowed teeth were revealed in a charming smile. He had short, black hair, like Peri's father, and a pair of grey eyes that perfectly matched hers. It was a face that she had seen in photographs and old films, a younger version of a face that she missed so deeply. The name on his fatigues read "Private H. Masters."

Struggling to pick her jaw up from the ground, Peri's words caught in her throat. She didn't know whether she should laugh or cry or run away. "G-Grandpa?" she muttered.

The man knelt to her level, pushing a strand of her hair behind her ear. "There go those gears turning again," he said like he always used to when he caught Peri thinking. His hands were cold and rough, just as she remembered.

He held on to her hand as they both sat on the floor, and as she ran her fingers over his dirt-encrusted wedding ring, she felt as if she had been wrapped in a freshly dried blanket. Though he still smelled like vanilla and old cigars, he looked so tired and like he had seen so much.

“Grandpa,” Peri said, almost breathlessly, “where have you been?”

“Korea,” he said, his hand resting over hers. “Just came back.”

“How was it?” Leaning forward, Peri propped her chin on her hands like she always did when Grandpa told one of his famous stories. “What did you do?”

He breathed a long sigh and sat cross-legged. “It’s a mess over there, like a whole bunch of spilled milk. No one wants to fix it, but we have to.”

Peri imagined it, an entire country drowning in spilled milk, and soldiers like Grandpa holding giant mops.

“But, I’ll tell you, Peri,” he continued, cracking a smile, “as long as I had my buddy Robbie with me, it wasn’t a big deal. He made it all seem easier.”

“Did he come with you?”

Grandpa’s eyes wandered past Peri. “He got, um,” he stopped when he saw that Peri’s eyes were locked with his. “I don’t see him much anymore.”

Though she wanted to say more, her words fell short. “Oh.” As her thoughts drifted from Grandpa’s friend, she caught sight of his faded wedding ring. “You’re married, Grandpa?”

As he fiddled with his ring, his smile, reflecting the sunlight, stretched too big for his face. “Got married a couple years back. Small wedding; we couldn’t afford much. Mary wanted to get married before deployment, just in case-” He cut himself off as if the words escaped him. Biting his lip, he stared at his ring.

“What?” Peri asked.

He shook his head and tried to smile. “Nothing, kiddo.” As he leaned against the wall of the treehouse, he shut his eyes and grit his teeth, putting a hand to his thigh.

“What’s wrong?” Peri scooted to his side, gears in her mind turning a mile a minute.

Shaking his head, he put his hand up. “Just my leg.”

Peri shot up to her feet. "I can get you something for that!" But as she turned to head into the woods, he caught her arm and pulled her back to the floor. It was then when Peri caught sight of something incredible. As the corners of Grandpa's mouth turned up, the lines in his face deepened right before her eyes. As if by magic, strands of his hair fell to the ground and replaced themselves with grey patches. His belly rounded out, leaving him a bit softer under a white, button-up shirt. The lines on his forehead deepened, just like her father's had begun to.

"W-what," Peri choked out, her words tying themselves in knots.

He let out a chuckle. "What did you expect?"

For the first time in what felt like ages, a sparkling, genuine smile crept across Peri's face. Grandpa sat cross-legged on the ground, humming a tune to himself. Peri took a seat across from him, words escaping her, keeping her mouth shut.

Grandpa's laughter bellowed through the trees and was carried by the breeze. "Wow, I'm shocked!" he exclaimed with a gleam in his eyes.

Peri felt an eyebrow raise. "What do you mean?"

"You're not talking," he said, pushing a strand of Peri's hair behind her ear. "Peri Masters is quiet for the first time in eight years."

"Grandpa!" Giving him a playful shove, Peri giggled until her stomach hurt as he pulled her into his lap. The greying whiskers on his face tickled her as he planted a kiss on her porcelain cheek.

A wide, yellowed smile crept across Grandpa's face. "There's that laugh!" In a way, it was just like any other afternoon with him.

Crawling out from his lap, Peri grabbed her bin of dress-up clothes from the corner, the ones they used to play with every weekend. A chuckle came from between Grandpa's chapped lips as he caught sight of the pile of pink, sequined fabric. "Well, make me pretty."

This Grandpa had more hair than Peri was used to, which worked to her advantage as she carefully placed an assortment of bows in it. The tickle of her fingers through his hair made his ease radiate, and for once, Peri felt that, too.

"So," he said, clearing his throat as she ran a pink brush through his hair. "A little birdy told me you got suspended."

Peri's grin flattened into a frown, and she got that sinking feeling in her chest like whenever Mom talked too much about the new baby. "Maybe."

Grandpa's expression hardened a bit. "C'mon, Peri."

Prying her gaze from his, she picked at her fingernails. Almost to herself, she said, "It's not a big deal."

"What happened?"

Remembering that Grandpa never, ever let things go, she sighed and shrugged her shoulders. "Stacy Miller called me a weirdo because I dress like a clown and I like Batman, not Barbie."

He leaned closer, a gentle look in his tired eyes. "And?"

"I punched her."

Shaking his head, Grandpa reached into the bin and placed a frilly hat atop his granddaughter's head. "Well, she shouldn't have said that. Kids like that are just too serious for third grade; too much vanilla in their diets."

Peri giggled at the thought of Stacy being forced to eat tofu and plain yogurt all day, every day.

"But," Grandpa continued, shaking some glitter from his hair. "Sometimes bad things are going to happen."

"I know," she said matter-of-factly, thinking about the funeral.

He tried to smile, even though he seemed to sense Peri's pain from afar. "You're young," he reminded her, "but when you get to my age, you realize something: things like that are just a tiny bit of your life. That Miller girl is a tiny fraction in the big book of Peri." He held up two fingers, a small space between them. "And before you know it, she'll be nothing."

Drawing her knees to her chest, she blew a strand of hair from her face. "But she won't leave me alone. She's like a million bad things all at once. She keeps looking at me weird and calling me names and picking on me. I wish she and her stupid face would just go away."

Grandpa rested his calloused hand on hers. "Sometimes it feels like that, I know. You should've been there when the plant laid me off. I didn't know what to do with myself. Rent piled up.

I'd stay up all night." Leaning against the wall, he stretched his legs out and took a deep breath. "But you know, it was just a small part of my life. Things go by much quicker than you think." He pulled a necklace from the box and snapped it around Peri's neck, the plastic jewel in the middle glimmering in the sunlight.

When Peri peered up at him, it happened again. His hair was fading to a shade of grey that matched his eyes, and his back became hunched over like a snail's shell. Deep wrinkles etched themselves into his face like a stick in the sand.

With a glassy film over her eyes, Peri wrapped her arms around the aging man's neck and they stayed like that for what she wished could be forever. But in a split second, her eyes popped open and she sat with her arms stretched toward nothing.

"Down here!" bellowed a weathered voice from below. Looking out the treehouse window, Peri saw a familiar sight. She saw the same old man standing at the foot of a creek that ran through the woods, as if he never left.

Peri bounded down the treehouse ladder and plowed into his stomach. He let out a stressed breath, but squeezed Peri as tightly as he could manage. "There she is."

Pulling away, Peri saw the white-haired, wrinkly Grandpa that she knew best. A slight tremor in his hands was kept steady when Peri held on to them, and he never frowned.

"Hey, Grandpa."

Without saying a word, he ruffled her hair with his free hand, and the two of them walked the perimeter of the creek. "You know," he finally began, "you need to stop getting older every day."

She giggled, eyes dancing as she gazed up at him. "You always say that!"

They led each other to a tree beside the creek, and Peri helped him take a seat beside her. Leaning her head into his chest, she watched all the different fish of all different colors. She watched the dragonflies guarding the creek from above, like guardian angels.

"The dragonflies are protecting the fish," Peri said, her finger struggling to follow the little creatures.

Grandpa chuckled and folded his hands together. "Maybe so." Letting out a strained cough, Grandpa leaned forward and covered his mouth with his hands.

His coughs shook the woods, causing the fish to swim to the other end, and as Peri tried to help him, he struggled to get out a breath.

“Are you okay?”

When he was able to compose himself, he cleared his throat and shook his head. “Not really.”

As she looked at him more closely, Peri noticed a lack of color in his normally rosy cheeks. She noticed the droop in his old eyes, and the unsteady rhythm of his chest moving up and down. She noticed what she hadn’t seen the first time, the things he tried to cover up, the things Mom and Dad made sure not to mention.

“You’re sick,” she said, almost to herself. Out of the corner of her eye she saw him nod, his eyes shut. “But you can get better, right?”

Grandpa rested an unsteady hand on Peri’s shoulder. He glanced at the wedding ring he had worn since 1952 and sighed. “Well, you know I’m getting pretty old.”

Peri knew what that meant. Trying to curl into herself, she shut her eyes to keep the tears away. She placed her hands over her ears and buried her head into her knees.

“Peri,” Grandpa coaxed, reaching his head toward her. “I-”

“La, la, la!” she shouted, cutting him off. “I can’t hear you! I can’t hear you!”

“Peri!” Grandpa took hold of her and pried Peri’s hands from her ears. “Hey, now,” he said, running his pruned fingers down Peri’s spine. “I’m not scared of what’s coming. Why should you be scared?”

Sniffling, she refused to meet his gaze. “Why aren’t you scared?”

He shrugged and cracked a smile. “I’ve done everything I can do. I’ve got a lot waiting for me. I’ve got that old hound dog of mine, I’ve got Robbie and a bunch of guys from the unit,” he stopped and peered at his ring. “And I know you don’t remember her, but I’m sure Grandma Mary’s waiting, too.” He lifted his hand to wipe her tears and push a strand of loose hair away.

Peri’s words caught in her throat. “But, but,” she stammered, “but I need you, too.”

“Hey,” Grandpa coaxed, lifting her chin so they could see each other.

Through glassy eyes, Peri looked at him and really saw him, not only as her grandfather, but as a soldier and a man. “Listen to me, kiddo. I’ll be fine, and you’ll be fine, too. I promise you that. You just keep your head high, because that wild little mind of yours is going to change the world one day.”

But she couldn’t imagine the world without him. She couldn’t imagine the world all by herself, abandoned like a broken toy. “I-I,” she stammered. “I am scared.”

“Of what?” he asked softly.

“Everything!” she cried. “I’m scared of all the kids at school, a-and Mom’s new baby.” Sniffing and shutting her eyes, she sighed. “Who’s going to play with me? Who’s going to tell me old stories and play dress-up with me?” She almost felt her heart dropping into her stomach. “I’m all by myself.”

Grandpa held onto her as closely as he could, resting his chin atop her head and pulling her face into his chest. “You’re never, ever alone, sweetheart. I can promise you that.”

Though there was so much Peri wanted to say, so much that she hadn’t said the first time, all she could do was wrap her arms around him and grab hold of whatever was left of him. But soon he was gone, and she was left sitting cross-legged in the middle of the woods. He had gone the way of the wind, whistling to the tune of his favorite records.

After sitting by the creek for what felt like forever, the world around her felt clearer, and not just because the moisture behind her eyes had begun to dissolve. Though she was eight years old and could make up anything, Peri knew that Grandpa wasn’t coming back. And maybe that was okay. If she couldn’t bring him back, she could at least be like a bit more like him. Peri picked herself up and forced a strained smile, just for herself. Peering up at the clouds, she could feel Grandpa’s droopy eyes on her and smell his scent that lingered in the air. He had vanished, but she still felt his hands on her shoulders, almost like a push. A push toward walking again, then running, and then flying, like he always believed she would.



One by One | Brenda Kearns

CALLIE DANIELS

Kharma

I have lived long enough to know
That if it goes
It will trace the arc of a circle or maybe an ellipse
Putting it on a collision course with its origin
It might vaporize and become a cloud
Only to send the droplets crashing back down
But sure as you and I are standing here with love or despise
If it goes, it will come back
Around
The evil done will find its way back to punish
Maybe not today or tomorrow
Possibly not in this life
But surely it comes
It knows the names and secret places
No shadow or dark night will hide the deserving
When it comes back
Around
And if there is some sweet something
That has lifted a chin or unknowingly carried a burden
That has given hope or shared His Word
Then that too will find its way back
It arrives in a cool summer breeze
Or the laughter of a child
Or on a shady ride with friends
And causes the corners of your lips to curve
And your arms to reach high and receive your prize
When it comes back
Around



Beads | Christina Gant

CALLIE DANIELS

Mom and I

I love you
I love you more
I love you best
I love you most
I love you as big as Fort Smith
I love you as big as Arkansas
I love you the size of the Earth
I love you the distance to the Moon
I love you as big as the Universe
I love you a googol
I love you to infinity
I love you more...

CALLIE DANIELS

Virginia Louisa Minor

Your failure is my victory

Virginia Louisa Minor

Smugly dismissed by Christian clergy

Virginia Louisa Minor

Born in Virginia 1824

West to St. Louis during the Civil War

Virginia Louisa Minor

The quartet sang “Nearer, my God, to Thee”

At your request, no minister spoke officially

Now peaceful rest in Bellefontaine Cemetery

Virginia Louisa Minor

Rights pioneer, they say

Support for Union soldiers from the Ladies Union Aid Society

Then organized the Woman Suffrage Association of Missouri

How could legislators reject the idea explicitly?

“Citizenship does not necessarily confer the right of suffrage,”

The supreme court determined unanimously

Virginia Louisa Minor!

And the debate shifted to the black man

So efforts now toward the national endorsement

of the Women’s Suffrage Movement

Virginia Louisa Minor

Twenty-six years after your death

America ratified the 19th Amendment

Virginia Louisa Minor

Though you didn’t succeed, you spurred focus and momentum

Virginia Louisa Minor

Your failure is my victory

KEVIN W. KELLEY

We Live in a Highway Town

There are those that chose this place, and did by way of high pay and high mobility.
Those that are stuck, live life the high way. Lay low and live slow with the grasses.
Those few who choose to reject and refuse to be stuck have the means to change it.
But those are the few, the lost, drove off, driven off, often over by the drift and flow of traffic.
The tide washes them out, as the tide washes up this low-lying town.

Landscape | Alison Ouellette-Kirby



JULIE VARWIG

Weatherman

We hear the hum of the rain before it hits ground
We spot the looming grey clouds
Ready to spill droplets of crystal to cut the earth
And strike with the spikes of lightning.

We know when storms are coming.

And the winsome weatherman, always in the know,
informs of further than just the T-storm.
The air becomes more humid and warm,
and I stay clear of the window I long to look out from,
to watch the sky turn from grey to green.

Could there but be a weatherman to predict
the storms of life,
I'd retreat from the windows,
hide in the shadows,
knowing what is to come,
dreading the hum of harm and hurt
to pierce our hearts at the aforesaid time;
taking away what should be life lived
Outside,
now becomes living as though the sun never shines.
Let that never be for me.

No weatherman for life, to dim
even the brightest day,
when the sky gleams at its peak,
No thoughts toward the onslaught
that will be next week.
No Stop! Or Wait! Or Beware!
Because why should I bear
the weight of problems before they form their clouds?
Life would not be living if lived beneath the prophecies
of the future's trial-filled shroud.

Scan to listen!





JULIE VARWIG

Ode to a Clipped Wing

Your heart aches, and a desperate numbness pains
The emotions as though you were a machine,
Ticking on while doubt reigns;
Death no longer is just a dream,
But real as your doubts are fake.
In the instant of panicked flight,
Then not just your heart aches;
Heavy head tucks beneath the clipped wing at night.

A cage, a restrained place with new food;
Smells and sights as alien as mars,
Within them trapped; a home that would and could
Never be claimed as such, tearing into old scars.
The handle made of priceless yet useless gold,
You scoff, retreat, and then sob on your perch.
Locked in, no license to free the old
Feathers, ruffled by fangled hurts.

Your wrinkled tears I could wipe away
Would that the cage be opened, free,
By steady hands, not riddled with decay,
By the realization of what is owned by me.
Does a bird lay down, and hunch, pained?
His palace not belonging to him--
Borrowed until death be gained;
The haunting shadow, growing thin

As light dims around your gloried cage--
The well-hoped-for change, for which
Loss of lively eyes would be the wage;
Making the new climate switch.

Fellow birds, all cooped up too,
Yet unlike you, content to live
In the nest, more than a few
Willing to let wings weaken and strength give.



Risen | Jessica Toenjes

Not so, do you, My Bird, continue to live,
Lacking the luster of life you once flew
Pained by the handicapping clip you can't forgive.
Swearing to not believe what flies true.

Not you, for your wing shakes against will,
And your beak's uncertainty fails to crack
The bars that keep you caged until
A final exit straightens your hunched back.
To heal your wing that longs to soar
Out the gold door, far from past and present,
To that holy place where all fly
Free from bondage evermore;
I now must try, no thought of ownership to resent,
Lest I let memory of your sorrowful home die.

HEATHER STRUTMAN

The Aftermath

My city, my hometown, my neighborhood,
where I grew up and where I will grow old
is nothing but rubbish.

Fire, ashes, buildings burned, broken
windows, glass scattered
stores looted. People
crying, people
hurting. Dreams
destroyed, innocents
suffering because of
the actions of only a few.

Why destroy
our
city,
hometown,
neighborhood?



Untitled | Sue Wolf

KYLE WALSH

Scratched CD

Every night is the same routine:

In bed by eleven

But awake until the sun rises

With you on my mind and not in my bed

Somewhere in between the free fall of my self-esteem and thoughts of suicide

I write,

And write,

And write

Connecting, then detaching over and over again.



Labyrinth Interrupted | Debra Crank-Lewis

KYLE WALSH

Forest Nights

Make me feel emotions
I didn't know I had
Make the rain stagnant
Let the lightning bugs
Bounce from droplet to droplet
Lighting up the night sky
With each individual hop.
Let the bluebirds
Awake early and
Sing what I never could.
Make me believe everything you say.
Make me feel alive.

Telescope

I want a world in which the sky is lit up dark purple at night and a harmonious orange at daylight
Where the clouds are golden brown and the sun that hides behind them is a passionate red
I want a world where the grass blades and the trees that rest above are as blue as the Atlantic
Where the deep, treacherous oceans are calming off-white and the sand that shadows the water
is light-pink

I want a world where I can lie with you and create worlds

Starlit Path | Maggie Jackman



KYLE WALSH

Ghost

The ghost of your name,
So elegant, striking,
Floats through each room
Passing through memories of
Our lips pressed against
Out-of-focus photographs and
Passion so intense
It makes plane crashes
Look like pillow fights
Leaving them all behind
Back in December
When you left.



Blue Garage Door, Augusta, MO | Julie Nowakowski

SARAH MYERS

Ferguson

We stand beneath
the black sky, the North star
in its lonesome guidance—
an accompaniment
to the hearts
on the street.

Hands Up,
face the police,
some yell slurs
while others dance to the rhythm
of their drums
and souls.

One step forward
from the ones in the military gear,
and the crowd panics
with confused collisions
into their comrades,
premature maneuvers,
like lost cattle.

A pastor woman, bold,
fierce as the night's movement, commands
to the world with her hands
in the air,
her god-like vocals, bellowing
to stop.

Stop.

I know we should, but
why? When my city's hearts
beat with the blood of
an enslaved history,
a division written
into the wrinkles
of the rivers of our elderly
faces. The city of segregation
into the North and West
counties,

the city

that everyone
is talking about.

Must we stop?

And might we
start?

To join
together.



Untitled | Sue Wolf

SARAH MYERS

Skins

Skins—
I'll have you
put them on
until they tighten
your first flesh.

Peel off that wretched
superficial layer
so everyone can
see
what you've been hiding
in your blood.

Your veins will be the rivers
that carry the trash
of your citizens.

There will be no one to clean you up.

Your bones will collapse
on sight and they will
laugh.

Only then
will I let
you say something.

X

Wounds and daggers
colliding as words
shot from your mouth,
built from your vocal chords,
born in your heart.

You always kept your hair black
like your eyes.
Your demeanor—tense—
like the pain in your leg
you've had
for years.

I wonder if I've caused that too.

We pass,
our eyes skim on the outer frames
of each other's bodies, barely giving
any
recognition.

Never to the windows,
where we might
trip into a path
with too many mirrors.

But how I wish
to look at you,
to somehow spare the disappointment
of seeing the story of my tree
locked
in your selfish,
neglected

wounds.

RANDY BARGE

Beat Street

Brittle little fettle strummed more power than the drum
They say he is a dumb dumb who can't come because
Peter Piper picked pickles then
Decided to let the day go way finding little time to play
Forgetting what they say
He came tame now he has fame



SK8 | Micah Plummer

RANDY BARGE

Caught in Time

Could the thought be as it was that fall?
Time will go on, whether or not it must
Ease, relax no need to clench fist ready to brawl
Anyone can feel at the highest of all
Forgotten but not forgiven, its rust
Could the thought be as it was that fall?
Ignore, it till the fullest even if it's not saw
It's clear eventually everything comes to dust
Ease, relax no need to clench fist ready to brawl
The shortest of man can be made to feel tall
Dispose of them, scraping them off like burnt crust
Could the thought be as it was that fall?
Sweet more gentle than the most precious doll
Sought after, sparkling eye not pure lust
Ease, relax no need to clench fist ready to brawl
Can't be heard with the slightest but still I call
Mesmerized, caught by the web distracted by the bust
Could the thought be as it was that fall?
Ease, relax no need to clench fist ready to brawl.

MEGHAN O'KEEFE

This World and Us

This world is not a tomb for our love stories. This world is a door and it is the door through which we pass. This world is not a tomb for our love story. This world is just the beginning and when our bodies detach themselves from this place, you and I will find each other and our stories will not end. We will not end, and in the next life we will stir one another until the oceans in me reflect the skies in you. The world is not a tomb for our love story and one day this world will end but it will not be our tomb.



Statue | Tyra Bowman

STEPHANIE KLINE

Mask

Do you like this new mask?

I got it recently.

The old one cracked.

This one is tougher than the last one.

It's made of concrete lies

and solid smiles,

Foolproof secrets,

Bound in broken promises

and dipped in apologies.

Fit just fine.

Do you like this new mask?

I got it recently.

MARY KANE

The Kettle: A Sestina

(Inspired by the short story "The Kettle," by Eva Marie Ginsburg)

Like a nightingale, the Swedish kettle
Trilled in the twilight, while the man
Poured chardonnay for his lady,
Puttered as the sputtering pots
Sulked and simmered on the range
At the Lone Star ranch house.

Love was looming in the steamy house.
The happy chef smiled as the kettle
Sang, "Me! Me! Me!" in operatic range.
He chopped the chervil, lucky man.
Stirred couscous in the cast-iron pot.
Steamed apricots. Beamed at his lady.

The cookery rasped and rattled at the lady:
"You brought this interloper to our house."
"Insufferable sophisticate!" hissed the pots.
"This sneaky Scandinavian kettle's
Struck a spell, enchanted our good man:
We'll have no squatters on this range."

"We're the rough-and-readies of the range.
Double-trouble, double-trouble, lady."
Bubble, bubble, bubble. But the man
Lit candles all about the dusky house
Smiled at the shrilly shrieking kettle
Ignored the mumbling, grumbling pots.

(Continued)

“Life was good with just the pots.”
They sneered, snarled, “We ruled the range.”
They clattered, rattled at the kettle,
They snickered at the stylish lady:
Unwelcome interloper of the house,
Who’d made a simpering sissy of the man.

“We’re here! We’re standing by our man!”
Bragged the brash and brawny pots
When *she* quit coming to the house
And all was very quiet on the range.
Yet they began to miss the little lady
And the singing of that silly kettle.

The man no longer roams around the range,
And the idle pots think of the pretty lady,
How the house was sweeter with a singing kettle.

Tea Time | Nicole Brase



JAKE HOWELL

Corporal Contrivances

Our hearts sink within our minds clasps
We are sick again
We think of what we could not grasp
We want to know when

When will our time come?
They say twenty years is young
Twenty years has made us numb
We're all out strung

We're past the point of no return
Born in a machine
Former structure will be spurned
We just want to be clean

What we want can't be found
What can't be found can't be bought
Our innocence has drowned
Our existence is fraught

CHRIS REICHENBERG

Paper

Opaque pulp glares vengefully back at me.
How it teases with its vast sheer emptiness
Lacking color; texture, taste, or weight.
Unfilled page leaves you empty inside

Little punched holes are too small for fingers
No flash appeal for manifesting inspiration
The tiny floss-like lines tend to hypnotize
Single shiny little wire is the lone accessory

Slowly shaping thoughts begin to contrast the sheet
Ink smears when it is fresh from the pen
Ideas start to flourish with a flowing elegance
Satisfaction looms with hope of completion
Endless possibilities of translated thought
Etched ideas
Now permanent

JUNE FLEMING

Passing By

It was quite a calm day as I watched farm after farm pass by my car window. Tall elms reached for the sky which sheltered farmhouses from the cold winter winds. It was early spring. Many fields were newly ploughed ready to plant. Nearby, a windmill stands still, waiting for a friendly breeze. A red barn caught my eye, bringing back memories of times I spent at my grandfather's farm. Memories tugged at my heart; I longed for days gone by. The sun was trying to come out to meet the day. Smoke rose in the distance from a farmhouse over another hill, as clouds hid part of it. Silos stood proud holding the last of winter's grain, and patches of wild flowers over the fields. It was time to plant again.

Small clusters of trees and bushes, looking like little forests, passed by as my eye caught broken fences here and there. They needed mending. My eye caught a horse wagging his tail in a peaceful pasture as cows grazed. I was just passing by.

KIM LEE SEAGULL

The Birth of the Sun God

Love is the Morning Star
Tummy-blushing with her Son
That Bumblebee Avatar
Stung them sweet as one.

Be Bumblebeatification
From the Daystar's sacred pen
Do tell with rhyme and reason
The Dawning of Aten.

Oh sweet honey dripping Sun
How golden is your birth
Sol make all people one
And conquer hell on earth.



To the Top | Philip Padilla

SAMMI WYSS

Innocence

The long road trip has us all exhausted. So far this is my least favorite hotel room. Dad says it will only be for one night. I'm hesitant to lie down on the sunken dirty mattress, but my brother doesn't seem to have a problem with it. I miss my bed and my friends. I wonder when we'll get back home. I carefully sit on the edge and pretend to watch TV while I try to listen to my parents' conversation.

"We have to keep moving. They're coming after us. It won't take long for them to find us again."

"I'm tired. We're all tired. Can't we just call Joe and we'll stay with him?"

"No, do you really want to get your brother involved in this?"

Mom doesn't answer. I realize that I'm no longer looking at the TV. My eyes have shifted toward them. They realize I'm eavesdropping.

I hear people outside our hotel door. I run to the door and look through the peep hole.

"Hey, I think someone's outside. Should I answer it?"

I look at Mom, her face pale and eyes wide.

"No. We need to leave now. It's time to move to our next city."

JORDAN STARKEY

Cede

To be a mighty oak I did my best
And prayed the earth my one tall wish would grant,
So life you see is tough to full digest,
My being this here small tomato plant;
Had I been sown perhaps in top-class soil
Or yet received a tasteful manicure,
I might have grown beyond a pint-sized foil
Who to the neck is buried in manure;
Or had I yet been planted with a will
Not short of bite or fiber, grit or rope,
But ripe to face the heat and blight and chill,
I might at least have been a cantaloupe;
One hope alone is left me to resist:
To be a Bloody Mary with a twist.

LEE LUMPKINS

The Foggy Mist

My mood matches the weather, close to the earth and foggy. For days I had felt as though I were running in a fog. My mind just wouldn't concentrate on anything. This fog is pushing down my back. I feel so unbalanced. Perhaps I just need to rest a bit.

I arrived home from work expecting to be greeted by my husband, six kids, two cats, and puppy. No one was there and all their belongings are gone. On the walls are the faded marks where the family portrait hung. The only evidence that this is the correct house is my belongings are still here. I checked the house number again just to make sure this is the right place. What could have transpired in the eight hours since I left the house for my work this morning? I searched the house for an explanation; surely there was a note or some indication of where they might have gone. There is none. Just emptiness.

I tried to think back to the argument we had over the weekend. He had threatened to leave, as he had many times before. So what was different this time? The children had refused to eat the dinner I had prepared, insisting that their father made a better dinner and he didn't make them eat if they didn't want to. I, on the other hand, think children should eat what is put on the table, just as my parents had taught me. I had to admit, the argument had gotten out of hand.

I made one more trip through the house, upstairs and down. My clothes are strewn on the floor and the cats have taken the beat up old couch as their own.

I called everyone I could think of. No one admitted knowing anything. It's awfully hard to hide six kids and three pets. Well, at least it's quiet and I sure am tired. My feet hurt from being on them all day, so I lay down for a nap. I dreamed of being lost and going in circles. I awoke with a start. "Are you going to sleep on this ratty old couch all night? He flipped on the lights. "Why not come to bed and get some rest?"

Had I been dreaming? I looked around as he led me upstairs. Everything was in its place. I let him tuck me into bed. The foggy mist encircled me.

JUSTIN MONTGOMERY

The Kiss of Winter

In the cold,
Glowing under the symphony of snow;
She stands,
Bathed in the warmth of the street lamp.

Her dark hair but a silhouette,
Waving with rhythmic wonder,
Her fathomless eyes gazing upon the light,
As the tears freeze against her flushed skin,
Cold and callous like dreams once envisioned.

The snowflakes grow in size and dance with grace,
Catching in her eyelashes as her heart begins to chill;
Enveloped by the frost, her gaze meets mine.

A pained smile creeps onto her face,
As she plants her soft lips briefly to my cheek;
Then turns her tears towards the light of the street lamp,
And fades into the darkness of my memory.



Snow Princess | Laney Janicke

CATHERINE COPELAND

The Darkness Within

I stand tall and throw my arms up to the skies
I raise my eyes up as I scream, "Stop the madness,"
Still the darkness surrounds me
Its grasp tightens around me, slowly,
Tightening so that it is impossible to breathe
Pushing me deeper into the night
Extracting all memories of happy times
Filling my brain with murky thoughts
Draining all hope from my soul
Nothing remains to call me
An empty shell
is all that's left.



Dreamcatcher | Kim Hesselmeyer

BETTY TYREE OSIEK

Tone Poem

Myriad shades of muted sepia
Fill autumn's staid palette.
Spring's verdant green eclipsed
By neutral amber hues of fall,
Once gleaming leaves of gold and red
Their flaming colors flaunt no more.

Each rustling leaf in gentle wind
Fluttering among its backlit mates,
Waves adieu to the setting sun.
Clothed in neuter beige and brown
Mute new colors of the moment.
Deepening shades of waning harvests
Mourn late summer's riotous tones.



Untitled | Julia Krussel

MARY KAY LANE

Concrete Poem

Cement, said Professor What's-His-Name, is what holds everything together - the aggregate, the random bits of sand and gravel, unassembled, not yet whole.

He should know, he designed the graceful spirals leading to the bridge over Burlington Rd that we slid down when drunk after studying Materials Science and Thermodynamics too late on Thursday nights and rewarding ourselves with dime pints of piss-colored beer that held us together, making us feel whole.

Years later, inappropriately dressed for traipsing around construction sites I pretended to know more about concrete than the sunburned, toothless Mexicans in muddy boots, who'd been pouring it for decades, keeping our suburban landscape together. I'd nod and say it looked good and they'd laugh as I walked away.

It did look good, oozing down the chute, thick and sticky, not quite solid, not quite liquid. I wanted to push my hands into it. I wondered if it was cold. I never touched it. I never got it on my clothes.

Everything falls apart. I can't remember my professor's name or the name of the bar or how to measure the strength of a concrete slab or its optimal curing temperature or why I thought I should be an engineer in the first place.

I still feel unassembled. Not quite whole. There is not enough cement in the world to keep me from coming unglued.

MARY KAY LANE

You Alone

You

enter alone

It's utterly terrifying

probably. You don't remember.

You have nothing. Suddenly you

are thrust into a room full

of strangers though some of the voices

are vaguely familiar. You grow. You learn. You

gather people around you. Parents. Brothers. Sisters. Friends. Teachers.

Classmates. More friends. Too many to count. Then . . . WHAM! One

person really stands out from the crowd. You build a life

together. Maybe adding more people as you go. In-laws. Kids. Friends.

Neighbors. Bosses. Co-workers. Minions if you're lucky. And stuff. You accumulate lots

of stuff. You are no longer naked and alone. And then, you start

to worry that you have too much stuff and you start shedding it. Garage

sales. Craig's List. Goodwill. Town dump. And then someone decides you have too many

people. Kids move away. Bosses retire. Co-workers get laid off. Minions move on.

Parents die. That someone who entered your life with a WHAM is

far away. Maybe not literally, maybe not all the time, but

there is a lot less WHAM happening and a lot

more silence. Some good, some bad. The phone doesn't

ring except on your birthday and big holidays.

You don't care. Much. You still have

memories. For now. Voices grow unfamiliar.

You start missing people and

your stuff. Then suddenly

leaving alone, utterly

terrified, just

you.



Arrkk! | Thanporn Praobchoke

MARY KAY LANE

Cast of Characters

Person —any ordinary human, featureless, uncomplicated, perhaps just a corpse.

Person A — she who does everything but write poems; who wishes she was writing poems every time she is not writing poems; who waits to get started writing poems until THERE IS NO TIME; who would rather run 10 miles a day because it is easier than writing poems and because she

can eat whatever she wants which she could not do if she sits and writes poems; who would rather scrub toilets because it gives her such a sense of accomplishment; who wishes she had an alter ego but who can hardly manage the gargantuan one with which she is already shackled; who, to become a writer of poems, must create a

Persona (aka Person B) — she who sits outdoors under a wide-brimmed hat at a café and drinks multiple cups of strong black coffee and writes poems and other bits of fiction long-hand onto sheets of long yellow paper; who runs out of paper and continues to write on paper napkins, pulling them out of the silver dispenser beside her one-by-one, little six-by-six inch bits of pure white inspiration; who is brought, without having to ask, refills of inky coffee and replacement pens by the attentive and respectful waiter; who lives in a town where there is an outdoor café and attentive, respectful waiters; who doesn't mind if some of the words get swept down the street by the wind; who hopes that someone who needs them will find them and put them to good use; who walks to the café in the morning and walks home the long way in the afternoon and does not know she is exercising; whose home is sparse and uncluttered except for the words and wine bottles strewn about; who does not struggle with decisions about what to eat and what to wear; who saves those struggles for her characters and her plots and her metaphors; who tears her hair out over it sometimes; who cannot tear herself away from her words, they clutter her brain so; who stays up half the night putting her yellow papers and white napkins into perfect order; whose relationships suffer because of her single-mindedness; whose overindulgence of introspection and solitude and words words words make her an eccentric in the neighborhood which would make her a little smug and proud if she were to notice, which she doesn't.



MARY KAY LANE

Exceptional Vectors

Certain exceptional vectors x are in the same direction as Ax . Those are the “eigenvectors” - Introduction to Linear Algebra by Gilbert Strang

Yesterday’s arithmetic is a hazy memory,
fragile, just out of reach, gathering dust
like the feathery matrix of cobwebs
in the corners of the kitchen.

Hazy like the days when I believed
that life’s path was an arrow straight and true
shot from God’s Great Bow;
when I believed in the gentle fictions
of youthful kingdoms where dragons are slain,
fair maidens rescued and happily ever afters
never failed to make a deathbed appearance;
when arithmetic got simpler after calculus;
when, with enough paper and erasers,
all of life’s problems could be solved
and when this made sense:

$$\lambda_{\pm} = \frac{1}{2} \left[(a_{11} + a_{22}) \pm \sqrt{4 a_{12} a_{21} + (a_{11} - a_{22})^2} \right],$$

The eigenvalue λ tells whether the vector x is stretched or shrunk or reversed or left unchanged. The eigenvalue λ could be zero! Then the eigenvector x is in the nullspace.

yet now, all I see are the a’s cowering in a cave,
quadrupling their forces in vain, scurrying around
in a disorderly matrix, worrying about their future
in nullspace.

CONTRIBUTORS

Randy Barge

Randy Barge loves to tell a story through his writing and sometimes it's his story. With each word he wants some meaning behind it even if a simple poem, short story or a music lyric. Writing is his passion and love.

Tyra Bowman

Tyra Bowman is a young writer and photographer who expresses herself through her art.

Nicole Brase

Nicole Brase is a beginning Digital Photography student. She likes taking photos that make people see all the beautiful things that are in the world.

Catherine Copeland

Catherine Copeland spent her life in the workforce, thinking that a college education was not only out of her reach, but also beyond her intelligence. The forces of the universe thought differently and drove this 55-year-old grandma through the doors of SCC. Here she found every fiber of her being intertwining with SCC as if they were one. Catherine has searched her whole life for a place to belong; she found it at SCC.

Debra Crank-Lewis

Debra Crank-Lewis grew up on a farm surrounded by a wonderful extended family. There are many teachers in her family tree so perhaps her calling was set early on. She has two WONDERFUL children. Reading, travel, cooking, storytelling and now, perhaps photography are among her interests.

Callie Daniels

Callie Daniels is a Professor of Mathematics at St. Charles Community College. She is teacher and author who enjoys spending time shooting action photography, riding horses, and writing poetry.

Dana Delibovi

Dana Delibovi is a poet living in Lake Saint Louis, Missouri. Her work has appeared previously in Mid Rivers Review and other journals, and on the St. Louis Metro as part of the Poetry in Motion project. She teaches philosophy at Lindenwood University.

Collin Elliot

Collin W. Elliot grew up in a city that showed him diversity - diversity in people, places, and beliefs. This diversity has helped structure him to be the man he is today. For that he is forever thankful.

June Fleming

June Helen Fleming is connected to the land and herself. She said, “When I write, I write with an open heart. It is like letting a soft breeze touch my soul. It doesn’t matter what I write about; it has to come from my heart.”

Christina Gant

Christina Gant teaches writing and literature at SCC and she hosts “The Coffeehouse,” SCC’s open-mic night, twice each semester. While her favorite creative art is poetry, she also has a passion for photographing the natural world.

Harleigh Heck

Harleigh Heck is based out of Wentzville, MO and writes mainly on young adult fantasy stories, whimsical poetry, and non-fiction family memoirs. Heck has won the 2014 James Haba Award for Poetry and she currently holds a Bachelors degree in Creative Writing from Ashford University.

Kim Hesselmeyer

Kim Hesselmeyer is a nineteen-year-old mother who decided to go back to school and follow her dreams of becoming a photographer and bettering her and her daughter’s future.

Jake Howell

Jake Howell is a twenty one year old student trying to escape mediocrity and the digital dark age.

Maggie Jackman

Maggie Jackman earned her Associate’s degree at St. Charles Community College last Spring and is now attending Webster University to complete her Business Management degree. She also owns a small business selling homemade artisan goods and photography. Her work is available at Gidget’s Garage in Columbia, Missouri, as well as on Etsy. Eventually, she hopes to own her own store.

Laney Janicke

Laney Janicke is a twenty-one-year-old nursing student. She loves photographing nature more than anything because she seeks to capture the small things that normally go unnoticed.

Emily Joshu

Emily Joshu is a 19-year-old, soon-to-be sophomore who plans to study Creative Writing, for which she has had a passion as long as she can remember. She is a student journalist for Missouri State University’s newspaper, The Standard, but her soft spot lies with fiction and eventually becoming a literary agent.

CONTRIBUTORS

Mary Kane

Mary Kane is an expatriate of suburban Chicago. A lifelong learner with a passion for poetry, she lives in St. Charles and attends St. Charles Community College. She is a frequent contributor to Mid Rivers Review.

Brenda Kearns

Brenda Kearns has two passions: her family and still life photography. In the fringe hours you can find her styling, photographing, and digitally editing her art, as well as shopping for props and networking with other still life artists online. She is the Benefits Specialist for St. Charles Community College, and resides in St. Peters with her husband. Brenda also enjoys reading and grandparenting.

Alli Keisker

Alli Keisker was exposed to many mediums of art at a very young age, but after being heavily involved in journalism courses in high school, she realized that photography was something that she wanted to pursue. For her high school graduation present, Alli received her first camera, and she began photographing portraits for friends and family on the side. Although she originally preferred portrait photography, Alli has grown to love nature and landscape photography as well. Some of her landscape work can be seen in her book, *Often Overlooked*, which was published in 2014.

Kevin W. Kelley

Kevin W. Kelley is a St. Louis native. A video creator, director, writer, producer, painter, animator, playwright, and self proclaimed orator. It is said he explores deeply personal beliefs, ideas, ideals, ordeals, and concepts with his work. In 2016 he plans to launch Asartr Productions, to create video, film, and live performance.

Stephanie Kline

Stephanie Kline loves writing and plans to major in Creative Writing and minor in Teaching English as a Second Language.

Julia Krussel

Julia Krussel is a twenty year old student who plans on getting her degree as a Vet Tech within the next couple of years. She took a couple of photography classes at St. Charles Community College to gain more knowledge for the hobby.

Mary Kay Lane

Mary Kay Lane lives in Muscatine, Iowa where she works as a reference librarian. Her poetry, short fiction and other writings can be found in *Our Iowa*, *Lyrical Iowa*, and *St. Anthony's Messenger*.

Lee Lumpkins

Lee Lumpkins lives in a rural area of Missouri with one large goldfish and one Yellow Nape Parrot. Her hobbies are reading and writing short stories and poetry. She enjoys the SCC Coffeehouse and is pleased to contribute to *Mid Rivers Review*.

Justin Montgomery

Justin Montgomery is a student at St. Charles Community College with a nagging writing habit. Aspiring novelist who loves horror, spooks, ghosts, and Halloween. Hopes to major in creative writing and make it to age 60.

Sarah Myers

Sarah Myers is a student interested in everything culturally innovative. If you offer her a deep thought and some soup she will be sure to have lunch with you.

Julie Nowakowski

Julie Nowakowski is a graduate of Washington University's School of Fine Arts. She attended a semester of Digital Photography at SCC. Other than photography, she enjoys tae kwon do and spending time with her family.

Meghan O'Keefe

Meghan O'Keefe, 19, is a journalism major at University of Missouri, Columbia.

Betty Tyree Osiek

Betty Tyree Osiek is a retired university professor and writer with her main work a stylistic study of a Columbian poet. Her own poetic muse visits infrequently but sometimes with a clear vision of fall colors.

Alison Ouellette-Kirby

Alison Ouellette-Kirby is an artist and has been a faculty member at St. Charles Community College since 1999.

Philip Padilla

Philip Padilla is a 28 year old photographer born and raised in St. Louis specializing in self-portraiture and the art of the outfit as an expressive medium. A self-portrait is not only a document of the way the world sees us, but also a record of how we present ourselves to the world. Philip is currently in pursuit of a daily self-portrait project in an attempt to better understand himself and the world we live in.

CONTRIBUTORS

Micah Plummer

Micah Plummer is a student photographer with many hobbies, including shooting motorcycles, sports events, people, and civil war reenactments. He is active in his community and school and has a passion for adventure and traveling.

Rachel Pogue

Rachel Pogue has been interested in photography for a few years now and hopes to shoot for either Vogue or National Geographic one day.

Thanaporn Prasobchoke

Thanaporn Prasobchoke is a native of Thailand and has lived in St. Louis, Missouri since 2009. She won two SCC Board Room Awards for Graphic Design, First and Second places at the SCC student Art Exhibition and, Honor in the Dean's List for spring 2014 and 2015. She is currently a Graphic Design student and Computer Programming tutor at SCC.

Chris Reichenburg

Chris Reichenberg is still searching for his path, just rolling in the grass, smelling the air, and waiting for what's in store.

Kim Lee Seagull

Kim Lee Seagull always prays before he writes, for after all, poetry is holy and the reason for its success is not an earthly, but a transcendental one, since it comes from the invisible world.

Jordan Starkey

At his death, Instructor Starkey wishes to be buried in a sturdy, well-sealed box of solid oak along with several romance novels for escape and a lapdog -- preferable de-wormed. Such comforts shall provide him a brand new lease on life.

Heather Strutman

Heather Strutman needs music for basic survival, and she loves working through her emotions by writing poetry. She is drawn to the arts for the same reason she is dedicated to becoming a nurse: she aims to heal human suffering and celebrate the human experience. Heather will begin nursing school in Fall 2016.

Jessica Toenjes

Jessica Toenjes is from O'Fallon, Missouri, and is currently attending St. Charles Community College in pursuit of a degree in graphic design.

Julie Varwig

Julie Varwig is in her third year of studies at the St. Charles Community College and has enjoyed seeing her writing grow from the various Creative Writing courses offered there. Julie is pursuing an English Degree with an emphasis in Creative Writing. Specifically, she loves to write in the genres of poetry and non-fiction. Julie also loves to travel, spend time with her family and friends, and has a passion for Christian Missions.

Emma vonBecker

Emma VonBecker is often referred to as the “crazy cat lady” and her thirteen cats justify this nickname. She sits alone in coffee shops and quizzically observes people from the corner whilst caressing a stray kitten. Just kidding, you can’t bring a kitten into a coffee shop. However, you will find her there with her nose in a book, most likely wishing she had a kitten to hold.

Kyle Walsh

Kyle Walsh is just trying his best.

Sue Wolf

Sue Wolf is a St. Louis native and St. Peters resident. She singles out her daughters for being her greatest joy in life. They have been strong supporters of their mother’s photography, often helping to critique her work.

Sammi Wyss

Sammi Wyss, whose major is marketing, attended St. Charles Community College and is now attending the University of Missouri. He hopes to be reincarnated into an aristo-cat.

Given Zane

Given Zane is a 22-year-old photographer based out of the St. Louis area. He’s currently going to college for Software Engineering with a minor in photography. He’s been taking photographs seriously for over a decade now and has no intention of stopping any time soon.

