River Poets Journal 2016
Special Edition

Tightrope by Catrin Welz-Stein

A Collection of Signature Poems

2016 Volume 10 Issue 1 $20.00
Harlekin Cat by Catrin Welz-Stein
An Anthology of Poems
Selected By Individual Poets’
As Their Signature Poem

Family Portrait by Catrin Welz-Stein
Dear Poets and Writers,

This special edition of River Poets Journal was conceived during a late night conversation with a friend, who asked if I had a favorite poem?

I replied I had a poem that was selected by many others. It in effect travels the internet each autumn, appearing sometimes in the most unlikely places. It’s fascinating to follow it over the years.

After my friend left, I thought about what marks a poem as a signature poem, the poem that is most indicative of a poet’s style, and their inspiration for writing poetry. Over the next few days I read through my collection of poems written over the years, and got it down to three poems. Each poem had a common thread, an existentialism, as well as my own writing style. I finally settled on one.

Though other poems of mine have been published, and this poem may only be published in this journal, it is my signature poem in so many ways, most of all as a human being learning to survive as best I can in a mysterious universe.

Each of the poems in this anthology of forty-five poets along with their reason for selecting it, provides a glimpse into the poet’s life, and their unique view of their world.

I hope you enjoy the reading as much as I have.

Judith Lawrence, editor

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River Poets Journal publishes three large issues a year, a Special Themed issue in the first quarter, a Spring/Summer issue during late Summer, and an Autumn/Winter issue towards the end of the year.

Artists or Photographers - please submit themed samples of your work.

Submissions are open year round for the Spring/Summer and the Autumn/Winter open themed issues.

Please provide a short bio of 2-5 lines with your submission. Either a personal bio, current list of publications, or combo will do.

Column space always presents a problem when formatting a poem in a journal. Please refrain from mixing long lines in an otherwise short or average line length poem in your submission. Although it might be an excellent poem, it may prevent publication due to space allowance.

Upcoming Publications in 2016

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River Poets Journal Submission Guidelines

River Poets Journal Accepts:

- New and Established Writers
- Poetry - 3 to 6 poems - please include your name on each poem submitted.
- Short Stories - under 5,000 words
- Flash Fiction - under 3,000 words
- Essays - under 500 words
- Short Memoir - under 1,000 words
- Excerpts from novels that can stand on their own - under 3,000 words preferred
- Art (illustrations and paintings) or Photography
- A short bio of 2 - 5 lines
- Simultaneous and previously published “exceptional” poems are accepted as long as we know where poems are being considered or have appeared.

We prefer:

- Work that inspires, excites, feeds the imagination, rich in imagery; work that is memorable.
- Work that is submitted in the body of an email or as a word attachment, but will accept work through snail mail if the writer does not use a computer. Unselected snail mail submissions are returned if the author requests and SASE is provided with sufficient postage.
- When submitting work, please provide a short bio of 3-4 lines. Listing all your published work is not required. If not previously published, write something about your life you would like the readers to know.
- Previously being published is not a requirement for publication in our Journal. We love new writers with great potential.
- Send work in simple format, Times New Roman, Arial, Georgia 12 pt font, single spaced.
- Please note long line poems may need editing to fit constraints of formatting.

We do not accept:

- Unsolicited reviews
- Pornographic and blatantly vulgar language
- Clichéd or over-sentimental poems or stories

Response time is:

3 to 6 months depending on time of year work is submitted. All submissions are thoroughly read.

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Why I Won’t

I am a poet, but don’t ask me to slam.

I spent the first half of my life listening, and I’m testing out a voice for the second half. My voice has surfaced like bruised fruit, stewed long enough. My voice is unexpected and thrilling, but still unfamiliar to me, of all people. My words are gay and newly emerged from the closet, full of righteousness and fear, angst and relief. They are the frailest of tendrils, rising from concrete and straining towards the sun. I have no intention of hurling my words against the wall of yours to see what sticks.

My words are saving my life.

I am a poet, but I am also a lioness guarding her cubs. I could kill you on sight.

Don’t ask me to slam.

©Susan Mahan, September 1999

(Previously published in Riveter Review - 12/2013)

Twilight

Twilight slants a creamy pink against the old house, the way colors fade at sunset. The evening almost over leaves us wanting—a restlessness, the day somehow unfinished.

We pour another glass of red, wander through old roses, cast a pebble in the pond, sit, our backs against the iron bench, watch the road for company.

We could, like our parents boil water, sip Sanka, head upstairs early. I could mend a sock, turn a hem while we listen to the news—tomorrow’s weather, next fall’s election.

How lovely you are tonight still slim and straight, my boy. Strands of white appear as I run my fingers through your thinning hair, silvery in the shadows.

The air is cooler now, your arm around me, firm. We turn—fix our eyes, our steps slow and measured. A nighthawk passes, circles.

©Sharon Lask Munson

(Previously published in Stillness Settles Down the Road, Uttered Chaos Press, 2010)
**That Day**

that day  
I woke up wanting to caress  
the face of things  
to whisper  
to live is enough  

that day  
I rode a fairground ride in celebration  
sky blue Denver tilting  
and a small boy by my side  
kissing the whirlwind with laughter  

that day  
I learned that scientists are working  
on a bomb that vaporizes  
human life on impact  
finding us by body heat  
leaving the more valuable things  
unharmed the buildings  
intact the roads the bridges  

not even in my dreams had I been  
this breathless against my will  

for whom  
will these bridges span?  
will the books then read themselves?  
for whom will roller coasters roll?  

that day  
I vowed to quick  
caress this sweet quick world  
without pity without promise  
but with a passion that  

even a single soldier rolling  
in the dirt of conflict would be more  
sacred than a bridge a drop of oil  
an ocean of democracy  

there will be no more tears then  
quick now caress  

©Beate Sigriddaughter

(Previously published in *Le Nouveau Monde Vert (Summer 2008)*)

**Drive-Thru Poetry**

In writing about nothing,  
I write about everything.  
I am not peculiar in this;  
poets do it all the time.  

Form throws me; I flounder  
in rhythm and rhyme,  
and don’t speak of caesuras  
or sonnets; I know no art.  

Poems are not written  
but recovered—are not read  
but recognized—but this  
has all been said before.  

What is written  
is not as important  
as what is left blank.  
MTV zen: 4000  
deep thoughts  
flickering per second.  

©Steve Werkmeister

**Your Spirit is a Shadow**

Your spirit is a shadow  
lingering  
made of light  

Your spirit is a shadow  
growing longer  
into night  

Your spirit is a shadow  
none can capture  
all can see  

Your spirit is a shadow  
set free  

©Joe Cottonwood
Seasons of the Mind

A smile searching for a smile- an ovum awaiting pregnancy- a looking down to find green rising up everywhere. A sense that time is on your side now. Hope in the heart of the young-everyone is young.

Backs to hammocks, faces to the sun-summer is a promise of long, lighted days-of nights made soft by the warmth of hand holding hand and moonlit eyes. Summer is the promise kept, a promise kept.

Oh, but autumn is a halved pleasure. At first the smell of school books and crisp, clean air bathing lungs. Then a preview of the long days end in the hurrying night. First the scent of freedom and then of confinement.

And now the mind is cold with days and Death whispers “I am near.” But somewhere in that mind a blanket of pure, bright Snowlight winks, winks at imagined sins and dreams once again of Spring’s Eternal Smile.

©Frank Cavano

(Previously published by vox poetica)

Attempted Dialogue With Cicadas

Flinging this voice up
is futile I’ll never find them
singing in the tree tops
They seem to be everywhere like stars
but I am defeated
for there may be just two or three
each with single notes
pitching me out of my frame
into the sky’s dome
and my voice will never discover
what branches they call from
thriving while I fail to reach them
charging the air with their magical tremble
thrilling the forest as they did
when we were dream seeds

©Roberta Gould

(Published in her book of poems, Three Windows)

Sailing

for Joseph Conrad

I have always taken
the four a.m. watch:
those three hours before dawn when,
inhaling the moist sweetness
of a new day, we awake
and escape last night’s darkness,
leaving technology
to experience
quiet and primitive satisfaction.

The ocean rushing underneath,
its volume
dependent upon current hull speed,
spills a phosphorescent wake —
the only natural source of light
besides the moon.

Rolling up and down,
swaying into balance
on the balls of my feet while
cradling the warmth
of a mug’s contents.

Soon
an orange sliver appears
and grows, as the sun
finds the seam in the weld
that fixes sea to sky.

©Bill Cushing

Sailing by Catrin Welz-Stein
**The Old Couple Flies in a Dream to the Still Red Desert**

We fell asleep holding hands that night, in bed, mind you, facing each other side by side, my right hand atop your right. That's how it was, make no mistake. With our sleep masks on, mine red, yours black, you, Liz, or Lizard, turned to Zorra; I, Ron, *Gordo, Hombre Chiropteran (más loco que una cabra).* *

Off we flew into the dream ethereal, stars kissing, pulling at, our wind-stiff capes. Below, the soft red clay hacienda eroded brick by brick into red dust, which flew up into the twin chambers of our noses — our nostrils — four rooms, in all. Nothing was rent-, or otherwise, controlled, that night the world became a still red desert.

*(Gordo = Fatso
Hombre Chiropteran = Bat Man
*más loco que una cabra* = crazier than a goat)*

©Ron Singer

(Previously published in *New Works Review, 2008; poemeleon, 2014)*

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**I Felt You, before I Saw You...**

...And, thus hadn’t need to gaze upon thaw-green, dance under red-breasted melody to know Life’d given chase after that which having embraced this old body, permits at last the touching of Hands, glimpsing of Lips what kneaded this vessel and filled its sails.

For, sure as Springing sun, well-before being spied over melting mountain heights and endless-wave horizon, warmed the pre-dawn easterlies, unraveled the tatters of Death’s Winter blanket on many a bright morning as this...

I felt You, before I saw You.

©Ryan Frisinger

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**The Night Speaks**

“My spirit is the cold effluvium Of endless introspection that decays under my pale light. Societal delirium moulds the gloom that my spirit shall allay

O mortals, behold my lonesome, bright child! scarred and naked who roves my blackened frame Your ancestry that tells tales wise and wild bleeds as you play oblivion’s sylvan game

As you catalyze your mortality I proudly stand as your symbolic tomb Shining bright as hope’s deathly duality Your bliss and fears my barren child illumes

Come forth O mortals! Embrace the dark Like I do at each departure of the warm light In its bowels roils the utopian spark May it absolve you of your greed-blighted plight!”

©Nilotpal Sarmah
Evensong

Father, look at my ribs, how I’ve grown gaunt. Love, smaller than gaps in this bone wicker, has disappeared, and night lies over stones I’ve cast back at my enemies’ ghosts. Father, veins of water I’ve witched weren’t there; diviners’ rods deceived me. Scars and lesions now appear in the mirror. My body was burned in Calumet, shot in Leadville and Everett, was poisoned in Lake Charles. My body is legion, and I linger in vapors, unwritten quatrains, I linger, and labor in light that frays words on pages.

Father, we’ve grown frail together. I see you, squatting like a hobo, deep in the ailing forest, cold near a stick fire, a seeping spring where I once knew you by the cougar’s caterwaul that rolled down the ridge, by currents your earth once issued, clear and moving. My answer was to kill questions, draw wages, and to know the heart as a convict locked in a cage. I see my bereaved and wayworn face in yours, see us both as phantoms, shrouded by the lurid smoke rising from the lethal stacks in Akron. Father, kneel next to me. We are brothers.

Purple

-For my father

At the plane’s porthole, purple trees patch work across the southern California landscape. Almost perfect circles from above.

I see Jacarandas only in May. My annual Orange County pilgrimage to my brother’s house, pool, and wine cellars. My first sunburn of the season.

We are lucky, my brother and I, to see each other twice a year. Our lives are more than seven years different. Yet we like each other; we complement each other in song.

This year luck ran contrary. Together at least once, twice a month, we met in pale, bitter hospitals, cloistering bedrooms and, finally, a funeral home.

The purple I saw then was smudged circles under his eyes; deep nights of no sleep; dark clouds that dropped drizzle or snow through the too long winter.

But now again it is the end of May. I’ve eaten grilled chicken, drank too many margaritas, hugged my brother more often and finally goodbye.

Jacarandas fade and disappear as I settle back in my seat. There is something about that color, rare, found deep in rainbows, on the backs of royalty, gods even.

©Karen Vande Bossche
Beach Philosophy

We built our castle walls of sand
adorned with sea grass
twigs and shards of shells
souvenirs of many journeys
and gazed upon the distant stars
on a blue velvet sky evening.

Holding a handful of ocean
we pondered
were we discarded toys
of an alien ship in passing
or minute atom generated sparks
burning brightly for a passage in time
dimming to firefly light...our youth gone
poured too quickly through our fingers
or did God really have a Master Plan?

We bantered our existential questions
over the drift of sand, breeze, and water.

Deities for the moment
we waited hushed and expectant
for God in a chariot
to blaze across the heavens
the Mother ship to rescue
or the atoms to re-connect.

Mockingly the ocean waves crested
spilled abruptly in our laps
God stayed his elusive self
the moon slid behind the clouds
and no alien beckoned
through the stretch of stars.

Drunk on moonlight and wine,
we toasted the vast galaxy
for keeping its secrets
suspended as we were
dangling in the universe
hungry for knowledge
resigned to waiting out our lifetimes
swathed only in the comfort of
each other's weathered arms.

©Judith A. Lawrence

The Missing Force at 36° N Latitude,
107° 57’ 30” Longitude

With the sun in its summer
house, afternoon winds beat
the sand’s message of heat.
Clouds assemble to drum
thunderstorms. But no rains come.

Where snake should swallow lizard,
eagle swallow snake,
time swallowed whole
the golden bird and its people
because no rains came.

The magnitude of their loss
is the magnitude of their epic
ancient civilization brought
asunder by all the erosional
forces you can name, except one.

When no rains came after solstice
morning upon solstice morning,
endlessly rainless, the wind, worse
than any desert wind I’ve imagine,
a life-abrading wind, roared.

Gravity toppled the Anasazi gods
from atop their canyon temples.
Great edifices of sandstone
and great walls of rock and mortar
baked and froze for silent ages,

and tumbled into ruins—
Chaco without the force
of water,
Chaco becoming a message
of the dust.

©Karla Linn Merrifield

(First appeared in Weber: The Contemporary West in 2012
- reprinted in Lithic Scatter and Other Poems)


**Postcard to Mom**

Just show me your palms:
I’d like to drink water
From out of your
Cupped hands.
Let a drop of my tears
Sink
In the smallest of your palm
Wrinkles.
You fondled me a lot
With your hands,
You raised me up to heaven
Not once,
When the Earth rested against your feet,
And clouds
Covered up
My infantile
Face.

The world happened to be
Not so small
As the log hut
On a steep bank was,
Where in a little window
Celestial distance
Would close up,
And in the morning
A rowan tree branch
Knocked the windowpane.
There is no more
Little hut there,
I’ve lost the key to its front door.
Still I imagine Mom
Lonely waiting
For a postcard there,
Fingering my playthings.

©Valery Petrovskiy

(Originally published in Contemporary Literary Review blog, India)

**Pearls**

In the nursing home cafeteria
she wears her pearl necklace to breakfast
her fingers caressing each gem
like it was Aladdin’s lamp
and as each wish is granted
she travels through time
from pearl to pearl
secretly opening doors to the past
The staff physician blames her age
falsely accusing longevity
for suspending her belief in tomorrow
and precluding any coherent
interest in today
But if only science understood
she doesn’t simply
recall and remember
she returns
to call out her lover’s name for the first time again
to calm her newborn’s fear of the light
her toddler’s fear of the dark
to caress her mother’s hand for the last time once more
re-living moments that made a difference
moments that prove to her heart she was there
moments that ensure her humanity
shining forever
like pearls strung along the thread
of her life-story

©Alan D. Harris

(Published in Metric Conversions 2013, Pushcart Prize nomination)
**Over-Inspiration**

Here it comes
again so soon

Oh dear God no
oh yes
the moon

Once more

paged up and pulled
another raised wolf whisker
further and farther off
course

by the shadow call
of its 8 billionth poem

waning in
a rising tide
of deep reference

on the bemused earth below

©Mark van Gelder

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**On that one-way trip to Mars**

If I didn’t have a bone disorder
I would go to Mars
and never come back.

I would go to Mars,
send an application to NASA,
tell them my coding is so-so,
I’ve never peered into a robot’s circuitry
but I’d like to learn how.

I would go to Mars,
someone who has to
look and write and revise
to understand. Someone who believes
there’s other life out there,
not because of scientific proof
or a god told me, but because I want
humanity to feel less lonely.

I would go to Mars and send back news
of the Sols. I’d create the first
Martian newspaper, publish
the first book of Martian poetry,
paint the Martian soil with my words.

I would go to Mars if I wasn’t too short
for NASA’s height restrictions.
I’d tell them you can fit more short people
into a rocket. Don’t worry
about my bone deterioration rate,
I had arthritis at 13. Walked like an old lady
at 20. It’d be nice to float
and give my bones a break.

I would go to Mars
if I didn’t have bones
clicking against each other,
if I was a jellified blob. If the genetic
letters within me
didn’t spell out feeble,
different, unfit for space travel.

©Marlena Chertock

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The Man in the Moon by Catrin Welz-Stein
Ole Man Blank

These soft pads I touch on the bottom of your curled up toes a fashion plate, they match your charcoal gray coat of fur that smells sweeter than oranges

Once you fit in the palm of young Dan’s hand the kitten no one wanted too scrawny with baby yellow eyes that opened for no one but my son, young man Dan

How beautiful you grew you lovely duckling your still regal walk strutting through the dining room or curled up in a sunbeam that traveled a million miles to be with you

Silken ears swivel at every sound remember how you purred on my chest when we were in love and lived together?

Now, you don’t remember me, ole man Blank, you sleep the day long on their living room couch on the street with no sidewalks Your former mistress here? You don’t give a damn as I stroke your thin gray tail.

Sleep is your ole man’s job and I, too, am getting old, newly collecting Social Security a harbinger of what comes next when I too shall lie sleeping with no cat or man beside me just disbelief that it’s true a racer nearing the finish line Let me walk in the sun.

Dance

An open heart folds and unfolds in the unseen rhythm of petals, a rhythm that transcends time, like waves sliding in and out over and over; the moon’s slivers swelling to wholeness again and again.

The rose, invisible, seeding, sprouting, then shooting its glaring red stalk for all its worth to produce one fragile bud, and all the while green leaves everywhere sway and pelicans skim the sea.

The dance of it, wild and still is always here.

White

A Mediterranean snowfall coats an olive branch absorbing the splendor of a first touch.

I stand facing you awed by the hush as feathers flutter to the brush of your voice.

Your hand gently grazes my head and I am suspended in the wonder, momentarily believing snowflakes do not reach earth.

©Ruth Deming

©Maryann Russo

©Loukia M. Janavaras
Missing Boy  
(New York, October, 2012)  

Cops are combing the boroughs, prowling sullen streets. They flash their brights, and radio a voice he'll know: *Avonte, it's Mom. You're safe. Run to the lights.*

*Avonte Oquendo Perdido* 
is like a phrase in Esperanto. His eyes, in the photo, are those of a faun that can’t explain, although it knows.

The search is on for a gray and white shirt, black sneakers and jeans. Today, they question the rains, tomorrow, the snows. Months later, an answer roils the salt water.

O river, rivero!

©Sarah White

(Distributed in the Oct. 2015 issue of the on-line journal, Verse-Virtual)

Dusk in a Maine Winter

Gray-blue sea and sky fog creeping over the dunes a blur of circular brightness hinting at the moon stately dark branches dusted with snow resting places for cawing crows As they take wing the cold chill of evening beckoning me home.

©Jane Sloven

#7

Now, here Jokers, slight of pocket, embark quietly On any life of solitude followed— Yet rarely led, to aim for fickle prosperity In the eyes of majesty & fiends who Endure in a golden age of coin versus providence

Naturally, our veins open to accept all Objects, foreign & domestic, the nature of us To feel anything, now please, But to reject notions of pleasure Means a people decide the important, Inevitably failing to live and perish like Kings

We're grotesque, Standing, waiting, by the foyer of youth Infatuation with the gold in our teeth, -chomp- piercing what tough men deem Leather skin tanned in the desert, Barren filled, labored thoughts of grandeur

©Mike Freveletti

Exodus

And if ever you don't see Exodus, dig in the soil like a fruit worm and lift the stone of yourself heavier, to find a word harder than Maya.*

And if you ever demand for more, dig the sky.

©Bozhidar Pangelov

(*Maya or Māyā (Sanskrit माया māyāa[']) , a term found in Pali and Sanskrit literature, has multiple meanings and can be translated to mean something of an 'illusion'*)
“Good luck to ya,” Mickey Rooney said in probably nineteen fifty five or fifty six, shaking hands with Wendell and I, two farm teens from Michigan who met him and his straight man, Joey Forman, one night somewhere near the donut stand at Buck Lake Ranch, which was an outdoor entertainment park in northern Indiana.

We must have seen them before the show started. They were doing some sort of corny comedy act on a large half circular outdoor stage. It must have been one of the low points of his career, somewhere in between his brilliant early movie run and his television and Broadway appearances and later movie roles. Of course, he could do everything, sing, dance and act. Comedy or drama, it didn’t matter to him. When we met him he was still full of that wonderful energy and talent.

When we shook hands, I noticed that the top of his head came up to my shoulders and that his handshake was strong and sincere. I don’t remember anything else he said, just that he wished us good luck that summer night on a midway street full of yellow lights.

©Joseph Buehler

Mystic Tree by Catrin Welz-Stein
At Nine, This Is My Church

Aunt Helen’s house smells like the end of summer:
old wood and tobacco, dust and lilacs.
Nearly noon and the butter-yellow walls
of my aunt’s kitchen glow with amaurotic sunlight,
sharpening the gleam of anything in my squinted sight-line.

From my mother’s lap, on the only chair that isn’t
rigged with a broomstick planked with doughy strips
of egg noodles in all stages of drying,
I watch my aunt lean her heft
over the doddering wood table,
her body rocking the dough to submission:

roll, roll, flour, fold--roll, roll, flour fold.
Her wadded knuckles, bent against the butcher
knife, slice out consistent thin ribbons,
her plump hands so graceful and deliberate;

each rolled slice unfurling to noodles and laid across
the floured rack to dry. And their talk,
murmured in unison with the knock of
knife to wood, that rumbled intimacy that sisters have.

She nods, lowers the first fist of noodles into
the salted pot of water, nudging her wrist against
her dark tousled hair, in her shortness of breath;
asks if I’m hungry yet.

©Lorraine Henrie Lins

Open the Gate

Soon, as is right
I’ll watch you go
And know
That from pram to now
I did the best I could
To make you good
And grow.

And further then,
You’ll be yourself
Your confidence not lacking
And requiring a lesser backing

And then one day
You may turn back
And say
That we understand
All that came before
And look upon it
Kindly from afar.

Open the gate S
And off you go
Excitement growing
Up the track
To other gates and other tracks
Ones I’ll not point to
But ones that will be found by you.

©John Shand

It is All Connected by Catrin Welz-Stein
Ride a White Swan by Catrin Welz-Stein
How To Fight Like A Girl

To fight like a girl
you must first become an ocean
to hold the crush of tears
pooling beneath the ducts.

You must learn to walk
through the day with a fish of fear
floating through
the coral of your belly.

At the sound of battle,
you must paint your nails
the boldest blood shade of red
and use them like shark teeth
to maim and masticate
those piranha emotions
gnawing at your strength.

You must get off your knees
after the tentacles of cancer and chemo,
nausea and fatigue, pain and weakness
grasp your body and feed on all things woman.

You must remember you are a woman
when lavas of sweat roll from your bald head
and flank your face, and your lips crack and flake
like a dried beach.

You must stand straight, wash yourself in softness,
tattoo stars on your fists and sing praises
for the half-moons in the sky of your breasts.

©Loretta Diane Walker

(Previously published in 94 Creations Literary Journal, October 2013, Her Texas, March 2015)

Poetry

nests in the tree whose absence
grows on you lies in the fruit

of a dream you peel the skin from
shines in the sentence parsed by

sunlight It draws up the rainbow
tROUT caught in the net of your rhythms

disappears in the still water
of speech where images bob like apples

It stares up at you from the eye
of a period trapped in the cul-de-sac

of the present where words spring
from the pencil cradled in the halfway

house of your hand that leads
to your wrist that rises to your elbow

that climbs crossing the shoulder’s white
Alps down into the valley of bone where

your heart and lungs housing
all those hollow rooms resound

with poetry’s indrawn breath
the pump that pushes out blood

©Llewellyn McKernan

(First published in 1989 in Appalachian Heritage)
Lecturing My Daughter

In Her First Fall Rain   (6 October 71)

this then is fall rain.
i spoke of it
in july, telling you
rain has textures,
telling you july
rain drives deep for
dry roots, to fill them,
drives in at warm
angles, softly. i
told you then fall

rain is cold, rough as
wrought iron, sometimes,
bent as rusted nails.
you were content,

though, to wait, to learn
this rain by touch,

to measure your blue
fingers against

the still warm places
between rain-drops

on your surprised face.

©Tom Montag

Knowledge

If you look for love,
you shall not find it—
better to let it creep
upon you in the dark

or fall from the sudden noon

like an avalanche,
stark... and blinding.

For no sound shall tell you where
when you hear the footsteps

and feel
the lurch of the heart,
the gentleness of the eyes...

and the fingers, lost
uncurling... steady.

No voice will call your name;
no bell will ring—

instead,
it will descend like freight

and the beating of a face...

fixed
and downward,

like the knowledge of the rain.

©Richard Atwood

(Published in Death And Morning, iUniverse, 2011)
Poetry

Star of the Sea

I cry for Stella Maris after Hurricane Sandy when I visit at the end of summer. Sandy trips off of people’s tongues everyday as if the storm hit yesterday. The hurricane sucked sand from the land back in the sea, threw up dirt, sea water, fish, trash. I walk the fence along the back of the property with signs marked “Danger”. Aftershocks don’t stop.

Gone is the wild flower garden, only one post from the clothesline tilts toward the house to escape the tangled lines that pull it seaward. The pavilion washed away in the storm and I can’t walk down to the shore or sit on a bench to watch the ocean at daybreak. Each morning sunrise gets caught in the grid of a chain link fence that frames the shore with piles of boards and bits of broken lives.

I lean against the fence that stands between me and the sea to get as close as I can to a dune rose bush that hangs off the bluff. Torn from the front of the pavilion, its roots brush air, most leaves are salt brown, but it still bears tenacious blossoms. A butterfly lands on a dusk pink rose pollinating hope.

©Ingrid Bruck

(Previously published in the anthology, Howl of Sorrow: A Collection of Poetry Inspired by Hurricane Sandy c2015 Long Branch Arts Council)

An Octogenarian Ponders

Troubled nights prolonged; days cut short. My friends’ lives—succinctly summarized on headstones: name, dates of birth, demise—drown my spirit’s glee. Time’s threads, tangled with gloom and sadness, halt my laughter and speed the tears. But memory rebels and chooses joy! Joy, defiant, looks to God for victory. Advanced in age, daring to reject grief’s sorrow and pain, my heart whispers "There is no death." Life, renewed in a distant garden, reverberates as rich melodies echo from an angel choir. There my friends, in bodies of radiant glory, await my coming, and with that grand reunion all curfews end.

©Betty Jamerson Reed

(First published in Living With Loss™ Magazine, Summer 2011 )

Elements by Catrin Welz-Stein

Close to You by Catrin Welz-Stein
Poetry

**Crisp, the morning in April**

for Jeffrey

Crisp, the morning in April in Easter week and looking up you could just about fall over staring between the dense leaves for little diamonds of blue sky that seemed to bulge past their outlines. They twinkled and went out as whole branches got tugged down and cracked by the metal cable held tight in the winch.

You could see the cracks in the big limbs even as they opened downward toward the trunk like a jacket unzipping showing clean heartwood. You could even smell the light sinewy wood all sweet and simple despite the head-numbing noise of the chipper and despite the sourness of airborne bark-dust and exhaust and the asparagus-smelling leaf-confetti raining around the big wheels.

If you looked up and around that’s what you’d see, and that’s what you’d smell, itching more and more inside the neck of your sweatshirt with your hood down making your back hot. You wouldn’t be able to hear the limbs crack for the overpowering noise of the chipper or tell how fast your father’s red plaid sleeves tossed lighter limbs into the funnel’s draft.

You could only see snatches—your sister petting the white cat on the lawn, the firm stance of your brother’s white sneakers on the green-littered asphalt—only feel the bark twist in your hand as the chipper accepted what you offered, the zipper scrape your chin hard as the branch snagged your hood, the small surprise of your feet unburdened of their small weight, letting go, suddenly leaving earth.

©Casey FitzSimons

(Previously appeared in *Imitation and Allusion in December, 2013* )

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**Sideshow**

The sea climbs up to Coney Island step by wrinkled step, drifting back and forth on the beach to the moon’s beat, like the old men marking time on the Boardwalk, uncertain of the promised land’s hard comfort.

Gulls hobo up a thermal swirled around the Thunderbolt’s old bones to ride the rails, scavenging down the coaster’s skeleton for scraps.

But it’s winter now, the streets are empty, everything’s picked clean.

The Electric Ladies and the Giraffe-Necked Women from Burma still sashay up and down Surf Avenue, searching in vain for the long-lost rowdy boys from the Navy Yard; their painted faces flake off the woodwork sin by faded sin.

Even the barkers have nothing left to say; they huddle in trailers, silent over coffee and smokes.

Only the Wonder Wheel still circles heaven’s houses high above the sideshow, unmoved by the old men marooned on the empty beach to wait for the climbing sea and the hungry, cold-eyed gulls.

©Paul Bernstein

(Previously appeared in *the new renaissance*, Volume XIII, No. 2, 2009)
**Dog-bitten**

I think of growing up as a white house,
And its tasseled fence is there too, burnt with age.

There is grass brindled by dirt, and
Cicada skins, moth wings.

A sense of puncture wounds in things,
a taste of sulfur in the air and the punch.

Repetition occurs in all things damaging
and courteous to the house. The air,
eats and breathes and could do more if tapped.

Words lean to the left effortlessly,
and dance on wind drafts.

Through window, and plastic, glass,
and stalks of sunflower peaking through.

Daily, the daddy, seeks deprivation,
Or retribution, or retaliation against

The Tv, screens of metalled skin
that hiss, crackle like bugs missing
their stingers.

We return to the house where a screen smashes. And
there is a bursting outlined by its cloud.

There is a great sense of a young mother’s undoing
Like a bolt, unhinged.

I’ve yet to describe the action that fits
The setting like a glove. All I’ve been
told is that splinter from the woodrot
couldn’t surpass the bite of the cur.

©Matthew Tuckner

**Initiating My Daughter**

Before your childish body
rounds and softens,
before some smooth-skinned boy
rocks your equanimity,
as night’s bright crescent
pierces the Eastern sky—
we curl in the porch swing,
lap robe tucked around our feet.

Moonflowers twine the railing,
lucent, blue-sheen faces tipped
as I explain little winters
that come before spring, before rebirth:
womb damp, lush with fern—
cushioned bower, life cradle
where once I cradled you.

Before you outgrow fairy-tales
still half-believed,
before the first blood spills—
I whisper mysteries in your ear,
your eyes wide with wonder
that you, girl-child, are pilgrim
in this ancient rite.

Before you turn in seasons,
before you pull and press the tides,
know you hold life
behind your flat belly,
clap miracles in your hand—
Snow White and Rose Red,
virgin and goddess,
woman.

©Ann Howells

(Originally published in *Blood Offerings*
(Incarnate Muse Press))

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Make a Wish by Catrin Welz-Stein
Spectre of the Brocken

I’ve only once possessed a halo,
on the summit of a mountain
my shadow cast like a shroud
onto mist, sunlight diffracted
into a rainbow round my head.
My own personal nimbus.

It set me thinking about the sky
how it’s blue and why
light scatters in the air from
molecules of oxygen and nitrogen.
Their interference a Rayleigh scattering
of shorter wavelength blues and a smattering
of violet.

Does the sea reflect the sky?
Or sky the sea and does it matter?
Is the whiteness of the sun simply Mie scatter?

I’ve only once possessed a halo,
on the summit of a mountain
my shadow was cast like an angel
but no one else would ever see it.

©Clint Wastling

Advice to myself as a Young Poet

I give myself permission
to fall and slip on each word
I falter, embracing all
my fear. Although the tongue trips
in front of faces, squirming
to my stammering, bring me
near to all the places
I stumbled embarrassed
from their laughter—
I give myself permission
to hesitate with my eternal
sentence, exhaling these gusts
of tension looking up
so surprised when I feel
their eyes upon me,
now I find my cheer—
with breaths inhaling
my own locked lip verses
plunging into darkness. Call me
the seer of stutters, just because
I leap with my words
doesn’t mean you can feel
all the thunder rattling
never regretting the painful
ripples, the wrinkles
of my years. Standing
and still shaking I take back
all my tears, I give myself
permission to take back
the gaping toll of days
I fought when I sat
silently alone tripping
on my stutter step,
as I fell, grasping
nothing but air, embracing
each endless pause
while stuck inside
the climax—tongue tasting
all my fears.

©Adrian Ernesto Cepeda

(Thank You Alma Luz Villanueva)
In Our Minds

We keep the illegality of it in our minds
with choked breathing, we stand outside as they rifle the room
to find what we both know they will never find.
The good lady and I, follow them back
down
the winding
staircase, lustful whispers still smelling on our breath. One of the searchers stopped
abruptly     an askance glance at us
a few of our words might have fallen in the cracks on the floor.

Panting from the fear from thrill dangling   over
the 200 feet drop-off
of the sharpened cliffs,
freedom, a wanton child hanging around the ajar door
in this illicit game there’s a spin that you and I put on fate
to become two newly discovered planets,
held tightly in our fist, the patent, and we squeezed it down in our minds,

As we had long shaken off the searchers, their torchlight’s elongated silhouettes
on the wrong side of the dunes.
On this plateau now   looking
down
on their furtive torches flickering flickering...

©Eaton Jackson
Sustenance

The conference underway, a woman brings a baby to the session on the art of truth. Discrete, she takes a seat, then slings her son beneath her breast. Mere chairs apart, attendees listen as the leader, round with child herself, begins to speak about poetic license. Most ignore the sound of suckling while polite opinions tout ideals, but then one woman moves across the room, disgust apparent, even though she read aloud her gory work on loss of life from thugs on drugs just hours ago. Four times confined to nursery, I balk at her delight in blood, disdain for milk.

©Jane Blanchard

(Previously published: ETC: A Review of General Semantics 70.2 (April 2013): 218)

Heat Lightning

I lowered the anchor over the side, and watched as the splayed, cast iron behemoth plundered through green light to the bottom. Waves lapped boat ribs, making a drowsy, metallic thud.

Pink lightning, forked tongued, struck the western night sky, threatening bad weather.

Naw, it’s just heat lightning, Tom graveled. Won’t bother us.

I thought of electric fences, and how lightning coursed along the wire once, killing a man not ten feet from me.

I thought of my own un-holiness, and how the fires do not purge. I thought of a thousand ways to die.

The heat-cracked night pressed down. The water, the only certainty. I exist somewhere between God and my understanding of God.

©Bruce Majors

(Originally published by Number One Literary Magazine, volume 41, 2013)
Return

He looked at me in hesitation and confusion when I told him his home was once my home and I would like to look around. His wife invited me in. She was a fat woman, fat and sensuous who wore a tight skirt around her ample body, exposing soft skin, white, smooth and inviting, walking like a cat, a large cat purring, showing her house which was once my house or at least my Mother’s house, who did not purr, though she loved cats though she was a fat woman, not a sexy woman, not a woman at peace with her body, but she was queen of her kitchen, which no longer exists. Gone—the coal stove which burned all winter, keeping the kitchen cozy; gone—the kitchen table tight by the back wall, where we had our meals, conversations, conflicts; gone—the old radio above the door, where I stood on a chair not wanting to miss a word of the Lone Ranger; gone—the sink by the window; gone—the window, replaced by an extension built into the garden, the walls even the roof made transparent, transforming the kitchen, the house the atmosphere, making it bright and cheerful and I realized that my old home was a dark home, we all lived in dark homes, never expecting the light of the outside to be a part of the inside, never expecting to feel as free inside as outside and now my home is obliterated, the interior sunlight burning away my faded memories;

my Mother in her realm turned to ashes. Only the formal and infrequent presence of my Father is preserved—guest, landlord, odd job man face in newspaper, tyrant—impervious to time and the bright interior of this strange place which has no history or at least no history of its prior owners. Also gone—the garden of my memory, my playground, my gymnasium, my bright extra room, the lawn where I practiced walking on empty paint barrels, my Father painting the stucco walls white, why I never understood, his time so limited, me falling and breaking my arm, he rushing me to hospital, the long wait in a long corridor, my arm hurting, me leaning against my Father’s comforting body, the only time I remember such physical intimacy, that garden is gone, the lawn is gone,

the fruit trees are gone, those apple, pear and cherry trees that lined the lawn and which I climbed almost to the top, the branches that broke, the arrested falls, the bones that didn’t break, the white nets my Father spread over branches heavy with cherries in a valiant attempt to foil the birds. Gone—the vegetable garden that I had to weed replaced by a paved patio with potted plants, cute flea market metal sculptures with eyes and awkward arms, the cat woman, her large form displaying her space, talked of the neighborhood, how she had always loved this house even before she improved this house, living just down
the road, isn’t that so! she calls to her husband sitting in a corner reading a newspaper, he answers in a short simple sentence while her sentences continues with endless subordinate clauses

as voluminous as her body, as I looked around, looking for ghosts remembered filling up kerosene heaters all winter long in the dark space behind the garage which also no longer exists,

turned into an extra bedroom, the garage so tight my father had to squeeze past to start the car or push it out to start it on damp winter mornings, straining with a hand crank until my Mother threw a fit

and forced him to buy something modern and reliable that did not need to be babied and coaxed and stroked but started right away giving him more time to study the racing form, more time to ensure

my hair was combed, my tie straight before I rushed out the back door, collect my bike tucked behind the car in that tiny garage and off to school, which the cat woman gleefully told me no longer existed, torn down for more houses, the playing fields also torn up for more houses, but the lake, the reservoir, the recreational center for the town was still there, but there was no more boating

no more swimming, it was too polluted, but the path around it, through the woods, where I tried to kiss a girl, has been widened and paved, very convenient for mothers with strollers, you should go there, she said, it is very nice, but the more she talked the more I needed to shorten this visit to my old neighborhood, but first I asked to look at my old bedroom upstairs, which had not been improved

and looked cramped and claustrophobic, but of the two upstairs rooms I could not remember which was mine and which was my sister’s, I walked between both rooms, looked out the windows, looked into the street and looked into the garden, but I could not recall which was the space I protected from my sister’s prying presence.
Lost, I descended down the narrow stairs, through strange rooms that had once been living room, dining room, doors replaced with arches the past replaced by another’s presence, memory replaced by the present, shadows replaced by unforgiving light, whenever you are in the neighborhood

the cat woman smiled, come and visit, holding my hand I certainly will, I replied, we both knew we were lying as she closed the door. The one icon that remained, the one icon I had expected to be destroyed

still stood tall at the end of the street. A magnificent oak which had towered over the neighborhood, which I had climbed and explored whenever no neighbors were prying, whose girth was greater than four stretching arms, which had shaded childish games, showered abundant acorns, witnessed fights and frolics—it still towered, still stood tall, its great limbs impervious to time.
“Knowledge” was chosen as my signature poem, among a dozen favorites. I’ve had my Doctor Zhivago love affair -- didn't want it, don't value adultery, it happened. But then after, and long gone, am still haunted by the depth, the memory: aching to my soul to kindle again what was lost -- but not with a woman, next time a man. Yet whether str8 or gay, you can't have what you never meet. Ah, the tragedy of the wonder lost, the life to be gained, if not. But rarely is one able to make it so. It either happens, or it won't. —Rick Atwood

I chose “Sideshow” because I like the way it uses language to roll out a series of sharply-drawn images while maintaining a consistency of tone, pacing, and overall structure wrapping the imagery together. I consider it my signature poem because it is my primary performance piece whenever I read in a new milieu, and because it is a poem that other poets who have heard me read single out for praise. —Paul Bernstein

I selected “Sustenance” because it is often (ironically) difficult to achieve any balance between creativity and maternity. —Jane Blanchard

“Meeting Mickey Rooney” is one poem I am fond of. I am a seventy six year old poet and the events in the poem occurred many years ago in Indiana. —Joseph Buehler

“Star of the Sea,” (aka Stella Maris Retreat House) was inspired by Hurricane Sandy, my love of nature, and the deep connection to nature that I find at Stella Maris. Nature provides the springboard for meaning and imagery in this poem, it provides beauty, connection and consolation. I was library director in Long Branch, New Jersey when Hurricane Sandy hit. We reopened the library one week after the storm, just as soon as power was restored to city hall and the hospital. Our library served as a port in the storm, people came to the library to charge their phones, file insurance claims and get warm. Most of my staff (23 people) was in the same state as the community, with no heat or electricity at home. Everyone who came in told us their own Sandy story. My staff kept saying, “We don’t have it so bad,” even though three had lost everything, five had houses so badly flooded they couldn’t live in them and one lost their new truck. Stella Maris Retreat House was my favorite place in Long Branch to go to be on the ocean, their pavilion was destroyed, though the main house withstood massive storm damage. Three years later, the city is still recovering from Sandy, yet the prevailing mood is optimistic, just like my poem. —Ingrid Bruck

I selected “Seasons of the Mind” because I feel it shows how the parade of seasons mimics the ups and downs of the human experience with hopefulness re-kindled over and over again. We move from hope to gratification to ambivalence to dread and back to hope. The seasons paint these portraits for us in color and in black and white. —Frank Cavano

I selected “Advice to myself as a Young Poet,” because it's a poem that speaks to the silent ones. The ones who are afraid of speaking up and letting their voices heard. I wrote and read this at Alma Luz Villanueva’s seminars during one of my MFA residencies at Antioch University in Los Angeles. Because of my stutter, I’ve always been very shy and weary about reading my work among strangers and even had more trepidation with my colleagues but during this one seminar, Alma gave each of us strength and even though I stuttered I felt like this poem was my breakthrough. I am hoping will inspire other poets to let their voices shine loud in and out of their poetic pages. —Adrian Ernesto Cepeda
Poets’ Comments on Choosing Their Poem

I look out my skylights at night, thinking about life on other planets. I am obsessed with the increasing possibility that humans will land on Mars in my lifetime. “On that one-way trip to Mars” is a way for me to travel, since I cannot be an astronaut. I often write about my bone disorder and the rich words and images in medicine. This poem combines my obsession with learning more about my body and space travel. "On that one-way trip to Mars" has been selected for publication in Crab Fat Literary Magazine. — Marlena Chertock

Only a few of my poems rhyme, but I chose “Your Spirit is a Shadow,” because I see how it touches people when I read it aloud. I wrote it in memory of my brother, an old beatnik (I guess I’m an old hippie — only a few years made all the difference). I was my brother’s caretaker for his final seven years, the slow decline of dementia. He was not religious, in fact he was anti-religious, but I would talk to him about spirit. I said we all have a spirit that lives on after we die. He wasn’t buying it and kept challenging me: “What is spirit? What do you mean?” I told him your spirit is like a shadow except instead of darkness it is made of light. As his death neared, I could sense his spirit growing larger. He denied it to the end and I love him for that. After my brother’s passing, years passed before I could write about it. When I was ready, this poem sprang up. You could write it on my tombstone (and please do). — Joe Cottonwood

As a creative writing and literature major at the University of Central Florida, I was often referred to as the "blue collar poet" because of my prior experience both in the U. S. Navy and as a shipyard worker for almost a decade before returning to school. I regard “Sailing for Joseph Conrad” my most personal and autobiographically revealing work since I have been sailing since the age of five, and most of this grew from a series of overnight races I participated in as a teenager. Its primary inspiration, as noted in the dedication, began from a line in Conrad’s novel Heart of Darkness. — Bill Cushing

I chose “Ole Man Blank” because I am always mindful of my mortality and the poem also illustrates the fickle ways of love. Blank the cat once loved me and now he seems not to remember our five years of love together. — Ruth Z. Deming

I've chosen “Crisp, the morning in April” because it deals with tragedy by describing the pleasant day that encloses it, the natural things that led to it, but avoids lurid indulgence. — Casey FitzSimons

I chose “#7,” because no matter how much time has passed since I wrote it I tend to see something in the news that reminds me that progress moves at a glacial pace. What might actually be important is often lost. — Mike Freveletti

For me, “I Felt You, before I Saw You...” is a glimpse of the hopeful and wonderful intimacy between Maker and Made. It makes me less afraid to live and less afraid to die every time I read it. — Ryan Frisinger

A signature poem, just one poem, that is an interesting idea, but of all the poems written over many years, which are all in one way or another, biography, which is the signature poem? I have no idea. “Return” is a poem written in response to events in a life, or a mood, or a phrase? Or hope? I’m going to the past, to my childhood, or at least a futile attempt to return, but as we all know, we can never really go home. — Peter D. Goodwin
Poets’ Comments on Choosing Their Poem

On “Attempted Dialogue With Cicadas,” The forest was a buzz for weeks and it was pure magic. This was in 1980…I have luckily experienced two more generations of the 17 year cicada. And what I say was how it was, is... — Roberta Gould

I was a young aspiring poet back in 1973, working on my BA in English. But I had no focus. The real world soon swept me up—marriage, job, children, and grandchildren. I found myself working with older Americans in nursing homes, home care, and hospice. With the birth of my first grandchild I started writing again. I went back to school and earned an MA in creative writing. “Pearls” was the first poem I had published, inspired by 30 years of working in the health care industry and encouraged by professors who taught me the art of revision. — Alan D. Harris

I consider “Initiating My Daughter,” to be my signature poem. It was written almost twenty years ago, and until fairly recently, I used it to open or close every reading I did. Among poet friends, this is the poem with which I am most often associated. It is not absolutely true in every detail, but is true in spirit and close to my heart. It has been published several times, originally in the anthology, Blood Offerings, from Incarnate Muse Press. I spoke with one of the editors, Anita Barnard, about six months after it was released. She said the other editor, Michelle Rhea, had called her one morning, and during the opening of the conversation, asked if she was crying. She replied she had just read a poem that brought her to tears. It was my poem. This is the highest compliment I have ever been paid. — Ann Howells

I particularly like “In Our Minds,” which is trying to recount two secret lovers who were almost caught. — Eaton Jackson

“White” was the first poem I published as an adult since I had been featured in university publications as a student. That’s mainly due to not submitting. When I finally decided to submit it, I had not, up until that time, wished for anything more than for this poem to be published. “White” is poem that I used to recite like a mantra to calm me to sleep. The stories that surround it from that moment until now are as intricate as snowflakes. — Loukia M. Janavaras

“Twilight” is one of my earlier poems. It’s a love poem, of course. I find I still choose to read the poem at readings...maybe because we’re growing older...and I feel such sweetness in our life. — Sharon Lask Munson

I chose “Beach Philosophy,” as my signature poem. This poem truly encompasses what I feel about the mysteries of life with love being the one true constant. — Judith A. Lawrence

“At Nine, This Is My Church” was selected to offer a jig-saw glimpse--a signature, as it were. — Lorraine Henrie Lins

Once I began writing, I realized how important expressing myself was to me. When I attended my first poetry slam as an audience member, I was somewhat horrified that people would get up and pit their words against each other. My words were very long in coming, and I did not intend to risk them for a contest. Thus, my poem, “Why I Won't” was born. I have now written over 350 poems and numerous memoirs and stories, many of them published. — Susan Mahan

I selected “Heat Lightning,” as Tom, my brother-in-law, and I were night fishing for crappie on the Tennessee River. With lights lowered into the water, it made an eerie green glow visible down to
Poets’ Comments on Choosing Their Poem

about fifteen feet. That strange green light and the pink heat lightning which was closing in the Western sky was dynamite for writing this poem. I chose it because it’s one poem I’ve written that fit perfectly with my mood. Mildly dark, a bit melancholy, and introspective. It was like sailing a dark sea with not dimension, no direction. —Bruce Majors

I selected “Poetry” as my signature poem because of its two-line stanzas, which is my favorite verse form. Because of its fulsome images, my favorite kind of poetic language (it appeals to all the senses, including emotional and mental ones). Because it’s about poetry, my favorite activity, where a pencil, a piece of paper, and the poems I write there are my best friends, my daily companions, the only constant in constant change. “Poetry” won first prize, lyric poetry category, in the 1986 West Virginia Writers Contest. —Llewellyn McKernan

“Missing Force” embodies two major thrusts of my poetry – Nature and environmental activism. As important, it depicts a most sacred place on this planet, rich in lessons for us mortals. —Karla Linn Merrifield

“Lecturing My Daughter in Her First Fall Rain,” was selected because it is the most widely read and shared of all my poems, and because it is one that my daughter about whom it is written and I can recite in unison. It’s sad to think that I could have stopped writing in November, 1972, and I’d still have my signature poem, but that's how it goes. —Tom Montag

“Exodus” is my signature poem. Maya or Māyā (Sanskrit माया māyā), a term found in Pali and Sanskrit literature, has multiple meanings and can be translated to mean something of an ’illusion' —Bozhidar Pangelov

“Postcard to Mom” is devoted to my Mom, that's why I selected it. —Valery V. Petrovskiy

I have chosen “An Octogenarian Ponders,” because it provides a way to honor friends whose lives have ended, but whose memory creates a compelling desire to reunite with them. —Betty Jamerson Reed

“Dance” inspired the title of my first book, "Wild and Still,” which epitomizes my love of nature, especially the ocean, and the energy of ebb and flow in life. It was published in 2013 by Over and Above Press. —Maryann Russo

I chose “That Day” for my signature poem because it reflects both my tenderness for this world and my despair over the wars that are being fought in it. —Beate Sigriddaughter

I chose “The Night Speaks” as the nighttime is always inspiring to me. Its contrast with the bright cacophonous daytime makes it a period of intrigue to me. The mortal presences around me that come out of their lair to earn their nocturnal livelihood and the moon and the stars can teach us a lot about ourselves. The night definitely speaks through its silence. —Nilotpal Sarmah

“Open the Gate” was written on the occasion of my daughter's 18th birthday. I gave her a copy of it on that day. The gate referred to is of course a metaphor, but also a real gate. (I also gave her a framed photo of the gate I’d taken.) From it leads a track to an isolated and beautiful cottage we rent as a family every year in North Wales by the sea. When I first took my daughter there she was eight, and sitting in the car opposite the gate I said, “Open the gate Sarah.” —John Shand
Poets’ Comments on Choosing Their Poem

My one favorite poem...well...I like “The Old Couple Flies in a Dream to the Still Red Desert” very much today, probably because today also happens to be my wife's birthday.
 —Ron Singer

I chose “Dusk in a Maine Winter” because dusk feels like a magical time to me, especially during Maine winters. This poem allowed me to find words for the feelings that arise for me when day flows into night. —Jane Sloven

I chose, “Dog-bitten” solely for the poem’s representation of my ongoing battle with depicting my mother’s rather tempestuous childhood. I am constantly trying to write a poem that somehow simultaneously portrays her memories yet obscures them as to somehow mimic the passage of time. So far, this poem is the closest I’ve come to achieving this possibly never-ending goal of mine. I hope to somehow get this poem out there as a tribute to her and the memories she carries with her.
 —Matthew Tuckner

“Over Inspiration” was initially inspired by my step-granddaughter, who, when she was about two years old, rose up on her tiptoes, pointed at the moon, and exclaimed, “Oh no!” The world certainly has more pressing needs than yet another metapoem featuring the moon, (especially if the “gravity” of all those poems is somehow pulling back on the moon in return!), but when an adorable two year old warns me not to go there, I just can’t help myself. —Mark van Gelder

"Purple" was written on an airplane flying home from my brother's house, three weeks after my father died. It represents the durability of family and the promise that the memory of people we love returns to us in different forms. —Karen Vande Bossche

In February 2013, I was commissioned to write a poem for breast cancer survivors and those going through breast cancer. The poem I wrote was entitled Monday Mammogram: A Conversation with Karla K. When I wrote “How to Fight Like a Girl,” I had no idea I would literally be fighting that fight. July 24, 2013, I was diagnosed with stage 2 breast cancer. Again, I was asked in October to write a poem in recognition of breast cancer awareness. The Theme was “How to Fight Like a Girl,” hence the title of my poem. When I wrote this poem, I was going through chemotherapy.
 —Loretta Diane Walker

I’ve chosen “Spectre of the Brocken” simply because I still love performing and reading it.
 —Clint Wastling

“Drive-Thru Poetry” is an older poem that I wrote in my 20s, but it’s one I remember every time I’m asked the question so what do you write about? —Steve Werkmeister

I’ve been a laborer all of my life. In “Evensong,” I spoke, for the first time, with the “I” being neither myself nor another, but the collective voice of my peers, my class of people, past and present. After many years and thousands upon thousands of hours spent in harsh industrial environments, it seemed something I was perhaps credentialed to do. This poem, confessional, devotional and dispirited, is what emerged. —Rob Whitbeck

I chose “Missing Boy,” hoping it will serve as a reminder of an autistic boy whose disappearance was widely noted, and is now forgotten, in his city. He himself, incapable of speech, was as deserving as any boy of a respectful and sorrowful elegy. —Sarah White
Writers’ Bios

**Rick Atwood** has written three books of poetry, three screenplays, two mega stage plays, and been published in a few literary journals. Still, relatively alone and unknown. Retired, living in Kansas, and wish to God I were near the sea again. Born in Baltimore, raised in PA., lived mostly in California. Currently finalizing a gay, erotic fantasy, (Game of Thrones ambiance): sizzling, bloody, and romantic, with a moral thread woven throughout.

**Paul Bernstein** is a medical editor and self-taught poet who has published steadily for the past 15 years. Recent work has appeared or been accepted in *New Plains Review, Front Porch Review, Big River Poetry Journal, River Poets Review, Poetry Quarterly, U.S.1 Worksheets* and elsewhere. He is also a prizewinning amateur country music lyricist. Paul currently lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he participates regularly in open mic readings.

**Jane Blanchard** lives and writes in Georgia. Her poetry has recently appeared in *The Evansville Review, The Rotary Dial*, and *The Seventh Quarry*.

**Ingrid Bruck** is a poet/storyteller/retired library director. She recently moved to Amish country in Pennsylvania. She writes poems, cans, makes jam, and grows wildflowers. Her work has appeared in *Howl of Sorrow* and recently in *Topography* and *Panolyzine*. She is a member of *The International Women’s Writing Guild* and a charter member of *The Avocado Sisterhood*.


**Adrian Ernesto Cepeda** lives in Los Angeles. He is currently enrolled in the MFA program at Antioch University in Los Angeles, CA. Although he has been writing poetry for over twenty years, its been within the recent years that his poems began flourishing, catching lyrical fire. His working philosophy is to write poetry every day because when inspiration calls, you must accept the charges.

**Marlena Chertock** is the Poetry Editor for *District Lit* and a graduate of the *Jiménez-Porter Writers’ House*. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Lines+Stars, The Little Patuxent Review, Medical Literary Messenger, Fukushima Poetry Anthology, jaffatelaqlam, Crab Fat, Cacti Fur, Straight Forward Poetry, and The Syzygy Poetry Journal*. Her articles have appeared in *The Washington Post, Marketplace, NBC News, News21, WTOP, USA TODAY, and The Gazette*. Find her at marlenachertock.com or @mchertock.

**Frank Cavano** is a retired physician who tries to capture in his writings the pleasure and the pain, the beauty and the pathos and the humor of the unique condition of being human. Over the last 6-7 years he has had more than 100 pieces (poetry, short stories, essays) published online and/or in print. He is always grateful when an effort strikes a chord with a reader.

**Joe Cottonwood** has worked as a carpenter, plumber, and electrician for most of his life. He is the author of nine published novels, a book of poetry, and a memoir. He lives in La Honda, California, where he built a house and raised a family. His most recent book is *99 Jobs: Blood, Sweat, and Houses*.

**Bill Cushing** was born in Virginia, lived in various states in the US, and settled in California in 1996. Earning an MFA in writing from Goddard College, Bill has had reviews, articles, and poems published in *Another Chicago Magazine, Birders World, Brownstone Review, the Florida Times Union, genius & madness, Metaphor, Sabal Palm Review, the San Juan Star, and Synergy*. He now teaches English at East Los Angeles and Mt. San Antonio colleges as well as focusing his energy on his wife Ghisela and their son Gabriel.
Writers’ Bios

Ruth Z. Deming, a psychotherapist and mental health advocate, has had her poetry published in lit mags including Mad Swirl, Poet’s Haven and Bookends Review. She lives in Willow Grove, a suburb of Philadelphia, PA. You can read her blog at www.ruthzdeming.blogspot.com

Casey FitzSimons has poems in print and online in The Centrifugal Eye, Red Wheelbarrow, Mezzo Cammin, and numerous other journals. She has had first place awards from Mendocino Coast Writers Conference, (San Francisco) Bay Area Poets Coalition, and Ina Coolbrith Circle, and been honored by the Soul-making Keats Sonnet, River Styx, Writecorner Press, and Salem College competitions. She has published 12 chapbooks, including The Sharp Edges of Knowing (2015) and Against the Familiar Wall (2014). Casey taught art for many years. Her reviews of SF Bay Area exhibitions frequently appeared in Artweek, and her studio drawing book, Serious Drawing, was published by Prentice Hall. She has a master's degree in Fine Arts from San José State University.

Mike Freveletti is a poet & writer based in Chicago. His work has been published in poetry journals such as Snapdragon Journal, Allegro Poetry Magazine and Local Gems Press Limerick Edition. Most days you can find him in a local coffee shop reading books written by poets who inspire him. He's probably crafting a few his own in there as well. For eternal wisdom follow him on twitter @Mike21an.

Ryan Frisinger is a professor of English, holding an M.F.A. in Writing from Lindenwood University. He is also an accomplished songwriter, whose work has been featured in numerous television shows, such as America's Next Top Model and The Real World. His non-musical writing has appeared in publications like Foliate Oak Literary Magazine, The MacGuffin, and Punchnel's. He resides in Fort Wayne, Indiana, with his more-talented wife and couldn’t-care-less cat.

Peter D. Goodwin divides his time between the streets and vibrant clutter of New York City and the remnants of the natural world along Maryland’s Chesapeake Bay, discovering in the dislocation of environments and cultures the creative edge where words rekindle their spark. Poems published in the anthologies: September eleven; Maryland Voices; Listening to The Water: The Susquehanna Water Anthology; Alternatives To Surrender; Wild Things–Domestic and Otherwise; This Path; From The Porch Swing; The Coming Storm as well as in various journals including Rattle, Memoir(and), River Poets Journal, Delaware Poetry Review, Yellow Medicine Review, Twisted Tongue, Poetry Monthly, Main Street Rag, LockRaven Review, Sliver of Stone, Greensilk Review.

Roberta Gould was born in Brooklyn, New York, she is the author of 11 books of poetry, including: Louder Than Seeds, Pacing the Wind and What History Trammels. Gould’s poems have appeared in many poetry journals such as Green Mountain Review, Confrontation, and The Manhattan Poetry Review, in many Poetry Anthologies, The New York Times, and in numerous online publications.

Alan D. Harris is a 60 year-old graduate student who writes short stories, plays, and poetry based primarily upon the life-stories of friends, family and total strangers. Harris is the 2011 recipient of the Stephen H. Tudor Scholarship in Creative Writing, the 2014 John Clare Poetry Prize, and the 2015 Tompkins Poetry Award from Wayne State University. In addition he is the father of seven, grandfather of seven, as well as a Pushcart Prize nominee in both 2013 and 2014.

Lorraine Henrie Lins is the author of a full-length book of poetry entitled, All the Stars Blown to One Side of The Sky (Virtual Artists Collective, 2014) and two chapbooks by Finishing Line Press: I Called It Swimming (2011) and Delaying Balance (2013) In 2010, Lins was named the Bucks County Pennsylvania Poet Laureate, and prior, had the honor of winning The Penland Prize for Poetry. Her poems have appeared in numerous publications, including: The Schuylkill Valley Journal, Mudfish 16, Transcendent Visions and, Eating Her Wedding Dress, along with several online journals and
collections. Born and raised in the suburbs of Central New Jersey, the self-professed Jersey Girl now resides in the suburbs of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with her family and several dogs.

**Ann Howells**’s poetry appears in *Borderlands, RiverSedge,* and *Spillway* among others. She serves on the board of Dallas Poets Community, 501-c-3 non-profit, and has edited *Illya’s Honey* since 1999, recently going digital (www.IlyasHoney.com) and taking on a co-editor. In 2001, she was named “Distinguished Poet of Dallas” by the city. Her chapbook is, *Black Crow in Flight,* (Main Street Rag Publishing, 2007). She has been read on NPR, interviewed on *Writers Around Annapolis* television, and nominated four times for a Pushcart. Her first book, *Under a Lone Star,* will be released by Village Books Press early in 2016.

**Eaton Jackson** is an aspiring poet. He is Jamaican by birth, but has been living in the United States for the past four years.

**Loukia M. Janavaras** is from Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. She resided in Athens, Greece, for 11 years followed by two years in the United Arab Emirates. In 2010, she received an Honorable Mention in the Writer’s Digest 79th Annual Writing Competition for The Neighbor in the Memoirs/Personal Essay category. In 2012, her work appeared in a range of publications, including *The Creative Writer,* *Gloom Cupboard,* *Wilderness House Literary Review,* *Turbulence,* *The Newtowner,* *Pyrrha,* *Riverbabble,* *Decades Review,* *Torrid Literature Journal,* *Down in the Dirt,* *Eskimo Pie,* *Shadow Road Quarterly,* and *Eunoia Review.*

**Sharon Lask Munson** has been published in *Spillway,* *Popshot,* *Cirque,* *Halfway Down the Stairs* and many others. She is the author of the chapbook, *Stillness Sets Down the Lane* (Uttered Chaos Press, 2010), a full-length book of poems, *That Certain Blue* (Blue Light Press, 2011), and *Braiding Lives* (Poetica Publishing Company, 2014.) She lives and writes in Eugene, Oregon. You can find her at www.sharonlaskmunson.com

**Judith A. Lawrence,** Editor/Publisher of *Lilly Press/River Poets Journal* has just completed a book of ten short stories, titled “The Art of Living.” She currently is working on finishing a murder/mystery novel. Her memoir, based on growing up in foster homes, titled “*What Fruit She Bears*,” is seeking a publisher. She has published several chapbooks of her poetry. Her poetry/fiction has been published in various anthologies and online literary sites.

**Susan Mahan** began writing poetry when her husband died in 1997, at first to assuage her grief. But slowly, she remembered that she had always wanted to be a writer when she was a kid. Life had gotten in the way.

**Bruce Majors** lives in East Tennessee on the Tennessee River where he spends a good amount of time hiking and writing in the rolling wooded hills referred to as “The Knobs.” Majors has published extensively in literary journals and is currently working on his fifth and sixth books of poetry. His current chapbook, just out in February, is entitled “Last Flight of Angels.” from *Finishing Line Press.* He is a member of the Chattanooga and Knoxville Writers Guilds.

**Llewellyn McKernan** has written more poems in West Virginia than anywhere else on earth, so she considers it home. Some of her poems have been published in over 110 journals, 39 anthologies, and have won 94 prizes, awards, and honors. Some can also be found in five poetry books: *Short and Simple Annals,* *Many Waters,* *Llewellyn McKernan’s Greatest Hits,* *Pencil Memory,* and *The Sound of One Tree Falling.*
Writers’ Bios

**Karla Linn Merrifield** is a nine-time Pushcart-Prize nominee and National Park Artist-in-Residence. She has had over 500 poems appear in dozens of journals and anthologies. She has eleven books to her credit, the newest of which *Bunchberries, More Poems of Canada*, a sequel to *Godwit: Poems of Canada* (FootHills), which received the Eiseman Award for Poetry. She is assistant editor and poetry book reviewer for *The Centrifugal Eye* (www.centrifugaleye.com, ). Visit her blog, *Vagabond Poet*, at http://karlalinn.blogspot.com.

**Tom Montag** is most recently the author of *In This Place: Selected Poems 1982-2013*. He is a contributing writer at Verse-Virtual. In 2015 he was the featured poet at Atticus Review (April) and Contemporary American Voices (August) and at year’s end received Pushcart Prize nominations from Provo Canyon Review and Blue Heron Review. Other poems will be found at Hamilton Stone Review, The Homestead Review, Little Patuxent Review, Mud Season Review, Poetry Quarterly, Third Wednesday, and elsewhere.

**Bozhidar Pangelov** was born in the soft month of October in the city of the chestnut trees, Sofia, Bulgaria, where he lives and works. He likes to joke that the only authorship he acknowledges are his three children and his job/hobby in the sphere of business services. His first book was *Four Cycles*, written with Vanja Konstantinova, editor of his next book *Delta*. Some of his poems have been translated into Italian, German, Polish, Russian, Chinese, Turkish and English, and have appeared on poetry sites as well as in anthologies and periodicals all over the world. His pen name “bogpan” means “god Pan” in Greek religion and mythology.

**Valery Petrovskiy** graduated from VKS Higher School, Moscow in Journalism. His work was published in *CLRI, Literary Yard, Missing Slate, Ivory Tower*, elsewhere. He is the author of short story collections “Into the Blue on New Year’s Eve” (*Hammer and Anvil Books, 2013*), “Tomcat Tale” (*Editura StudIS, 2013*). A Pushcart Prize nominee and a finalist to Open Russia’s Literary Contest, 2012, he resides in a remote village by the Volga River, Russia.


**Maryann Russo**’s poems have appeared in numerous publications. In 2013, she published her first book of poetry, “Wild and Still.” She is publishing her second book of poetry “I Wait For the River,” in the summer of 2016. One of her poems was nominated for the 2013 Pushcart Prize. Maryann is a psychotherapist who lives in Palos Verdes Estates.

**Nilotpal Sarmah** is an engineer by profession. His intellectual identity has always been that of a poet’s. A day’s hectic job is topped off with some of his sincerely composed verses. Born in 1987 in Assam, India, her seasonal landscapes have molded Nilotpal’s thoughts. He is constantly writing in the humble yet ambitious hope of seeing his words in print someday.

**John Shand** is an Associate Lecturer in Philosophy at the Open University in Great Britain.
Writers’ Bios

Beate Sigriddaughter, www.sigriddaughter.com, lives and writes in Silver City, New Mexico, Land of Enchantment. Her work has received four Pushcart Prize nominations and won four poetry awards. Her 2015 novel Audrey: A Book of Love is available from ELJ Publications.


Jane Sloven is a writer and a retired psychotherapist. In addition to clinical pieces, her published work includes a memoir, Chocolate, in RiverPoetsJournal, Special Edition-2013, Tales From the Matriarchal Zone; a short-short story, Tara at the Mall, published in December of 2013 in www.chicagonow.com/chicago-literati/2013, two short-short stories, Rufus and Rascal, and an essay, Ralph, in Write To Woof, 2014, by Greywolf Press. She is working on a mystery and a memoir.

Matthew Tuckner was born in Westchester, NY. He is currently a Freshman at Bennington College where he plans to study Poetry, Playwriting, and Film Studies. Clint Wastling is a writer based in the East Riding of Yorkshire. He’s had stories published in “The Weekly News” and in a variety of anthologies and magazines. His first novel, “The Geology of Desire,” was published recently by Stairwell Books. It’s a crime novel set in and around Whitby and Hull in the early 1980’s and WWII and features an undergraduate geologist as the protagonist and would be investigator. Copies available from the publisher at: http://www.stairwellbooks.co.uk/html/novels.html

Mark van Gelder’s poetry has appeared recently in The Texas Observer, the 2016 Texas Poetry Calendar, BestAustin Poetry 2014-15, the Austin International Poetry Festival’s Di-versé-city Anthology (winning 3rd place in 2014), Blue Hole, and the Poetry @ Round Top Festival Anthology. Other awards include 2ndplace for the 2015 Elzy Marathon Thompson Memorial Award, sponsored by the Austin Poetry Society. Mark tinkers with poems in the garage at night in Austin, Texas.

Karen Vande Bossche is a Bellingham, Washington, poet and short story writer who teaches middle school. Some of her more recent work can be found in Burningword, Damselfly, Silver Birch Press and Sediment. Other poems are forthcoming in Straight Forward Poetry, Lunch Ticket, and Drunk Monkeys. Karen was born in the Midwest, raised in Southern California, and is firmly planted now in the Pacific Northwest.

Loretta Diane Walker, a three time Pushcart nominee, has published three collections of poetry. Loretta was recently nominated as “Statesman in the Arts” by the Odessa’s Heritage Council. Walker’s work has appeared in a number of publications, most recently in Her Texas, Red River Review, Illya’s Honey, San Pedro River Review, Pushing the Envelope: Epistolary Poems, 2016 Texas Poetry Calendar, Connecticut River Review, River Poets Journal, and Sugared Water Literary Journal. Her manuscript Word Ghetto won the 2011 Bluelight Press Book Award. She teaches music in Odessa, Texas. Loretta received a BME from Texas Tech University and earned a MA from the University of Texas of the Permian Basin.

Clint Wastling is a writer based in the East Riding of Yorkshire. He’s had stories published in “The Weekly News” and in a variety of anthologies and magazines. His first novel, “The Geology of Desire,”
was published recently by Stairwell Books. It’s a crime novel set in and around Whitby and Hull in the early 1980’s and WWII and features an undergraduate geologist as the protagonist and would be investigator. Copies available from the publisher at: http://www.stairwellbooks.co.uk/html/novels.html

**Steve Werkmeister** is currently an Associate Professor of English at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas, and lives with his family in Olathe, Kansas. His first poetry collection will be released this summer by PunksWritePoemsPress. You can find him on Twitter (@SteveWerkmyster), and he has a literature-focused blog at https://stevesofgrass.wordpress.com/

**Rob Whitbeck** is the author of two full-length poetry collections, *Oregon Sojourn* and *The Taproot Confessions*. He lives rurally in eastern Oregon with his wife and two sons.

**Sarah White** is a retired Professor of French. She lives, writes, and paints in New York City. Her most recent published collections are “The Unknowing Muse” (*Dos Madres Press, 2014*) and “Wars Don’t Happen Anymore,” (*Deerbrook Editions, 2015*).

**Artist Bio:**

**Catrin Welz-Stein** is a German Graphic Designer who makes digital artwork. Catrin graduated from Graphic Design in Darmstadt, Germany and then worked for different advertising agencies in Germany, USA and Switzerland. In 2009 Catrin started to create digital images by collaging old illustrations and photographs. At the same time she discovered online social networks and her private images were then open to the public. The positive responses Catrin received were her motivation to go on with her art.

“A large part of my work is the search for license-free images, illustrations or photos, for which copyright has long expired. Old books, magazines and the Internet are my primary resources for that. Once I have found the fitting image, I break it into pieces and then weave it back together mixed with other images. I transform, assemble and retouch the pieces, until the original image is no longer recognizable and an entirely new image is created.”

To Feel Again by Catrin Welz-Stein