

Keeping the Flame Alive

Issue 8

On The First Day of Women's History Month

The time of the healing feminine energy has come.

Patriarchy has sewn destruction long enough.

The time has come to be healers.

Peace, love, and understanding are essential to our survival.

Rather than selfish bullies let us be supportive healers,
dwelling harmoniously with each other, with Mother Earth.

In this time of terrible conflict and division:

Let us awaken our hearts and practice compassion.

Let us practice community, friendship, and helping each other.

Let us practice resurrection.

May democracy find ways to survive and thrive.

May there be freedom, equality, and justice for all.

May the wisdom of the heart guide us always.

Life is a fleeting moment.

Rather than hate, may we choose love.

- Ron Whitehead, U.S. National Lifetime Poet Laureate

Confessions of Snow

I.

Snowmen talk
in whispers, romantic and dark,
discuss their former lives
as water, as cloud vapor,
their miraculous birth
as frozen crystals
waltzing through winter air. Air
cold enough to freeze lungs.
Their bodies molded by children
on a break from school—
laughter bringing them awake
out of the dark – innocent,
they talk of shadows,
they talk of moonlight
on the whiteness of wintry earth.

Their mouths are made of buckwheat
coal found by railroads.
Their words full of industry and carbon,
business and profit.
They repeat what they hear.
“Business is good for the world.”
Buttons for eyes and scarves
wrapped around their necks
by careful mothers; a pipe
from a father’s study – to smoke
tobacco leftover in the bowl. They learn
early, fire is important. Fire is bright.

II.

After a few days
witnessing snowball fights,
they become family:
the adopted uncle,
always nearby,
always ready,
to tell the wild joke: how do
snowmen mate? With ice-
testicles. Only the frozen stars laugh
at their humor. The snowmen begin to demand:
“Call us snow people.” They
say, “Where are the snowwomen?”
“We want snowwomen,
and puppies. We want
equal rights and jobs.
We want families.
We have rights.”

III.

As they age, snowmen become
lecherous. Empty beer
cans surround them in
the morning and
the whiff of marijuana smoke
drifts through their hats.
They demand to be kissed.
They demand snowman-caves
To hang out with other snowman,
To watch snow sports and drink
cheap Canadian whiskey.
Their laughter is Abraham Lincoln
splitting logs after midnight

in the glow of a lantern and
after the secession of Southern States.

Outside of bedrooms
they watch women
and men undress.
Their stick hands long
to touch flesh. They begin
to comprehend desire,
and with desire
begins all deaths.

IV.

Yet, at night
under a bone-white moon – full,
if you listen closely,
They'll teach you
about absence.
They'll teach you
about stillness.
They'll teach you
how to be alone.

- Kent Fielding

WHEN I GET OLD

I pray that I have said enough, learned enough, done enough, served enough, taught enough, written enough. I pray that I can then be silent and witness my work take form in the world. I pray that benefactors, beneficiaries, and prodigies will be courageous and wise enough not to make the same mistakes that I have made. That their strength shall carry the burden of action and not blustery words. That they might see beyond me, and beyond themselves into a future that welcomes dignity and humility. This will be my first step into heaven.

- Joe Kidd

When The Drummers Charge

Which song would sound loudest
Through this impenetrable valley?
A lone whisper lulled goodbye,
With the Fifers & Drummers charging?
The hour coveted in snow
Beyond the palisades, they've rallied,
Under volley with their volts
Moving in smoke-field dodging cannons
Orderlies and majors roll
Forming their flanking ranks,
Taking up arms on those who flee
Descending on the foray along the battlements.
Sabers splitting sash
Dividing blue & gold,
A bugle ends the conflict
When blood makes the grasses grow.
Would this valley be a ditch?
Will this songbird muffle, sigh?
Clinching guts with a lone slow bleed
With the bodies that we've left behind.

- Frogg Corpse

Chain Smoking

I see her smoking a cigarette in the rain.
Tragically sheltering the ember,
To have a moment with her thoughts,
To unravel them.
An abandoned chain in a forgotten drawer
Painfully twisted, knotted confused thoughts
While the rain seeps in...chain smoking.
Like foul, deep memories dripping
Interrupting attempts of clarity.
She just needs a couple selfish minutes
Of cancer filled indulgence.
Meditation. Escape. Leave me alone.
A pendant trapped in the middle of pain
Sad and reflective in the drizzle.
So careful, cupping the ember and undoing the damage
While a wiley runaway drip sneaks it's way
To her naked cigarette paper.
The dampness ruins her concentration.
There are only these precious moments.
Now, the end is in sight.
The depth of poignant thoughts fade
As ash gathers before a flick...
And she takes a final drag of a necklace of guilt...
Before the reality of the rain
Quenches her moment.
Rain choking, chain smoking.
She goes back to work.
Her break time is over.

- Claire Conroy

A Postcard Picture Life

I'm much better at empathy
than I am at sympathy
although
I did not choose to be this way

I look at the news every morning
until I realize there's nothing
happy for the world to report
some days that takes me
longer than others
whenever the realization hits
I always laugh
at how fake it all is
there can't be that much night
when we can all see the sun
there can't be that much sorrow
I mean come on
we all pass by the same rose gardens
it's not my fault some of us
never stop to notice them

I have seen heaven
and I have seen hell
I've seen the Northern Lights
twice in one year
and watched the ocean calm itself
under mother moon each night
I know the want of hunger
and the luxury of a never ending full spoon
I know the song that the caged bird sings
and I know the smiles
of infinite blue skies and freedom

I know that me and you
are closer to cousin
than foe
and that despite those
that tell us otherwise
we both crave the same things
when our eyes close for the night -
the safety of a full cupboard
a touch of love and comfort
enough hope to feed our friends

- Dan Denton

WHAT WE CAN DO

There is nothing we can do

To the overlords preying over us

Nothing we can do

To the governments that suffocate us

Nothing nothing

And more nothing to be done

Our friends sabotage us

We return to our families

Failing to sooth us in our pain

They shower

Combustibles of assurance

Deluged in opened sores

Explosions burning cruelty

And it becomes worse than nothing

Unconsumed fiery apathy

Fiends lurk in every direction

They blind us

And I believe I hear them scream

They bludgeon and prod us

And try to devour our remains

In a blood red wave of engorgement

They are more than hungry

They are malnourished

Hollow fangs hidden behind their lips

We are beaten at their festivals

They are purified by our screams

There is no need for air or future

Because there is nothing
And nothing to be done about it

Our destruction
In screams and lamentation
Coexists with
Their sweetest contentment
The defamation of our existence
Shaping their paramount joy
Until we are eventually slaughtered
There is nothing we can do
In the remaining void
That is the distillate evil nothing
Not even the smacking of corrupt lips
Heard quietly in the background

There is something we can do

To march forward
Smile at the human hearts
Beating hopefully and in syncopation
On the streets and subways
Tables and beds
And we touch the hands
Of the curious depraved lonely and weeping

There is something we can do
To carry the silence with us
And take it to every being in chaos
Or bring those two hours before dawn
Or any other hour
For no other reason than

They were sleeping and that time
Should be shared by everyone
Together in the moment

Laughing walking and if necessary
Fists clenched and fighting as one
In the battle for righteousness
Because we are told by the highest authority
Our individual human spirit
That this is what we must do
To live to continue
To love
And to die
So that this place and these people
Become better
Or to allow access
To the ones not yet here

There is something we can do
There is
Something we must do
We are beautiful
We are the consummate dawn and dusk
And the life in between
The emergence of mud to the gods and back
In the cycle and the circle of creation
And we are the things that must do
What must be done
To continue to grow
To love and to share the inner grace
And everything else

- Giulio Magrini

A Phantom Of My Nights

I thought I'd met you a million times before
pierced the pinprick of your eyes -
heard you whisper my willing name
I know that I felt you - meet me halfway.

how can I live without you when -
I don't even know your name !
like a ghost from another world
you haunt me every night without fail.

always slipping by me- through a closed door
you seem to have no solid form to be found
the one I thought I knew - I know not at all
always under cover - in layers of disguise.

my dreams have left the window of my soul open
so freely you wander without shoes - or direction
like so many ghosts before you - only you remain
to tangle up my senses and torment me all night long !

you held my heart in chains - though broken they have become
without a heart to love me - your always on the run
now I must turn my face as the sun streaks from the east
time to rise and shine - from these dreams of you !

- Myrtle Thomas

Aloha Shirt Man Tries to Write a Social Justice Poem That Offers Solutions Rather Than Accusations

Within the ruin of our choices, the matador prays for redemption after recognizing mercy in the bull's holy eyes. Hannibal's beast repeats the drummer's beat. The rescued mutt curls its warmth around the adoptive family's youngest child. A crow will honor a human's charity with brilliant gifts for seventeen years. A spider will scurry toward the benefactor bearing a Q-tip soaked in water. We have forgotten the gorilla that cradled the baby that toppled into her cage. We have descended into mocking those haunted by different ghosts. Let this be one poem that offers hope to those who feel despair.

- Michael Brockley

A Poem For 1AM, or, Suite Judy Blue Eyes Revisited

Is there goodness to be found in drifting
In touching pieces of the past
I like to say I have no regrets
I like to lie to myself
I like to say I would not change a thing
Knowing that is just a tale I tell
When I have forgotten how to sleep

Change is just a dream
If I'd been different then
Seen the coming end of today
I would have embraced a worse path
Would have long ago been gone
I played it lazy, played it safe
I decided I did not want to die with nothing on my lips
But a false truth pushing old poetic cliches

Should I have left you all when I was young?
Too late to wonder now
I've been swept along to old age
I am only pieces of what is in my memories
I may wake again determined not to fade away
At 1AM I will pray to a god in whom I don't believe
To stop the rushing torment of dreams of change
Change that I know can never be

- Peter Kaczmarczyk

Heart of Hearts

don't leave your brokenness

at my doorstep

come sit inside my heart

where blood is warm

and comfort is warmer

i knew you then

know you still inside

these walls that hold you

- Rita S Spalding

“Tonsure”

As we kissed, I ran my fingers through his hair, as I had seen lovers do... and when I touched the shorn spot on the crown of his head, I froze.

This was a wound, I realized. A gaping hole where youth and beauty should have been.

Where youth and beauty had been wrenched from us, that we be exposed to God and humbled before men.

So I touched it softly, tenderly. Cupped his head and whispered comfort between my kisses. He was marked for God, but he was mine now. If anyone were looking at him from on high, the only thing they would see is a lover's touch upon his innocent head.

- Joey Otero

In The Periphery

Can I come and play, just for a day?

No, I want you to, but I know who you are, close up, and afar.

Can I come and play, just for a day?

Yes, I don't want you, but I know who you are, close up, and afar.

What if I do let you play, just for a day, it will be okay? I have fear, it's clear, that I need you, sometimes.

What if I don't, let you play, for a day, will it be okay? I have fear, it's clear, that sometimes I don't need you anymore.

You are in my periphery, your trickery is slippery, cash on delivery, you know my history. My toes know the water, I become fodder, in your muddy, mess, I feel possessed and not whoever I'm trying to be, you see, you are my victory, my misery, splintery artillery that fought for me. I'm afraid to let you go completely, uneasy, can I discretely keep you?

You are in my periphery, but, I really can't keep you anymore, I'm not your malleable whore, I implore you, let me sore, please... I'm afraid. I'll keep my toes dry for a while, I need my own style, find my smile, I need to dial in my strength, and take yours away. I know what I say is confusing, the musing of duality, leaves cracks in my sanity, a cavity for you to affably fill. You will kill me, if I let you back in, I can't hear over your din.

I need quiet, I can't keep you, walk away, I can't play with you today, or tomorrow, it will never be okay to follow you away from me. I need to be, whoever I am. I'm afraid, but I can braid the fear, with the strength more near, to me than you are now. I do know how, one step at a time, when I can no longer see, you in my periphery.

- Jude Miller

Losing The Questions

The smell of the absence of any
smells strongly. She must be
more depressed today than yesterday.
I smell no lavender soap, no body mist.
The air whirs in the kitchen as if we
can afford an airconditioner and have
turned it on only for the hum and not
for the cool. I wipe sweat from my
mother's brows. One blue fly hovers
over the bowl of her oatmeal. "Do you
remember anything today?" I ask, albeit
I must learn to lose the questions because
all answers are ephemeral at best.

- Kushal Poddar

Can You Imagine?

Can you imagine?

Denied.

Poof.

That was the sound of your dreams evaporating in one Onomatopoeia.

The journey ahead filled with needs, dreams of those you love.

The days, numbered already, now divided, until you return to dust.

The journey.

Serendipitous moments.

Now, just a marker.

If that, even.

- Joseph P. Gillis

Breathless

The pandemic is past
but still
we are being suffocated
with pillows of power
and prejudice,
hardly hidden,
in the institutions
we were told would protect
us all.
Some of us
believed it.

But the old masks are off now,
forced off the face by lies.
All they hid is exposed.
We know it now.

So in these new times
we will put on our masks
carefully
to protect
ourselves.
We know now
that we are all
George Floyd
potentially
later or sooner.

And we know
we are all his killers
potentially
unless we look behind the masks.

- Lynn White

Illuminated Places

The night she died
I had a dream.
I saw her walking
in a pleasant landscape
on an uphill footpath
toward an illuminated place.
Her back was to me.
She turned and saw me
watching her leave
for the last time.

Thrilled to see me,
she smiled and
waved with the familiar
excited anticipation
I had seen so many times
before when I arrived
at her sheltered home
and we would go for coffee.
There were days I thought
this a chore, a boring task
that subtracted
from my important life.
But, in that moment,
in her joyful smile, clarity.
She knew I feared
to carry on without her.
“You will be OK.
I will wait here for you.”

Everyone had believed
I was the stronger sister.

- Martha Ellen Johnson

Reservoirs

The things we knew already
have origins in a bare space
we've tried to leave behind.
We looked to replace them,
asking for a second chance.
murmurs in the afternoon,
shaped by the mainstream
scarred from the mainline.
We thought it was coming to us
if we could gain the upper hand.

- Michael Igoe

Potpourri

By: Kathleen Tan

Once upon a time, there was a rich man who was in love with one of his employees, so he told his gardener to leave a small flower on her doorstep early every morning. The gardener set his assistant on the chore. The rich man was playing the long game, so it became a calming routine to the gardener's assistant to spend some time in the early morning looking for a small flower, and to walk out into the town to bring it to the doorstep of the little cottage. For years, the woman diligently collected the flower every morning, and brought it inside to dry, until she finally collected a bouquet that had grown so large and remarkable, that she brought it with her when she moved out to get married.

A few months after this, the gardener's assistant met a stranger in the doorway of the cottage. "Are you," the man asked, "the one who has been bringing me flowers every day?"

"I guess it's become a habit," the gardener's assistant said. "Whenever I come into the town in the morning, I pick up a coffee on the way. After so many years, no one questions it anymore."

"It can be our secret," the man said.

And so, at the start of each day, the gardener's assistant continued to pick a flower to bring into town, grabbing a coffee on the way, making conversation with the man in the doorway of the cottage. After a few weeks of this, the man said: "I think you'd save a lot of money if you just had your coffee over here." And the apprentice, of course, agreed.

For a long time, each morning the gardener's apprentice would bring a flower from the rich man's garden to the cottage in town, and drink a cup of coffee with the man on the doorstep of the cottage. Until, after some years, the man one day said: "I think it would be better if you just brought your flowers home in the evening instead. You could sleep for fifteen minutes longer every morning. And I could wake you up with coffee."

Quantum Birds

Birds at dusk
Pause
In their aerial exhaustion
Settle their pounding hearts
Bodies turn to watch the sunset
Waiting for the earth's magnetic field
To become visible

They see it
Unlike us
In their tetrachromatic vision
As a vibrant glowing radiance
In a color we cannot even imagine

Or I imagine it
As the color of Love
The earth's magnetic field
A wild alluring hue
We can't
With our big science brains
Quantify or analyze

The birds
Sense in their quantum way
Through spinning electrons in the inner eye
A visual display of Universal Love
Guiding them forward on great migrations

Love enters a bird's eye
Same as it enters our hearts
At the subatomic level

- Skye Nicholson 2025

Inspired by the Radiolab podcast
<https://radiolab.org/podcast/quantum-birds>

Buddy

That polaroid, like a Hardy novel

In its soiled-sand way

Curled at the edges

French toast

Brittle in the memory.

I am wearing my father's

Howling blue dogtooth jumper

And there you , Wolf eyed ,

Yet not having the cunning

to escape this photograph/

© Bernard Pearson

Bill Caruthers

In my life

I've known two people

With the name Bill Caruthers

I can't remember

Which is which

I just know they're not brothers

- Elliott Fraser

Patriotic Predators

Oh, beautiful, for spacious skies,
for amber waves of grain—soon those skies will reek of hate.
And then the F(elon's) loyalists tried to destroy all signs of democracy.
Oh, say, can you see, by the dawn's early light:
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?
And chaos broke out throughout our nation's Capitol,
and the insurrectionists pushed to stop a legal election
because their master fed them it was rigged and stolen.
And the rockets' red glare: the bombs bursting in air
gave proof through the night, that our flag was still there,
but some traitors were burning it and using it as a weapon
against true patriots who defended our country
and some even with their lives.
Oh, say does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave,
'ver the land of the free, and the home of the brave?
The brave were disposed of many decades ago,
and the free are the criminal insurrectionists
because the Master Felon considers them "fine people."
But nobody will ever hear them scream: "Give me liberty,
or give me death!"
Rest in power, Aaron Bushnell. You were a deserving fine young man.
And people watched in horror as your life went up in flames,
and you will never again see the flag you fought for:
Whose broad stripes and bright stars
Through the perilous fight
O'er the ramparts we watched
Were so gallantly, yeah, streaming?
And the rockets' red glare
The bombs bursting in air
Gave proof through the night

That our flag was still there

O say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave

O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave

- Martina Robles Gallegos

FAMILIAL TIES

They shared the innocence that comes
from the purity of damaged brains.
He never met his favorite aunt yet
always went to her picture to stare. Seated
in my deceased sister's chair, my son,
muted by blood that clotted in his head,

would lean into his crooked hand,
creating a contemplative pose.

What thoughts crossed his mind
as he watched videos and heard
Bob the Builder ask, "Can we fix it?"
I wonder: did he think, *Yes, we can!*

- Bill Cushing

LAST HOMECOMING

Evening. The valley
dumb,
the autumn sky clouded,
its flat cloth
pierced by silent birds.

Those days
when the sky rang blue, like copper,
will not come again. Nor
the eager green growth
of new plantings. Only
what is already known, known
too well, the marked
wooden table, the candle, the door
barred at night.

And nor will sleep come, that sleep
put aside joyfully at morning; only
a dusty quiet, the eyelids dry.

We came here first
in youth. Then
the mornings were long, fresh, the afternoons
slumbrous, sunlight slanting
through the windows, golden. And every night
a half moon, high, silver; we
were rich. We knew nothing
of time.

But time knew of us. And counted us,
folded us in, then divided us.

Now I alone breast the hill
to look down
on the empty house.
Just once more to enter, find
the kettle, make up
the bed.
I have no need
to bar the door this time.

- Peter Newall

The Light in my Heart

By: Chitra Gopalakrishnan

I paddle a stream brimmed with pink lotuses to a primeval, symmetrical, stone Krishna temple echoing the peals of golden bells.

As my boat heaves and sways, in the copper-gold shades of dawn waters, I surrender to the sounds of rolling bells and then to the rhythm of subtle energies beyond the bustle of everyday existence.

On the ghats that speckle with light and shade, I see ascetics sit in silence, their eyes riveted to spaces unknown, otherworldly, as they seek ultimate release from the cyclic binding of earthly life.

Once youthful and unwrinkled, their skins are now smeared with ash and sandalwood, with lime and bright red powders, to illuminate the third eye on their forehead.

To me, their heads, crowned with straggling matted hair, seem to represent the core of their understanding of the universe which says well-being and balance lie beyond the physical world.

I bow down to the temple steps and touch their cold grey stone to submit to the deity, the supreme godhead, and give my ego, my sense of 'I'.

As I climb the temple steps to enter the mandapa, the metrical Hare Krishna Maha Mantra, which aims to connect devotees' souls with Lord Krishna, falls upon my ears.

As I cross this portico, I see bees drunk on devotee offerings: sunshine yellow mangoes, turmeric and bananas dribble the priests' pulsing cadences all over us.

Within the temple's dark interior, its sanctum, shine triangles of flames, fires that flicker above their wicks dipped in oil within clay lamps.

I selfishly hoard their light inside of me.

Is my fly down?

I was in the shopping plaza. People were going everywhere. They bounced on their legs like little seizures. One guy came up to me and asked how I was doing. "Good," I said way too familiarly, like I was his best friend. It was embarrassing. Then it happened. I didn't know if my fly was down. I didn't want to check. I didn't want people thinking I was a pervert grabbing his groin. It felt like it was down. "Oh shit!" I thought. I checked in the reflection of the thrift store window. Couldn't see. I turned in a circle, nerves swirling me around. I had to check. As discreetly as possible, I felt my zipper. It was up. "Thank God!" I thought. A lady said to me, "Well isn't that something!" and I realized she was referring to a new Cadillac that was driving behind me.

- Dan Flore III

Ditch Witch

After Erika Wannemacher

A woman spends fifty years
picking pieces of glass out of the arroyo.
Or fifty women spend a day
collecting shards. Then suddenly
It is a whirlwind
vortex
a curator can hang from the ceiling.

I looked into the crystal ball
saw neither past nor future or
my own reflection
just something
I'd heard of
but never seen—
light in darkness.

- Miriam Sagan

A Road Previously Cut

By: Matt McGee

His name was Lawrence Eastman, but no one called him Larry. Born in 1901 he was ripe for the picking when the First World War started up. Trench warfare. The Europeans invented it. You'd think the Germans had invented the whole mess just so they could come up with something like a high-RPM machine gun that would let them dominate the whole works.

And when America got involved, and the country's noble boarded ships beside their gung-ho asshole counterparts – yes, America has always had gung-ho assholes milling around in its backwoods and occasionally in its forefront, that was about the time Lawrence Eastman reluctantly went down to a US recruiting office and signed up.

It was actually a woman name Penelope, whom no one called Penny except her annoying older brother who knew she didn't like it, that talked the young Eastman lad into enlisting.

"Lawrence, fourteen boys from around town have already signed up. Two have already returned, one of them still alive."

Lawrence shrugged. "That's fine for them. War is for some people. Some of us just want to write poetry and lie here under a shady tree with a beautiful woman."

"I mention it because, well, it's becoming kind of an embarrassment."

"Embarrassed? You're embarrassed of me?"

Penelope didn't answer. But she did lean to one side, exposing another inch of the soft, pale skin of her chest.

Lawrence, at that very moment, knew better. He knew this is how men get killed, following the lower half of their bodies rather than the top.

He stood, towering over her, and pointed. If his arms were longer he'd have been able to touch the tip of her nose.

"You'll see," he said.

First stop, recruiting office. Second, inform Penelope that they'd be married on his return. He didn't really want to, but he told himself there had to be a reward to this. Next came induction, then a long boat ride to the other side of the globe.

He was three days into the trenches, ten feet beneath the surface of French soil when the whistle sounded and it was his turn to charge.

Lawrence Eastman left behind eight unpublished manuscripts in the attic of his mother's house, which she never knew existed, and passed away before she could find them. It was another man, Roger Evans, who bought the Eastman's house in 1960. He found the box, filled with Lawrence's poems as well as twelve journals, all documenting his short time on earth.

They were a godsend. Not because Roger Evans needed Lawrence's late guidance, but because Roger wanted so badly to have a real career writing poetry. He just had no raw talent. He had no flame other than the desire to feel needed in the bohemian circles he saw forming. With the mask Lawrence had so beautifully created, Roger Evans could step out into the coffee shops of Greenwich Village and pass himself off as the kind of poet the world needed.

Even if the words had come a generation too early.

Orion Laughs

There you are again Orion
hunting me, haunting me, mocking me.

Asking “Why I still haven't ascended
to your heights? To rise into the sky?”

I hang my head answering
That “I don't know why.”

That “I'm not sure.” Yet, I do know
and you know. It's my lack of faith

in myself, in humanity. It's this
that holds me here. Orion laughs

as he fades into the night.

Until tomorrow, when he'll ask

the same question. Maybe by then
I'll have a better answer.

- Michael Duckwall

Congested

We pose as
piddling waves
working whenever
the hell we please
We take bribes
from artists
and writers
for first serial
rights to seascapes
similes and metaphors
We inspire
We curse the boring
shore but applaud
no breakers
riptides or squalls
When the salty wet
falls nearly flat
as linoleum
buffed pristine
We launch gobs
of phlegm to try
to travel farther
than they say
a pebble's ripples do

- Thomas M. McDade

Malasana

You pay extra to sit outside
And watch the evening passers-by.
Sip coffee, beer, enjoy the crowd
And never share your thoughts aloud.
These streets as well have known their flights
As demonstrators hymned the night,
Their flags and banners scald the air
As sirens keen and rockets flare.
This square once filled with chants and songs,
That fleeting sense that we belong,
The contact point of fear and dreams
Played out in memory's flickering scenes.
These revolutions ebb and fail
As round the longing streets I trail,
A wanderer between the wars
And not sure what's worth fighting for.
The young men scorn my holding back
And value doubts less than attack.
But trembling hands aren't always fear
Regret and shame are rioting here.
Is hope just one thrown brick away
As tear gas wafts and flames display
The power of words to make us think
We are immortal, on the brink
Of better times, justice and peace.
With shields and batons come police
Still more young braves so proud and scared
They dare not stop - so be prepared
For fighting and for quick arrests.
Real men stand up for these cruel tests,
Their strength is not to walk away
But make their news in bold display
While poets wonder, can't decide

If paint and slogans make a side
Or are they servants of our hands
Instructed by cool, wise commands.
Maybe words scurry out of sight
And freed, they set the world alight.

- Peter Appleton

Malasana is a district of Madrid where the 1808 uprising started. It is named after the young woman assaulted by occupying troops.

Toward the End of Winter

There were white flowers, bark fallen from
limbs, a few violets, holly bush nearly bare.

I've a pocket full of apology, and one of
hope, strength of sunlight against my back.

There are jet planes too, but no bombs
yet where fine old houses wait. Humans
pass

leafless shrubbery alive with sparrows.

- Jim Needler

Spirit Map

Dad gave directions using dead people as landmarks.

“Just passed Power’s Fruit stand”, “Out by Tony Racine’s trailer.”

important men and women from his teenage years

standing as sun bleached and faded numbers on county roads.

All those old roads look the same, corn and soybeans stretched out to the horizon

Watch for the spectral country doctors directing traffic at crossroads,

phantom famers waving people on at the junction.

A Fruit stand hawks pomegranates

out by Mason's curve, the curve Jim Baker took

at over a hundred miles per hour,

Rand McNally's Necronomicon ex-mortis

in the glove compartment,

Mom’s feet propped up on the dash pointing

towards the sky.

- Jonathan Baker

Distances

From the back deck of my present home in Georgia, USA
I look at the deep green trees with white magnolias
thirty feet away.
Beyond the measured distance, the heart flies
to a home seven seas away
in a small village in Bangladesh.
There, at the end of my cottage- garden
just like the magnolia and the cedars,
stood coconut, guava, mangoes, and jackfruit trees.
*They, too, stared up at the blue sky
through sunshine and hail.*
Through the cracks of time, they come back
down the memory lanes.
Blue jays and robins frolic on the branches
of the magnolia thirty feet away
and I catch my breath
as the village home comes alive with squirrels
leaping from one tree to another for ripe mangoes to come.
Without calendars or measuring tapes
the trees in the yard could change the inner clock.
And transported to my childhood days
distances become a matter of the heart and soul
no longer caged in the time frame.

- Tulip Chowdhury

THE MANSION [EXCERPT]

After the meeting ended,

I met the stranger Salim described:

Tall man. Afro. Dark blue trench.

My first friend in San Francisco: Ralowe.

Almost stray dog style, I

Followed Ralowe to a bus stop

Between Geary & Van Ness &

We entered through the back door of

The crowded #38. My first MUNI bus ride.

Disembark at Geary & Fillmore. Enter Japantown.

Left on Fillmore. Trot three blocks north.

Left on Sutter. Trot down a dark, deserted driveway.

Chainlink fence swung open.

Enter sidedoor. To an Edwardian Gothic

Wreck, nearly one hundred years old, closed to

The public for unspecified years, *sans* electricity.

Ralowe led me up a spiral staircase

In the pitch black indoors.

Second floor. A long, piercing

Strip of halogen light

Lacerated utter darkness. Ralowe & I

Met Salim & Katherine. With his Maglite©,

Salim gave Katherine & I an impromptu tour of this

Large, archaic house of yet-to-be-questioned history.

Basement: Frightening, but huge.

First floor: Save for one well-lived in, empty rooms.

Kitchen with functional stove and refrigerator.

Third floor: Spacious attic. Three rooms unclaimed.

Back to second floor. Katherine, somewhat frightened,

Decided not to stay. Being new in town, I stayed.

Salim provided me with a couple of
Tattered blankets & a room. Personal
Inner sanctum:
No door, no lock,
One window boarded up, one window intact.

I laid down my backpack & suitcase
In that ice-cold bedroom, kept my caramel
Brown leather trench on, took off my black leather
Timberlands©, crawled under both tattered blankets
Snacked on a chocolate croissant and
Thought on the way to needed sleep:

“This squat. Any squat. The solution to homelessness is right here.”

How did I repay
Salim & Ralowe for providing me
Shelter miles away from my family?

By giving my doorless room life,
Enjoying hot showers in the morning,
Dinners & desserts by candlelight,
Bringing in four more heads from the outside,
Also new to the Bay: Ruth, Remy, Russell & Brandon,
Stocking second floor shelves with
Tools, candles, matches, first aid kits, blankets
& water jugs,
Stocking the dumb waiter with food
Gathered from soup kitchens & grocery giveaways,
Giving tours of all four floors to new people
Either passing through or staying for the long haul,
Teaching new ones the secret squat knock as easy
Identification for us old heads,
Doing dumpster-dive runs near midnight
As Japantown & Fillmore were off to

The sleep of the righteous,

Writing a short note of thanks before

Leaving the squat for work & residency at the Broadmoor Hotel.

W: 11.12

[From the book *The Mansion: Liberated Zones Inside The Controlled Inner City*,
Gnashing Teeth Publishing, 2025.]

- Dee Allen

A Thousand Yards

He said "you've a thousand yard stare"

I reach back to blurry memories

I catch the corners

I miss the lost

I still dream of them

Can almost see them

I know

They know

I care

- Christine Howser

JUST DANCING

Aurora to Borealis:

“Fools think we’re playing.

Don’t they know

we’re just

dancing

with ole Sol

whose plasma skirt

gets us

twirling

across the

atmosphere?”

- Sara Etgen-Baker

In My Embrace

If at any point you felt
Comfort in my embrace
You knew my expression
Of affection was truthful

That any time you focused
On the love you were given
Layers of soul warmed up
Ones you deemed petrified

Did you feel yourself melt
Into my biceps as your head
Rested upon my shoulder
Needing someone to care?

Would my heart cradle yours
Knowing the strength of
My kindness allows you
To be fully vulnerable?

But with certainty I say
If I ever gave you a hug
And you felt the impact
You're still a human being

- Jacob R. Moses

First World Emoji's

A flight my son was on
the landing gear would not retract
and so, gallons of fuel
was ditched into the air, the blue.
Skull shaped emoji's trail across my screen...

My son, familiar with the edge
of death was texting us - his plane
we watched upon the app
encircling and losing weight to land.
Heart shaped emoji's trail across my screen...

My eldest son is texting now
about the use of long range
missile arms and who, amongst us
has the firing of these things?
I think that I could launch them
from my phone - he says.
Laughing emoji's dance across my screen...

And now
my friend is texting - do I think
that turquoise is more blue than green?

Artist emoji's flit across my screen...

- Lois Hambleton

COFFINSVILLE

By: August Moon

The Circle K in Crawfordsville sat under a flickering neon sign, its parking lot a graveyard of crushed cans and cigarette butts. Locals knew to avoid it after dark—whispers of the "Tweakers" kept most away. They weren't just junkies anymore. Something in the meth had turned them, hollowed their eyes to black pits, and stretched their skin tight over twitching bones. Zombies, but not the slow kind. Fast. Hungry.

They lurked near the pumps, swaying like broken marionettes, teeth chattering in unison. You could smell the chemical rot on them—ammonia and decay. Most nights, they'd just watch, but get too close, and one would lurch forward, voice rasping, "Hey, man, got a smoke?" A test. Say no, and they'd swarm. Say yes, and they'd still swarm, only slower, savoring it.

Last week, Jimmy didn't know better. Pulled in for a late-night Slurpee, fumbled his keys, and got within arm's reach. "Cigarette?" one croaked, head tilting unnaturally. Jimmy laughed, nervous, and shook his head. The Tweaker grinned—too wide, too many teeth—and lunged. They pinned him to the asphalt, clawing and gnashing. By the time the clerk peeked out, Jimmy's face was gone, just a red smear under the sodium lights, the pack of Marlboros he'd had in his pocket torn open and scattered.

Now, the Tweakers wait. Every car that rolls in is a gamble. The air hums with their jittery whispers, and the wind carries a faint, "Got a smoke?" If you hear it, don't answer. Don't stop. Drive.

Book Money

for Tony Brewer, on his birthday

It's so cold out
we have all of
the faucets dripping.

The first month into winter, and
we aren't even running the
exhaust fan in the bathroom,
for fear of it sucking
all of the heat out of the upstairs.

So the whole upper
floor smells like shit
all winter long.

Because we gotta
keep the electric bill down
to a mere
four hundred dollars
a month.

Can't let the co-op
take all of our money.

Gotta save it
for book money.

Buying books,
making books.

Or at least
thinking
about making books.

Winter gives us
time to contemplate
the things that we have
because
we are so close
in proximity with
all of our belongings
and the walls circling in
closer and closer
each frigid month.

I blow my nose
yet again,
this time
grateful
for the lack of blood.

- April Ridge

In Memorium

The Lament of One

I have lost the scent of your hair.

Do not let this be your skull,

Remnants of skin withdrawing under a merciless sky.

It does not care for you, the sky!

It is simply the unspeakable witness to your final degradation.

Embracing death and the Dawn in equal measure,

Don't cherish the cold clarity of the tomb for deep and dark is the well of unknowing.

The horror of unbeing.

The black weight of the last thought your only cover against the screams.

- Cheryl Smith 2018

June 24, 1965 – January 8, 2021

Underwater Pollen

Katie Hughbanks

The Trees of Stable Studios

Native American Blessing for Jessica Kennick and Family

As I walk among the trees at Stable Studios,

I listen to the music all around me.

The songs of the whipperwill and larks fill my ears
and my heart is lifted to the sky.

As the notes continue on, I soar higher above the treetops
where the authors of this music live.

The mighty oaks are steadfast guardians over the Studios,
ensuring the peace and serenity for all who have come
to hear the choir.

The songbirds join in and add another musical dimension to the choir.

Soaring above the treetops I see all the members of the choir,
nestled in the branches of the wooded wonderland - chirping
and cooing the unspoken words to their beautiful song of joy.

The wondrous willow whose limbs hang down
like the mighty arms of a mother with many children,
ushering them to the safety of her body and the shelter of her love
by the water's edge. This image of the stately willow seems to
invite you to lay your head upon her breast.

When I return to the willows to rest, sleep and dream, they
leave me rejuvenated by their energy and
my heart is lifted once again

The songs of the birds carry me away once again; the
fragrance of the cedars and lilac bushes is intoxicating.

Oh, to stroll down the lanes amidst the oaks and poplars and be
surrounded by the purple beauty of blossoming redbuds
and snow-white dogwoods -- and all the while, the orchestra plays on.

The lifeforces at Stable Studios are being replenished and nurtured in
nature again...by the trees.

- BRENT TALKINGTON April, 2024

July 28, 1968 - June 4, 2024

The unknown note

In the quiet of the night
after the settling of the heart and soul
when the world around you sleeps
and you are finally alone
there is a note that floats in the air
it takes rest in your head

it causes you to do things
others may not do
to walk a different path
than intended for you

This is the unknown note
each one so
only those that hear it
can sing it
in the pitch be true
others have their own notes
to hear and to listen to
that guide their steps
and direct them what to do

When each of us is singing
this note of our souls
and let its music take us
to where only we can go
And our destination reached
no matter how different and far
they may be

there will be others there
singing notes of their souls
all in harmony

Tho' the roads we took were different
our destination was the same
for as each voice needs different training
for it to sing on pitch and key
each soul must walk its own path
to get where it is to be

- Dallas Gambill

1950 - 2025

Forever Painting the Clouds (A Conversation with Dallas)

Howdy There, it is 11:11

And I am painting the clouds

Floating above it all, looking down

Man proposes, God Disposes

And I believe in Miracles

God sent a handsome

Cary- Grant- sort-of-Angel Unawares

To pick me up from the sidewalk

After a hard fall

Bruises healed-I feel fine

It is a beautiful day

I have dreamed this life

Into my own reality

And visions come

And I am cared for

Even as I care for others

Howdy There, it's 11:11-

I got the Fullmoonitus vibrations

A sip of bourbon and a tube of Payne's Gray

Are what I need today

As I flow with Enya on the stereo

With her, I will Sail Away

I am the Wild Child of which she sings

Ever feel alive, and you've nothing missing?

She must know my heart, she must know my heart

And I am back painting the clouds

Floating above it all, looking down

Hello, it's 11:11

Just checking in

As I ponder this life, they always said I was naïve, I was innocent

Maybe so, maybe so

I wonder how many crossroads one life can have?

And I just paint the clouds,

Floating above it all, looking down

Hello, it's 11:11

The Earth quakes Santorini

And the Full Snow Moon rises in Leo

Reaching peak illumination-

It has arrived to take me away

Silence has fallen

As you inquire- "It's 1:11 Dallas! Are you okay?"

And I hear you all faintly

From far above in the luminous clouds

Back home at last

Floating above it all, looking down

And I am smiling

-Patty Cooper Wells February 14, 2025