

RED WOLF FALL 2022 ISSUE 21



# A CHANGE OF WORLD

IRENE TOH, EDITOR

**Red Wolf Journal**

**Fall 2022 Issue 21**

**A Change of World**

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Cover artwork: Rembrandt van Rijn, *Young Woman at an Open Half-Door*, 1645

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## A Change of World

It occurred to me that the editorial for the Spring Edition of the same title is too high falutin. It's like something that flew over my head. Oh what is that? A bird? A plane? An asteroid?

So I would like to have a reiteration of the same theme, so as you may continue to think about changes and shifts. Tiny shifts that eventually make a huge difference. Imagine drawing a straight line, but tilt it in a tiny shift of the pencil and it's no longer a straight line but is now a new trajectory above the original straight line. The original line is a flat horizon and you're walking slowly and seeing no end to the trudge over the same desert terrain. But your feet suddenly starts walking up a small mound of land and as you crossed over you see...a revelation! An oasis of some kind. If this desert is filled with people walking all in different directions, they will each stumble into different endings. Same starting point, different endings. Different experiences.

We like stories. We tell a story in our poems, don't we, or create some kind of world? For example:

### Strange Weather in Tokyo

Life is austere, my friend,  
so we ducked inside a bar  
to drink sake, eat edamame  
and tofu and cod, sometimes  
smoked oysters.

It was a way of being alive,  
you know. That's how she got  
into the orbit of Mr Matsumoto,  
her old schoolteacher, bereaved,  
and went mushroom hunting.

She asked every so often,  
what on earth am I doing.  
When he said, you're such a  
lovely girl, she was content;  
time had stopped for them.

I wrote it after reading a novel of the same title. As said, with poetry, we can perhaps practice the zen that Jane Hirschfield speaks of: "Zen pretty much comes down to three things – everything changes; everything is connected; pay attention." Perhaps you'd like to write it down. Pin down what happened after walking the desert. You pay attention, perhaps to tell a story. What we notice in stories are the changes, or how a poem pivots, so by the time the reader finishes to read, something has changed. A mood, a thought, a knowing, whatever.

In Rembrandt's drawing, a young woman stands at a doorway, with an intriguing face. A thinking look? What is she thinking? What happened to her? What will happen to her? Is there a story behind her beaded necklace? We, as reader, await a story. In any story, there is change. What situation is she in? What happens when she steps out of the door, or step back inside? What's her story? I guess at the very least we look forward to a change of scenery. What's her mood before and after? A change of the narrator's view of the world affects us, as reader. That's why we read the poem, right? The poem needs to bring us somewhere. It needs to transcend or shift in some way. So it's a portal, to our souls, I think. What's our truth? Change comes from any

kind of portal. As doors are portals, to a different world, so are books, and nature, anything I suppose. So are people. You change your people, you change your world. Who you met, who you left, who left you, who you keep. One of the big truths in life, I think. Nothing is forever. Yet you still believe in forever, do you? The other big truth? When you happen onto something, or meet someone, by chance, it isn't really. And when you chance onto something, or someone, that gives you joy, you must feel the presence of God. That's a bit like poetry for me.

I think of Spring 2022 Edition as Part One and the Fall 2022 Edition as Part Two. Let us see the same as well as new footsteps in the sand. Time is change. We'll see what changes. After all, change takes time. In art, as in life, everything is process. Process matters. Process takes time, and for us humans, however slow it seems, it is never at the speed at which a tree grows, measured in hundreds of years. Then anyhow, comes the big change. Big change can happen in a day, or in other words, in one day everything can change. Change, like taxes and death, is certain. That's why we hang onto the threads, because life is full of change, even when we think things are the same, and poetry helps us navigate, to find our own truth, amidst terrible uncertainty. Where art meets life (isn't that the place you and I have been?)—that's a journey of change. So here's to change and a final collaboration, our collective effort.

Here's my take on the cover painting. May you find your own response to it. Like trees who photosynthesize, we make our own stories. Someone said, "Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here."

The sun streamed into my heart  
as the tiger year dawns.  
For a while it's been dark  
but maybe the minute changes  
undetected, unknown.

My son listened rapt to stories  
I tell him, of my youth,  
as to tarot readings.  
A girl stood at a patio door  
and listened too.

Her thatched roof house wouldn't be  
anything I imagined.  
An old farmhouse out in the Cotswolds,  
she standing there, clutching  
her neck, that glistened with red pearls.

Ahh, change! I leave you with these words,

How can I sing? Time tells me what I am.  
I change and I am the same.  
I empty myself of my life and my life remains.

—Mark Strand, "The Remains"

Irene Toh  
Editor  
Fall 2022

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Each moment is a place you've never been.

—Mark Strand

It's A Warm Evening Before April  
by B. L. Bruce

It's a warm evening before April and I'm planting wildflowers at the base of the peach tree: zinnia, cosmos, aster. I think of my mother, slender hands moving through the earth. This is why she never paints her nails. Earlier, we walked through the narrow rows of the nursery. Every so often she'd reach out to touch the soft leaf of a plant, recite its name. *Salvia leucantha*. *Mexican sage brush*. *Hot lips*. Now, I think of how, in a few months, bright colors will appear here from the soil. And again, I will think of her.

**B. L. Bruce** is an award-winning poet and Pushcart Prize nominee living and writing along California's Central Coast. Her creative work has appeared in dozens of anthologies, magazines, and literary publications, including most recently *Frogpond Journal*, *La Merle Poetry Journal*, *Visitant*, *Blood Moon Poetry*, and *Feral*, among many others. Bruce is the author of four books, *The Weight of Snow*, *28 Days of Solitude*, *The Starling's Song*, and *Measures*, and is the editor-in-chief of the nature-centric literary magazine *Humana Obscura*.

Honoring Harry Chapin  
by Jeff Burt

It wouldn't keep, this impulse.  
I had to make the long transit  
in the oak forest, moonlight  
choked by a rare cloud  
eleven miles to walk, car  
broken down on County N,  
moon swung in my face like an amulet,  
the frosted ground like lit glass,  
lugging a pack full of pamphlets  
to distribute by six A.M.  
in October darkness on my college campus,  
calling for cans of food  
for the first World Hunger Day,  
for starving Biafrans,  
malnourished seniors in Milwaukee,  
to give from our excess  
not confined by jurisdiction of town,  
as much to feed as to honor  
Harry Chapin, his songs on replay  
in my head, his melodies making the hairs  
on my arms bristle, I so alive,  
and yes people were hungry,  
I was hungry, impoverished.  
I had so much to give.

Sources: When I was in college I played his music (on vinyl!) often, and found his devotion to people and charities enthralling. I organized a World Hunger Day on campus, the first, and wept when he died a few years later.

Little Popple River  
by Jeff Burt

One road led to the cabin on Little Popple River  
and ahead it looked like an old man, wrinkled, buckled, sunken.  
I drove at times with clenched teeth and hands,  
at other times loose, as if my bones  
had slid from my body and were seated  
on the passenger's side, a few times  
with a hollow gut turned childish  
when the ride made the low swales  
of asphalt vanish or the high rises pitched  
the truck such that I could see sky  
and nothing else. That made me think of Tubman,  
who at night said all she could see was the Drinking Gourd,  
the prescient Dipper in the northern sky—  
the rhythm of walking in the forested dark  
not unlike the passage at sea,  
one step a sudden swallowing in the furrow  
and the next riding the tower of a wave  
launched into nowhere.  
At the speed the road forced me to travel  
I knew I would not make the cabin  
and the comforts of friendship that night.

That day I had visited a safe house  
on the Underground Railway, a humble  
almost claustrophobic home with a secret passage  
where I had to bow at doorways to fit  
and the steps were shorter than my shoes.  
I had imagined the house would be large,  
enlarging, a place where a freed person could relax  
and stretch and feel the full length of freedom,  
not have to tuck, shrink, and curl again.

I stayed in my car overnight. The seat  
not long enough for my frame, I tried to sleep  
sitting aslant, but Tubman's pull kept me awake,  
and quietly rose, hushed the closing of the door  
and stood out in the woods with the pines sighing  
and the stars vivid without a moon.  
The Dipper poured. I drank.  
I drank an unbound freedom and cried  
and laughed and felt the wounds of misery  
if not healed then dulled. When done, I shrank,  
I hung my shoulders and drew them forward  
and with head bowed returned to the car  
with my watch ticking and feet cold.  
Salvation occurs often and triumphantly alone,  
but between people it is seldom.  
That historic stretch that Tubman made,  
that far travel on foot, that long reach

of her dream, that recapturing of the soul's expansion,  
it has seldom ended. For many,  
the doors remain a smaller size.  
Even with freedom they must stay hunched to enter in.

When I reached the cabin in the morning  
at Little Popple River my friend apologized  
for the road, but no, I told him, no,  
but I had no way to tell him then  
I had encountered a fleeting joy  
bound by a continuing sorrow,  
and, returning late that night, would again.

Sources: The poem is a true story of a visit I made to a friend's cabin in Wisconsin after having toured a stop in the Underground Railway. For living in a northern state, I was fortunate to have a father introduce me to Martin Luther King, Jr., the marches, and demonstrations at a young age.

**Jeff Burt** lives in Santa Cruz County, California, with his wife. He has contributed previously to *Red Wolf Journal*, to *Williwaw Journal*, *Heartwood*, *Willows Wept Review*, and *Farmer-ish*.

Illusion Colors  
by Joe Cottonwood

A watercolor, twilight over weedy water  
purchased from an artsy shop, way back,  
the first painting I ever bought  
though it took my last penny.

The shop owner said  
“Oh you want the one with the illusion colors.”  
Huh?  
Just now after half a century I googled  
but still I don’t understand  
illusions we can see and touch.

This painting I so loved  
I immediately gave away  
because love gets mixed up that way,  
gave to my sister who was having a rough time.

That swamp sunset casting colorful peace  
still hangs in her home  
above umpteen grandchildren so  
Thank you, forgotten artist  
for how sky celebrates or mourns,  
for the invisible forces of family,  
for colors so lasting and real.

Message To A Womb  
by Joe Cottonwood

I lay my head on her belly and listen  
All communication seems two-way, within  
It's so quiet out here

She feels your hiccups  
She knows when you're sleeping  
She says you move toward me  
when I place hands over womb

In a belly-bare contest  
she wins on convexity and stretchity  
I win on hairity

In a breast-bare contest  
she wins on utility  
and again, on beauty  
I, on muscularity

In a time-keeping contest  
I win on wrist-watchity  
She, on moon-cyclity

In a baby-making contest,  
no contest. We win.

I'm just the outsider DNA-supply  
can't nourish, can't caress  
the curly fingers twitching legs  
the lips mouthing baby lyrics  
when I sing to the navel call-response

Me: *Oh you can't get to heaven*  
You: *bup lup, bup lup*  
Me: *—in my old car*  
You: *bup lup, bup lup*  
but we both know you're in heaven on earth

What I'm trying to say is  
you touch my spirit  
and when you bust out  
you'll call, I'll respond

**Joe Cottonwood** has repaired hundreds of houses to support his writing habit in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California. His latest book of poetry is *Random Saints*.

On Leaving Home  
by Debbie Cutler

When I left Alaska I glanced back  
at 29 years of life  
in the arms of a state  
I love, cherish.

Everything about the Great Land  
captivates  
the mountains I climbed  
stun, enchant  
despite treacherous trails  
that overlook vistas of green  
trees and shrubs of various hues  
and dark oceans that roar  
with angry glacial waves  
showing might and strength.

Summers plentiful with berries  
and bears  
adventures everywhere  
danger never more than a second away  
or not  
you never know until it is upon you.

The winters dark  
still, magical and silent  
snow crystals glisten everywhere  
deep cold—powerful enough to kill  
frostbitten toes blacken  
and hypothermia fuels false warmth  
so people undress  
die alone in the wilds  
frozen, half-naked.

Alaska beats with nature  
despite harsh or beautiful outcomes  
it calls your name  
lures you in  
like the arms of a siren.

When I left Alaska  
my pride, my heart  
after 29 years  
I moved to Missouri  
enjoying a different, safer world  
for the older me.

Summer's scents of flowers wild  
mowed grass and the fresh rain that follows

outdoor barbecues in months  
beyond the three of my former home.

Humidity curls my hair  
and smooths skin  
I have a cool drink in hand  
while warmth that heals  
comforts, calms  
summers in Missouri  
feel like vacation  
tropical and soothing.

Outdoor concerts on a summer's eve  
swims in pools, warm and uplifting  
relaxation on the porch  
with my daughter's dog, Fiona  
drives through the countryside  
with old growth and farmland  
corn, soybeans, tomatoes.

Seeking, searching  
town to town, city to city  
for wineries, fairs, outdoor venues  
all unique and quaint  
houses with wrap-around porches  
and antique grace.

Even winters provide  
peace and solitude  
Missouri's cold is milder  
snow decorating landscapes  
like white frosting  
in an enchanted world  
that offers everything  
I need.

**Debbie Cutler**, a writer of more than 30 years, has been published in numerous mainstream and literary magazines, including *Cirque*, *Wingless Dreamer*, *Journal of Expressive Writing*, *The Dewdrop*, *Pure Slush*, *Shanti Arts (Still Point Arts Quarterly)*, *Sweetycat Press*, *The MockingOwl Roost*, *Prime*, *Of Rust and Glass*, *Paddler Press*. *Columbia Business Times*, *Editor and Publisher*, *Independent Living*, *Wanderlust*, among others. She most recently worked at the University of Missouri, writing for seven departments in the College of Arts and Science. She was the former managing editor of *Alaska Business* and former editor of *Alaska* magazine. She is now retired and lives in Columbia, Missouri.

While Tending In My Garden (After Tu Fu)  
by George Freek

Clouds float in the air.  
You'd hardly know  
they were there. The sun  
grows warm. In my garden  
bees begin to swarm.  
They'll be angry when I  
steal their honey. People  
move down my street,  
but what life once  
moved beneath their feet?  
It was there for millions  
of years. Life is a mystery.  
I look to the stars. I  
stare at the sun.  
While tending my roses,  
the riddle will remain,  
and when I'm done, I'm  
no closer to an answer  
than when I first begun.

A Simple Poem (After Ou Yang Hsiu)  
by George Freek

As apple blossoms fall  
like grains of rice,  
I see in the murky water  
fish, swimming near  
the surface. There's purpose  
in their meanderings,  
but I can't say what it is.  
Spring will stir the hearts  
of fish and men alike.  
But my hair is now white,  
And some things are best  
forgotten. I recall  
the fragrance of lilies  
and their color,  
against a lowering sky  
like the purest cotton.  
But I can't tell you why.

During An Evening Walk (After Lu Yu)  
by George Freck

After a warm rain the grass  
stretches to the horizon.  
It meets the infinite sky.  
The gardens are as brilliant  
as a Persian rug.  
I enjoy it while I can.  
Storm clouds loom ahead.  
Suddenly clouds are boulders.  
The sky becomes blood red.  
Turning away, with eyes  
locked firmly on my feet,  
I avoid a black weed bed,  
And the leaves which hung  
like lanterns from the branches  
fall on my hatless head.

A Cat's Life (After Liu Young)  
By George Freek

The clouds are dissolved  
by the sun, which rises  
like a man stumbling  
out of bed.

In my willow tree  
a young squirrel screams  
at my elderly cat,  
stretching languidly  
in the grass.

The squirrel's rage  
is impotent.

Every cat should  
have his day.

But for my old cat,  
the night will come  
and will last forever,  
and it's not too far away.

**George Freek's** poetry has appeared in numerous Journals and Reviews. His poem "Written At Blue Lake" was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Dream And Ecstasy  
By John Grey

Here, where art gets out from under,  
truths bleed  
the aspects of this changing world  
make us think about states  
of animal passion,  
what nature wants,  
what it attempts,  
winter abstract,  
spring emboldened,  
a summer of the purest type,  
then, half brown, half-naked,  
fall's imperfect sketches,

To the Dionysian spirit  
more artistic audacity,  
more chaos reaching out to form,  
and here I am,  
in my best procreating smock,  
up to my old autobiography,  
splashing paint on a mirror.

**John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Sheepshead Review*, *Stand*, *Poetry Salzburg Review* and *Hollins Critic*. Latest books, *Leaves On Pages*, *Memory Outside The Head* and *Guest Of Myself* are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Ellipsis*, *Blueline* and *International Poetry Review*.

Beyond All Counting  
by Mary Anna Scenga Kruch

Unease perforated edges of my awareness in dreams: Ukrainian women forced to watch husbands shot, lose sons in battle, take shelter in shadowed remains of homes, grow cold with approaching winter. As my own fireplace had cooled to blinking embers, I added wood and lit candles to mark remembered comfort that I longed to somehow send, contemplated a sky that stretched across oceans, past burned out buildings and blackened tanks—to where moonlight invited views of a cloudless sky splashed with stars beyond all counting.

**Mary Anna Scenga Kruch**, a former middle school teacher and university professor, is now a full-time writer. She has published a chapbook, *We Draw Breath from the same Sky* and a full-length hybrid memoir, *Grace Notes*. Recent poetry can be found in *Wayne Literary Review* and *The Wild Word* and is forthcoming in *Blue Heron Review* and *Panoplyzine*.

Tonight I Wish Of  
By Karla Linn Merrifield

the taste of that hurricane season  
of the ten-thousand thoughts  
of wishful thinking that is  
of thee  
of thy brain and  
of leaning over in this poem welcoming you  
of salt from your fluid body on my lips  
of electrolytes delivered to my tongue  
of Beaufort-12 velocity  
of lashing me vigorously limp  
of humbled pose in the eye—  
of deceptive calm—then you, you  
of, oh, tumultuous thrashing  
of muscles  
of my well-toned pelvic floor, but also  
of my heart as organ, also fit, and  
of my heart, love's metaphor, imperiled

then of warbler song lovely and lilting,  
whistling again and again:  
you, insistent for me to listen—  
sing to me as you pass through me, all  
of me, my ten-thousand thoughts  
of wishful thinking  
we could be anything

Holding Patterns  
by Karla Linn Merrifield

1.

I hold you safely  
by a tanka's tight confines—  
deliciously—  
for we can come together  
on the spicy here and now.

2.

I  
hold  
you yet  
bodily  
in Fibonacci  
safety, perfectly boundaried.

3.

Encore! Encore! Unexpected encore  
of holding you again, a kiss's fleshy surprise  
within the slinky five-lined skink  
of a playful poem, on my flicking tongue:  
you holding me again, how kiss of flesh surprises.

4.

Trust me, I'm containering your hold  
to a scherzo.

5.

Holding you?  
What?  
Just  
fuckin' happily  
in bondage of a piem.  
Tight? Right!

6.

This:  
the box  
I cast us in  
together, not  
so much a looser hold  
as one more expansive.

In an ethere I wrap  
thigh-lengths of measured lines—heartbeats.  
En fin, this exuberance is skin-deep.

7.

All I gotta do  
is hold on, hold on—let go  
till who fuckin' knows.

Triptych: On Cinematic Waves  
by Karla Linn Merrifield

I.

This is the voyage  
of movie songs  
of jigs and reels  
—oh, and of waltzes  
of blues and bar stools  
of parallel soundtracks  
of Bach and Brubeck—  
of your tempo's desire.

II.

This is of North Atlantic voyaging  
of USA and Canada  
of international waters betwixt  
of British Empire born to independence  
of Boston port, 4th of July  
of an entire movie plot walking by  
of 1st Lt. O'Malley, his "breast salad"  
of four wars: WWII to Desert I.

III.

This is to be a voyageur again  
of meta-documentary subject matter  
of chart and shoal in minute/second parts  
of another longitude of longing  
of northern latitudes  
of surprise and wonder  
of the quintessential video du jour  
of this truth: *I* am the movie.

Karla Linn Merrifield has had 1000+ poems appear in dozens of journals and anthologies. She has 15 books to her credit. Following her 2018 *Psyche's Scroll* (Poetry Box Select) is the full-length book *Athabaskan Fractal: Poems of the Far North* from Cirque Press. Her newest poetry collection, *My Body the Guitar*, recently nominated for the National Book Award, was inspired by famous guitarists and their guitars and published in December 2021 by Before Your Quiet Eyes Publications Holograph Series (Rochester, NY). She is a frequent contributor to The Songs of Eretz Poetry Review. Web site: <https://www.karlalinnmerrifield.org/>; blog at <https://karlalinnmerrifield.wordpress.com/>; Tweet @LinnMerrifield; <https://www.facebook.com/karlalinn.merrifield>.

Jersey City  
by Mitchel Montagna

The city is empty, except for the bars  
that nurture the lost and burn up like stars

With rubble and ruin and Eden so near  
it's hard to believe that we once lived here

But I still see the soft dimming blue of her eyes  
and the shape of her smile, once wistful and wise

And the form of her body, collapsed to its knees  
on the field where we played, in the shadow of trees.

I dreamed I returned, bone-chilled in the rain  
to the ground where she withered, grieving in pain

She still kissed my scar with a slow lover's trace  
while tears of compassion fell from her face

Such memories flicker as every heart beats  
like neon lights dimming above city streets.

Lost Girl  
by Mitchel Montagna

I touched my hand to your waist as you came to the door  
I'd never seen those stellar blue eyes before.

Like dark shades of twilight stirring the skies  
Like tunnels of mood aimed to hypnotize.

Then, when you smiled, I knew I could cast  
every damn bit of business of shame from my past.

But I couldn't compete with your immaculate whole:  
The malice I hid or your generous soul.

So I closed down my heart, and left you betrayed  
Certain with time that your jeweled eyes would fade.

But you hung with me close, like a hovering dream  
And you cradled my soul, then the air turned to steam.

You are missing, I'm haunted and needing to know  
of the footprints you left all those long years ago.

I swear I must follow; for nothing is right  
They've torn me apart through indifference and spite.

When I find you, I'll quietly huddle outside  
and peek through your window with eyes opened wide.

I'll dig through my conscience and find me a prayer  
that your life's full of wonder and people who care.

That you triumph in dreams and in those whom you love  
That your spirit feels watched and blessed from above.

Then, I'll retreat and move on with my load  
Like a tired wind drifts down a long dusty road.

I'll wander alone through each canyon and curve  
Convinced that we both got the end we deserve.

A Farewell to Sleep  
by Mitchel Montagna

Peace came upon me after midnight  
It settled like the pale mist in a dream  
Outside the moonglow was shedding light  
Stars rippled on a silvery stream.

On shore we found glossy and snaking vines  
They glowed ever-softly in the dark  
Nearby were traces of shadowy pines  
Dawn lit up their leaves like a spark.

I dreamt of highways and sonic booms  
I awoke as wind teased out our names  
All exits ahead were sealed off like tombs  
A bank of clouds burst into flames.

I pressed for sleep but nothing would yield  
Bathed in twilight she pulled back her hair  
I knelt in the smoky ash of the field  
I saw her shadow dissolve in the air.

Catskills, Late 1970s  
by Mitchel Montagna

I thought I saw Val near the bus station, beneath sparkling leaves  
in sleek summer clothes, dazzling as the morning light  
Treetops split the radiance around her; I know if she smiles, she  
will fuse those fiery shards together  
But I don't wait to see. I turn away, looking for the 10:05, because  
she probably doesn't know me at all.

On 17 north near the mountains, cotton-blue sky, bluffs and  
meadows like shimmering gardens  
If you doze, you feel the tingling of haunted canyons; graffiti  
carved by those who have become ghosts  
After a steep climb the Grossingers sign looms, overlooking a world  
at end, as our bus slips cautiously by.

Riding through Liberty, pale granite and dust, gasping old stores; strutting  
unemployed, pretending to own the streets  
I settle into a small cabin, then walk outside, purple twilight  
descending on the woods nearby  
A sparrow chants; a young woman sits cross-legged at a picnic  
table and asks who I am.

Her dark eyes mirror the changing sky; a breeze carries a pine-needle scent;  
her smile is clever and makes me smile  
I'm here for a new beginning, I admit. She points to the moon, impeccably round  
just above the horizon  
Stars seem to creep out as if from behind a curtain. She brushes hair from  
her cheek, and thanks me for a gorgeous night.

**Mitchel Montagna** has worked as a special education teacher, radio news reporter, and corporate communicator. He is married and lives in New Jersey.

Hearts Keep Us Green  
by Frederick Pollack

An uncle or a parent's cousin,  
his status like his name forgotten,  
is revived and asked, apologetically,  
for information—  
some files have been lost or decayed, need  
updating.  
He accepts with good grace  
(remembers bureaucratic housekeeping);  
and the coffee is good, the interview room  
airy. My name comes up. He can't place it—  
recalls the nickname I escaped;  
fills in details about my childhood;  
is unsurprised to learn  
how little I earn.

He begins to fade as he leaves the building  
but without awareness or anguish;  
eternity is in fact an easy,  
even sensuous dissolve.  
The towers soar benignly, their angles  
manly, linked  
(as in my earliest art) by arching walkways,  
attended by flying cars.  
Sky blazons needs. Street level  
is all distinctive stores asserting  
mothers and fathers;  
and youths, never discomposed  
except by enthusiasm, enter them  
to find themselves.

Author of two book-length narrative poems, *The Adventure and Happiness*, both Story Line Press; the former to be reissued 2022 by Red Hen Press. Two collections of shorter poems, *A Poverty of Words*, (Prolific Press, 2015) and *Landscape with Mutant* (Smokestack Books, UK, 2018). **Frederick Pollack** has appeared in *Salmagundi*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Fish Anthology* (Ireland), *Magma* (UK), *Bateau*, *Fulcrum*, *Chiron Review*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, etc. Online, poems have appeared in *Big Bridge*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *BlazeVox*, *The New Hampshire Review*, *Mudlark*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Faircloth Review*, *Triggerfish*, etc.

Becoming Birders  
By Emalisa Rose

We became birders.

Through the curfew of Covid, those  
initial few weeks, wings at the window,  
representative of what had forsaken us.

With our “Backyard Birds,” bible, we  
watched and identified, that which was  
formerly background noise, become  
center stage.

We became bakers.

I always loved sourdough; Hector, the  
strudel. he’d bake with his grandmother.

With jam jars and mixing bowls, yeasts  
oils, etc., we were passing the time doing  
something productive.

We became birders. We became bakers.  
We became close, again.

Some progress notes:

Being home together, during Covid’s initial few weeks, a husband and wife are faced  
with hours of downtime in addition to the time spent doing their individual job duties.  
now from home. Both have worked for decades but now there is a new dynamic to their  
relationship. They are hesitant at first, sometimes in their own individual spaces, but they take  
the opportunity to find some mutual interests which leads to an unexpected, yet positive change  
in their marriage.

When not writing, **Emalisa Rose** enjoys crafting and birding. She volunteers in animal rescue. She  
lives by the beach, which provides much of the inspiration for her art. Some of her work has  
appeared in *Mad Swirl*, *Literary Veganism*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice* and other wonderful  
places. Her latest collection is *On the whims of the cross currents*, published by Red Wolf Editions.

Another Gin  
by Emil Sinclair

Are you afraid to die  
she says  
no I say  
I ain't afraid  
second-rate play  
never make Broadway  
too long a run  
already  
have to know when  
to fold 'em  
held 'em too long  
over and over  
same old dialogue  
I know all the words  
we had  
blocking moves  
almost lovers once  
upon a time  
goes round and round  
can't get free  
of your gaze  
makes me what  
I'm not  
now pour me  
another gin  
me up  
please

Ad Astra (To the Stars)  
by Emil Sinclair

I want to hitch a ride on the starship  
Enterprise  
to escape this demon-haunted world  
of lies and hate.  
I'll explore strange new worlds  
of peace and kindness;  
dematerialize  
in the transporter room  
of lost souls;  
and join a landing party  
on a planet of understanding.  
I can abide these wars  
no more.  
The ghosts of history  
live to rattle their noisy chains  
and wrap them  
tightly  
around our necks.  
But my own ghost  
has soft, gentle hands  
and a voice like music;  
her accent does lilt.  
Her green eyes bore through  
sham illusions  
like the morning sun  
burns off fog.  
Truth is her medicine.  
Come with me,  
my love;  
let us go together  
alone  
to the stars.

This, Dream  
by Emil Sinclair

This dream, this dream.  
“The clouds all over  
are one-sided,”  
said the kingbird.  
Wake up  
and die  
to be wise;  
for in her green eyes  
is the great light  
that shines from within.  
“I will miss you  
in a good way,”  
she said,  
closing the door  
behind me  
as it opened  
onto blue stars  
spinning fiercely  
into wavy particles  
that do not  
stand still.  
But I still see her face  
in thunder  
and hear her voice  
in a pink sky  
at night.  
This world is a koan;  
become what you dream.

Resurrection  
by Emil Sinclair

The cavernous hall  
was dead silent,  
except  
for the echo  
of my footsteps  
on the cold marble floor.  
Slowly I traversed  
its considerable length,  
until at last,  
before the throne  
of the Great Lion,  
I prostrated myself  
as an homage  
to His Majesty.  
“Arise!”  
commanded a voice  
booming like thunder  
over the lake.  
I stood myself up  
and beheld His gaze,  
as expressionless  
and impassive  
as the Sphinx.  
He looked straight  
through me,  
as if I wasn't there.

No, the voice was Hers—  
the Great Phoenix,  
perched upon His left  
shoulder.  
Her steely blue eyes,  
the color  
of star sapphires,  
bore into my mind—  
indeed, into my soul.  
“What is your question?”  
She demanded.  
I could barely speak,  
yet managed to squeak:  
“What is death?”  
I implored her.  
Her eyes blazed  
a blue fire,  
as a shriek of laughter,  
so loud and sharp,  
escaped her gullet,  
it shattered to shards  
the great crystal egg

from which it is said  
she herself had been born.  
My mouth agape,  
I watched in astonishment  
the Great Lion,  
sitting motionless  
upon His throne  
not moving a whisker,  
even as the raptor  
spread her enormous wings,  
which grew and grew,  
until they touched  
the very ceiling.  
Her body now  
was the width of the hall,  
and began to pulsate,  
turning as red  
as a hot poker  
in a furnace fire.

Suddenly, there was  
an explosion  
that rocked the hall  
and knocked me flat  
on my back.  
As I roused myself,  
I saw that there was  
smoke and ash  
everywhere,  
covering the floor  
where the crystal egg  
had been shattered.  
In the center of the debris  
I saw a tiny form  
wriggling and writhing,  
and heard it softly peep;  
it was featherless and naked,  
helpless and hungry,  
crying for food  
and warmth.  
“Take her!”  
bellowed the Great Lion,  
rousing Himself  
at last  
from His torpor.  
“She is yours now.”

And so it was.  
I removed my wool mantle,  
and ever so gently  
placed the baby bird  
in the folds

of the cloth,  
to keep her warm  
and safe.  
She has grown now  
in size and strength,  
and always sits upon  
my left shoulder,  
where she shall remain  
forever.

**Emil Sinclair** is the pseudonym of a sometime poet and long-time philosophy professor in New York City.

Time-Out  
by Adrienne Stevenson

this existential pause  
this gap in relentless motion  
this hiatus in what we accept  
as normalcy

made us feel like guilty children  
sent to our rooms to stop making strange  
learning a lesson the world renders futile  
in its push for ever more action

after two years of physical distance  
friends mainly seen dimly through a screen  
I took stock of my emotional well-being  
and found it much improved

I took time to reacquaint myself  
with things I know to be true  
that there are limits to growth  
that acting in haste results

in repenting at leisure  
that we are all still children inside  
and need the occasional time-out  
to bring us back in touch with reality

*Papaver Somniferum*  
by Adrienne Stevenson

once just a bump on a tall sage-green stalk  
the cocoon swells, grows pale, bursts  
with delicate colour  
near transparent pink petals  
single outer, frilly inner  
but the bloom only lasts a day  
glacial in development  
evanescent in display

fading blossoms leave behind  
innocuous-seeming seed pods  
still green and tender  
but, if nicked, capable of weeping  
tears that promise relief  
from the never-ending grief  
of a dying planet

Adrienne Stevenson lives in Ottawa, Ontario. A retired forensic scientist and Pushcart-nominated poet, she writes in many genres. Her poetry has appeared in more than forty print and online journals and anthologies in Canada, the USA, the UK, and Australia. When not writing, Adrienne tends a large garden, reads voraciously, and procrastinates playing several musical instruments.

Raindrops  
by Søren Sørensen

Raindrops are drumming the roof of my car  
The road is covered with sleet  
The air is foggy, and I can't see afar  
But I'm not worried a bit

My brain is shuffling things left far behind  
My thoughts are vague and obscure  
The nature is muddled, and so is my mind  
Something makes me feel insecure

It's not the weather, nor the frosty, drab sky  
Not the niggling, dull rain  
My dreams appear to have gone awry  
Just thrown down the drain

Snapshots of my life revive in my head  
Like a disarrayed pack  
My car is stingily drifting ahead  
My ponderings are whizzing aback

All my strivings have crumbled and failed  
The past is a dreary black hole  
The future is veiled with a nebulous shade  
Unwelcoming for a leisurely stroll

The present is just a dimensionless dot  
I don't know if it even exists  
I am left to hide myself in a tiny slot  
Submerge into a cloudy mist

Who am I after all, and why am I here?  
Does my life make any sense?  
All is a spectacle meant to soon disappear  
Vanish into empty space

Raindrops are tediously beating my car  
All I can see is muddy sleet  
The air is foggy, and I can't see afar  
But I'm not worried a bit

**Søren Sørensen** is a physics professor at the University of Central Florida.

A Bounded Space  
By Ralph Stevens

starts at the end,  
at the beach, say, or  
the island dock,  
edgy places where  
the unknown begins.  
You turn back,  
from waves running calmly  
up the sand or thrashing  
against the rocks, knowing you have  
reached a boundary of sorts.  
You could break loose in your inflatable,  
perhaps slide out of harbor  
on a jet ski but you know you're  
only ignoring the border,  
the line between loneliness and intimacy  
with all the enclosures  
of community.

And that's what this is about,  
enclosure, and what it creates, an attachment  
as of atomic particles or the attraction  
between stars. We can't go out today,  
we say at breakfast, meaning  
off this island to go shopping;  
the seas are too big, the ferry  
cannot dock, the fishermen  
won't go out to traps.  
The border is closed.

In a bounded space,  
you go abroad only when  
conditions allow.  
The alternative is intimacy, such as now,  
in a friend's kitchen with coffee  
and fresh biscuits,  
a space where folks live enclosed,  
not trapped but gathered  
into one.

Source: The prompt for this poem was a remark in a sermon by The Reverend Tom Powell, in April, 2021.

For a Few Months  
By Ralph Stevens

perhaps a year,  
I knew her name,  
the girl in pink tights,  
walking splay-footed from the post office,  
a lollypop in her mouth.  
It was September,  
a few weeks into school, a few  
vestiges of summer hovering  
the way vestiges do, reminders  
of things past, the heat of August,  
cries from the soccer field, slow  
conversation on the porches  
at sunset. It must have been  
lunchtime at the school. She took a few  
minutes to check the family mail or  
perhaps just to get that lollypop  
from the candy master  
at the post office window.  
I said hello, as I would now and then,  
when we passed on the road, perhaps  
made a bit of conversation. After all  
they were new to our island town, she  
and her family, and we pride ourselves  
on welcoming newcomers, making them  
feel at home. I did my part  
and can still see her,  
meandering toward me, her feet  
pointing at nothing in particular,  
face pointed at nothing  
in particular so why,  
a few years later,  
long after they left  
as quietly as they'd come,  
have I forgotten her name?

Beaufort Scale  
By Ralph Stevens

*The Beaufort Scale of windspeed ranges from Force 0, "Calm, smoke rises vertically" to Force 12, "Hurricane, violent destruction."*

November. A calm morning.  
Chimney smoke rises  
straight as a young poplar,  
the weather vane next door  
motionless, the lake still sleeping.  
Some days the wind  
is a breath on my face and I  
walk quietly to hear  
the leaves rustle, watch  
the lake form glassy wavelets,  
the trees, how the small  
twigs move, how the schoolhouse flag  
stretches itself. And now  
branches sway, dust and loose  
paper scatter at my feet,  
while the lake gallops  
like white horses. At the ocean  
waves take a long form,  
release puffs of spray  
grow larger, grow  
white foam crests, send spray  
against my face.  
The sea heaps up, the wind pushes me,  
Walking is difficult, foam streaks  
the waves and the sea rolls.  
I think of shingles blown off roofs,  
trees blown down, uprooted.  
Waves crest, hang snarling,  
hide the small ship  
that struggles to windward.  
It's time to seek shelter and  
I do, praying for protection  
of a world now invisible  
behind the foam and spray.

Source: Descriptions, in the Beaufort Scale, of sea and land conditions of wind are common. The language used in this poem can be found at the National Weather Service site, <https://www.weather.gov/mfl/beaufort>

A Congregation of Gulls  
By Ralph Stevens

They don't know me but  
I watch while first one,  
a herring gull, glides slowly down  
lands on the lake near  
the shore opposite. She  
just sits there the way  
gulls do, floating with the  
peace that wild things  
seem to have at times like these,  
a cool November morning,  
quiet between the noise of  
summer, long gone now, and  
winter's hammer.  
But she's not alone for long.  
A second gull lands gracefully nearby,  
and suddenly there are more,  
in groups of two or three,  
arriving now and then,  
like guests at a party until  
there's a congregation of gulls,  
a flotilla out there in the lake,  
sitting still or rising, one  
after the other, wings flapping,  
a few inches above the water,  
then resting again.  
Now two take off together,  
fly around the party,  
and return, having gone  
perhaps into a corner to talk  
seeing they had some private  
business with each other.  
I'm not a guest, of course, being  
far away and other,  
just observing, although—  
such being the world's intimacies—  
our unacknowledged,  
unseen connection is nonetheless  
a connection, a different sort  
of congregation.

Ralph Stevens is the author of the poetry collections *At Bunker Cove* (Moon Pie Press), *Things Haven't Been the Same* (Finishing Line Press), and *Water under Snow* (Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers). Individual poems have appeared in a variety of publications. He lives with his wife Sally Rowan in Ellsworth, Maine. Ralph's most recent book, *Water under Snow*, is now available from Wipf and Stock Publishers at:

<https://wipfandstock.com/9781666730845/water-under-snow/>

And from Amazon at:

[https://smile.amazon.com/Water-under-Snow-Ralph-Stevens/dp/166673084X/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=27GCCLJ3OM8FE&keywords=Ralph+Stevens+Water+under+Snow&qid=1640886858&prefix=ralph+stevens+water+under+snow%2Caps%2C104&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Water-under-Snow-Ralph-Stevens/dp/166673084X/ref=sr_1_1?crid=27GCCLJ3OM8FE&keywords=Ralph+Stevens+Water+under+Snow&qid=1640886858&prefix=ralph+stevens+water+under+snow%2Caps%2C104&sr=8-1)

Earth Will Abide  
by Debi Swim

“The measure of intelligence is the ability to change.” —Albert Einstein

We’ve grown used to the man with the sign  
“The end of the world is near.” He hangs out  
on the street corner and we sneer, two thousand  
years and more, yet we are still here.  
It won’t matter in the long run whether or not  
we change, earth will remain and heal herself  
though people may be in short supply. Still, I  
have no faith that man will change if he survives.  
Most are too greedy, lusting for power and fun.  
Consumers who buy and buy then toss it out  
to make room for more. Politicians, movie stars,  
sports idols, you don’t do what you preach.

Process notes: Has anyone else noticed how many more storage units are being built?

“Earth Abides”, written by George R. Stewart

Debi Swim writes primarily to prompts. She is a wife, mother, grandmother and persistent WV poet.

## It Feels Like 1955

by Mark Tulin

We all meet again next week,  
with frowns on our faces,  
a pair of baggy sweats,  
an overflowing laundry basket  
poured into the churning vortex.

It seems like 1955,  
outdated calendars on the walls,  
a black-and-white TV with a fuzzy screen,  
and dingy tile floors, mid-century.

We are like sloths in the launderette,  
everyone appears resigned  
to miss out on life,  
as our clothes take priority,  
watching them do the Maytag dance.

There is never enough change  
in the malfunctioning coin machine;  
no excitement in pushing a cart;  
our clothes, like old ideas  
have just enough detergent to spare.

I wait patiently to be renewed,  
leaf through an old People Magazine,  
study each spin-dry cycle,  
believing my life will change  
once the buzzer goes off.

Venice Beach Mermaid  
by Mark Tulin

The homeless man on the beach  
sculpts the woman of his dreams  
with gnarled hands and a kid's shovel.  
He may be destitute and hungry,  
but he has the passion of Michelangelo.

He carved her sandy flesh  
into smoothed edges,  
serrated her fishtail,  
and gave her life  
by the shine of the sun.

A mermaid! He exclaimed—  
sensual and slender,  
able to provide hours of friendship,  
to share stories by the sea,  
easing his loneliness.

Her quiet presence, he enjoyed  
until the tide was high  
and his only faithful companion  
melted by a wave,  
along with his heart.

Evolution of Time  
by Mark Tulin

The crimson sky of daybreak  
rises during prehistoric times,  
when the dinosaurs roamed the earth—  
alpha-beasts trampling on jungle weeds,  
undisturbed by humans  
when nature had its way.

Until man invented the wheel,  
a gun, and the need to control  
the land, sky, and ocean  
to suit his desires.

Turn back the time  
when the Stegosaurus  
walked on too big feet,  
when the Brontosaurus  
could reach the top of a tree.

Does evolution spell extinction?  
Is human progress destroying Mother Earth?  
Do we need to bring back dinosaurs  
to save us from ourselves?

**Mark Tulin** is a retired family therapist from California. Mark's books include *Magical Yogis*, *Awkward Grace*, *The Asthmatic Kid and Other Stories*, *Junkyard Souls*, and *Rain on Cabrillo*. He's featured in *Weeds and Wildflowers*, *Still Point Journal*, *The Mindful Word*, *The Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Amethyst Review*, *Vita Brevis Press*, *White Enso*, and others. He is also a Pushcart nominee and a Best of Drabble. Visit Mark at [www.crowonthewire.com](http://www.crowonthewire.com).

Balconies Belay  
by Robert Walton

Blossoms leap  
Up sunlight cascades  
Like salmon returning home  
To Machete's cliffs  
As swallows swoop  
Past our nest of ropes.  
A falcon cries trespass  
From the summit spire—  
And we do,  
And we'll leave,  
Though it seems a shame  
To climb away  
From this blossom-drenched ledge.

**Robert Walton** retired from teaching after thirty-six years of service at San Lorenzo Middle School. Walton's novel, *Dawn Drums*, won the 2014 New Mexico Book Awards Tony Hillerman Prize for best fiction. "Sockdologizer", his dramatization of Abraham Lincoln's assassination, won the Saturday Writers 2020 Everything Children contest. His *Joaquin's Gold*, offering legends and stories about famed old West bandit Joaquin Murrieta, was published in January. Most recently, his "Mansa Musa's Wisdom" was published in Cricket Media's February, 2022 issue of *Spider* magazine . Website : <http://chaosgatebook.wordpress.com/>

At the end of my suffering /there was a door.

—Louise Gluck