

*Willows Wept Review*  
Issue Twenty-Seven Winter 2023



Cover image: *Bear Creek Cottonwood, Denver Suburbs* by W Goodwin.  
See more of W's work in this issue.

*Willows Wept Review*  
Issue Twenty-Seven Winter 2023

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[willowswept.com](http://willowswept.com)

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ISSN 2158-5326 (digital)

ISSN 2770-5722 (print)

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# The Poet Revisits Herself in Spring

---

*by Alison Davis*

The northern mockingbirds have returned again and made a nest in the bush at the edge of the driveway. The poet watches the children cluster around and coo at the babies, tie bits of string around the branches in celebration and make a bed of leaves and poppy petals below, should one of the fledglings meet gravity and before their earth-wings are ready.

A troupe of males triangulate their watch: rooftop, lamppost, telephone wire. Their calls have become unmistakable.

The poet is always here, taking notes, which is to say is always here, taking in— the single lupine and the dead lamb's ear, the green platter succulents from Lily's fenceless garden and all the seeds that have not yet found a way to be licked alive by the sun. Grey-breasted birds stay a while and go, and whatever is born eventually finds its own legs and walks a way. Growing things takes courage, kairos.

Rice husks dissolve in the soil like yesterdays, and the poet thinks there are only two kinds of time: the back-then of belief and the fresh-now of faith.

The planets will not wash their hands of what is trying to emerge here along all these fault lines, here among these faulty minds.

The poet is constellating her tender-tongued self into every season.

# Menstruation Haibun at Sinkyone Wilderness State Park

---

*by Alison Davis*

We are all singing a song about birds this time, and though our voices are strong, our breath a fierce and sacred fire, it is not what makes the limbs of the redwood dance. I am still always looking for treetops, and I am still always looking for stones, which means I don't know which way to look. Cow's parsnip and columbine flank the trail, and the light pours through between the pines. Each step becomes a deliberate habit. To inhabit my body among all the earth-bodies, this is the most ecstatic tale of flesh on flesh. Later we sit in a circle at Anderson Gulch and carve spoons with hot coals and sharp knives. Sweet smoke, strong stroke. We sweat and tell stories worth telling, whether they are true or not. Renegade summers. River-wild loves. Cliff jumping from one incarnation to the next. When I stand, I wipe the seat of my pants and come away with a smear of blood on my fingertips. This is where the new initiate is claimed. For four days, my body makes a great display, far away from the city comforts that let us hide our bodies, hide from our bodies, their secretions and smells and soft-spoken rhythmic wisdom. They all know. We are still singing when we reach Wheeler Beach, now about the sun rising in our souls, and I keep the song alive as I wash at the edge of the creek. I offer my blood with that of the fox and the doe and field mouse and birthing Mother and, yes, with everything that has been wounded or left dead on this precious earth, and I stay in the story that what I need in this moment is already here. I stay I stay I stay in the story that

my blood will bind me  
to the solid, hallowed ground  
and be my glory



# At the Creek

---

*by Alison Davis*

1.

each shadow a small  
promise of what can still be  
revealed: way-making light.

2.

earth altars, nosegays:  
honeysuckle, white sage, pine.  
i need my body.

3.

we follow the deer tracks  
to the black cottonwood tree  
and wait in silence.

4.

my breath catches at  
each feather. what has happened  
to my winter wings?

5.

i offer myself  
a bouquet of rosemary,  
wind, and wild prayers.

---

Alison Davis is an educator, author, and activist living in Northern California. She holds degrees from Very Prestigious Universities but sees her willingness to be like Rumi and gamble everything for love as her greatest credential. Her writing has appeared in numerous scholarly and literary publications.

# Storm Sonnet

---

by Paul Ilichko

Rain having fallen to a biblical degree  
unstopping for days on end till leaving behind  
its predictable catastrophe fields of rotten  
items mud-soaked and stinking of despair  
visions seared in survivors' minds of  
a subaquatic hell sunlight's shafts that split  
the clouds perceived as mockery until it was over  
and slowly voices began to be heard again  
rough hands seen to work themselves to bone  
clearing the world of ruin and debris butterflies  
now visible flying from the mouth of  
the apocalypse working silent to the surface  
before erupting from the broken earth  
surely to be taken as a harbinger of something.

# Hollow

---

by Paul Ilichko

Shadows darken into cobalt  
upon a northward facing wall etched  
in blackness plank by overlapping  
plank  
wires stretch across  
the foreground hung with lamps  
the glow of lit bulbs barely visible  
outside the range of shade  
beyond  
the greenstone cliff still stands immense  
fading rapidly into winter its trees  
are bare except for ochre patches  
where oaks cling on with intense  
concentration waiting for the following  
spring for final release of their inevitability  
higher on the slope are seen the patchy  
evergreens working to offset the dullness  
that surrounds them  
this then  
is West Virginia and we have seen it  
with our own eyes the rawness of  
November in a place of such intrinsic  
beauty of such intrinsic hardship.

---

Paul Ilichko is a British/American poet, who lives with his partner in Lambertville, New Jersey. His work has appeared in a variety of journals, including *The Night Heron Barks*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Sleet Magazine*, and *Book of Matches*.

# A Compass for Ariadne

---

by Greg Sendi

1.

To true the walls, we put a drib of oil  
in a shallow cup

and lay on top an olive leaf  
and on the leaf

a flake from off the Anatolian  
hammers we use

to set the lintels and split beams.  
Those shards

lay everywhere, peppering the floor,  
like beetles

scuttling in the dust. They would  
recollect,

each to the others, in a clot.

2.

You hear princess, you think some child.  
She was not young.

She lived a life apart at Gortyna,  
away from palace

things, more like a nun almost,  
to tend her brother.

She spoke to him like others  
couldn't,

calmed, perhaps, by the tea-scent  
of her hair,

her nails on him, the gentle way  
she poulticed mud

to salve the wounds he gave himself.

3.

Suffice to say the suitor who appeared  
that year in autumn

in his dark-beaked galley took  
her by surprise.

Her father sent no herald. But she liked  
his plumpish

northern face. He gave her splendid  
non-promises:

*I've come to make these things all right again  
and I come to you*

*with mercy of the gods for him  
and thanks to you*

*the sad fellow will at last be free.*

4.

So the halfmoon past his coming she  
made gifts of sage

and beeswax, tallow soaps and stones  
to tell the gods

her eagerness (she never could do goats  
or even birds)

and told him secrets one-two-three  
and showed him threadwork

from her girlhood. With confiding hand  
she traced love plans

upon his chest and abdomen of meals  
they would share

and abundant teeming garden hives.

5.

I know you think you know. But I am  
just the beam

and chisel guy. I built a portico  
as would befit

a prison. Full stop. The rest are fairy tales  
told by swindlers.

This much I can tell you:  
No magic ball

of string or ball of magic string  
what have you

rolled forward like some schnauzer  
snout-down

de-vermining the cave.

6.

She was the magic. She herself. And when  
the day came, she

tied onto the high doorframe a hem-  
thread of her bleachwhite

gown and danced him forward, unraveling  
until at last

the dress was gone, and they stood where  
he sat in cowfilth,

allayed to hear her breathing near, she now  
naked to both.

Then it was one-two-three and afterward,  
spindling the thread

around the bludgeon, he walked out.

7.

The desolation calls are hard to tell.  
The cave could not  
contain them. The insects stopped their  
skittily hiss.

After some time alone she must  
have found one of the cups  
with olive leaf and hammer shard  
and learned its art:

However she might turn amazed  
in gyral darkness,  
in frenzy pandemoniac, bereft,  
it trued her dismal  
course and pointed her the other way.

8.

As she emerged, I found a painter's tarp  
to wrap her body in.

She was from head to foot enameled  
in cattle blood.

She had torn her tea-scent hair in sheaves  
and plastered it

with gore along the cavern walls. I gave  
her water from a skin.

She tightly held the little cup and went  
its unremitting way,

the leaf and shard recoiling by degrees  
and pointing her

through Knossos to the Cyclades.

---

Greg Sendi is a Chicago writer and former fiction editor at *Chicago Review*. His career has included broadcast and trade journalism as well as poetry and fiction. Recently, his work has appeared or been accepted for publication in a wide range of print and online literary magazines.

# Late August

---

*by Kevin Winchester*

Late August and the garden's gone to seed  
from want of water and lack of desire, no need  
of another quart to can or bag to freeze.  
Cicadas drone while old men lounge in the shade,  
shirts open, sipping sweet tea  
from sweating glasses their women made.  
They sit swearing at the white glare of the noonday sun,  
tilting their stubbled chins toward a hint of breeze,  
relief that never comes 'round.

Late August and the garden's gone to seed.

Evening falls and the boys all pose and preen  
in the parking lot of the Dairy Queen  
at the corner of Wolfe Pond Road and Main,  
hungry to be more than they seem, hurried to become  
who they think they will be. All fury and sound,  
they know everything, clamor for war, but want it for free.  
They're gonna change the world, maybe burn it down  
on a primitive pyre cobbled from musk and youth and greed  
when the weekend comes around.

Late August and the garden's gone to seed.

The boys, their rides shining like moon flower,  
rev their engines, thinking the young girls care  
about a car, or speed, or the pomade in their hair.  
The girls swirl by, perfumed and coy  
keeping their distance, folding their secrets  
in denim and lace, safe from the noise.  
They move in murmuration, they move as one,  
holding fast to their trinkets and treasures  
until the right day comes 'round.

Late August and the garden's gone to seed.



Near midnight, there's a thickening to the air.  
From the porch, old men lean back their chairs  
on two legs and rub gnarled fingers over thinning hair,  
reading signs printed on scars as old as trees.  
Out on the highway, the boys blow by, music hounding,  
taillights swallowed by the night. The men concede,  
their yellowed eyes dimming with the knowledge  
there's no more left to glean from planting in the Spring.  
And too soon the winter comes.

Too soon the winter comes.

# Squall Line

---

by Kevin Winchester

I cross the sawgrass dunes,  
the sand soft and loose as sugar,  
to the hardpack left by the receding tide  
and head out for a few miles along the shore,  
dodging people sparsely scattered along the way.  
Pipers skirt and scurry ahead of me,  
weaving around tangles of umber seaweed.  
An elderly lady, her Georgia Bulldog hoodie cinched against the wind,  
stands ankle deep in the foam, contemplating the squall line  
advancing northward out where ocean and sky blur gray.  
I veer around an expecting mother as she finds a shark's tooth,  
dark as obsidian among the fractured shells.  
She passes it to her partner who prods the point with his fingertip, testing,  
the benign prick of finger a reminder  
of our most prehistoric fears.  
Sharks have no bones, he tells her,  
their teeth the only hard part of their skeleton.  
The black ones are fossilized, ten thousand years old,  
or older, he says. She nods and rubs her belly, stares across the surf  
toward the horizon as if she might see back in time  
three hundred and eighty million years,  
a time before trees first spread roots in the rich soil,  
when the warm swirling waters held the beginning  
of all she knows, of all there is to know,  
and the sea clawed at the slanted sand,  
white fanged and hungry to reclaim its young.

---

Kevin Winchester writes. Sometimes he writes poetry, sometimes he writes fiction. All of it usually stems from time he's spent out wandering around thinking about things he sees in the world. When he's not writing or wandering, he does the same things most other people do.

# Runt

---

*by Michael McCormick*

We stately ascend  
the swallow thronged loft

bearing magi gifts  
of manger milk

One spotlight babe  
lies too still

Dust mote cherubim  
descend with dread news

---

Michael McCormick writes stories in his Batman pajamas. Mike's work has appeared in *Braided Way*, *Fickle Muses*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Loud Coffee*, *Roaring Muse*, *Talking Stick*, *Whispering Shade*, and elsewhere. Find out more at [www.mikemccormick.org](http://www.mikemccormick.org).

# Running A-Fowl

---

*by Louise Robertson*

It means something kind of like the word epiphany,  
the definition of which you do not  
want to give in English class  
when the stooping  
teacher who stands in front of the graying  
blackboard looking  
at all the teenagers, scans for  
a likely source of a definition at which point  
you sink within the slick metal, finger-width  
bars confining you to the bolted-to-the-desk  
seat knowing that she knows  
that you know most of the definitions  
floating in the books and it's kind of like  
when you were confronted by  
her to supply the meaning of  
"unrequited" and you thought  
silence was an apt  
response, something to show what  
the air around an emotion like that is  
and it's kind of like  
being on the beach in winter  
as the gulls glide over a trash can  
in the slush-colored  
clouds of a five o'clock dusk  
and the hard  
sand slants into undulating ankle- and knee-deep  
waves and you are 16-years-old  
and feel like you could run  
and soar  
forever.

# America

---

by Louise Robertson

Joy, like a car, teaches  
you nothing, or rather  
it teaches  
you to keep doing the same thing,  
Over and over.

Do this.  
Refill this.

Pay  
anything to feed this  
to bursting.

When gasoline smells, you  
keep on huffing.  
How hot it gets in that thing and you stay there,  
hoping it's the kind of fire  
you can put in your mouth  
and it won't hurt you.  
I mean like a cigarette. I mean like a gun.

---

Louise Robertson counts among her many publications, awards, and honors two jars of homemade pickles she received for running a monthly workshop. Her poems have appeared in *SWWIM*, *New Ohio Review*, *Southern Florida Poetry Journal*, and many other journals.

# Pinks and Reds

---

*by W Goodwin*



# White Ibis

---

*by W Goodwin*



# Radioles

---

by *W Goodwin*



---

W Goodwin resides in Colorado and is bound by blood to salt water and directed by mixed genetics to explore uncommon places and themes. The author graduated from UCLA (biology and English). The author's short stories and artwork have appeared in more than half a dozen literary journals.



# Understanding Summer

---

*by Jane Rosenberg LaForge*

In Cinderella, it is not the fairy  
godmother but her assistants  
who transform the protagonist's  
rags into a regal yellow, at least in how  
we danced it at my ballet school.  
We surrounded the girl in the rip-away  
blouse and wrap-around skirt, escorted her  
off stage in a circle; she left her overclothes  
in the wings and we ushered her back  
to reveal the metamorphosis. Now there's  
an analogy about the passage of time, uses  
of patience, how to make magic real  
for a disbelieving audience.

I was the winter fairy, my movements  
sodden, my sweep indiscriminate,  
while the other girls were outfitted  
in brighter steps, organza and sequins  
that spoke of months spent outdoors  
or barefoot on a plush carpet. In summer,  
our days distended until they felt as if  
they'd tumble over the cliff road, but with  
a soft landing, into a slope of ivy where the rats subsisted—  
pigs with whiskers, our mother said—  
perish the thought, we might encounter  
something animal and indigenous. Our mother  
did not take stock in tales of rodents being  
switched for horses, or that evil could exist  
within a set of parents. She'd be similarly  
unimpressed with how seasons have turned  
apocalyptic with fire and rain, and other  
pithy elements. To watch me dance, she said,  
was to have her own feet hurt, re-living fissure  
of sinews, snap of tendons. If she had faith  
the asphalt grip of psoriasis on her skin would  
be relinquished; that the drift of continents  
would fill crevices and heal the abyss,

she might have outlasted her allotment  
of days, and put down the plagues  
of frogs and grasshoppers.

# A Daughter's Burden

---

by Jane Rosenberg LaForge

The reach of water over the curvature of the earth decides the strength of tides in a lake; how deeply leaves drink of the sun determines whether the cells will descend into mayhem. I know only that once, we were young and tan, and our brown hair turned blonde from swimming in chlorine; then our blonde took on the glistening green hues of lettuce. After summer, we were left with heads of straw, dull, dry, and broken, surrendering to static electricity that would come for us in winter months. Now there's no more going to the moon and back because pregnant astronauts, exposed to cosmic radiation, would give birth to monsters. The beating speech of stars has disappeared where I once listened, in the yard my father paved because he was sick of the maintenance. They've disappeared in the country, too, where my daughter dresses in black and dyes her hair the same as though she might be called upon to dissolve into the background. Still she swims gracefully in the wastes of glaciers with the strength and drive of a comet, and in her wake, not so much a tail, but a stream of her mother's unrequited accomplishments.

---

Jane Rosenberg LaForge has published three books of poetry, four chapbooks, a memoir, and two novels. Her next full-length poetry book, with essays, is *My Aunt's Abortion* (BlazeVox, 2023). She reviews books for *American Book Review* and reads poetry for *COUNTERCLOCK* literary magazine.

# A Mother's Confession

---

*by Becky Boling*

A mother lives with guilt  
as routine as her morning coffee  
sips it sans sugar  
black as an endless pit.

It weighs the shoulders down.  
A teacher's iron hand, it  
bends the back, vertebrae by vertebrae.

Scissors snip cookie-cutter silhouettes  
butchered chances, a banner she pins  
to the wall with bloodied, bandaged fingers.

A mother forgets how to sleep, her tour  
of duty endless. Her brittle heart keeps  
time, harbors a hidden cricket's regrets.

# Swept Away

---

*by Becky Boling*

That winter night, blue and frosty,  
when I got into my rusty Dodge Dart  
eager to spend the weekend with you,  
I wasn't thinking of snow-iced roads  
or blinding, glazed windowpanes  
but warm laughter, hands reaching,  
whispered moments on cotton pillowcases,  
our complicit adolescent bodies  
on the verge of adulthood—you  
in your first real job, I still  
in school—folding like mirror images,  
one into another, the heart of sameness.

The single-lane highway threaded  
west to the state line. I clutched  
the wheel, fingers numb, checked  
the temperature of the arctic gale  
billowing from the heat vents.  
Shivers along my back chipped  
with an ice pick at my self-delusion.  
The forced air was no warmer.

The second- or third-hand car my mother  
had bought me when I turned eighteen  
came without a manual, without frills,  
familiar switches, levers, or dials.  
Only later, when winter gave a dying roar,  
would I learn how to turn on the heat.

On worn treads, I glided into the last town  
my side of the border, not far from the city  
where you had set up house.  
I drove down a neighborhood street,  
through an arboreal tunnel. Canopies  
of bare branches arched and stretched  
overhead, a thousand arms embraced,  
despite the span of sidewalk and pavement.

Sifted snowflakes glimmered beneath  
streetlamps as they floated towards me,  
before they could find rest on my windshield.  
My headlights parted the wintery veil.  
Powdery particles, far too light to resist  
the gentle brush of wipers, fell  
to either side of the road,  
swept into the darkness.

That moment endures, a memory  
that comes each winter when I drive in snow.  
I watch, suspended, while snow winnows itself,  
clears a path before me that still waits in patient  
calm and splendor, knowing you are waiting, too.

A bower of white crystals falls, like a sacrament,  
on the threshold of a life. I am already nostalgic  
for what is passing, has passed, resigned  
to the inevitable, but no longer able to feel the cold.

---

Becky Boling, Pushcart Prize Nominee, has published prose and poetry (*The Ekphrastic Review*, *Lost Lake Folk Opera*, *Willows Wept Review*, *Martin Lake Journal*, *Persimmon Tree*, *3rdWednesday Magazine*), written dramatic monologues for Northfield's SOLOS: Monologue Writing and Performance Festival, and won competitions—Northfield Sidewalk Poetry & Red Wing Arts' 19th and 21st Poet-Artist Collaboration (2020, 2022). Cathy Wurzer (MPR) narrated two of her poems for *Pandemic Poetry* (2021). She is included in the Ramsey County Library's anthology, *This Was 2020: Minnesotans Write About Pandemics and Social Justice in a Historic Year*. Transplanted from southern Indiana, she flourishes, like dandelions, in Minnesota soil.

# November Triptych from the Lake

---

by Karla Linn Merrifield

chickadees ride  
bare limbs in wild gale, clinging;  
hunger season strikes

raw waves pound raw shores,  
clawing at the cold morning;  
not a crow caws down

the lake does not wait;  
its white horses clamor in—  
the season churns dark

---

Karla Linn Merrifield has sixteen books to her credit. Her newest book, *My Body the Guitar*, was recently nominated for the National Book Award. It was inspired by famous guitarists and their guitars and published by Before Your Quiet Eyes Publications Holograph Series. She is frequent contributor to *The Songs of Eretz Poetry Review*. Connect with Karla online at <https://www.karlalinnmerrifield.org/> and <https://karlalinnmerrifield.wordpress.com/>, on Twitter at @LinnMerrifield, and on Facebook at /karlalinn.merrifield.

# Otherland

---

*by Steve McCown*

After the storm, we walked in trees,  
on the backs of old elms  
tossed over our playground like pick-up sticks.

In a line we balanced on a hundred exposed rings,  
crossed to another hundred,  
then branched out, slowly, to the ends:

a leafy mass shrouding a swing set,  
a cluster of unearthed roots  
stopping a merry-go-round forever, in mid spin.

Split in two, a teeter totter  
lost its equilibrium.  
A jungle gym was smashed,

our monkey motions banished.  
Yet we explored the wreckage.  
One playground replaced another.

The toppled, the crushed, led us up  
to the highest limbs, to the fallen heights.



# Contents of a Cedar Chest

---

by Steve McCown

It isn't the soft Canadian wool blankets  
scattered with moth balls  
like toxic hailstones,

or the summer sheets  
absorbing acrid fumes  
like bad dreams,

or the surviving moths  
attacking Father's decorated Army uniform  
folded at the bottom.

It's the chest itself.  
When empty, it isn't.

Bands of crimson and orange  
and russet rise  
or set every time I open  
and close the lid-- an ingrained sun.

Free of fumes,  
a rich redolence emerges,  
a treasure trove of earthy scents  
deeply inhaled,  
transporting me far away--

into the North Woods,  
into the heart of cedar.

---

Nominated for a Pushcart Prize for his poem "Lacerations," Steve McCown has published poetry in *Willows Wept Review*, *Colorado Crossing*, *Arizona Western Voice*, *Bright Light Stories in the Night*, and *Lost Lake Folk Opera Magazine*, and five of his poems are stamped in the sidewalks in Northfield, Minnesota. His collection *Ghosting* was recently published by Shipwreck Publishing Company.

# Housebreaking Phoenix

---

by Beth Copeland

With dogs, it's the same as with men—I fall in love too soon. While walking Phoenix in the snow, I pray for one thing—that he'll pee so we can go inside where it's warm. But all he wants is to pull me on the leash as he pursues the scent of something I can't see in the pre-dawn dark. *Pee*, I plead. *Phoenix, please*. Of course, he doesn't understand a word I say. I lead him to places he's peed before—a tree, a post, a propane tank in the backyard, but he doggedly trots down the hill. It's slick and I forgot to put ice cleats on my boots. If he'll just do this one thing, I'll love him forever. It's kind of like wanting a man to comfort you when your feelings are hurt, an act—like peeing—you'd think he'd know how to do without you having to tromp around in circles in the cold pleading for what seems like hours: Hold me, love me. *Pee, Phoenix. Pee.*

Yesterday, my sister said Phoenix's name should be Pee Nix, and we laughed like we joked about the guy I dated who liked dressing in a gorilla suit and the Elvis impersonator on a dating site who typed *Hello ... Hello ... Hello ...* like an echo instead of something funny like *I'm all shook up* or *Shake, rattle, and roll*, and the poet who said I might be The One and called me his skinny 70-year-old mountain girl. I said, *That sounds like Granny Clampett*, and he said, *More like an aging Ellie Mae*, digging that damn ditch deeper each time he opened his pie-hole. Phoenix plows ahead, daring me to release the leash and let him run into the woods, but if I do, he'll follow his nose and never come home. That's how it is in the push-pull of love. First, he'll tug you down the road and later, when you think it's time to go out again, he'll stand like a statue

in the doorway, framed in falling snow, refusing to  
budge. I bribe him with a biscuit. It's puppy love.

---

Beth Copeland is the author of *Selfie with Cherry* (Glass Lyre Press, 2022); *Blue Honey*, 2017 Dogfish Head Poetry Prize winner; *Transcendental Telemarketer* (BlazeVOX, 2012); and *Traveling through Glass*, 1999 Bright Hill Press Poetry Book Award winner. She owns and operates Tiny Cabin, Big Ideas™, a retreat for writers in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

# Clara Barton and Me

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by Daniel Bailey

It turns out at 70 I'm still a first-grader while Cathy, her black hair spilling over her red coat, walks the last short block to Edison Elementary in Walla Walla, Washington, 1957. We boys in her class wait on the corner of the playground today as every day, vying to accompany her into the building.

About that playground. It was seriously muddy from overnight rain during the afternoon recess one day when I just had to know something. Who was faster, lithe Dave or sturdy Rick? My short self was only the third-speediest kid in our class, the bitter pill life had forced me to swallow. The other two begged not to race. But teachers checked the "Leadership" box on my report cards in those days, and I somehow made them agree to run down to the big tree, touch it, and run back to Cathy's corner. The first to touch the crosswalk sign would win.

Dave took a small lead, then Rick pushed up on his right shoulder. Dave found a touch more speed to stay just in front. The two sped along that way some seconds.

Maybe it was the necessary deceleration for the tree-touch. Or a particularly large patch of black mud. In any case, it looked for a moment like Rick might hold it together as he began sliding across an impressive stretch of muck. Until one foot caught something hard. Whereupon, arms akimbo, Rick pitched forward landing pretty close to the horizontal in the black ooze. When he came to a stop, the front half of his body was a gloppy mess. I never did find out who was faster.

Inside the building, we learned our sums from textbooks. Mrs. Hill gave us speedy kids mimeographed pages for extra practice. One day I completed four of these fast and looked around to confirm my mathematical superiority. Big Greg was working on his seventh page. Cathy had just finished her ninth. So she wasn't only the prettiest girl in the class, she was the smartest *kid*, period! My awe of her reached new heights.

During noon hour one day on the playground, converted into a field of battle, Cathy as Clara Barton glided among the fallen. Which included me, the four-star general of one of three contending armies. She knelt over me. If this was dying, I was all in.

Yet being 70 also means still being the 16-year-old at the Sky Vue Drive-In with Rhonda who, in front of her house, slid in ahead of me so close to the wheel of my dad's cream Mercury I could barely squeeze in on the driver's side. Soon clunky speakers on our window tops blared the tinny soundtrack of a forgettable movie. Rhonda's manner and attire all but entreated me to pet with her. Which would have been a first. But I was too gutless, a failure that hurt me then and hurts me now. A sleepless night later I called her at 8:00 a.m. asking her out again. She declined, uncertain of my state of mind. As well she might have been. For after battlefield general, I'd begun a second career as inhibited teen who, in his arrested development, would attempt suicide not many years later.

At moments though, I'm my current age: old. My prostate pinches. So much that a *uroflowmeter*, of all the god-awful things—masquerading as a white wastepaper basket—documented that I peed five times at a single standing. My urologist and I decided to drug my quisling gland into a stupor for now and ream it out later if need be. I left his office at 70 feeling 105. But enough of that.

Cathy with her long black hair and red coat bends over me on the sparse grass of the cold battlefield. No other kids are near. I can hardly believe this is happening. To increase the chance she'll stay, I play a very seriously wounded general indeed. Cathy responds with a particularly caring Clara.

Just as the bell ends lunch hour, softly as a seraph, she kisses me on the cheek. It turns out the moment has shimmered down the decades for us both. Which we confirmed at our fiftieth high school reunion where, on an impulse, I brush-kissed Cathy back. It came off. She beamed.

Shafts of memory from what's come before light my consciousness every day. Russians and Venezuelans, say anthropologists, more than others, live in the past. I say they live richly. For "The past," as William Faulkner wrote, "is never dead. It's not even past."

---

Daniel Bailey has spent half his life outside his native USA, including teaching English at a university inside a gathering Venezuelan dictatorship. *Star 82 Review*, *The South Shore Review*, *CP Quarterly* and the *TESL Reporter*, among other venues, have presented his work. Chess and tennis continue to gladden his life.

# Parsley

---

by Zoe Dickinson

as we wait for dad to return  
from a nuclear imaging test at the Gatineau hospital  
mom tells me  
how she walked into a party at his house  
in the dark belly of an Ottawa Valley winter  
1979  
saw parsley, glowing  
under fluorescent lights  
behind the living-room sofa  
  
and she knew  
he wasn't like anyone else.

like Rapunzel's mother, mine knows the value  
of something rare and green.

later, they built a greenhouse together  
against the side of the house.  
February afternoons, he'd be in there  
up a ladder  
fertilizing guava blossoms with a paintbrush  
air soft as moist earth  
while outside, a metre of snow  
hid garden beds  
frozen to flint

now  
as we wait for radioactive material  
to reveal rebel cells in dad's bones:  
how can our love of growing things  
include the cancer growing inside him?

all those years  
practicing patience in the garden, practicing  
tender ruthlessness  
in the care of peas, asparagus, and melons  
carry us now

reconcile radiation  
as pulling weeds  
and letting them wilt on the compost heap  
to make room for parsley

# on the dangers of literary birds

---

by *Zoe Dickinson*

Nay, I'll have a starling shall be taught to speak  
Nothing but 'Mortimer,' and give it him  
To keep his anger still in motion.

—Shakespeare, *Henry IV*, Part 1

starlings are getting in everywhere.  
the bookstore's warehouse  
at the edge of the sea  
is under siege  
speckled invaders infiltrate every pipe and vent

we come in one morning to a skitter in the heating duct  
that becomes frenzied flapping when the furnace blasts  
remove the silver casing, and out flies a starling  
satin breast the colour of evening  
circles stacks of books  
an aerial browser

and it isn't even our first starling incident this week

I wonder, are North American starlings particularly literary  
in their tastes?

brought here by Shakespeare enthusiasts  
determined to fill Central Park  
with every bird mentioned by the Bard  
100 starlings loosed in 1890  
now 200 million

starlings evict native birds from nests  
suck the eggs, or—so like a colonist—push them over the edge  
to rot below, wasted  
appropriate even the songs  
of robin, pewee, and thrush



we fortify the old warehouse: seal openings, screen vents  
hang a “closed” sign in the window to deter avian customers  
but still I dream of starlings

what do you do with 200 million starlings?  
gathering up these descendants of a literary conceit  
impossible as un-spilling water,  
as un-settling a continent

---

Zoe Dickinson is a poet and bookseller from Victoria, British Columbia. Her poetry is rooted in the Pacific coastline, with a focus on local ecology and human relationships with nature. She is a manager at Russell Books and the Artistic Director of the Planet Earth Poetry Reading Series.

# Bug Bites

---

*by Gabby Gilliam*

Mosquitoes wander bare flesh  
like it's an open air market  
leave itchy welts in their wake.

I eye the lake, consider casting  
myself into its lush cool  
to rid my skin of uninvited guests.

Instead I throw towel over shoulders  
and retreat into the cabin, forsaking  
sky for a storm of calamine.

# An Excerpt from a Sommelier's CV

---

by Gabby Gilliam

## *Professional Summary*

Expert sommelier with extensive climatological training and a passion for improving customer dining experience with the right wine. Thorough understanding of climate change and how rising temperatures can be exploited to cultivate the *vitis vinifera*.

## *Specialties*

- Pairing the flavor of wind-whipped panic with petrichor to create a hurricane that tastes like change.
- The sticky sweetness of freshly forested lumber paired with toxic carbon gas emissions.
- Melting ice caps with a hint of microplastics paired with the salt-kissed tang of rising sea levels.
- The acrid bouquet of redwoods as they burn paired with a featherlight finish of ash.

---

Gabby Gilliam lives in the DC metro area. Her poetry has most recently appeared in *Tofu Ink*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Cauldron Anthology*, *Instant Noodles*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, and *Equinox*. Find her online at [gabbygilliam.squarespace.com](http://gabbygilliam.squarespace.com) or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GabbyGilliamAuthor](https://www.facebook.com/GabbyGilliamAuthor).

# Lessons from the Khan

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*by Jack Granath*

Genghis Khan once took a city  
By setting all the cats on fire  
And with that little stratagem  
Let slip the last, great truth of war.

---

Jack Granath is a librarian in Kansas.

# Green World

---

by D. E. Green

A pair of legs striding by on 6th Street  
just visible through the bush of early summer.  
Birdsong and squirrel chatter.  
Chickens scratching and pecking,  
neighborhood pets.  
I could sit here forever  
or at least I feel right now I could.  
Between the feeling and the reality  
the world, I know, intrudes.  
This sitting, this green world, cannot last.  
Even my own hunger, thirst, will betray me.  
You will ask a question.  
I will answer.  
And this world will end.  
Something like it may return  
tomorrow, may fool me into thinking,  
*This is how life is now.*  
*This green world is our world.*  
And it is.  
But only for a moment.  
Nothing green can stay.

---

D. E. (Doug) Green taught English at Augsburg University for 33 years. He has published articles on Shakespeare, general-interest essays, and poetry. His poem "Gratitude" won the 2018 Martin Lake Journal Bookend Prize; other work has appeared in *Bright Light: Stories in the Night* (Southeastern Minnesota Poets, 2021 and 2022); in the 2021 and 2022 Red Wing Arts Poet Artist Collaboration; in *Third Wednesday*; in *Lost Lake Folk Opera*; in *Willows Wept Review*; and on the sidewalks of his hometown, Northfield, Minnesota. Three of his poems were recognized in the 2022 League of Minnesota Poets Contest. His first collection, *Jumping the Median*, was published in 2019 by Encircle Publications. Doug likes to say that he has been an occasional poet for 40 years.

# huge and great

---

by James B. Nicola

My great-great grandmother—  
there may have been another *great* in there—  
hated her hands  
because they were so

huge.

She lived a century and a half ago  
and yet I know about her hands so huge  
and what her mother said to her.

Can you think what you might say  
to a daughter who hates her hands,  
a trope  
to be  
passed down for decades  
and yet still sound new?

When my aunt told me,  
it seemed like the  
smartest thing for an aunt to say  
to a niece who has huge hands  
and such  
hate  
for her hands  
so that she might feel good—no, *great*—  
about how much  
huge hands might touch  
and do.  
I hope  
that I can be as wise  
with you.

And I think it's fine to put another *great* in there.  
Or two.

# The Bells of St. Stephen's

---

by James B. Nicola

They shot some rounds of glory into the sky  
then gave his brother Bob the shells  
and folded flag so he could tell their mom  
what Steven did in Vietnam—  
he'd never told his family!—  
and those who never met the guy  
who was my second cousin, namely, me.  
You should have heard them ring St. Stephen's bells.

The service brought no pall to bear  
but sundry anecdotes to share  
of his "other family" out west  
where Steven has been laid to rest  
and readings from a gilded tome  
to usher him, the cousin I never met, home.

And now I have a bullet shell  
and several other tales to tell  
of the war hero I never knew  
that I had been related to.  
And he's your second cousin, too.  
We'll catch up with him later, though  
precisely when is not for us to know.

---

James B. Nicola, returning contributor, is the author of seven collections of poetry, the latest two being *Turns & Twists* (just out) and *Fires of Heaven: Poems of Faith and Sense*. His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience: The Practical Guide to Live Performance* won a *Choice* award.

# Icarus

---

by L. G. Rymond

He fell from the sky  
to our garden. The size of him, sodden,  
sprawled on his back, woke us  
from the satisfaction of sowing seeds.

His kind fly so high, he might  
have collided with a plane  
and fallen, fallen. He would not  
have cried out.

One wing smashed, no sign  
of struggle – his friend Death  
met him with a quick greeting  
and stepped along.

Had I watched him circle,  
spread his primary feathers  
like fingers stroking fresh  
roundabout winds?

Had I seen him with kin clustered  
over roadside feast of decay once  
lovely and fleet – smudge of fox,  
hillock of deer?

After somber observation, we bore  
his remains down to the forest floor  
where we leave our own small dead  
to sacred scavengers.

---

L. G. Rymond has been runner up/finalist for Bucks County Pennsylvania Poet Laureate for the last four years. Their poetry has appeared in the *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *Heron Tree Review*, *The Dillydoun Review*, and others, as well as the anthology *Carry Us to the Next Well* (Kelsay Books, 2021).



# North of Middlebury Gap

---

*by Patrick Ganey*

the blanket of snow is this quiet  
up the mountain in early  
winter and I labor to find  
rhythms to match thoughts that mirror  
my breath still walking fast  
enough to sweat while flakes

fall and cover each step soft  
powder muffles my dog unleashed  
and running back and forth perhaps  
looking for blizzard covered blazes  
or expecting fish from tins  
as old habits  
keep my gaitered boots breaking fresh  
snow for her short legs to bound through noise

catches me unaware as birch bark caught in a blow  
down and a half  
hidden moose disturbed in rest clamors just  
before me. I am sure it will fall over  
its bulk is too big for those knobbed legs  
but turning its head and sinking deep  
dark eyes into mine, the whole beast lurches  
unfazed through thickets steeper than my trail.

Who knows if it hears the miles above us jet  
heading God knows where as it disappears  
I almost expect visions and begin to  
pray

this is not a quiet we inhabit  
before we hike  
on the edge of empty

# Khlong Toie Market

---

by Patrick Ganey

Almost everywhere the ground is wet, and dirty grey puddles with debris dissolve any semblance of hygiene as wave after wave of people, motorbikes, dollies, styrofoam containers and woven bamboo baskets stream through this massive market in the heart of Bangkok, Thailand. Crossing the khlong—or canal—over a small bridge whose damp thick planks are saturated with the accretion of quantity, and entering the market whose boundary is loosely defined by a brackish canal that shames the Cuyahoga River with a viscous liquid that now fills its channeled, hardened banks, visitors find it hard not to be awakened by the intense smells of rot, filthy water, row after row of crammed caged chickens ducks geese and other fowl, the squawks and bleats obliterated by the regular thump of heavy cleavers dispatching birds on huge wood cutting boards—slices of tree trunks actually, where bird after bird is killed plucked singed gutted and prepared for sale, and just past them are the rows under red plastic awnings of every cut and piece of animal that can be eaten, between the stalls crammed tight with people and carts, the voices of women young and old calling out the prices for a kilo of limes, squash, beans, bunches of basil and lemon grass, bottles of honey from fertile Phetchabun Province, curry pastes and mangoes, watermelon, garlic, turmeric, bitter herbs and gourds, lumps of liver and mounds of gizzards, heaps of feet cleaned and ready for stews and curries and soups, and all this before you come to the tubs of eels turtles catfish and shrimp of every size, fresh dried and salted, piled over ice and fat white-fleshed fish with scales as thick as fingernails being scraped off by men in rubber boots who smoke and cough and talk all the while, girls sitting in a circle de-veining shrimp one after one after another for hours at a time, their wrists tattooed and hard as their weathered fingers fly through shrimp like an old nun's fingers run through rosary beads, habit and meditation built into the repetition, and cats prowling the aisles thin and tattered, tails mostly missing and eyes alert ready to pounce on the rat that runs between stacks of crates, across the child's feet who plays with a toy gun as the other children clamber on empty tables used earlier in the day for trimming roots and pulling off dead leaves, tidying up the produce before the rush of another day, hour after hour of noise and people and everything for sale, the coming and going from the far provinces of Thailand to feed the hungry capital. Old men lie asleep on a low platform surrounded by piles of dried noodles or bags of

rice, a tired mother snores in a small chair with a television showing soap operas playing only for the toddler who lies curled up next to her, looking at the TV as well as her phone, and a young woman sits among stacks of plastic mixing bowls, wire baskets for frying fish and cooking noodles, charcoal braziers and hand forged knives, soup bowls and metal spoons, enough goods to let a small town feed, and where does she find love and friends and a breath of fresh air, sitting long hours and when the rain falls and the mishmash of tin roofs and thick plastic sheeting fray or give way or end between two rows of goods, the aisle splashes with a steady stream of water, flip flops and rubber boots the only useful footwear, the pyramids of limes of all sizes splashed with rain and fresher looking than ever, and rough young men moving small loads of wholesale goods from one end of the market to the next, filling the rows with the urgency of the day's wages, the bags of ice to be delivered up and down the rows to sellers of almost living things that depend upon the cold to keep them fresh, and sitting here and there in dark nooks are middle aged women and men with hand calculators and clipboards tallying purchases and sales, chain smoking cigarettes in anticipation of the next day's business, the floods in Trang or relentless heat in Roi Et, the sacks of rice secure and dry under the high corrugated roof, and another motorcycle delivering whatever it was they needed next, and he stops for a bite of grilled fish, the fish coated in a snowy layer of salt pure and simple grilled over charcoal, the sizzle and smoke and smell mixing with salted squid and crispy chicken legs, plumes of smoke sanctifying the hard and endless work of these huge numbers of people whose lives are spent in this labyrinth of life death and sustenance.

---

Born and raised in Buffalo, New York, Patrick Ganey has since lived in Northfield, Minnesota; southern Thailand; and Middlebury, Vermont, where he now resides. He studied English at SUNY Buffalo and has worked in theatre, conservation, and higher education.

# Careless

---

by Andi Myles

The world ended when that snail dried out  
on the tacky sunbaked asphalt  
and no one noticed that  
something continued, but it was not

the world with the snail in it.  
I misplaced the world where  
this snail is whole  
where it was not crushed by the heel of

my elementary school best friend  
who told me on the first day of sixth grade  
at the outdoor lunch tables  
that we could not be friends anymore

because she was in 6B and I was in 6A.  
I always wondered, after five years of togetherness,  
if our separation was kismet,  
or if I was her Eurydice.

While we are looking  
for the world that ended,  
can you help me find

the first boy whose heart I broke  
his name was Daniel and I  
was cruel.

# Could we say then, at least, that I am your muse?

---

by Andi Myles

I built a house of railroad tracks and rubber tires  
and painted it turquoise

Or I changed my name to Deniz  
and sold mounds of sunset-colored spices in Istanbul's Grand Bazaar

Or I brought forth new life from a genome  
I created by writing poetry with nucleotides

Or I sometimes report a problem with a new jet  
just so I can take her for another ride

Or I once dropped a box of canned goods,  
and wrote a poem about it

Or I once dropped a box of canned goods,  
and you turned the glittering cans oozing  
dark juices into a glorious work of art.

My house is my house the way a warm shower  
resembles a June rain—  
which is to say, not much.

I cannot keep the birds from creating a haven in my roof  
or the floorboards from serving as sanctuary for mice and wasps.

It's a hell of a thing, to wake up one day to realize that  
in the story of the zombie apocalypse, you would be a zombie—  
that your role has only ever been supporting cast.

---

Andi Myles is a Washington DC area science writer by day, poet in the in between times. Her favorite space is the fine line between essay and poetry. Her work has appeared in *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Evocations Review*, and *Beyond Words*, among others.

# Weed Trees

---

by Patrick T. Reardon

I make my stand with the weed trees  
—with white poplar, silver maple,  
box elder, Siberian elm, black locust,  
yew, honey locust, ailanthus,  
coffee wood and white mulberry—  
scorned as invasives, meddlesome,  
argumentative.

In 3 a.m. rain-snow,  
we march onto the concrete and block  
all four northbound lanes of Interstate 90.  
Traffic backs all the way to Janesville.

At the roadside, three Sister Marys  
set up a hospitality wagon.  
One asks me, “Are you packing?”  
She’s no fool. She knows this is a dangerous place.  
Rage ripples the dark.

My brother had his gun hidden  
for when he needed it.

Drivers, walking, line for coffee  
and a bologna sandwich to tide them over  
until authorities can figure a route  
over to the southbound lanes.  
A detour to clear the space  
for negotiators to arrive and parlay.

We shall not move.  
Our roots go down to the center of the earth.  
Our branches rise to Jupiter.

My brother once stood on this highway  
hitchhiking to escape and never got a ride.  
The world is with us. But my brother isn’t.  
In the blank concrete in front of us,  
authorities begin to build a sawmill.

# Endangered

---

by Patrick T. Reardon

Roselle Road in Hoffman Estates,  
in Schaumburg Township,  
in the far arm of Northwest Cook County,  
far suburbland, 29 miles from the Loop—

Roselle Road, a nine-lane housing tract of cars,  
soil of construction projects,  
sweat of bulldozers and brawned machines,  
pavement of crushed pavement,  
to keep enough elbow space.  
Always elbow space.

Lanes and lines, transit veins,  
bordering flesh of yearned safety—sky blue—  
well-grassed, subdivisoned, property-lined.

Geologists of the sociologic can read the strata—  
this tract and that one and the next.  
In each, denizens know neighbor's  
income, ambitions and crosses,  
to right, to left, and across the street,  
knowing their own.

I walk the conservation area,  
a zoo of grit and raw and wild,  
as if weeds were an endangered species.

---

Patrick T. Reardon, a three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, has authored eleven books, including the poetry collections *Requiem for David* (Silver Birch), *Darkness on the Face of the Deep* (Kelsay) and *The Lost Tribes* (Grey Book). Forthcoming is his memoir in prose poems *Puddin': The Autobiography of a Baby* (Third World).

# Plowed Under

---

by Julie A. Ryan

Songs I sang in the field when I was a child re-emerge  
as I now dread being mowed down too soon,  
dead in my tracks,  
while knee-deep in muddled dreams.

I want to take John Denver's country roads home  
once more, see the sun come up,  
rake these fading farm-girl fingers  
through wild plans and rows of tangled knots

to unearth the messy plot that buried ambitions,  
kept me from reaching the end  
of trails where I might find success  
and the place I belong.

---

Julie A. Ryan is a poet, essayist, novelist, and visual artist. Her poetry, essays, and prose have appeared in a variety of publications, including *VisualVerse.org*, *Writers' Night*, *Northfield Sidewalk Poetry*, *End in Mind Pandemic Poetry Project*, *Lost Lake Folk Opera*, Minnesota newspapers, and *The Clothesline Review*. Her collection of concrete poems, titled *Relative Space*, was published in 2021, and her socially relevant *When Life Was Still* fictional trilogy was released in 2020. Since childhood, she has been interested in nature, wordplay, design, math, science, and humanitarian issues—themes that frequently coexist in her writing projects today.



# Summer's End

---

by Marly Youmans

As if to recompense for all the wrack  
And wreck of this strange year, our summer has  
Been lovely, perfect in parade of warm  
And sunny days, as if the South had come  
To pay a call and lingered on for months:  
As last night's frolic, with a jazz quartet  
In the garden with a trifling rainfall,  
With grass and leaves and the tall crowns of trees  
Growing greener than the greenest daydream  
Of verdant springtime, and the children's voices  
Piping in the distance, all perfection  
Like the now-past fabulous green tower  
Of the buckeye tree that lifts infinite  
Coral and cream pagodas in the air.  
Twenty-one years in a northern village  
Till finally a faultless summer's swath,  
And somehow I am feeling that this is  
Closure, that I am done with many things,  
That I am setting down my books and pen  
And bidding my adieu to beautiful  
Failures, monuments of words and story,  
Discerning something fresh that's glimmering  
In far but also leaf-green distances.

Whatever does it mean to sit with friends  
By the bonfire when music ebbs and think,  
Here am I at the edge of age, yet dream  
Like a child that something's soon to happen,  
Something now to begin? And what is it?  
What will I make, what will I come to be?

---

Recent books from Marly Youmans include *Charis in the World of Wonders* (novel, Ignatius, 2020) and *The Book of the Red King* (poems, Phoenicia, 2019). Forthcoming is an adventure in blank verse and bob-and-wheel chapters, *Seren of the Wildwood* (Wiseblood).

*Willows Wept Review*



