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IRENE TOH, EDITOR

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A Change Of Season

You, as our header says,
“turn toward me, your lips move, wanting to speak.”
After experience comes expression, comes story.
It’s you trying to be coherent in a somewhat random world.
You trying to process experience.
Everything that is experienced and spoken is a process,
remains in your consciousness,
which you try to solidify by speaking about.
Form is your consciousness wanting to speak.
Poems are our spiritual selves speaking.

In speaking, poems are ways of falling in love with the world,
of discovery and re-discovery,
an enactment and a reenactment of the world,
or the worlds we imagine ourselves in,
in a never-ending process.

The world you write about is a multifarious thing.
It changes according to light or dark,
at different moments. It becomes infinite
just as poetry is, while we remain finite.
It’s all about perception isn’t it?
Our point of view changes depending on who
we are at a certain point in time.
Our selves are perhaps seasons.
A reflection.

Irene Toh
Editor, Winter/Spring 2023

You turn toward me, your lips move, wanting to speak.
In the ornate mirror above the bureau,
I see my teeth and snout, my small yellow eyes.
I cannot hear your words for all the barking.

—Stephen Dobyns, “Wolves In The Street”



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In Memoriam



Poems by Christopher Hileman (1945-2020)

The Holiness of Place

Some of us build on
the people in our strange lives
and some build heart on
the places they go,
they have been in former lives.

What is it I do
that so provokes you
I ask? And why is it that
you take me away
again and again?

I am from forests. Aspens
quake in my back yard
and I shiver to
their time, taking their green shape,
continuing my
eternal return.

State of the Union

I turned seventy
and you gave me a giraffe,
and that cat gave me nothing
as is her usual daily practice.
She did deign to sleep
beside me down by
my left knee when I
took my morning nap.

You've started the tea and our
next meal with the stray
from the bluff behind
our house looking on, rating
her prospects with us.

I can't tell you how
satisfied I am with things
as they are right now
my love, me with you,
knowing how it could have turned
that November day.

A Rooster Poem

A sense of the end
dogs me all around the slope
behind my log house
as I pull slivers
out my dad-blamed body parts
and hear the rooster
crow in his cage built
by Jose for him last spring.
A fine black fellow
is Leo, with eyes
that pierce the hen perfumed air
and his hens stay close.
I have no hen, me.

In Our Garden

I know you watch me
as I dig in our moist earth
searching for worm holes
and the rich castings
found in the passage of time.

My broad muscled dream,
best dream of my life
rises to the heat of you,
your demanding care.
I have planted you
deep in me as if I were
woman to you and love
itself the member.

Christopher Hileman moved to Oregon in 1973. He was a mechanical designer before his retirement. He lived on the volcanic bluff overlooking Willamette Falls in Oregon City, Oregon, for years before moving to the north bank of the McKenzie River in Vida, Oregon. His poems can be found at <http://northernwall.blogspot.com/> and at Red Wolf Journal as well as in a selected poems collection, *We Will All Fly*, to be released posthumously.

Poems by Gale Acuff

When nobody loves you God always will

says my Sunday School teacher after class
to me so I say *I don't believe in*
God, which makes her lose her wound of a smile
and I bet you don't really, either and
then she starts to cry so I reach for her,
I touch her garment and say *Your faith has*
made you well, goodbye, see you next week, then
she looks up through her watery face where
I thought she'd been drowned but only baptized
so I lose again, then she says *Don't go*
but I say *I shall return*, a little
like Jesus and Douglas MacArthur, then
again Jesus never has but Dugout
Doug did. That means something. I'll ask next week.

Before you realize it you're dead is

what they teach at Sunday School or is that
preach but anyway I'm ten years old, I be-
-lieve 'most anything, that's half the fun of
being alive at least when you're 10 and
I hope I never grow up if that's true
and even if it isn't and I'm small
for my age anyway and my teacher
is beautiful but 25 but still
I hope to marry her one day, ten years
from now make it when she's *not older but
better* I'll tell her like the commercial
on TV does and that will make her feel
good I think but that's where babies come from
I hear tell. And you can take your clothes off.

When the world ends I'd like to be right there

with it or maybe that's *with it as it*
leaves but then I'd be *going* with it but
with any luck I'll wake up dead later
in the Afterlife, in either Heaven
or Hell and Heaven's finer but then some
souls favor Hell but I'm not good with pain
and I can always get punished On High
as well and maybe even better no
matter that there's supposed to be no sin
in the Good Place but is God in charge or
not and the answer is *You betcha* so
if He wants to make Paradise even
more perfect than it already is then
He can get tougher on the saved. *I would.*

People die all the time and get buried

There's nothing new in that but still it's strange,
not death I mean but what we do with it,
put the body in a crate, then under
-ground, and at the head a stone and plastic
flowers maybe and folks with money place
a stone at the dead person's feet so they
have something to stand on maybe
and as for the soul you never see it
unless I guess you yourself are gone and
in Heaven or Hell but wouldn't it be
neat if souls could stay on Earth and bodies
go to the Afterlife but then what would
the monument builder do, they'd be out
of work. So maybe there's something to death.

When people die they go to Heaven but

only to be judged, there's no question
that they can stay forever, live with God
and Jesus and the Holy Ghost and get
all the perks they're promised if they're good so
probably most folks will go to Hell but
then again at some churches simply be-
-cause Jesus was crucified they get to
go to Heaven and *dwell* and not just *live*
there forever, that would include me but
only if they're correct, the only way
for me to learn is to wait and die and see
even if I won't have any eyes then
save the ones rotting in my coffin or
maybe they're replaced so I'm glassy-eyed.

People die and that's how they live and some

believe that they'll live forever even
when they're croaked but that's *religion*, I be-
-lieve sometimes and other times nix but at
church and Sunday School they say I must be
-lieve all the time else if I die before
I know it I'll wake up dead in Hell and
burn and burn forever yet never be
consumed, always more pain to burn, it's like
the burning bush, maybe, of Moses, I
even told my Sunday School teacher so
but she slapped me just like Mother does and
because I love her I'm not going to
tell and anyway Mother would agree.
So where's God Almighty when you need Him?

Gale Acuff had hundreds of poems published in a dozen countries and have authored three books of poetry. His poems have appeared in *Ascent*, *Reed*, *Arkansas Review*, *Poem*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Florida Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Roanoke Review*, *Ohio Journal*, *Sou'wester*, *South Dakota Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *New Texas*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Poetry Midwest*, *Adirondack Review*, *Worcester Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Delmarva Review*, *Maryland Poetry Review*, *Maryland Literary Review*, *George Washington Review*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *Ann Arbor Review*, *Plainsongs*, *Slant*, *Chiron Review*, *Coe Review*, *McNeese Review*, *Weber*, *War*, *Literature & the Arts*, *Aethlon*, *Able Muse*, *The Font*, *Teach. Write.*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Cardiff Review*, *Tokyo Review*, *Indian Review*, *Muse India*, *Bombay Review*, and many other journals. He has taught tertiary English courses in the US, PR China, and Palestine.

Poems by Jeff Burt

Hull

All this travel, all these strokes
of invisible oars to reach you.

The day turns gray, the water
against me. I have bound my hands

to the wood so when they weary
I will not let go.

~

A house with few windows
windows with few views

the day begins in shadows
and ends in shadows

correspondence frequent
but conversation absent

when the leaves fall
I wait for light to enter

~

The snow like water
its other state

curls over
and holds shape

that sand can wish
it could do

joy and sadness
have similar arcs

build a little lip
that extends

the force that built it
weathering time's

erosion, a trajectory
against the pull of gravity

a conversation
with you mother

that continues
with a suspended decrescendo

after the quiet
of your death.

~

I lie in the hull
cradled and curled

snow falling on my face
it is not easy to let go

hard to be free
when the ice encroaches

when life withdraws
when cold advances

hard to believe
that I will walk away from this water

this boat, that my arms will tire
that I will put down the oars

that I will rise from the hull
like a seed, take root elsewhere

Sources: Hull--my mother died in November; it remains the season I find I still talk to her.

I Am Old and It's November

I burn the leftover triangles of fir
from making stairs to a deck
and the few, lean outcast branches
of oak that beetles and disease lopped off.
The fir growls and spits out sap like a wild cur
while the oak barely musters a flicker.
I poke a branch with a stick,
hoping to provoke it into joining
but it stays reluctant,
like the new kid at school
on the outside of a happy ring.

I squint through smoke, strike
the silver tomahawk into a rotting stump.
It hits a knot and kicks back
just missing my right ear,
sings like a tuning fork,
forearm like a pulsating circuit
for the wood's last electric moment.

Again, old oak, without asking,
you have taught me.
Let me go out singing.
Before ash, let me ring.

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*.

Poems by George Freek

The End Of A Year (After Su Tung Po)

A dark cloud falls over
the remaining light,
a frozen sliver of ice.
This brutal weather
destroys all my desires.
Outside my room
shadows sit like old men
morosely sipping tea,
watching leaves fall
from dessicated trees.
My garden lies under feet
of snow. Months ago,
I watched daffodils,
reach toward the sky,
and bees rush to
gather nectar
before the flowers died.

Thoughts On A Winter Evening (After Li Shangyin)

Icy waves batter the shore.
Clouds like boulders
crash erratically
in the storm-filled air.
The blood moves slowly
in my hardening veins.
I wonder when I lost my way.
What wisdom can the stars
give me. They were dead
billions of years ago.
They fill me with dismay.
Savants in purple robes
write erudite books,
gazing at the sea,
or like blind men in a fog,
search for answers
in the dregs of a cup of tea.

I Lay Aside My Pen (After Su Tung Po)

The night unfolds like a fan.
The sky wears a halo of stars,
but its meaning is unclear.
I know only what I can.
What I'll never know,
I must doubt. The stars
exist in a different sphere.
I lay in bed, holding
my pen, thinking only
in words often said,
dull clichés,
and worn out phrases
in age old rhymes.
When I came to this,
I said I would quit.
I fear I've reached that time.

On Sitting To Write A Poem

We are the inferior artists.
Life has its own poetry.
Leaves hang in the wind,
just waiting out the weather,
and sparrows cut
tunnels through the night,
finding cracks in
a stoney darkness.
A lioness who slaughtered a deer,
drags the carcass miles
to feed her cubs
and in the distance there are
great mountain peaks
which strain
towards the stars
like stiff unyielding fingers.

By The White River

The dying sun still warms
the trees, as they prepare
to lose their leaves.

As the sun sets,

I fall to my knees.

Let the stars tell their tales,
of the bodies singing
from their graves,
bodies, who thought
they would never die,
who know nothing
of where they now lie,
whose upturned eyes
will find no hope
in this October sky,
and the swift flow of life,
as like a river it passes by.

The Lake on a November Night

The sky is a white blanket.
Nasty weather is coming.
Dead leaves drop from the trees.
The sun is a dying ember.
The stars are hiding
from this winter weather.
Across the lake, I watch
a boat, barely afloat,
battling the heaving waves.
The boatmen struggle like bats
lost in a cave.
They're miles from shore.
I can pray for them,
but can do nothing more.

Ice Time and the River

Clouds say what they say
to this sullen night.
As the moon climbs the sky,
the sweetness of apple
blossoms comes to my mind.
But spring is far away.
Snow is falling on the trees.
Starlings huddle frozen
on barren branches,
without their leaves.
Last winter, my wife
would be making tea
for my friends and me.
But she's dead.
The friends, I no longer
try to see. The end
of life is bitter.
The river still flows,
but turns to ice in the winter.

The Astronomer

I'm growing old
learning each day
how little I know.
As stars drift by,
in eloquent mystery,
they're unimaginably
distant from me.
I learn what I can
by watching birds,
inhabiting a universe
I can touch and see,
singing in
blithe ignorance
in my backyard pear tree.

Nature

Nature attacks us relentlessly.
Leaves squirm as they die.
They have no mind
to wonder why.
The stars seem small to me,
but why they're here
is an unsolvable mystery.
The moon appears
in a threatening disguise,
then reappears
in funereal guise.
A fierce wind suddenly blows,
so I hurry home.
I've wasted a hour,
and still know nothing more
than those dead leaves.

Why I Sometimes Drink

As day turns into night,
my life spreads across my lap
like a confusing map.
The past is a book of the dead.
It's better left unread.
Darkness enfolds the moon,
like a smothering cocoon.
I'll think no more of it.
Thinking is a bottomless pit.
I shiver with a sudden chill.
I'm unable to move.
I have lost all will.
The stars look down,
but the stars are twisted
into the fabric of night.
And I fear there is
no God to set things right.

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

Poems by John Grey

Dawn Poem

It always takes sky for its cue,
never streets, the houses,
the few with lights on.
Clouds are nothing.
Not even gray can worry it.
I have to think it beautiful
no matter what.
It's a film God made.

And its back story is
that what shines through windows
matters more than lover,
job, family, thirsting for a drink,
nervous for a cigarette.
Like I said, even when it's
gray overhead as shed roofs,
it still shines more than people.

My waking doesn't influence it
one way or the other.
And what it did yesterday
is merely a suggestion.
It offers hope because
that's its job.
Even when there isn't any.

Can you believe
that there's been more dawns
than all the weeds in Connecticut,
the eyeballs in China.
The sun parks
somewhere in the universe
like burning gases will.
And the earth turns
because otherwise
half the planet would
have the nightclubs,
the other half, the ball-fields.

Poets are drawn to it, of course.
Some write up the colors
like it's an assignment

from their soul's last English class.
Others merely scribble
how crappy the new day
makes them feel.
The hour's alive with coffee.
Thanks to dawn,
a farmer in Bolivia
can feed his family of six.

I'm on the porch,
don't know really what to make of it.
Half-yawn, half appreciation,
half sips of java.
That's more typical of my math
than my feelings.
I knew a woman called Dawn once.
Many a night she lit my way
but never in the morning.

Old Bodies For New

When sorrow wearies me,
I go off in search of miracles,
new buds on the dead branch,
crocus poking through the melting snow.

They're lowering one more inmate
into the earth.
Worms lick their chops.
Worms, I suppose, are miracles in their way,
breathing on the body
Likewise, the moss that grows
where nothing should live.
And the weeds, unloved,
but that doesn't stop them sprouting.

When I'm so tired of missing someone,
not even a memory can soothe,
I break down people into fragments,
feed them to the world.
What worms cannot devour,
moss covers.
What moss cannot make safe,
the wild grabs joyously.

The Old Coffee House

It's shuttered now,
this life of the mind.
It no longer accommodates
the passion, the pretension,
of fervent twenty-year-olds.

Wiser souls tell me
that's what universities are for
not coffee houses,
that knowledge is lectured downward,
not launched from below.

But college education
fades with the diploma.
Voluntary learning
has always been more lifelong.
And where else could you
sip the one cup of joe
into the early hours of the night.
And discover, to your eyes' delight,
that pretty women
often dressed in black.

I peer through the window.
There's just some tables, chairs,
shunted to the side.
The local art is gone from the walls.
And outrageous theories
are no longer accepted as currency.

Here was my introduction to Gide and Camus,
Modigliani and the Fauves.
Stockhausen and Buffy Sainte-Marie
I slept elsewhere.
But this has always been my address.

Denture Poem

He whipped out his teeth
like palming a card.
My magician of a grandfather's mouth caved in.
Then his resultant loud cackle of a laugh
fluttered his lips outward.
He placed the dentures gently on the table.
"Some trick, huh," he said.

I couldn't keep my eyes off them.
A full perfect set,
everything from incisor to canine
accounted for.
Then he filled a glass of water,
dropped his teeth in,
added some fizzy stuff,
sat back and watched those fake ivories
clean themselves.

I figured amusements were few in old age.
Gumming for an audience of one
was his equivalent of kicking a football around
or swimming in the lake.

After a few minutes,
he extracted his teeth,
wiped them down,
slipped them back into his mouth.

At least his arms and legs were original.
And his mind was still sharp.
"Thirsty?" he asked,
as he nudged the glass of water toward me.
My teeth shuddered at the thought.
But, at least, they didn't go anywhere.

World's Last Man

Ten miles of driving
and the only lights
are the ones my car makes,
the only voice
my humming
to the radio song
some dead man sings.

Headed home, early morning,
I really could believe
that I'm the only one left alive.
Those car lots, hardware stores,
7/11's, aren't just empty, 3. a. m.,
they're empty around the clock.

There's no one on the sidewalks.
Not because they're sleeping
but because there's no one.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Sheepshead Review*, *Stand*, *Washington Square Review* and *Floyd County Moonshine*. Latest books, *Covert*, *Memory Outside The Head* and *Guest Of Myself* are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in the *McNeese Review*, *Santa Fe Literary Review* and *Open Ceilings*.

Poems by Ron. Lavalette

I Heard Voices

I heard voices
on the long highway home from Sutton
and I missed you when the sun went down.

I heard voices in the dashboard, singing.
I turned up the volume and I missed you.
I thought about Graffiti Overpass
thirty years ago in Stafford Springs:
"Love conquers all," it said; *"The strong will endure."*

I heard voices on the rise near Coventry
and I missed you when the sun went down.
As the darkness rose around me
I thought about you, that night in Forest Park,
the darkest rose in the garden,
and the long highway home, alone.

Rust, Pepper

It's hard, living here, not to
want to be a tender poet, not to
wax poetic and rhapsodic when I
step out onto the deck at dawn
as the last tendrils of fog fade,
the first birdsong of the day
rising, a delicate prelude; hard
not to give in, not to write
about wispy cloud and fragile
early leaf unfurling in early Spring.

But I'm not like that. No.
Morning's birdsong is for nerds.
Not for me the silver sunrise; rust is
where I really live. Give me instead
the mid-afternoon call of ravenous
crows, swooping down on carion.

I can tell you this much:
faced with a panful of fresh-caught
trout, I'll choose the coarse-ground
pepper every time, leave the lilt of
saffron for some other kind of poet.

As It Should Be

This morning's forecast
requires no translation.
There is nothing unintelligible
about the sunshine, nothing
open to interpretation, nothing
equivocal. No.

 This morning
the lawn—if brown can be a lawn,
if a lawn is a mat of last year's leaves—
this morning, then, at long last
is finally and totally frost-free,
no snow left anywhere, just a
slowly warming too-long cold
and the promise of a soon Spring.

Relative Distance

I suppose I'll be up late again tonight,
with the white high full moon
in the cold, almost-springtime sky
banging on the windowsill
screaming to be let in,
and you so far away.

I suppose that in two months' time
the grass will have greened
and I will lie again in your arms,
having forgotten completely
the shadows of these midnight clouds
racing across the deadleaf lawn.

Tonight, though,
it's late and I'm awake,
thinking of you
staring up at the same silent moon
a quarter million miles away.

Ron. Lavalette is a very widely published poet living on the Canadian border in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. His premier chapbook, *Fallen Away*, is now available from Finishing Line Press. His poetry and short prose has appeared extensively in journals, reviews, and anthologies ranging alphabetically from *Able Muse* and the *Anthology of New England Poets* through the *World Haiku Review*. A reasonable sample of his published work can be viewed at EGGS OVER TOKYO: <http://eggsovertokyo.blogspot.com>

Poems by Karla Linn Merrifield

Our Words Began the Imagination

of time, its construct of eons
and nanoseconds. Elasticity
sticks to my tongue and stretches
across your upper palate as we
attempt to pronounce the number
of hours to germinate the idea of love.

Likewise is distance reinvented
every instance your synapses
trick your lips into giving voice
to the exactitude of bird migration.
And my axons and my dendrites pulse
with the articulation of new latitudes.

At long last miles and years evaporate;
we are able to utter in unison: time is
the longest distance between two places,
two bodies and their minds. But with
practice we are able to sing a belief as do
peach-faced lovebirds — *Agapornis roseicollis*.



Père Lachaise Cemetery Diptych

#1

*Une
rose
blanche pour
Héloïse
et Abelard, deux âmes—
les amants qui aiment aujourd'hui*

One
rose
white for
Heloise
and Abelard, two souls—
two lovers who do love today

#2

*Une
rose
blanche pour
Frédéric
Chopin— l'âme qui joue
parfums d'une polonaise perdue*

One
rose
white for
Frédéric
Chopin— his soul plays
perfumes of a lost Polish dance

On her annual quest to Taos, JoJo the Poet's soul

sopped up Puebloan vibes like so much spilled
iced lattes, musing how *What is past or passing
is to come*, an idea whose Native American time
had taught long before Yeats copped it;
trouble was Jesus the Penitente kept
scourging himself in her midnight mind's
eye— So JoJo'd no choice but to smudge
sage through the cortex's casita consigning
the extremist's spirit to his afterlife in Hollywood,
leaving Jill and her pal Pi to obtain the mountain.

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.

A Ruined Imagination
by Michael Minassian

Riding in a boat
on land is never
a good idea.

To some, water is home
to others, a place to drown,
all eyes on the horizon.

Approaching the church,
the steeple winks
its crooked bell.

Trying not to make a sound
we recite the names
of God with our tongue,

hoping to see the face
she gave us before
we were born.

Michael Minassian is a Contributing Editor for *Verse-Virtual*, an online poetry journal. His poetry collections *Time is Not a River*, *Morning Calm*, and *A Matter of Timing* as well as a new chapbook, *Jack Pays a Visit*, are all available on Amazon. For more information:
<https://michaelminassian.com>

Poems by Misky

Just Write Just Write

He wants to go the garden centre
and buy some decorative bark for
the hebe bush he cut to the quick.

I reckon cats'll use it as a litter box,
but he knows that, so I say nought.

Big 20kg bags the size of hay bales.
He buys three because it's 3 for 24
... or 10 for one. Obviously, 3 it is.

Watch your back, I say, as he groans,
but he knows that. I say it anyway.

And the wind is blowing in gusts,
and the temperature is dropping,
clouds rushing in all directions,

and I'm thinking, I might be able
to write something about this.

Cold as a Muscle

There's an assassin at the heart of the winter, it's a cold muscle, forcing itself on everything. The chairs and the wrought iron table are up against the wall, upended and blown away. Frost covers the grass. Snow covers the roses. Ice covers the creek. Children are skating on it every day. The creek's only a few inches deep at this time of year. Even the heart of water has shrunk. Assassins, assassins everywhere.

Sun hangs low as birds
Pecking at the grass, the sun
Cold as a muscle

Misky lives in the UK, surrounded by fields and hills, flowers, and vineyards. She never buys clothing without pockets. Her poetry and prose are widely published, and regularly featured in *Ten Penny Players* monthly publications, and *Visual Verse*. Her photography is published with *Unsplash*.

Giving Grace To The Gull
by Emalisa Rose

In these first weeks of Autumn
it's been you, sitting shoreline
beside me.

Regarding the others that
starred in the Summer,
now off with their song list
soaring heights within Sicily
and miles high in Monterrey.

I confess, I'd forsaken you
seduced by the 'fancy' ones.

But reminded you've stayed,
even through long months of
lockdown and serial snowfalls

I beg your forgiveness
sweet silver gull.

I'm sorry I'd overlooked you.

Author's notes: Living by the beach, provides much of the paint for my poetry. Watching the gulls, the sky, the sea, the sand lit soliloquy, who wouldn't be inspired. For the past few summers, my beach has been home to two endangered species that found a home in the sands there — the black skimmers and the least terns. They stay for a spell, usually 3 or 4 months, then they are off again to warm exotic places. This poem tributes the ones that stay for the four seasons, through the whip of Winter. When I walk on that cold, snowy boardwalk in the jaundice of January, with my bag of bread, looking for signs of life, besides mine, I know they will be there for me. They are the ones that stay and I am grateful.

When not writing poetry, Emalisa Rose enjoys crafting with macrame. She volunteers in animal rescue and tends to cat colonies. She lives by the beach, which provides much of the inspiration for her art. She walks with a birding group on weekends. Some of her work has appeared in *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, *Red Wolf Editions*, *The Rye Whiskey Review* and other wonderful places. Her latest collection is *This water paint life*, published by Origami Poems Project. She can be reached at veganflower00@gmail.com.

Poems by Emil Sinclair

Northwest Winds

When the northwest winds
blow in,
the warm, moist air
flees south
for comfort.
It's cool and dry now;
the leaves have color,
and she's getting us ready
for winter.
I don't need anything
special much,
anymore;
just some hot coffee,
and a good book
to read
at bedtime.
I saw this coming
a good long while ago.
Well, I'm ready.

Almost

I can almost remember
the autumn of my
childhood.
Huge piles of fallen leaves
burning in the street;
smoke rising,
filling the air
with the incense
of sweet decay.
Going to the five and dime
with my mother,
to shop for my first
Halloween costume.
Walking through the door
and being greeted
by the pungent aromas
of freshly popped
popcorn,
strawberry licorice,
and greasy hot dogs,
twirling on the spit
at the luncheon counter.
In those days,
Autumn was a promise
of magic
yet to come.
Nowadays when I see
the green leaves
begin to turn
red and orange,
I can almost remember
not to sigh.

A Path of Souls

Now I scour the stars
in hopes
that I might find you
there.

The sails
of my celestial
barque
are filled by strong
solar winds;
charged particles
that propel my
broken soul
along
the pollen path
of our ancestors,
the Sky People.

Orion and Cygnus
are hazy
and dull.

Even Antares,
the heart
of the scorpion,
has no sting
to match yours.
Only Ursa Major,
the Great Bear,
shines with
your fiery
passion;
speaks with
your lilting
accent;
carries the
alluring scent
of your musky
perfume.
I have found you,
at last!

Heeding the cry
of my soul,
the Great Bear
smiles,
as I tip my oar
to salute
her magnificence.

She hides no more
from me.
I adjust my rudder,
quickly making
my way
to her
starry
arms.

If You Can See

Wah Chang
saw the future;
then he made it
with his hands,
so we could see it, too.
There is nothing lost
in that translation.
The artist's hand
is the eye of vision,
which opens inward
to our dreams,
and outward
to ten thousand things;
yet knowing all the time
they are one
and the same.
A sculptor
and a sage,
his breath was weak
from polio;
but the breath
of spirit
was his strength.
He is all around us—
if you can only see.
(for Wah Chang)

Process note:

Wah Ming Chang (1917–2003) was a sculptor, painter, and designer whose work (sometimes uncredited) appears in such classic science fiction movies as “The Time Machine” (1960), and the original “Star Trek” television series. His design of the communicator inspired the cellular flip phone.

The Trees, The Trees

It seemed like fall
would never come;
the weather's been
so warm and damp,
more like spring
or summer.
Then suddenly—
no, overnight—
the leaves turned brown
and brittle,
the air waxed cold and dry,
the winds picked up,
and fall took place;
the ground now lies snuggled
beneath its annual blanket.
But the trees look lost,
just standing there;
naked and skinny,
out in the open,
like some poor orphans
out of a Dickens novel,
or wartime refugees.
I would help them,
if I could.

What You Love

Holy holy holy:
the world is filled with light.
Yellow roses and late
Beethoven quartets;
crossword puzzles
done in pen.
Rows and columns
of neatly printed figures,
always adding up.
Tears shed in a corner;
prayers said to herself.
An ordinary life,
lived impeccably.
What's the secret?
Become transparent
to the light;
give yourself
to what you love.

A Body of Work

We make our bodies
with our thoughts;
it is the mind as seen.
A sculptor carves
the muscles;
a poet lights the eyes.
Movement is
the drummer's beat;
the rhythm of the lines.
But the mind obeys
the secret wishes
of our own
immortal soul—
the one true artist
in this fleshy residence.
There is no praise,
there is no blame;
not a wisp didactic.
For soul comes through
no matter what;
its sheer radiance
unobstructed.

A Brief Letter To An Old Friend

I'm still above ground, not below;
the house is also hanging on.
The stonework steps are cracked;
the paint is chipped and peeling.
Inside's not much better, I'm afraid.
The carpet's worn and tattered,
the black-on-silver flocked wallpaper
is faded and torn, here and there.
But I could not be more at home.
I don't get many visitors these days,
except my nightly glass of scotch.
I get up early, and write all morning;
with dark roast coffee my sole companion.
Then some kippers and cheese for lunch.
Afternoon's for reading, mostly now for fun.
Sometimes a short nap; an hour or so, at most.
It's just the cat and me, you know;
and I no longer care what other people think.
Life's not done with me quite yet,
and that's just fine by me.
Yes, I'm getting old;
but now I'm feeling free.

The Turtle

Our backyard was a paradise
when I was growing up.
There were rhubarb plants,
and raspberry bushes,
and huckleberries, too.
A tall lone cherry tree
was always picked clean
by the crows and grackles
before we could eat the fruit.
My father made a wooden arbor
for the grapes, both green and red.
The green ones were pretty sour;
the red were sweet enough.
He loved to make a garden;
he'd grow squat tomatoes
and dwarf cucumbers.
When most of them were ripe,
he'd go out with brown paper bags
and pick the best.
He'd hand them out like candy,
so proud of his fine vegetables.

One day, when I was maybe ten,
a big old box turtle appeared.
It must have wandered up
and over from the nearby stream.
It was the biggest turtle
I'd ever seen, with a shell the size
of a soldier's helmet!
I watched the turtle walk
so slow and sure,
mesmerized by its gait.
My father told me just to watch;
don't bother it, he warned.
Because the Indians who once
lived in this land of plenty
respected mother turtle.
They called our earth
Turtle Island,
for turtle was the creator.
The Bible says that God
walks through the Garden
at the time of the evening breeze.
Well, that one day she did.

Hermann's Art

They sent him off to boarding school,
to make their dreams come true.
His dream was to write poems,
and stand and gaze for hours
at the turbid river,
as it flowed beneath
the bridge of stone.
Why is it so hard to be
just what we are?
Wrens must warble;
grass must grow;
and day must follow night.
But we do have a choice to make;
to say yes or no to our fate.
Either way, we must learn the art
of making friends with grief.

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

Yellow Leaves
by Søren Sørensen

Yellow leaves blown by late October wind,
drab sky obscured by frosty, tedious rain
drearly drumming on the windowpane...
they bring back memories I thought were bygone.

Let the wind blow and the rain fall,
the past is gone once and for all.

The bench under the old weeping willow,
you and I, and the evening, the moon's timid glow,
Will you come tomorrow? you pleaded gently seeking reliance.
The wind responded with a soft whistle, then there was silence.

Let the wind blow and the rain fall,
the past is gone once and for all.

Now I am dreaming that it was today
and that *tomorrow* was one midnight away.
Alas, it was yesteryear before yesteryear before yesteryear.
Time does not cure; memories will never be wiped away by years.

Let the wind blow and the rain fall,
the past is gone once and for all.

What I lost one evening is revisiting me on a rainy day.
I should have known, real things come seldom, they come only once.
The void cannot be filled by belated regret.
I wish someone had told me: *You can lose easily but will not forget.*

Let the wind blow and the rain fall,
the past is gone once and for all.

Søren Sørensen is the pen name of a physics professor at the University of Central Florida. He shares the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish poet and philosopher, the founder of existentialism. His poems reflect some of his feelings; they are genuine.

Poems by Debi Swim

Autumn

Waking to fog-filled mornings
foretelling winter snows
August ends like a dry martini
in small, lingering sips
that you hate to see go

September comes swiftly like crows
gleaning what's left of the corn
spider webs dot the fields
miscanthus flowers dry creamy white
inviting as a chenille throw.

October is the realization
Old Women's Summer is gone
sweaters and shawls
come out of storage
there's a chill in the air of fall

Autumn is regrets and revelations
escalation of time winding down
a time to scatter, a time to decline,
a time to wait
for frost makes the sweet ice wines.

Process notes:

1. For every fog in August, there will be a snowfall. Weather lore, Farmers' Almanac
2. A warm period in late autumn is called Altweibersommer ("old women's summer") in Germany
3. Ice wine (or icewine; German: Eiswein) is a type of dessert wine produced from grapes that have been frozen while still on the vine.

Love Takes a Toll

So many hellos
so many goodbyes
as the generations
begin and end.
And love lavished
fiercely, tenderly,
eagerly, reluctantly,
are the little pieces of me
given away willingly
and continue to give
year after year after year...
and I'm beginning to feel
like a desiccated leaf
lacy and fragile, disappearing
in beauty and grace
to sweet remembrance.
Dust unto dust.

"I'm Old, Gandalf. I know I don't look it, but I'm beginning to feel it in my heart. I feel... thin.
Sort of stretched, like... butter scraped over too much bread." Bilbo Baggins

Bewitched

I've driven this road a hundred times
eyes on the white lines and signs,
busy dictating my thoughts.
What was so different about today, anyway?

Maybe it was the way the sunlight slanted
through the trees on the mountain side
or the deer and doe beside the road eating
defiantly on their piece of this earth.

Or maybe the mist swirling off the river
like wraiths of tormented souls
that caught my eye, set the mood,
and whispers of the linden tree like

a hymn, a lullaby, an incantation of
praise and peace reminding me that
I've become estranged from what's true
to exist in a matrix of emptiness and lies.

In Praise of Grey

Grey with just a tinge of blue
that coos a sweet sad song
at the end of day
holding at bay
garish primary shades
when I've become tired of
keeping up...
I'm fading away
frayed, scuffed,
losing that vigor of red
tossing out scarlet
shunning crimson
for the soothing sheen of pearl
and arctic platinum
and pigeon grey.
Grey is an absence and...
I am a floating cloud
I am ashes of yesterday
I am a grisaille.

3-D Memories

I begin to forget what happened
just yesterday as
the distant past loses its sepia
coloration and is no longer
one-dimensional, flat, insipid
becomes a hologram image
that teleports me
to those living moments again
Why?
I can't undo it. I can't right it.
We've all moved on
carrying yesterday's weight
squeezing the baggage
into the hidden places...
I'm trying to navigate this
difficult passage
between 'Waiting for God'
and 'Do not go gentle, rage'
One seems too passive
the other too violent.
But what do I do with these
years before the end
when raging doesn't seem to help
and capitulation
like copping out?

Process notes:

"Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" is a poem by the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas.

"Waiting for God" is a British sitcom that ran from June 1990 to October 1994.

I woke from a dream into the scene of a past incident. Maybe this was traumatic stress disorder, but it felt like I was back in that moment, reliving it with a new perception of accountability that left me in tears and rage. I can only hope this is not what old age memories are always like.

The More Things Change...The More They Remain The Same
by Debi Swim

"It's the want of something that gives you the blues. It's not what isn't, it's what you wish was that makes unhappiness." Janis Joplin

I've been running scared always
Nazi soldiers goose stepping down my street
King Kong rising up over the hill
Sirens in my dreams I cower in the bomb shelter
underneath the house, stocked, locked
Wonder who my neighbor is
a cold war spy dad mowing the suburban grass
sometimes I feel I'm living 1984
perpetual war, government surveillance, thought
crime, privileged elite
we sing songs of peace mid the riots of Charlotte
fall to a knee OhSayCanYouSee
freedoms just another word for what you ain't got
I don't want to be afraid no more
I don't want anyone to be afraid no more
and it's onetwothreefour
tell me what we're fighting for
we want things to stay the same but things they
gotta change, they gotta change,
they — got — to — change.
Oh, God, we don't need another Mercedes Benz,
we just need to live as friends

Process notes:

I was born in 1951 and I'm still waiting for humanity and civilization to get better and better. I guess dystopian is easier to believe in than utopian because of that pesky "human nature" thing.

Quiescence

my world has shrunk to tiny...
this room where my computer lives
trips to the grocery store
a walk on the ridge
or around the yard
watching nature ready
for a long rest.

maybe a body does that too.
maybe the decades of living
and all that entails,
finally erodes a soul
till self-repair shuts
it down to a low hum
the psyche's winter of quiescence

it worries me though.
weighty things
have been left behind,
undesired, not even a whiff
of incense draws me there
but, you are everywhere, right?
Is this sabbatical from life

normal aging or a
spiritual malady?
Have I lost
my footing?
my center?
or found
a new one?

A Winter Vignette

Sometime after midnight it was to start
I stayed up late to see the first
chunky flakes blowing quietly, crosswise
across the ground.
Fir trees wavered and through the gaps
a moonstone glow shown dim.
Soon the tool shed roof was covered
the yard disappearing from view.
I lingered in the beauty and splendor of
this white out. Somewhere, off in the woods
a hound bayed, tracking a raccoon, I guess.

I prayed for all God's little wild creatures
everywhere in the cold
and trundled off to a warm, quilted bed.

Tangled Thread

We fought and scratched, loved and hated, name called and bullied, laughed at and cried with. We were loyal to a fault. We lived up to the expectations as to oldest, middle and baby. Each of us were anxious to get away from the other and forge our own identities as we messily weaved a tangled tapestry of family. Now we can see it isn't tangled at all but woven to encircle and hold us all. And we continue to weave a tangled beauty of children and grandchildren into that needlecraft. What a lovely coat of arms.

Golden haired children
we will be to the other
in our silver years

A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

When my time is ended
and God calls me home
and He says, one thing,
only one thing can you bring.
What would I be clasping
tightly in my fist...
jewels
gold
photographs
a sentimental trinket?
I can't think of a thing
to grab hold of
and clutch to my breast.
What would I miss?

I'd miss glorious sunrises
and tender, calm rains
mountains of blue
in a long leafy range
I'd miss so many people
but I'd not bring a one
that must not be done
not their time yet.

My memories take up
just a little space and
I carry those in my head.
So I think I'll just open
that tightly clasped fist
and empty-handed
start all over again.

Debi Swim has had poems published in two anthologies and in the *Bluestone Journal* for Bluefield College. She is a persistent WV poet who loves to write to prompts.

Poems by Alan Toltzis

The Cuckoo and the Warbler

The monotony of wings, of water, of life churrs everywhere, when hunger coaxes a reed warbler from her nest for a few moments.

Just like that, a cuckoo lays her dead ringer of a speckled egg among three sister eggs. Off she goes. And the warblers?

They suspect nothing. Minding four eggs is as easy as three. But in two weeks all hell breaks loose. The cuckoo hatchling

is first to crack out of its shell.
Each time the warblers leave their nest,
to collect food, the hellion's ungainly body

and greedy soul transform into a bald, blind, and feeble Sisyphus—rolling, pushing, grappling with the eggs, one, by one, by one.

This murderous combination of disloyalty
and disguise will not be denied until the first egg, perched on its scraggly scapulae breaches

the top of the nest. A final crazed push
hoists the first of the warbler eggs up and over. It plops into the water below and bobs away.

Each egg of betrayal becomes easier to toss. With one mouth to feed, the cuckoo dwarfs its parents, full-grown in two weeks.

Still, they continue to feed their demon
until the nest's integrity overflowing with deceit, collapses under the burden of deception.

The End of the World

*God destroyed Noah's generation
because the earth was full of petty theft.
Sanhedrin 108a*

Alone, in the produce aisle, I pluck and palm
a single green grape,
the cool globe
smooth as a worn stone.
As if clearing my throat,
I cover my mouth and savor
a sweetly crisp explosion of flavor.
Theft worth less a cent. Drop
by drop insignificance,
surges unnoticed—a deluge
of unending violence, inundating
the last ark of honesty, afloat
in swarming swells of indifference.

Alan Toltzis is the author of two poetry collections—*49 Aspects of Human Emotion* and *The Last Commandment*—and two chapbooks, *Nature Lessons* and *Mercy*. His poems have appeared in numerous print and online publications and he was runner up for the Thomas Merton Poetry Prize in Poetry of the Sacred. Alan serves as poetry editor for Dark Onus Lit and Poetica Publishing. After a lifetime in Philadelphia, he now lives in Los Angeles. Find him online at alantoltzis.com; follow him @ToltzisAlan.

Poems by Alan Walowitz

Brief Stop at the Whitney

We'll text our friends,
and tweet our acquaintances--
time to take photos of the Hoppers
and post them on Facebook.

Then, at leisure on the bus, we can see
if the Nighthawks are secretly snarling
or their beaks are empty as sieves.
We'll blow up the naked woman
standing in the sun and examine her skin.
Does she have the texture of a reptile
or does the canvas poke through
the pigment like a knife?

Time enough for the others in our party
to study the floor plan for the rest rooms,
eye with envy the nearest exit,
cross their arms over their chests,
to keep their anxious hearts from bouncing out
and bounding down the stairs like a Slinky,
a pram gone wild, or a Dali if, God forbid,
they choose to proceed through their time here
with such little intention.

Look,

Three generations of a Bronx family died Sunday when a speeding SUV carrying seven people — including three little girls — vaulted off an overpass and plunged 60 feet into the Bronx Zoo, killing everyone in the car.

—NY Daily News, April 30, 2012

most days I travel south on the Parkway
never even see the Bronx River though my mom says,
she took me fishing once I was a kid
and this time of night can't see nothing
even if there's water down there--

--the el's on my east,
but a train hardly comes
and on the west's the zoo where I hardly go
now that I'm always nights
but tell you the truth,
I could stand to calm there an hour some day.
Ten bucks for parking's a joke
considering what I make--

then I get close to the place
where the minivan drove crazy,
hit the Jersey barrier,
then flew high over the iron rail
and into a part of the zoo they don't use no more--
good thing no one was below,--

traffic slows to a crawl looking and looking
though it's already two days old
and this ain't some pisshole
where nothing happens, this is the Bronx.

The spot marked in red where it went flying
and there's a bunch of plastic flowers on the side
and a photo-guy is carrying his boxy camera
on a path along the Parkway
and what looks like a regular Bronx guy,
cool in camouflage, is leaning over the rail
to look down, but don't know why--

the van's gone,
the abuelas and niñas gone,
the mother who was driving and the titi gone.
I'm no rubber neck; I just want to drive, get home,
but the people that got to look they look
and make it stop-and-go and dangerous as hell for me,

and what, I'm not gonna slow down and look?

and, God, those kids, such a long way down.
Jesus, Lord God, in heaven
will you only look down sometimes
and take the goddamn time to

look?

Sabbatical

Being a good boy never was so easy:
the tables set, the garbage taken out,
the mothers not ignored.
And even now, years since being good
failed to be its own reward;
the cats are fed, books properly stowed,
the wives have been laid,
sometimes left satisfied.

I'd rather I knew how
to curl up in a corner with some trash.
Take the time I'm owed easy.
Let the clock on the wall
beat a lonesome tattoo.
Let the auditors scour the books
and track the embezzled hours.
Let doctors search for the pulse
that sleeps deep inside my being.

I'll wiggle a toe
when they carry me out
should I decide
I'm staying.

The Poems of the Air

The existence of the Higgs Boson is one reason why everything we see, including ourselves, all planets and stars, has mass and exists – hence why it was called the ‘God Particle.’

--The Daily Mail

Here comes Higgs
with God riding shotgun!
So hold any plans for our lives
unfolding haphazard and ruinous,
now we're full speed ahead
with the weighing and measuring
we never cared about in days gone by,
searching what keeps us plump and whole, –
and never even knowing
if this is the real Higgs
or some imposter Higgs, perhaps
the light-hearted one,
maybe even some other boson
we've just stumbled on
whistling past the graveyard
of this is where we're headed –
who cares so long as we don't go spinning
off the planet like a plate.

I used to keep my feet on the ground
with only floppy shoes,
my outsize nose, bobbing
with the joy of gravity neat,
inscribing lonely figures in the air.
But not so far or falutin' as the one
who keeps the top shelf stocked,
up where the good stuff's kept,
impossible to reach,
airy and uneditable.

Fall River Transfer

The night my father told us we were moving again we had gathered in the kitchen — he was known for being late and we were good at waiting. Some smoke was left in the air from where the fat had hit the bottom of the pan and the windows were open unseasonably wide. In the evening chill of the third week of April, we could already smell the magnolia my father insisted on planting out back. Same as when he was a kid, he would tell us, so we'd always remember. Look out my window; I've tried not to forget.

All I could look at, then, was the wallpaper starting to peel in the corner near my seat. A tiny edge of avocado pointing right at me had so far gone unnoticed, but there'd be hell to pay. The baby was complaining he didn't want to eat and played in the corner on the floor. My sister said she was tired of waiting, though my dad doted on her. She lit a cigarette and mused that maybe she'd get married though no one paid attention anymore, or could stand the boy she was seeing, the one who once hid a gun beneath the front seat of his car.

All I worried about was going. I didn't know where Fall River was — though I knew there must be shirt-mills and maybe a bridge where you could cross, or could tumble a long way down. The last time it had been Manila and for days I overheard all that talk of tin roofs, mother-of-pearl, and abalone washed up on shore, free for the taking. My mother tried to assure me: You know it never happens. But how would she know how it feels? She asked my sister for a cigarette, not her first of the day. Nothing much ever happens here. But just enough so it feels like it does.

My Friend's Nose

for Brian B.

They've taken the blade to Brian's nose again —
and enough already, many of us say —
the plastic surgeon's done a helluva job
sewing him up and matching his seams.
Say what you want about these docs —
though nowadays they're on the clock —
it's talent the way they manage those itty-bitty stitches
on Brian, who's small, and enough like a gnome —
but, even with the cutting,
has a shapely nose a little more than befits his size,
along with a great laugh which he needs
all the times his various parts have been opened
and poked and pulled upon.

Now my friend's been sold this piece of gold
he glues right on his lid
to keep it closed when he blinks, which
they claim will keep his eye from leaking.
But Brian's always pulling my leg —
I've never seen him weep except from laughing,
so he must keep any sadness to himself,
much like his fortune in baseball cards
and all the treasure he hides, but nobody else wants
and would likely languish forever on eBay, if they allow.
Some think this eye thing's only a trick to make him
even more valuable than he is,
which many of us already find
to be quite considerable.

1-800-4-Cancer

My wife loves to talk about her work, but I don't love to listen.
Who wants the tales she has to tell?
With her pay comes the horrors she's gathered that day:
People call the Cancer Hot Line and trade their woes for facts,
though the facts are always sad.
One woman called to find out what *malignant* was.
What her doctor wouldn't tell her, the Hot Line would.

I don't think I could.
I don't even like to hear the word,
though I like to say words are my work.
She says, *It's crazy, these poems you keep making.*
I know she's right, but the making's what I like:
the click I make when I close the door behind me;
the music I make when I'm rattling these keys.

But, then, right in the middle, the telephone rings.
It's my wife wanting nothing again:
She says: *I just have to talk to someone well and sane.*
She says: *It's an epidemic and it's closing in.*
She says: *Cancer. It can make you fucking crazy.*

I'm no doctor. There's not a single cure in my head.
But I notice if I wait enough,
the ringing of the phone will stop.
I'm an ostrich, I know, and sometimes I'm crazy.
But even she finds me easy
when left to these poems — healing me
and of my own tentative making.

Woke

Why not write a poem? I ask my wife with her MFA.
She claims she's got better things to do —
like sifting the litter box,
or watching Nadal peel off his wet stretch Nike
after one more win, and pull on his million-dollar watch.
Or she'll even spend time among her fellow woke
who are out to wake the rest of us.

The cats wish she'd sift the litter more,
and leave the world and Rafa alone.
Though she'll read my poems if I insist.
But, then, as we're sitting in some Spanish joint,
she tells me what a great cook Rafa is,
and I ought to help her win the vote,
and if she ever writes a poem
it would have telephone poles in it.
This, a strange admission,
coming as it does extempore and unasked.
She says she likes the way they connect the world,
yet stand tall and, kind of, above it all
and are fully-fashioned, but out of wood.
Though I know she thinks most of what's made by man,
or even man-imagined
is turning us to ruin.

She says, *Why not write your own telephone pole?*
I tell her, poets don't borrow, they steal —
and you might decide you need it back someday.
Never, she promises. *Things out here*
where it's real are much too serious.
But, she says to me, *I bet you put a telephone pole*
in a poem sooner than you think.
Then, she looks at me as if I've been cheating.
Never, I swear. And this time I really mean it.

Jugs

first got said by Paul whose older brother Don
said it to him before he said it to me.
Don never said anything to me
except “not home” from the kitchen window
when I’d come to the side to call for my pal.
Their father, Gordon, a banker at Green Point,
all the way downtown, a subway and bus —
but always took the 3A to 227, which only comes on the hour
which was never quite on time
but he’d wait for it like clockwork.
Nodding once in his worsted wool as he walked by
black felt hat straight as if nailed to his head
to make it home for dinner every night at 6
served by Pat, Paul’s sister, also mostly wordless,
who was studying to be a nun. Even if I try,
I can’t recall their mother, Mrs. H, calling him in,
but I can see her at the side door looking unhappy —
she might have been from someplace else
the way she always wore her hair pinned back
and a fancy apron on her dress.
Far as I remember, I never asked Paul
what his family talked about over dinner.
To tell the truth, Paul and I never talked much.
When we weren’t outside having a catch,
we mostly studied his father’s National Geographics,
wordless and thrilled, in the basement
while his sleek American Flyer headed at breakneck speed
toward the headless woman
we always laid across the tracks.

Summer is absurd

the way the heat and your words
weigh me down.
You know so many and wield them well.

But soon September when the edge of a breeze
will set me free,
the way your words never would.

Like a little boy, I have so many words
spinning in my head and don't even know
what all of them are for.

And this must be how you lure me,
babbling such nonsense,
so far from my home.

Still, when I string some words,
absurd as these,
and attempt some sense

of the summer mess I've made,
if I start to think of you — to tell the truth —
I don't think of you at all.

I swear, I never do.

Alan Walowitz is a Contributing Editor at *Verse-Virtual*, an Online Community Journal of Poetry. His chapbook, *Exactly Like Love*, comes from Osedax Press. The full-length, *The Story of the Milkman and Other Poems*, is available from Truth Serum Press. Most recently, from Arroyo Seco Press, is the chapbook *In the Muddle of the Night*, written both trans-continentially, and mostly remotely, with poet Betsy Mars.

Linked Haiku
By Martin Willitts Jr

*

cherry blossoms —
the absoluteness of dawn —
rivers to my heart.

*

Pink rose-light breaks,
pink anomalies of five clouds,
calls to our skin: here!

*

A sweet-edged joy —
gladiolus — pink-yellow
tissues of our love.

*

Seedlings tell us
to plant them for much later
in memory-house.

Resurrection

“Pysanky” means “to write,” used in making Ukrainian Easter eggs

I make Ukrainian eggs for Easter, piercing an egg,
draining it out slowly.

I boil the eggs.

I paint traditional designs for the customary Easter program,
where I will carry the eggs to be blessed in church.

I have choices in pysanky eggs.

Some are talismans for prosperity, healing, or protection.

I use beeswax and dyes for my creations.

I could make an octopus star, called the “ruzha,”
or the rotating cross, the “svarga” to represent the universe.

I could use a vertical star to mean *time* –
the beginning and end, the alpha and omega,
the joy and suffering of the resurrection.

I could add the water symbol for lifegiving,
the force of nature, the cleansing,
the purification. All I need is a wavy line.

Or maybe, I should add the grapevine for renewal.

Meanwhile, a Ukrainian woman is picking up
the scattered pieces of her former life.

Her son was shot while trying to surrender.

The mayor was bound behind his back and shot.

Smoky ruins rise from her desperate hands.

She finds an unharmed egg the enemy missed
while ram-sacking her house, tossing empty bottles,
pulling out drawers, stealing her underwear.

Her front door is pulled off its hinges.

She scrounges some water, enough to boil the egg.

She chooses the sheep symbol for innocence
and boundless love – because, what else remains?

She carries the egg like a sacrifice, a prayer
for a future she cannot at the moment imagine.

She wears a babushka, tied as tight as a prayer.

She finds the shattered walls of the church
where she used to give confession.

She kneels slowly at the destroyed altar, and prays.
She prays for those dead, those wounded,
those who must go on without someone.

Although we are an ocean apart, we both pray
that the world will know justice and renewal someday.
I bring my eggs to the Ukrainian church to be blessed.

How to Recover from Grief

Someday, our nagging losses will melt.
We can plant seeds,
trowel the earth as it softens like our hearts.
We can get out of our grief-bed.
We can sweep the porch of winter's debris
as if it was tears, oceanic mounds of tears.

I write this to anyone in the depth of sadness.
I have cleared a path.

Anyone can visit me if they like.
They can drive up my long driveway,
ring my doorbell. I will greet them,
let them cozy-in, ease-in, slouch into conversation.

I will be a good host. I will listen
as they pour out their stories. I don't mind.
The day is as long as their conversations need to be
to know it is alright for them to go forward
without the other person in their life.
It is alright. It is perfectly alright.

It is also alright if no one visits today or any other day.
It is alright if they decide to stay still
within the arms of silence, cradled in hush to know
death is the transcendental nature of this world,
its ethereal quickness and quirkiness.

Martin Willitts Jr is a retired Librarian. He has 21 full-length collections including the Blue Light Award 2019, *The Temporary World*, *Harvest Time* (Deerbrook Press, 2021) *Leaving Nothing Behind* (Fernwood Press, 2021), *Meditations on Thomas Cole's Paintings* (Aldrich Press, 2021,) *Not Only the Extraordinary are Exiting the Dream World* (Flowstone Press, 2021) and *All Wars Are the Same War* (FutureCycle Press, 2021).

Twilight Fox
by Robert Walton

Hiking down from rock spires
As day ended,
A gray fox —
Muzzle drooped low,
Tongue dust red —
Crossed the trail
In front of me.

He stopped, trembling,
A loop of drool
Sagging from his mouth,
Touching dust.
He stared at it.

I kicked a pebble
And he saw me,
A wild star flashing in his eye.
Gray lightning streaked
One more time
Around the next bend.

I found him stretched on golden grass
A little farther on,
Last steps taken,
That wild star
Still burning free.

I spoke,
Though words couldn't soothe him
Or even me:
Buddy
I'd like to give you a hand.

But the wild star faded with my words
And dusk's dry cloak,
soft and cool,
Folded around us both.

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. Most recently, his award winning collection of stories, *Joaquin's Gold*, was published on Kindle.

website : <http://chaosgatebook.wordpress.com/>

He hates the certainty of his mortality,
the fragility of tissue that sustains him.
All through each day no matter where he is,
part of him waits at the window for the picture
to be torn asunder, waits for the great hand
to burst through and drag him to oblivion.

—Stephen Dobyns, “Warning”

Epilogue

Waiting for Berry Pie
By Christopher Hileman

She said, "Let us pray."
I said, "Can't you see past –
the shade of this day?"

It's true the garden
is filled with noon's bright green light.
Here my cat twitches.

Meanwhile, the berry
arbor grows green slender spines
and threatens to fruit.



I Dwell in Summer
By Irene Toh

The question hangs. The hum of bees,
sail of butterflies in warmest summer.
I watched them. They're the magic
that God is made of.
Passions thrive, reflect their presence.

Words storm my heart, swarm as if
ablaze with these creatures.
A grasshopper jumps from forest blades.
Without you, in a life of
tardy labor, I am dumb.



Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

—Mary Oliver

Let me go out singing.
Before ash, let me ring.

—Jeff Burt