Third Wednesday is a literary arts magazine published by Gravity Presses (lest we all float away) Inc., offered in the traditions of several Michigan artists, writers, publishers, and editors. Although we manage the publication from Michigan, we welcome submissions (and certainly subscriptions) from all over the world. Financial assistance is gratefully appreciated at: Third Wednesday, 11316 Farley St. Redford, MI 48239.

Check us out on the Internet: thirdwednesday.org
Find subscription and submission information on the internet at thirdwednesday.org

Cover art: “Umbrella Street, Antalya, Turkey”, Photograph - Lauren Tivey, St. Augustine, FL

Third Wednesday Logo: SofaKingHappy Graphics

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1729 Plymouth Road
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Editors Note

Our summer issue includes the results of our first ever “One Sentence” poetry contest, an experiment that our editors have had a lot of fun reading. We’ve published not only the three winning poems for you, but a number of other entries in which we found considerable merit. Our contributors have proven that you can pack a lot of poetry into the basic building block of literature.

This issue is Volume XI, Number 3, meaning we’re well into our 11th year of publishing Third Wednesday. Over that time we’ve published over 3000 poems. That’s about 300 poems per year. To find them, our editors read a lot of poems, most of which didn’t get published. That means we sent out a lot of decline notices. We try to make them as polite as possible, but we know – they sting.

We often get thank you responses to acceptance notices and we appreciate them. We appreciate even more, receiving the rarer “thank you for reading” reply from someone who’s been declined. Those remind us that the poetry we pass on is just as important to someone as the poetry we accept, that someone sweated over those poems then sent them off into a cruel world to seek their fortune. Submitting is a small act of courage.

Tristia  * (Redacted from Ovid)

Little poem,
  you will go on into the world
  without me.
Go untroubled and unashamed.
  Look around with a timid heart.
  Find one who will pause over your words.
See that you do no harm
  at the world’s edge
  where there is no hope of certainty.
And to any who may ask how I fare,
  say that I lived.
  Except for that, be silent.

- David Jibson
Happy reading,
Contents

Impermanence Charlene Langfur.................................................................1
Detour Katherine Lo................................................................................2
Pyre Steven Deutsch...............................................................................2
[untitled] Simon Perchik..........................................................................4
Peter David Chorlton .............................................................................5

Five Poems by Don Thompson.................................................................6
  The Art of Stone Axes ...........................................................................6
  Old Habits ............................................................................................7
  Survivor ...............................................................................................7
  Bateau ...................................................................................................7
  Old Man’s Equinox ..............................................................................7

Christmas Truce Revised Bruce Grant.....................................................8
Tattoos Sue Hardebeck...........................................................................10
Lost Boys Matthew Forsythe.................................................................11
Untitled Rana Williams..........................................................................12
Ironing Merrill Douglas..........................................................................13
The Third Saturday in June Debbie Collins...........................................13
At Squalicum Lake: Right Here, She Said Richard Widerkehr...............14
Namaste Ann Privateer............................................................................15
Muse Emergency Kate Fetherston..........................................................16
Camping Above the Clear Eddy Richard Spilman...................................17
Floods Richard Spilman.........................................................................18
I Know That Heaven Exists Claire Rubin...............................................19
Journey from Point Pleasant Joseph Zaccardi.......................................20
The Revolution Begins with Temporary Ghosts Amy Strauss Friedman...21
Rumor Lance Nizami..............................................................................22
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dogwood Acres</td>
<td>Bonnie Thibodeau</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplest Form</td>
<td>Jamie Thomas</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tombstone</td>
<td>Leah Mueller</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Sentence Poetry Contest</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percy (Winning Poem)</td>
<td>Mark Madigan</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paintings As Metaphor (Winning Poem)</td>
<td>Mark Hinton</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upward Mobility (Winning Poem)</td>
<td>Brook Sadler</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowstorm</td>
<td>Laurence W. Thomas</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowley’s Dock</td>
<td>A.T. Hincapie</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early April in Ohio: (a Tanka)</td>
<td>Megan Neville</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Miracles</td>
<td>Sophia Rivkin</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont in Winter</td>
<td>Paul Ilechko</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangers Foul Ball</td>
<td>A.T. Hincapie</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit to Oil City, LA</td>
<td>Sarah Burton</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fisherman's Wife</td>
<td>William Cullen</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here lies OJ Simpson,</td>
<td>Nancy Cook</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>Matthew Landrum</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange Bright</td>
<td>Matthew Landrum</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Herd</td>
<td>Debbie Collins</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounds</td>
<td>Katherine Edgren</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Nancy Cegla</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ars Poetica</td>
<td>Katherine Edgren</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Buying Roses</td>
<td>Beate Sigriddaughter</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of the Depths of Despair</td>
<td>David James</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desert Song</td>
<td>Mark Fitzpatrick</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Double Life</td>
<td>Lawrence Daley</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollow</td>
<td>Matthew Roth</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sentence</td>
<td>Matthew Roth</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If You are Holding Yourself Together</td>
<td>Vema Jayne Zafra-Kasala</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the Holocaust Museum  Suzy Harris............................................... 40
Kitchen Knife  Suzy Harris................................................................. 40
Imprints  Vema Jayne Zafras-Kasala ............................................. 41
Take That  Patrick Keller ................................................................. 41
Midnight  Lissa Perrin ................................................................. 41
The Thing About Books  Jude Dippold ............................................. 42
Back in Ireland  Dorothy Dickinson .................................................. 42
Potential Energy  Pat Tompkins ....................................................... 43
Question  Steve Bellin-Oka .............................................................. 43
Space  Ryan Taub ............................................................................. 44
Replacement  Laurence W. Thomas ................................................ 45
Eclipse  Aileen Bassis ....................................................................... 45
In the Hills  Lauren Tivey ................................................................. 47
How to Read Poetry  Rick Blum .......................................................... 47
Dog-Strangling Vine  Charles Wyatt .................................................. 49
Over For Dinner  Robert Tremmel ..................................................... 50
Sauerkraut  Jude Dippold ................................................................. 51
Jazz In Hi-Fi  Gloria Keeley .............................................................. 52
Silence  Robert Estes ....................................................................... 53
Army of One  J. Ray Paradiso ............................................................ 54
At Osoyoos, British Columbia  Richard Widerkehr ....................... 55
Like Pharaohs  Deborah S. Prespare ............................................... 56
A Dog-Cow  Mark Bulwinkle ............................................................ 58
Don’t Forget  Leslie Schultz .............................................................. 59
Grandpa’s Love Language Is Warnings  Katherine Lo .................... 59
In the Dark Hours  Carolyn Locke ................................................. 60
If You Want To Be A River  John Corle ........................................... 61
The First Butterfly  Steve Denehan ................................................ 62
The Final Storm  Lauren Tivey .......................................................... 63
Essence  Lisa Timpf ......................................................................... 63
The Honey Thief  Kevin Casey ................................................................. 64
Playing it Safe  Rick Blum .................................................................. 65
My Rightful Place  Dave Dickson .......................................................... 66
Live And Let Die  David James ............................................................. 67
Toad  Nick Conrad .............................................................................. 68
The Fall  Vivian Wagner ................................................................. 68
Disturbance  Robert Tremmel ............................................................... 69
Jesse Jackson, 04/04/2018  Jude Dippold ............................................. 70
Her Names  Temy Tiemey ................................................................ 71
As My Mother Wakes From Anesthesia  Richard Widerkehr .............. 72
Mental Anguish  Thomas Gresham ....................................................... 73
Especially Abroad II  SEIGER ............................................................... 74
The Moon, It Beckons  Bruce McRae .................................................... 75
Common Teasel  Charles Wyatt ............................................................ 75
Turbines  Michelle Wiegars ................................................................. 76
Old Fish  Phillip Sterling .................................................................... 77
Nordic Jesus  Robert Tremmel ............................................................. 79
The Price  James Crews .................................................................... 80
Willy-Nilly  Jane Blanchard ................................................................. 80
Shadow Streams to Life  Denny Marshall ............................................. 81

INSIDE/OUT LITERARY ARTS PROJECT FEATURE .................................. 82
Alternate Names for Damarion  Damarion Walker ............................... 83
A Gun Did Not Write This Poem  Ja’lisa Taylor ..................................... 83
Stuff I'm Tired Of  Deante WalkerZ ...................................................... 84
I Praise  Shon Young .......................................................................... 84
The Time Is Now  Teanna Evans .......................................................... 84
I Am from America  Cheyenne Dalton .................................................. 85
Seasons  Demarion Walker ................................................................. 85

Morning Fog at Mora  Jude Dippold ..................................................... 86
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Subscription Rates:

4 print issues..........................$35  
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Impermanence

Winter in the desert is like this, life in the ground continues from one season to another, everything transforming and staying in place at once, The birds are moving fast over my head, their formation so perfect I find it hard to look away. In the new year I keep a look out for what is new, collecting all my papers in notebooks and finding places for them in drawers, tagged with the year and the month, historical life, no patching or fixing up what is done. What has happened in the past takes a set shape of its own in time. For me, a new year brings a new notebook. Soon I will have to move to a new home again as so many others do in times like these. I do not know where I will go and as I look for a new place, it feels like the whole world is shifting physically on the ground, and me along with it. I am a gardener and an essay reader in a world obsessed with money and electronic lights. I still take a walk at first light and breathe deep to balance my mind. Soon the sunflowers in my small garden will be taller than I am, giant strong green stems almost a half a foot now. They will be like little suns in the end. Bold with life all around them, stylistically, exactly as they are, All around them, the light purple petunias still thrive from the last season. Hold outs, little surprises breaking out from the middle what plants shouldn’t grow here in this season but do anyway in a dry desolate climate. And today the sky is bluer than ever, cloudless as if anything is possible, anything at all.

Charlene Langfur
Palm Desert, California
Detour

In the end, where you go is not
where you wanted to be, your lane rerouted, no choice but to follow
the coned curves furthering you
away from the bridge arcing ahead,
flaring over deep water, ships lumbering
their goods to port. You try the exit going east
then another going south, threads crossing
in a knot that cannot be untangled.
Your son starts to cry. So instead of
the place with the crayons and chicken piccata,
the one you both love to the point of ritual,
you stop at a battered metal cart on the side
of a road plumed with dust and buy hot dogs.
And because your hunger is so great, they satisfy.

Katherine Lo
Anaheim, California

Pyre

The Image is of a man,
thirtyish I suppose,
dressed in the discomfort
of his day—hat, tie, jacket.
His is one of the photos my mother saved
in a cardboard box—
each labeled cleanly
on the back,
with only a date.
This one reads,
September 4th, 1934.
There is no name.

I am intrigued
by its absence—
An uncle?
A friend?
He looks like a heavy
in an Edward G. Robinson movie.
I imagine he wandered
the grand boulevard
of Brownsville,
Pennsylvania Avenue—
a slum then and now,
up by the elevated train.
His fists clenched
as if looking ahead to trouble.
His temper awry.
The smoke
from his Lucky Strike
worrying his eyes.

On this quiet evening
in November
I add his to the stack
of photos I take
to the living room fireplace.
I burn them one by one—
it seems somehow fitting.

The gangster puts up
little resistance.

He silently browns
and burns.
Yet a plump woman
in a squirrel coat
with my mother’s
wide set eyes
burns
with fierce blue flames
and nerve-shattering pops.

The last photo,
that of an infant
in a knitted cap—
pink or blue?
must be coaxed into flame
for by now, the fire
has burned low in the hearth,
and through the unshaded window
I watch as night comes on too quickly.

Steven Deutsch
State College, Pennsylvania

[untitled]

These gravestones are shaped the way every avalanche
wants to enter the Earth – first as a single doorstep
then the rush though the rocks you listen for

are already moons helping you find the door
for holding on while the light under you
becomes another shadow made from wood

lays down as a room that cannot change its mind
is filled with cracked lips, the cold and end over end
the strong corners, the kisses that made it here.

Simon Perchik
East Hampton, New York
Peter

Peter of the velvet walk
has gone without a word,
gone from the dark brick streets,
from the daily rain,
from the company of men who talk sport.

No more addition, subtraction,
premiums, policies, cost of living
for him. He is not present.
Peter has had enough

of Manchester
with its factory horizon
and beer breath. All that remains

is the scent of after-shave in the aisles
where fellow workers still cover
their mouths when they speak of him.
He put on his whispering shoes,
packed his pink shirts
and left his mail to rot.
Peter, who spoke of Stravinsky

when the Beatles were in fashion,
who typed with two fingers
while day-dreaming art nouveau vines
around the edges of the paper,

has combed the red waves of his hair
to cover a thin spot
and washed the lines from his face
with two weeks’ notice.
His friends don’t know

whether he returned to Pakistan
to eat yogurt
or grew restless with potatoes
and craved Italian menus
in London. After four years in art school
and twenty in the office
Peter the permanent fixture
has left an empty chair
and a handkerchief folded on his desk.
This is where Peter sat,

where Peter quoted Wordsworth
while he worked beside women
and collected his pay
until money could not hold him down.
Who can we talk to
now he has gone

about Botticelli’s Primavera
floating on a shell
to a more beautiful world?

David Chorlton
Phoenix, Arizona

Five Poems by Don Thompson

The Art of Stone Axes

You can chip the stone into shape,
Approximately, but not much more.
All the skill’s in binding it to the handle—
The tight wrap, the unimaginable knots.
Old Habits

Out in the fields, no frost for a week.
The grass has had its first green memory,
Reminding Yokut ghosts to pack up
And trek to the high country for another summer.

Survivor

This mesquite, neither dead nor dying,
Holds onto life with its sparse roots.
It doesn’t take much, does it?
A tenuous grip can be tight enough.

Bateau

The warped half moon drifts by
With its paint chipped: Rimbaud’s boat,
Cold sober, its cargo of words
Rotting somewhere on a dock.

Old Man’s Equinox

Trees always lose their nerve
About now, unloading leaves like stock
In a falling market. Not me.
Autumn’s the time to buy into life.

Don Thompson

Buttonwillow, California
Ben warmed his hands with his tin coffee cup, wishing his thin blue coat kept out more of the cold.

A private stopped to talk with the soldiers huddled near the fire.

“Hey fellers” he said, “Did you hear? Christmas truce today, Johnny Reb agreed to zero six hundred hours.”

Two men by the fire whooped; Ben was silent. The private kicked Ben’s boots, outstretched to the fire.

“Didn’t you hear?”

“I’ll wait until my sergeant says so”, Ben said, peering at the man’s grimy face.

“That won’t take long, here he comes” said the private.

The sergeant repeated the order. The group around the fire cheered up at the news.

“What about general orders, Sarge?” asked Ben. “No talking except in the line of duty”.

The sergeant said “I believe that order might be ignored tonight” before moving to the next group.

Ben was relieved. He could relax. He nodded to the others and left to relieve his man; he would be anxious to get back to the fire.

Ben was still settling in when he heard the voice.

“Hey Yank” it called, “Merry Christmas over there.”

“Merry Christmas yourself, Reb” Ben called back.

“Hey, did y’all hear about the truce?” called the voice.

“I sure wouldn’t want to get shot tonight on account of you boys hadn’t heard the news.”

“We heard”, Ben said, “but to tell truth, we weren’t worried much about getting shot. We heard you Rebs don’t shoot so straight when it’s cold.”

The voice replied “Yank, you and me are gonna get along. But don’t you go believing rumors. Whoever said that ain’t never been to a good old fashioned Tennessee turkey shoot.”

It was silent then. Ben thought about his wife and little girl back home. He pictured them snug and warm in bed, sleeping peacefully. He was with them in his imagination; he ached to
be there in person.

The bitter night passed slowly, with occasional bantering between the soldiers. Finally, a faint light in the east signaled dawn, the end of the truce.

“Hey Yank, you still there?” called the voice again.
“I’m still here,” Ben replied.
“Time’s almost up” came back, then “You got any kids?”
“One, a little girl. You?”
“I got me a whole slew; right now I miss every one.”
“I hope when this is over you get back to them, Reb” said Ben.
“You too, Yank” said the voice.

Ben’s replacement was there, looking cold in the morning light. A few perfunctory shots were fired, a show of force after the sanity of the truce. Ben walked toward the line. He heard the voice call.
“Hey Yank, we never swapped names”. The shots were louder now.

Back at camp, Ben warmed his hands with his tin coffee cup, wishing his thin gray coat kept out more of the cold.

Bruce Grant
Massillon, Ohio
Tattoos

My students have them, of course: On their calves,
The insides of their forearms, or trailing down
From their shoulder to an elbow;
Even my dean has a simple cross
Marking her faith on the inside of her left wrist.

Having grown up when only sailors got tagged, I never saw myself
As one who needed to make a statement with my skin.
Now, though, I have four such beacons:
Simple tattoos created with a drop of ink, a needle push, and a firm wipe;
Tattoos simpler than the intersection of a short and long line;
Four solitary dots marking compass points for radiation.
When treatment is finished, they’ll look like nothing more
Than a freckle,
But for now each one is embellished with a line
Or a plus sign
Or a plus with a circle,
The targets trapped in the cross-hairs.

My chest is a treasure map
With two uneven fissures of no profound depth
And dotted lines drawn in Sharpie blue
And four X’s that mark the spot of a dubious treasure.
This island has no pirate invaders, no pearl hunters, no grinning adventurers,
Just one seeker of solitude, a shipwreck’s lone survivor.

Sue Hardebeck
Dix, Illinois
Lost Boys

They named the gator Captain Hook, and the rank gave weight to his legend, transforming a local nuisance, the doom of a brave but foolhardy Dachshund, into a legendary villain, the scourge of the Palm Lake Canal. At night, I led Ray and Jackson to the water’s edge, and the beams from their flashlights played across its surface, seeking the reflection of those watchful eyes.

I admired their choice, but my wife considered it nonsense. *Hook was the pirate,* she argued. *The croc that gobbled his band was named Tick-Tock.*

Our mythology came from Disney. That beast from Neverland would never quit. It longed to finish the meal, forever hunting the beleaguered Captain, but the clock in its gut would broadcast each approach.

Kelly wasn’t mad about the name, not really—merely annoyed that our sons preferred my dock to her screened porch. We both knew what was coming. That fall, she would move them to Atlanta, living with her parents as she sorted out her life.

The boys still visit each summer. I often suggest that we fish the canal, but they’re more intent on stealing my beers and cruising in the pontoon.

Captain Hook has long disappeared, off to a realm with fresh canine treats. At night, I sink myself against the dock, its wooden slats firm against my back. This world has become a strange and lonely place. I listen for sounds from the dark water, alert, vigilant, always aware of the tick, tick, ticking of the clock.

Matthew Forsythe
Winter Spring, Florida
Untitled
Rana Williams
Photograph
Ironing

My mother taught me on handkerchiefs:
work one flat, fold it in half
and in half again, pressing each time.
I liked stacking them, lining up corners,
nudging the edges into place.

I haven’t used a handkerchief in years.
But when I find a cotton shirt
or that sundress saved from the eighties
crushed in a pile of clean laundry,
I don’t mind the work: it’s good
making a hot iron melt wrinkles.

It feels like erasing a sickness
or using a palm to smooth years off a face.

Merrill Douglas
Vestal, New York

The Third Saturday in June

I was nursing some cheap gin
at this depressing little celebration,

watching my ex-lover kiss
his simpering new wife, her

mouth puckered
like an anus.

Pity? No thanks,
I've got plenty, tangled
in her veil and in
his laugh.

More gin for me, the averted eyes
around me small and mean.

I sneak outside with my drink.
The silence never sounded better.

Debbie Collins
Richmond, Virginia

At Squalicum Lake: Right Here, She Said

Just enough wind blows riffs
and ripples in. Over and over,
cloud shapes in the water
almost touch the shore.

This morning, I hunted
for my glasses. Look, she said,
they’re right here. Now
in the heat, a yellow jacket
flits back and forth
over early apples,
as if not one bruised halo
on the grass can feed
its strict desire. Cloud shapes
assemble and disassemble
on the water. For a moment,
we almost lack nothing.

Richard Widerkehr
Bellingham, Washington
Namaste
Ann Privateer
Photograph
Muse Emergency

No poems in the fridge. The ones in the cupboard expired last year. Farmer’s market’s picked clean. Rhododendrons dropped theirs, now lying rotten in autumn rain. None in the tool shed behind dirty gloves. Winter the usual desperate bleak gray for lack of them. I asked Perry the postman when we might be getting some in. He shook his head, “Paperwork,” he shrugged, “Border problems, no harbor permits. Congress didn’t appropriate. None to be had, not even for ready money.” Don’t think for a minute that poetry cares if your head’s in the oven. She won’t blanket you with sleep, won’t tend to your out of control kids, won’t be the womb you never had. Poetry’s on the loose, babbling to the moon. Shit-kickers clanking, she’s the crazy girl hanging out at that abandoned grocery store, buming cash for god knows what. Nevertheless, I’m in my ratty bathrobe chasing her through the streets all hours, Where has she gone? How can she leave me in dread and in fear of dread, that, with a casual flip of her purple hair, she’ll look not at me but at her black
fingernail scrolling the iPhone, “No longer will I come to you. I’ve got better prospects on Tinder, Twitter, whatever. Duh.”

OK, I’m begging---please change your mind. And, for the record, I didn’t mean whatever I said. Amen.

Kate Fetherston
Montpelier, Vermont

Camping Above the Clear Eddy

She wants to be clear where they’re headed. They’ve camped on a shelf where still water gathers courage before its fall. He wants the tent up, and then they can talk or make love or whatever.

Instead they strip and dive into a blue the color of ice where love shrinks like exposed anemones, and there they talk, shivering because truth sucks the warmth right out of them.

It’s perfect for him because commitments need heat, need the shelter
of backlit tableaux,
yet he marvels how she,
sidestroking the current,
adds one and one
and gets a thousand.

They emerge to an icy understanding
that lasts only until
they raise the tent
and zip bags together,
till the heat of twined bodies melds them into its own truth.

Richard Spilman
Hurricane, West Virginia

Floods

The water rises gradually, no great rush,
no surge sucking breath from your lungs
like a tsunami, though come to think of it, with tsunamis there are those pictures
from cameras found miles inland,
kids on the beach framed by the wave.

You walk through knee-high water,
as wide as a creek, moving townward with the road, then tumble into the flow,
whose dark thrill speeds you from hope
and like wanton dreams curls you gently into the suck and roil of deeper water.

But even as it drags you down, you feel not horror but assent, like the condemned
rounded up at gunpoint and lined
at the edge of a long trench, who stand
without a cry, without the least attempt
to run, waiting for the volley to come.

Richard Spilman
Hurricane, West Virginia

I Know That Heaven Exists

filled with seraphim
poised on pins

cherubim combing wings
with fat fingers

celestial choirs sing Bach
    He comes, He comes,
    the Bridegroom comes

little godlings trip over each
other, pushing and poking

to pass through pearly gates
Jesus shows up when he isn’t

dragging a wooden cross
through leper towns or

turning water into wine
he builds houses & more houses

villas, bungalows, cottages, cabins
plenty of room for the saved
in the promised land
plenty of room for those

who prayed Our Fathers
each day, drank wine

only at Communion
no empties in their trash

buried under boxes from Costco
I know that Heaven exists

but will the Bridegroom
come for me

Claire Rubin
Oakland, California

Journey from Point Pleasant

At the beach the lifeguard sits high on a throne
above swimmers and sunbathers his body trim
and muscular and shiny with coconut oil
his hair and eyebrows sun bleached and I think
I was seven years old when I saw him run
and dive into the ocean to pull a drowning man
from the surf and drag him limp and sea drizzled
ashore to put his lips over this man’s mouth
lying prone in the sand and the lifeguard turning
this man’s head to the side to expel foam
both of them giving and taking air in an embrace
and long after this day I thought why do we go
back to the sea to receive such treachery
but my family did return to our jetty-break beach
the next July my parents at rest under an umbrella
under a round yellow flower on this same Jersey sand
listening to the same rippling series of echoes
while I watched my brother run through the surf
running from something with his hands above his head
as though all of this was for him and everyone else
waiting to take turns there in the high noon light
that had shone on the breakers only last summer
for the man whose breath had gone to earth
never to return and for my brother who was found
a shade under twenty-five years later
drowned in a drug-induced depression
in a skuzzy Perth Amboy one-way alley
and all I can say now is I had a brother
and the last thing to see are the eyes

Joseph Zaccardi
Fairfax, California

The Revolution Begins with Temporary Ghosts
(Boötes Constellation – Herdsman)

He circles me twice, suspiciously
redrawing me in the elsewhere,
where the grass beneath me turns
lush jade to salt straw.
I stand dotted in sunlight as the accused,
aflame in morning’s cold glow
under a borderless sky, snow-globed
edges of edgeless glass.

I’ve driven the animals from their keeper
across the washed-out plain.
Renamed them all after celebrities
who died tragically and young.

The revolution begins with temporary ghosts.
The only sound of apocalypse is absence.
I have not moved to the beasts,  
stayed and played instead with an alcoholic god  
who too easily sanctions categorization.

I chew alive all that crosses my path.

Now the fourth brightest star lights my way  
curls around my doubt  
leaves me to hunt for a guide  
in search of consensual worship.

Amy Strauss Friedman  
Denver, Colorado

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Rumor

It was said  
And certainly no-one denied it  
At least, no-one who knew anybody  
And that was anybody who was anybody

Of course, you know what they said about how it started  
I mean: who else could have started it  
And of course you heard what happened after that

But who knew it would get so out-of-hand?  
If you know what I mean by out-of-hand  
No, really –

And then it was accomplished, after all  
Of course, they plan to say it didn’t happen  
But circumstances dictate that it did  
They can’t deny it.

Lance Nizami  
Palo Alto, California
Dogwood Acres

In the folds of these Appalachian ridges I am tipped in moonshine, tomatoes and wild ginseng roots, spare change and winks.

I spend the night lining well whiskey shots, cracking Keystone cans, uncapping Buds. But I let my hair and bar rag down a moment when Moe comes in—maybe from his fields on Friday, or fishing Bear Run Sunday. Sitting quiet, broad shoulders slouching, waiting on the far end stool he slides two quarters my way to cut me a break, or fill the lull—one song on the box—*Patsy's Walkin' after Midnight.*

He tucks a big dip in his lower lip the way his father uset, but I hear it was his grandma taught him how to lead and dip a woman on the dance floor—smooth as a creek stone.

One strong hand on the small of my back. Another on my hip—we are gone—dancing on the mountain in the moonlight.

Bonnie Thibodeau
Ellwood City, Pennsylvania

Simplest Form

I’m sitting on the other side of the state with the cell phone on speaker doing third grade homework. My daughter is learning
how to reduce fractions to their simplest form.
She’s a whiz at math, but fractions are fighting her;
she’d rather be playing soccer for her futbol club

and asking me why they call soccer futbol anyway.
Between bites of my Italian Sub (not a very good one
but at least it has oregano), I’m trying to explain

something that has become reflex—
dividing numerator and denominator by the same factor—
something that didn’t sit so well with

me as a kid, but has grown easier,
just like I hated these black olives once that are falling from my Hero,
but not now. Scarlett’s voice

flutters upward, rising in tone as she grasps the new numbers,
filting them forever away into her perfect working memory.
We work on three more problems, then

She says “love you” quickly while hanging up—
leaving me to suck the words back into my throat,
the ones I was going to offer, that might freeze this moment—

she’s not needing me now that the concept is hers. I’ll be home
tomorrow and it will be like I never left. Even now I can see
her chewing on the inside of her lip, like her mother does,

brow crinkled in concentration
as she is playing with her new knowledge, popping
from synapse to synapse, dancing

behind her eyeballs, like rolling
a pencil from finger to finger, absently,
while working on something larger, alone.

Jamie Thomas
Sterling Heights, Michigan
Tombstone
Leah Mueller
Photograph
One Sentence Poetry Contest

We tasked our contributors with packing as much poetry into a single sentence as they possibly could. They really came through for us. Picking three prize winning poems from the many we received was no easy job. The first three of these are winners of $25 prizes. Following them are the best of the rest, thirty-one more, in which our editors found considerable merit. Thanks to everyone who entered. Shall we do this again next year?

Percy  (Winning Poem)
*The Chamberlin Hotel*
*Ft. Monroe, VA*

Though he took
no notice of me

since I was young
and perhaps only saw him

two or four times
the week he attended
to our table

I’ve never forgotten
the delicate art
of that old man,

how with his right hand
trembling a bit

he’d spear with a miniature
silver fork
a cold pat of butter from the white china plate carried in his left

and oh how gently he’d lift it up

then set it beside the crescent roll steaming on my bread plate.

Mark Madigan
Springfield, Virginia

Paintings As Metaphor (Winning Poem)

Looking at Charlie Russell paintings at a gallery in Helena, Montana, I realize what I think poetry should always be: a cowboy and horse forever hanging in mid-air, a tumbling hat stuck there, a rattlesnake always just about to strike.

Mark Hinton
Bloomington, Minnesota
Upward Mobility  (Winning Poem)

It appears a comical fumble,
the rough & tumble clacking of claws
as a dozen hermit crabs scramble
toward an empty shell,

newly washed ashore
on a sandy spit off the coast of Belize,
where a scarcity of shells
makes its arrival a rare opportunity

to upgrade to much-needed bigger digs,
for which each stalk-eyed creature
must vie, circling first the vacant property,
to see whether it is sized appropriately

(a shell made to fit—just enough spare room
to grow a bit), and finding that
none of these dozen mobile denizens
is big enough to take occupancy

of the new shell, circling next
each of their competitors,
tapping claws to shells, smaller claws
batting larger, sizing each other

up, until they’ve got it figured,
at which point, they perform
an extraordinary ordering,
quickly resolving themselves

into a queue, smallest to largest,
with the largest positioned strategically
next to the big, empty shell, but
since even it can’t fill that shoe,

they all sit and wait for the arrival
of an even bigger crab, who
soon enough ambles over,
and seems to know straight away

that it belongs at the front of the line,
and once there, quickly exits its own shell,
its soft, bare body coming out like a nude bather
who, surprised to discover the presence of an onlooker,

shyly scurries to cover her body,
and climbs into the new spiraled chalet,
an act which initiates a domino effect, as each crab in the queue likewise

executes a swift exit, bashful dash,
and quick clamber to take hold
of the empty spot next door—
but it's not a maneuver without risk

since a same-sized latecomer
might arrive at any moment, attempt to cut
in line and usurp a shell, leaving,
as in a game of musical chairs,

one crab out, naked and vulnerable
to hot sun or hungry gull, making it,
strategically, a good idea to go for the collective scramble, which despite the clutching &
crawling and awkward claw-footed
social climbing, tends to the benefit of all.

Brook Sadler
Temple Terrace, Florida
Snowstorm

It seems an innocent coming without announcement,  
a horizon thickening like collections of memories  
like the other side of yesterdays grown cold,  
grown into the gloom of foreboding,  
the gray deepening to dusk before noon,  
the snow gentling its way at first,  
falling without the bluster of blizzards,  
without gusts sweeping into drifts  
and no wind to sting it into a sudden awareness  
that the growing piles slowly fill,  
eventually smother consciousness  
under the weight of accumulations  
like our drawn-out dying.

Laurence W. Thomas  
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Crowley’s Dock

I remember my hook caught  
in a turtle’s mouth, a neighbor’s pliers  
showing me not all life is meant for taking.

A.T. Hincapie  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Early April in Ohio: (a Tanka)

Snow evaporates  
as if called back to heaven:  
sweet sublimation  
conciliating our rage  
at winter’s sojourn turned stale.

Megan Neville  
Cleveland, Ohio
Minor Miracles

This is a small poem about small things like the petal toad one inch long that bounds down mountains or the one pound female shrew that runs eighteen miles an hour or the humming bird, smaller than a nickel that flies five thousand miles Alaska to Mexico, but the minor miracle the one I most admire is the peacock spider the size of a grain of sand makes love, then eats its mate.

Sophia Rivkin
Southfield, Michigan

Vermont in Winter

Vermont in winter, the smell of syrup and the taste of rum, spiced and orange, a warmth inside while the snow spreads across the land, locked and hardened in its white jacket, not to be relieved again until the eucalyptus days of spring when warmth and light explode in pink, white, and green and the trickling of ice cold streams is heard across the valleys as the mountains cry out in pleasure at the returning of the sun.

Paul Ilechko
Lambertville, New Jersey
Rangers Foul Ball  
(for Shannon Stone, Arlington 2011)

When he reached over the railing 
I could only picture Brownwood, 
Texas, his little boy reaching home 
without him, and the home team 
my father and I once watched 
from the same balcony, or how 
a body crumbles under its own weight, 
the way we all extend toward something 
in the name of someone else.

A.T. Hincapie 
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Exit to Oil City, LA

Fenced in like cattle on the ranches that lined the road 
oil derricks, 
heads to the ground, 
eating up oil like grass, 
rectangular heads slanted down like a steel horse ready 
to have a saddle 
swung across its metal frame.

Sarah Burton 
Tallahassee, Florida
The Fisherman's Wife

The wind whispering to her ear
may bring his last breath
as if a love cry could carry
across the sea
and yet gently sway
a buoy bell
to toll.

William Cullen
Brooklyn, New York

Here lies OJ Simpson,

and when I say “here lies,” I do not
mean “here rests”; I mean he lies, lies,
here he lies, this liar, recently paroled,
having told the nice review board
how for nine years now, almost,
he has been a model inmate,
has never once been written up
for discipline infractions, somehow
overlooking or forgetting how
the guards and fellow inmates
loved him for his nimbleness, his gift
for trading cash for favors, dipping
into millions owed my family
in that endless wrongful death suit,
having said with absolute sincerity,
with straight-faced,
straight-laced absolute sincerity,
how his life before this incident
(a strong-armed robbery he denies)
was pure, was victimless, devoid
of criminality, somehow overlooking or forgetting how Nicole and I lay pooled in blood, knifed and slashed and cut-throated by hands embraced by gloves, gloves that later shrank from moisture and later still conveyed the story of a man framed by police, a story told with absolute sincerity, with straight-laced, straight-faced absolute sincerity, so here lies OJ Simpson, here OJ Simpson lies, he lies, forever he will rest in sleaze.

Nancy Cook
St. Paul, Minnesota

Berlin

There will be a silver trembling in the trees beside the canal, the sound of joggers’ feet on brick paths, bread and orange juice, and coffee in glass mugs — all of that waits for a future morning, this August or the next — but our straw-gold summer, taken off and left like a jacket forgotten on a chair back of a sidewalk café, we didn’t even know was gone until we went to look for it.

Matthew Landrum
Detroit, Michigan
Orange Bright
*after Lorca*

Loneliness gives everything the face of desire and we mistake a bright orange for a moon hung in a green-swathed summer but no matter how much I want to, I cannot pluck and peel the moon nor part and devour it section by glistering section, its sour juice full and bright on my tongue.

Matthew Landrum
Detroit, Michigan

The Herd

look like graffiti on the side of a train or sharps and flats on a sheet of music, their breath coming in clouds and their bellowing wish for the morning oats and hay as yet unfulfilled.

Debbie Collins
Richmond, Virginia

Sounds

Betray:
how can such a treacherous word leave the mouth so beautifully?

Katherine Edgren
Dexter, Michigan
Art

keeps odd hours,
as must the artist
who wakens
in darkness
answering the call

as it gnaws like mice
consuming crumbs
of emotion,
of memory,
and ropes
that bind
the lion’s strength.

Nancy Cegla
Columbia, Missouri

Ars Poetica

Something like yeast
turns word or phrase into feast,
and a whole loaf of bread
springs forth from my head.

Katherine Edgren
Dexter, Michigan

On Buying Roses

Do I have to do everything myself?

Beate Sigriddaughter
Silver City, New Mexico
Out of the Depths of Despair

When the world trips & falls on its face, as it’s been doing lately, wallowing in the muck of low expectations & ignorance, there’s a general sadness that drizzles down, damping our shoulders, wetting our desire for stability & calm, for a firm handshake & a promise not to rush into anything cruel or stupid, a sadness that reminds us that without the fall from grace, there’d be no reason to rise, heart in hand, & stand up for what we believe.

David James
Linden, Michigan

Desert Song

In the short, prickly-leaved tree, the birds with the turquoise eyes shriek in ecstasy.

Mark Fitzpatrick
Seymour, Connecticut
A Double Life

It is time to go home
to be the other person,
the person they expect,
not the one who lives
another life
when he is away.

Lawrence Daley
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Hollow

Matter should grow denser
towards its center,

but it’s not that consistent,
so the wall where your fist went

turned out, thank God, to be hollow
as the fine, almost weightless, bones of a sparrow

flying through the great hall
of an old metaphor (you’ll recall)

where life is the air and the light and the room
that opens, a bloom

in the night’s dark garden, a gap
in the unremitting black

we thought so solid it could not open
a space to hope in.

Matthew Roth
Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania
The Sentence

From the pure fog, from the milk of silence, you’ve come, sensibly dressed for the journey, the train lurching out from the station before you even find your seat, the train whose route spans in a breath the gap between Arcturus and Albany, where a detour sends you meandering through barrens of sand and pine, now slowing to climb the bright spike of a lupine flower, spiraling up the green stem and raceme till you reach the top, rolling to a stop where bloom meets sky and the station master, a blue butterfly, unspools for you beneath a marquee of mid-day sun the precise evolution of his tongue.

Matthew Roth
Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania

If You are Holding Yourself Together

There will come a time when you learn to wrap your arms around your chest, not to keep yourself from falling apart, but to show the world that you love what you’ve become.

Vema Jayne Zafra-Kasala
Hagatna, Guam
At the Holocaust Museum

How did the photographer capture that moment in the fading light - the young mother tossing her baby, laughing, into the air, so that the last remembered moment would be delight?

Suzy Harris
Portland, Oregon

Kitchen Knife

My mother, slowly losing her sight, cuts the onion without looking, her knife like an old friend comfortable in her palm, the blade curving in from so much sharpening, so when it is time to pack up her kitchen I put the old knife in the discard pile but my mother says no, I’m keeping this; she has no need to learn a new one.

Suzy Harris
Portland, Oregon
Imprints

The light at the end of the driveway
glows blue in the blackness of the
night

where I last left you,
where your soles last kissed concrete,
where a part of you still remains dis-
turbing the air and my sleep.

Vema Jayne Zafra-Kasala
Hagatna, Guam

Take That

He swirled
the semi-colon into his copy
of the book; hundreds of
years earlier the author felt the slight
breeze smirk past her ear.

Patrick Keller
Long Beach, California

Midnight

Under the silk nightgown
her fingers worry the lump
like a rosary bead,
counting the hours until dawn.

Lissa Perrin
Ann Arbor, Michigan
The Thing About Books

The thing about books
is that you
no longer
need wonder
what the red-haired girl,
who walks her two dogs
past the Japanese magnolia
each morning
is thinking
when she pauses
to savor the scent
of its blooming.

Jude Dippold
Concrete, Washington

Back in Ireland

Coming home to visit Dublin after
living away is like rediscovering a
favorite snow globe, perhaps given
to you by your father when he returned
from a work trip over your birthday,
buried deep in the crevices of your
parents’ sofa, but then noticing a giant
crack down one side so that all the water
has long since drained out, forcing you
to toss it away again, no matter how much
you may have wanted to keep it.

Dorothy Dickinson
Holland, Michigan
Potential Energy

Brought indoors this morning,
tight red balls on stems,
shiny and dense as Tootsie
Pops,
they explode hours later: peo-
nies,
a promise exceeded.

Pat Tompkins
San Mateo, California

Question

How do you like this caved-in bedroom, ceiling plaster
strewn across the floor like unearthed pottery shards,
the crumpled, water-stained walls the color of formaldehyde,
and what about the burst copper pipe joints through which
it all seeped and spurt, pooling in the vanity drawers,
the wardrobe filled with suits worn only on Sundays,
the onyx cuff-links handed down from the one who built
the house, hunching for a generation on a brewery line
to pay it off, his back burning and coiling, the way
the wires did when they caught fire years after his wife
one day packed her suitcase and walked out the front door,
now lopsided on its bent hinges, the porch slats rotting, wisteria
vines veiling the beveled glass window he watched through?

Steve Bellin-Oka
Portales, New Mexico
Одинокая Приключения
по
Райан Tobochnik

Space
Ryan Taub

Scratchboard
Replacement

Comfort is rarely in question. I adjust new seats
to make them conform to what I’m used to,
mirrors to reflect on where I’ve been. Replacement
is the game of change like learning to love different people
when somebody dies or discovering that a new car
is so much better in ways never anticipated.
Comparison, like a simile, is two-ended;
the known explains the unknown
like getting a friend to try rattlesnake
by saying it tastes like chicken.

Laurence W. Thomas
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Eclipse

What lies coiled inside
invisible
as a black hole
consuming stars
and do stars know
they’re being
swallowed
as they’re pulled like swimmers
caught in a riptide?

I’ve heard that plants
feel pain when a stem is
snapped
and sounds
of Bach and Mozart
will make them grow.
I don’t know
the laws of the universe
or understand
the undulations of sound or how
a snake crossing my path
is at once both
beautiful and terrible

and I don’t know
the chemistry flowing inside us
or what tiny life-form
calls its siren song to you.
or what vibrates
in your veins
and pierces the membrane
around your cells.

Tell me where
in the folded loops of your brain
is that afternoon when we sat
in lawn chairs
eyes behind cardboard glasses
to see a black moon
float across a still sun.

How birds grew quiet
in the arms of grey trees and shadows
pooled and washed over knee-deep weeds
and above us
a glimpse of returning sun
held a promise
imperfect as any other.

Aileen Bassis
Jersey City, New Jersey
In the Hills

A boy beats a drum at sunset during Ramadan: The scrubby hills of Sirince are darkening, its orange groves, vineyards, reverberating, Torches, flutes, laughter. It is time for Iftar, and the boy ambles down the cobblestones, past bright kitchens, goats at their feed, pansies nodding in the velvet twilight. Your hand in mine; our easy bond and unspoken passion, palpable, laced between our bodies, both near and far.

We make our way to the whitewashed inn and its soft, handmade quilt, you and I, to feast on dates as the sun slips away, as the drumbeat swells, and the moon begins its rosy ascent. Here, we will make love. It is true: we are together, in a Turkish village in the mountains somewhere beyond time. No matter that we never happened; when you think of me, you can close your eyes and find me.

Lauren Tivey
St. Augustine, Florida

How to Read Poetry

To start: take a deep breath; hold it for three seconds; exhale
Drink some wine…beer if you prefer – poetry is for everyone
Read the title; always read the title
And the poet’s name
Take another sip of wine…or slug of beer
Read the first line, then the first verse
Do not pause to ponder at this time
Read the second verse all the way through
Read the whole damn poem
Reward yourself with another drink
Or, perhaps, some salted nuts
Ask yourself: Do I have any idea what this poem is about?
If no, have another drink (or some dessert) (or both)
Then pick another poem
If so, reread the first verse
Say to no one in particular: Hmmm
Take notice of any metaphors that may be echoed later
Congratulate yourself on knowing what a metaphor is
Take another drink if you are thirsty
If not, eat some nuts, then drink

Read the second verse again
Look for an extended metaphor from the first verse
If you find one, smile while nodding your head knowingly
If you don’t, smile while nodding your head knowingly
Take another deep breath with your eyes closed
Exhale; always exhale

Read the third verse (this one is typically the most revealing)
Look up at the overhead light fixture, or ceiling fan
Note if they are dusty
Write yourself a reminder in the margin to dust them tomorrow
They are always dusty
Look back down at the third verse with your eyes unfocused
Try to let the images in the poem infuse your subconscious
Do not fret if all you see are fuzzy words
Fuzzy words improve most poems

Refocus your eyes
Read any remaining verses
After each, pause briefly and exclaim:
Hmmm, or Aaah, or What the fuck?
When you’ve finished, stretch your legs
Then let your mind wander unhindered by logic
If you have an epiphany, tell a teenager right away
They may be able to make an app out of it
If you feel confused, blame it on the poet’s lack of clarity
If you feel horny, finish your drink and go to bed
Read the title and poet’s name one more time
Set both to memory, whether a good or bad association
If good, turn the page, take a deep breath, and begin anew
If bad, light a joint, take a deep breath, then turn the page
Either way, thank the poet for his efforts
*Always* thank the poet

**Rick Blum**
**Bedford, Massachusetts**

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**Dog-Strangling Vine**

*(Vincetoxicum rossicum)*

Leaves opposite
flowers pink to maroon

Perhaps there is a story
Charon and Cerberus
many necks to strangle

Also known as
swallowwort
flowering black or pale

alleiopathic critter
does not play well with others
will climb upon

the lyric trellis
each leaf a shudder
in the passage of time

Beginning with its seed-like seeds
shriveled nails

posing as a milkweed
luring poor dumb monarchs
who if they have names
are all Paddy
some from County Tipperary
some County Offaly

Native of Strathspey
this immigrant
inflorescence an umbel-like cyme

family Dogbane
harsh-voiced

Charles Wyatt
Nashville, Tennessee

Over For Dinner

The wine was good
as usual, but the lamb
was overdone

the potatoes not timed
quite right, the beans
a bit behind

the seasoning off

and somehow, she
was to blame again

it was all her fault

even the way the seam
of her shirt curved
along her collar bone

the shape
of her collarbone

and especially
the color
the deep red color
like the wine
which was good
but in the end
that was about all.

Robert Tremmel
Ankeny, Iowa

Sauerkraut

I remember
all these years later
the pungent smell of Sauerkraut
fermenting in crocks in the basement.
My parents persisted in making it
long after we had any need
for fermented cabbage
to supplement our food budget.
There was something
of love and survival
hidden beneath the scum
on the surface
of those huge earthenware vessels,
some ancestral memory
that told of the cruelty
of northern winters,
a remembrance that they honored
in the annual ritual,
a need to teach their children.

Jude Dippold
Concrete, Washington
Jazz In Hi-Fi

Side 1

scordutura strings produce jazz
bent notes touch intransitive
owls spin their heads until
too many drums are visible
blur blue sunglasses
like looking in a mirror
with the lights out
roots in blues
I listen to jazz
in the living room, in the kitchen
out the screen door playing the
Blue Ridge of the old Smokies
mute, like trumpet
biddly bop scoo, biddly bop scoo
yah!

Side 2

from the top
stop go stop go
drums - beat, beat, beat, beat
piano off key on key
under blue nights
star jazzmen riff horns
amid cigarettes blowing
bodies glow per Tango
cocktails sit, long cool ones
dancers percolate, Get Hot!
jump, jive; then you wail
misfits fit,
sing, sing, sing
I scat right back
I scat like that
biddly bop scoo, biddly bop scoo
yah!

Gloria Keeley
San Francisco, California

Silence

Light! Beauty! Light!
Beauty! Light! Beauty!
Music! Beauty! Light!
Laughter. Weeping.
Silence.
Darkness.

Robert Estes
Somerville, Massachusetts
Army of One
J. Ray Paradiso
Photograph
At Osoyoos, British Columbia

in memory, MRW

The sun hits the surface of this kettle lake, and white-caps dance like phosphor on blue-black. I love change, said my mother. Wind singes yellow-brown outcrops.

We visit wineries. Linda tastes; I drive. Orchards glow, and clusters in the sun can't hide the leaves, as if this high desert were a promised land.

When I sang “Imagine,” my mother asked, Will they ever stop fighting? As a girl, she lived on Valentine Lane, near the wrought-iron gate of a cemetery.

She saw the ice man’s horse go down. Did my mother wave sparklers by that gate? Near the end, she said, I’m ready, and we waited for a call in the night. Maybe, she waited for my sister’s call, which came on the last day our mother was conscious. Her smile,

as if she’d seen the first pinhole of light on the sky’s blue felt. The lips of this lake. Her DNA, an assembly, wind and light on water.

Richard Widerkehr
Bellingham Washington
Like Pharaohs

“I spent an afternoon burying frogs alive.”
“What’s that?”
“I was five. I think. My dad took me to see his sister—my Aunt Kim—and Uncle Felix. They lived in the country then. By a lake. Or maybe it was more like a watering hole.”
“Do you want some more wine with dessert?”
“There’s something wrong with me.”
“There’s nothing wrong with you.”
“You haven’t heard about the frogs yet.”
“Why are you thinking about frogs? Did you see frog legs on the menu or something?”
“No.”
“Want to stick with the pinot? It was good, wasn’t it?”
“Sure.”
“So, what dessert are you going to order?”
“The apple crumble.”
“Do you think pinot will go with apple crumble?”
“Pinot goes with everything, doesn’t it?”
“You’re right. Maybe we should share a dessert. I’m really full.”
“That’s fine. That day—”
“The day you killed frogs?”
“Yes. I killed at least a dozen that day. At least. There were probably more.”
“A dozen. That is morbid.”
“The frogs were the size of a quarter. Maybe smaller. They were everywhere. My dad, my aunt and uncle, they tried to step around them when they set up our blankets and barbecue equipment. A few frogs fell victim to their feet—squish.”
“Geez—do you need to be so graphic?”
“Sorry.”
“You know, they’ve got some other good dessert choices. We could even do cheeses.”
“Sure. Whatever. I was careful too that day. I tried stepping around them, like my aunt
and uncle and dad. At first anyway. But I got bored and built a pyramid in the mud by the water, using these plastic forms, like buckets, my aunt and uncle had given me. I built my mud masterpiece right on top of a dozen or so frogs. I buried them alive. Buried them in a pyramid like pharaohs.”

“We have a choice: two, three, or five cheeses.”
“I’m horrible, right?”
“I’m sure they were able to dig themselves out.”
“I doubt it.”
“Listen to you—still beating yourself up over the unlikely death of some tiny frogs.”
“That’s the thing, I’m not beating myself up. Not about the frogs exactly.”
“I’m thinking two’s plenty.”
“Am I a terrible person?”
“Of course not.”
“Even though I buried them and didn’t feel horrible about it?”
“Why would you have? They dug themselves out, I’m sure.”
“Maybe the heaps of mud I put on them were too much.”
“Hey, there’s our waiter.”
“I feel horrible that I didn’t feel horrible.”
“Good. He saw me.”
“I didn’t—I don’t care one way or the other.”
“Here he comes. I’d like a pecorino. And maybe a cheddar.”
“Cheese? What happened to the apple crumble?”
“I thought you didn’t care. I suppose pinot will go with the crumble. I read something interesting the other day. Did you know the pinot noir grape is like two thousand years old? A life before pinot. Can you imagine?”
“A life before pinot... What kind of wine got sealed up with the pharaohs, I wonder.”

Deborah S. Prespare
Brooklyn, New York
A Dog-Cow
Mark Bulwinkle
Linocut
Don’t Forget
for Ellen

Today’s the day you are due
to win the lottery, make a name
for yourself, find a new
friend or cheer an old one.

You will rinse flower-sprigged China
from your grandmother in hot suds,
and, while pulling weeds, see
one yellow leaf twirl down
onto the grey concrete.

You’ll probably hear that woodpecker,
tapping like a jeweler, precise and delicate,
into the rotting white column that holds up
your front porch roof, as well as those
unpredictable, ethereal tones drifting
from your rust-spotted windchimes.

Maybe you will breathe
a little easier
knowing that you are a shifting form
ever-filling with new radiance,
that every time the calendar page
turns – look! – there it is again:
your lucky number.

Leslie Schultz
Northfield, Minnesota

Grandpa’s Love Language Is Warnings

Grey-smudged newspaper clippings
arrive in envelopes, my address
written in shaky letters, listing
which fish are highest in mercury,
telling me all the chickens have cancer, how sugar is addictive as cocaine and the caramel lodged in the roof of my mouth will lead to diabetes.

All the visits of my childhood, he kept Vitamin C tablets in a baggie in his trouser pocket, slipping me one as a treat, the chalky sweet-sour puckering, watering my mouth.

After twenty years of deep sighs and pronouncements he doesn’t have much longer to live, he lies in a hospital bed eating ice cream, wondering why it is taking him so long to die. Why his body has dragged him all the way to ninety-five. When I say, I guess it was all that healthy living, his hand pauses on its upward path and he blinks.

I hadn’t thought of that, he says, then lips the last sweet bite of vanilla off the little wooden spoon.

Katherine Lo
Anaheim, California

In the Dark Hours

Step into the stillness of this stone. Find where it has lain beside the sea or under, uncountable years of sun and stars.
In its faint grooves feel the echo of feather, fin, leaf, blade of grass, or shell cast upon its surface.

Hold it in your palm just so, your fingers curling around it. Think of bodies, their boundaries

and secret places, what ancient energy they hold and release. Sit in this stone and hear what you hear—

lightning crack of ice, whistling wings, rumble in the valley, human voices calling from the desert.

Carolyn Locke
Troy, Maine

If You Want To Be A River

You must endure ice in winter, silt in spring, plunges of naked boys in summer who swing from ropes in the Elms, the tears of lovers in fall.

Eagles and ospreys will see right through you, stones will skip across your eddies, timber and barges will burden you moving goods to markets in the ports.

On your journey, you will carve canyons. You will change—always flowing to mother-ocean.
Falling, you will be admired in the water
turning the wheel, you will grind the grain,
light the lamp. You will dance upon boulders
make mists rise, carry ashes of the departed
and wishes on floating lanterns.

John Corle
Chester Springs, Pennsylvania

The First Butterfly

Like everything that matters
it is unexpected
it was a leaf
fluttering
at the very edge of my eyeline
I turned my head, and
happily wrong
I watched as the first spring breeze was born
from the butterfly’s fluttering wings
the rich velvet red
the silence, hopeful, light
the butterfly a messenger
winter is over

For one moment I imagined how beautiful it would be
if it were to burst into flames

Steve Denehan
County Kildare, Ireland
The Final Storm

Those last few days were the same
as all the other times: well-wishes
in the hardware store, long lines
at the gas station, obliterated shelves
at the supermarket, anxious people
hauling jugs of water, neighbors feebly
joking over their beers and boarding up
windows. We were used to this sort of thing;
we all knew this was coming, us veterans
of hurricanes past. There were the usual rounds
of good byes and good lucks, inquiries as to plans—
who was staying, who going—into the traffic
of evacuees. There were last looks between lovers,
pets crated and delivered to shelters. People started
praying again. When it came, with its briny swells,
its gnashing winds, we huddled in bathrooms, walls
shuddering, roofs rattling, trees bending and groaning
in apocalyptic pounding. Those moments, watching
the seas and rivers rise, inch by inch, listening
to trunks crash and transformers blow—we knew
this came too soon, but also, that it was overdue.
We’d seen the island nations vanish, the mainland
coast dissolve, entire cities swallowed up, and bloated
corpses like peaceful fish, gliding through the streets,
and we always knew that the world would end
in waves, collecting us back to its watery womb,
betraying us, as we’d betrayed it. All of this,
we’d expected long ago, and as that last storm hit,
we embraced our children, asking their forgiveness,
before going under together, forever.

Lauren Tivey
St. Augustine, Florida

Essence

I cannot say whose hands
crafted this carving of a horse—
who shaped upraised leg,
nostrils' flare, black mane,
who smoothed the wood grain like muscle
beneath curve of shoulder, rounded belly

legs too long, neck too thin
and yet the carving
conjures thoughts
of a brawny Belgian gelding
that lived on the farm next door
and rent-a-horses at a nearby stable
the day my dad and I
rode among the autumn leaves

despite the piece's flaws
its maker had it right, after all,
shaping, in his essence of horse-ness,
a spur for memory

Lisa Timpf
Simcoe, Ontario

The Honey Thief

For each of the Labor Days I knew him,
he'd gift me a mason jar of smoky amber:
honey from the two small hives he tended.

I never asked him, a policeman by trade,
which was his vocation, which avocation--
if his hobby was pursuing bees,
each in their brown and orange striped jackets,
leaving their cells behind each morning
like prisoners out on work release,
or if the blue uniform and utility belt
was just a money-making diversion
designed to fund the white gloves and veil.

And I never asked whether he felt guilt
or satisfaction when he’d cross that line
and become the brazen thief, face concealed,

who’d break into their homes in broad daylight,
brandishing the hot metal of a smoker
to make off with a summer’s worth of work.

Kevin Casey
Dover-Foxcroft, Maine

Playing it Safe

_Do you have anything of your Dad’s?_ my wife asked
out of nowhere one afternoon.

“Nothing I can think of offhand. Why?”

_Oh, I’m going to see a medium later tonight
and thought you might want me to try to contact him._

Now, I’m not one to give much credence
to the spirit world, though I’ve tried for years
to harness universal Chi to ameliorate my MS.
But mediums are too much of a stretch for me.

First of all, Reform Jews are, at best, dubious of the whole
afterlife thing. So if Dad’s going to send me a message,
he must have had a deathbed conversion, which is unlikely
since I was with him when he drew his last breath.
Secondly, he might communicate something only I would know about, blasting my long-held atheist beliefs into smithereens and leaving me adrift as I approach my eighth decade on this spinning ball of crusted rock.

Thirdly, he might simply say, *See you soon.*

That’s some fatherly foresight I’d rather not hear – just like always.

Rick Blum  
Bedford, Massachusetts  

My Rightful Place

Most often, I am the in-law who quietly stands to the side looking bemused, while listening to all the criss-crossing chatter coming from the family room.

But every once in a while I will hear someone say something so foolish and quite contrary to my way of thinking, spurring me on to the treasonous words

I can’t take back, because heads are turning with venomous stares until I am banished…to sit in the basement or the backyard with all the screaming little kids, where, I suppose, I must briefly serve my penance, until common
sense prevails and I am allowed
to return to my rightful place
as the strange uncle, off to the side.

Dave Dickson
Wixom, Michigan

Live And Let Die
“I lie here and plot the agony of resurrection.”
from “Antrim,” Robinson Jeffers

It’s what the dead do.

They conjure up plans to break the hard surface
and walk again
among the breathers, the bright sky,

the sheep on the hillside grass.
They want to hear the wren’s

song, feel the rain pouring down
on their faces, smell bacon frying in the pan,
but it takes them centuries

to move a finger a quarter inch underground
or wiggle a toe in wet sand.

It’s easy to imagine
the agony, the desire unfulfilled,
as they lie down there,

the concept of resurrection
crumbling like roadkill
on some random highway. It’s not

going to happen. In the cold darkness,
silence feasts on their quiet dreams.

David James
Linden, Michigan
Toad

Essence of other.
By streetlight, a clump of mottled clay,
scentless and rock still
to the dog. Night dweller,
mud bather, rain seeker,
rough skinned second
cousin twice disowned;
potent charm no more.
Stork prey, and heron.
For some, mere quack food,
for others, poison (not).
To the hound, just now,
a thing almost not there--
which is a kind
of contempt; which is
a kind of blessing,
this state of being
almost stone, this leaping
into the shadows,
this digging deeper
into the earth
when trouble nears.

Nick Conrad
Sylvania, Ohio

The Fall

The pine bent in the wind until
it could bend
no more and broke
instead, toward the house, its tip just denting the gutter, its root-ball turned up toward the turbulent sky. Then it was quiet, resting on the grass, seeing the world anew, even as it died, the air braking around it, the earth finally taking it back.

Vivian Wagner
New Concord, Ohio

Disturbance

Police tape, gold as aspen floats through a labyrinth of lesser autumn leaves, web of branches framing a wrecked truck punctuated with bullet holes.

Why the driver had to be shot is not yet clear and why he could not bring himself to stop is an even
greater mystery
than the heavy, grey clouds
in the east

the dry fountain next
to the place where he died

tire tracks, unreadable
hieroglyphs of bark
and turf thrown up
on the sidewalk

burning bush still
burning in a deeper
degree of dark

and always, this time of year
crows beginning to move
back into the trees.

Robert Tremmel
Ankeny, Iowa

Jesse Jackson, 04/04/2018

Jesse Jackson
shuffled away
from the podium
on the balcony
of the Lorraine Motel
and waited
for the roar
of the crowd
to fade into the wind.
Then,
after his entourage
had retreated,
he turned
and looked back
at the spot
in front of Room 306
where Martin had died
fifty years before,
knowing he might not live
to see it again
and not sure
if he wanted to.

Jude Dippold
Concrete, Washington

Her Names

Names radiate from her like breath,
as if she gives life to every plant,
even the Spanish moss in the highest
limbs of southern pine and the azalea
seedlings along her front walk,
it's slabs cracked and pitched
every which way like a pile
of brittle magnolia leaves.

In the sweat stained afternoon
we meet halfway up Oakdale Avenue,
her tall strides closing the gap between us
until we join, halves of the same seed,
while spring explodes around
us, tulip trees, dogwood, and cherry
blossoms burning red and pink,
petals clinging to her hair
as it flows and bounces in long yellow clusters like wild forsythia.

In the evening we eat nothing but flowers and drink Folonari wine, always on sale in half-gallon bottles, and we toast all things that escape her naming, and she names them then, some forgetting their names, as we finally forget ours, drunk with the thick perfume of May, faces flush, new sap rising.

Terry Tierney
Oakland, California

As My Mother Wakes From Anesthesia

They kept coming out, she says, as if gently surprised.
All these patterns, black and white and red.

Her mottled fingers beckon me close. Amid shining down-turned faces, she saw a river breathe,

fir trees held steady, as stars turned into black moths, dancing. 
At night when I can’t sleep, she says, I wait for what comes next.

Richard Widerkehr
Bellingham Washington
Mental Anguish

A son and his father emerge from a sleek sedan. As the father wrestles a backpack and violin case from the backseat, the son waits alongside the car and talks with relish about superheroes and bad guys and a video game with rules the father finds exasperating.

“I thought you could get mental anguish from all of the villains,” the son says, continuing the filibuster he launched during the car ride. “But you can’t. Only Modok can give it to you.”

The father hands the backpack to his son, who secures it over his shoulders. They walk through the parking lot to a sidewalk and head toward the son’s school, the father carrying the violin. The father tries to think of a way to show interest and keep his son talking, as he’s been told he must do more often. The son is so much different than the father was when he was young, and it’s baffling sometimes the work that it takes just to have a conversation.

“But you said they can all give you mental scarring, right?” the father asks, remembering some vague kernel from the morning’s drive. “All of the villains can?”

The son nods brightly as they step onto the sidewalk, clearly pleased at a sign of interest. “Right. But only Modok can do mental anguish.”

The father thinks he must remember the power he has to please his son. He shouldn’t forget this time.

The son seems poised to say something more when an older boy catches up to them and passes them, lightly brushing the son’s shoulder as he walks toward the school. The son’s gait slows, grows hesitant. He adjusts his backpack straps and says nothing.

The father realizes he remembers this Modok character. The son showed him a picture once, but he was distracted at the time and didn’t respond with much more than a shrug and a murmur. A creepy, ridiculous figure who was mostly just a massive head.

The father chuckles, processing everything he’s been told. “All Modok really needs to do to give you mental anguish is to show you his face,” he says. “Heh? Because he’s so ugly. Am I right?”

The father looks at his son, expecting a wide grin but instead finding only a grimace. His son’s eyes are alert and searching ahead to two kids nonchalantly chatting and laughing. The father and son will catch up to these boys soon. The son seems acutely aware of their proximity.

“Can we just walk?” the son says. “We don’t have to talk anymore.”

Thomas Gresham
Richmond, Virginia
The Moon, It Beckons

Someone said the fields were blue
where the moon had gone to ground.
Someone with drink on their breath
said the fields outside of town
were whited over in early frost.
We few went out to hear the stars complain
about their order and their magnitude.
We passed a last cigarette around,
our talk punctuated by laughter,
our breaths like webbing in the moonset.
Someone said something that stopped us dead,
each of us lost in our own thoughts awhile.
Only then we heard the rippling creekwater
and the cry of the high night overhead.

Bruce McRae
Salt Spring Island, British Columbia

Common Teasel
(Dipsacus Fullonum)

Consider you are a stout tap-rooted biennial
and at six feet you consider yourself
both dapper and elegant
Your spiny heads throw up several arms
perhaps in alarm
Your friends and family share your concern
A tangle you have become
It is the autumnal beheading you fear
Silvered or gilded
you will make a crisp winter bouquet

Charles Wyatt
Nashville, Tennessee

Turbines

You make me watch you,
turning your metallic
cartwheels in the sky,
your monstrous arms
spin through the air,
chopping up the mountain view
in whirling machinery.

They say we need you.
And I want to want you,
as you capture
the power of the wind
in your hands.

Yet I long for the earth
to be earth,
these mountains to
remain mountains,
and the birds who
lose their lives
in your manmade wings,
to fly again.

Michelle Wiegers
Bennington, Vermont
Old Fish

My father can no longer write out checks. So I stop over every couple weeks and take care of the bills. He added me to the checking account after Mom died. Before his glaucoma got too bad.

So last week I’m sitting at his kitchen table, nursing the nasty cup of coffee he always insists I have while I’m there—he refuses to make anything but instant—and when I remark how the gas bill is not as bad as I thought it would be, given the record-breaking cold, my father launches into this story about his best buddy from Detroit, a guy named Fred Fisher, who everyone called “Fish.” It was back in the day, Dad said, when there was still fish in the Rouge River. And old Fish liked to fish as much as Dad did. He told me how they’d play hooky from school and take their bamboo poles—like some kind of Andy Griffith show—and spend the day angling for panfish or carp or bullheads. In those days fish was fish. They didn’t care for trophies when it came to fishing in those days—no fancy trout or salmon. This was long before the Coho were introduced into the big lakes, before his dad—your grandfather, he said—moved the family North, though he could still recall the first time he saw shoreline heaped with dead alewives . . . and not even worth cat food.

Most boys had some kind of job then, Dad said—after school or on weekends—and Fred Fisher collected ash. Dad would help. They’d go door-to-door down the block, begging neighbors for ashcans, which Fish would empty into a wheelbarrow and haul over to the ash man, who paid something like two cents a load. The ash man trucked the stuff out to a farm or nursery or somewhere, maybe in Southfield or Livonia. It was a good job, Dad said. Dirty, but quite profitable. Five cents went a long way in those days.

He was a funny kid, Dad said, old Fish. Reddish hair, freckles. Kind of like Howdy Doody. Smart, but not too keen on school. He’d rather go fishing or collect ash. Some days they’d make five or six trips out to the ash man’s place.

People burned coal in those days. That’s where the ash
came from. A coal truck would grumble down the street every so often and fill everyone’s chute—everyone who could afford it. The price of coal was high, Dad said, so he and Fish would sometimes sneak over to the rail yard and fill a few burlap bags with coal to give it to the neighbors, so they would have something to burn . . . something to make ash with.

It was about then that the gas line got laid, Dad said. He pointed to the bill I was holding. Gas was cheap and plentiful and was supposed to be better than coal, but you also didn’t have much say in the matter. When everybody on your block got gas, you got gas too. It put the ash man out of business, it put Fish out of business. My father became a newsboy after that. Fish went to work for the gas company.

Ah, I said, an opportunist. Then I filled out a check for $76.21, signed it, and made sure the address on the invoice would be visible when I put it in the envelope. Dad said nothing—just sat there—as I wrote out a check to Ameritech for his phone. And one to the city for water and sewer.

There, I said. All utilities are paid. Then I thanked him for the coffee—though I’d dumped the better part of it in the sink—and said I would see him in a few days.

He’d just turned fourteen, Dad said, as I was hunching into my coat. Old Fish—asphyxiated, working gas lines on the west side. Some say he was stealing the gas, said my father, but it don’t much matter now. He’s dead at fourteen either way.

Either way, I repeated, we’ll pay the rent next time. And if you still want it, I’ll renew your subscription to Field and Stream as well.

It was the least I could do.

Phillip Sterling
Lowell, Michigan
Nordic Jesus

Once, and I’m not saying how, like a fly in winter
I ended up at a Catholic women’s retreat
watching a woman with heavy make-up
and fierce intensity focus a small spotlight
on a life-like print of the perfect Nordic Jesus
with chiseled, movie star features, long flowing auburn hair, blue eyes, sensuous lips
and a neatly trimmed beard.

A few years later, I saw this same woman at a restaurant
and there she told me with the same fierce intensity that she prays for me each day
but can’t remember why

and deep inside a small part of me that some might have a name for knows she is telling the truth
and believes her prayers are being answered.

Robert Tremmel
Ankeny, Iowa
The Price

Snow gathers on the antler-branches. A few brave cars carve twin tracks on blacktop still hoarding its heat. I want to go back to sleep, stop thinking about my mother rolled out of surgery, wondering how much pain she's in, if she's calling out my name. And whether or not my husband's plane will be late tonight, will stay in the sky and skid safely to a halt on tarmac free of black ice. It is the price of love—this worry that fills the ravaged yard, piling quite silently against my life no matter how warm I keep the house, how much salt I spread around it.

James Crews
Shaftsbury, Vermont

Willy-Nilly

Inserting some fresh dollar bill, You punch the proper button for A candy bar, which moves until It stops, hung up, and moves no more.

You wait for what may happen yet, Just as you have with parenthood: You paid for what you may not get, For reasons never understood.

Jane Blanchard
Augusta, Georgia
Shadow Streams to Life
Denny Marshall
*Drawing*
INSIDE/OUT LITERARY ARTS PROJECT FEATURE

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The Project is supported by gifts of corporations and people who hope to light the creative spark in our youth. Readers of Third Wednesday who see the fire burning in these young poets can help with donations sent to:

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InsideOut places professional writers and poets in Detroit schools to help children give voice to their often turbulent lives through poetry and writing. Since 1995, the organization has served tens of thousands of Detroit students grades K-12 in over 100 different schools. This year they are serving 27 different schools.

InsideOut works with a variety of schools, partner organizations, and artists to help inner-city schoolchildren find their inner voices with which to express themselves and share their stories, which they then do at performances and events presented by InsideOut.
Alternate Names for Damarion

(after Danez Smith)

1. Brilliant shadow
2. Monster under the bed
3. The night ended before it's time
4. Crow with one wing
5. The people lost in the darkness
6. Unlit gunpowder
7. Smoke
8. An unrooted tree

Damarion Walker

A Gun Did Not Write This Poem

A gun that kills
the morning blue sky.

A gun with no voice.
A gun that silences.

A pencil that speaks what it
has to say.

A pencil with words.
A gun of the night sky.

Ja’lisa Taylor
Stuff I'm Tired Of

I'm tired of being bounced
said the ball to the hand.

I'm tired of being slept on
said the bed to the human.

I'm tired of being called cup
of Joe said the coffee to Joe.

Deante Walker

I Praise

I praise the night like a closing door.
I praise the day which is like a fire.
I praise my game like a line going up and down.
I praise my bed like the sky opening.
I praise my mom who is a light
that comes when you're up or down.
I praise my dad who is a bird
flying over you to see if you're doing right.

Shon Young

The Time Is Now

The time is now
to acknowledge your knowledge.
The time is right to sing.
The time is now to let your voice
be heard. The time is right
to write. The time is now
to speak what you believe in.
The time is right to seek a path.
The time is now to seek and follow
your dreams. The time is now
for laughter.

Teanna Evans
I Am from America

The place that has golden leaves.
Oh please, it's just make believes.

Ah, duh, just do the same thing, make believe
of things you can see

such as my grandpa Willie doing crazy things
Ha ha, imagine me.

Cheyenne Dalton

Seasons

When spring comes the Detroit River
connecting the worlds with a single
bridge starts to melt and the girls
come out and your skin gets darker
and the animals come back and wake
up and the days get longer
ad Belle Isle gets packed because
now it's summer. And now
the beaches get filled and
the ghetto hood rats start
coming out of the house like
bees out of a hive that
will sting you if you get
close. And now the kids out
side and little girls are jumping
ropes and the crackheads
come out and start buying dope.
And the courts get filled with
people who can't even hoop and
then it resets and starts over
like a never ending loop.

Demarion Walker
Morning Fog at Mora
Jude Dippold
Photograph
3rd Wednesday