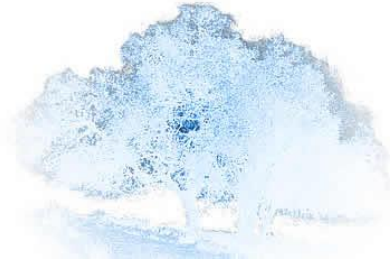


PVR 15



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# POMONA VALLEY REVIEW



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# Dear Readers

We wish we could say that 2021 has different circumstances than 2020; it does not. COVID-19 is still spreading as of August when this issue is released, despite the hope of a vaccine being introduced. Black Lives Matter is still crying out for justice to the silence of those in positions of authority and within our government. Workers are still being heavily exploited with pay staying stagnant and inflation rates rising, the cost of food rising, and the cost of rent rising all over the nation.

*PVR 15* is a reflection of this unrest, uncertainty, isolation, and fear. But within these pages is also a measure of hope: where there is love lost, there is love gained. Where there is isolation, there is connection to family and stronger bonds being formed in friendships. Where there is death, there is mourning and appreciation for what was had.

The issue opens with a poem called “Window” that reflects upon our time at home and is followed by the poem “Show Me How to

Reconnect” – which is the command this entire issue is trying to accomplish.

How do we reconnect to ourselves, to our experiences during and after 2020, to our communities, to our families, to those we loved, to those we stopped loving, and to those we lost?

The answers come in the way of our submissions. For some, it’s recognizing that we’re still here and able to create poetry, stories, and art. For others, it’s looking at and breaking down the systems that exploit and alienate us – capitalism and racism, for example, are critiqued heavily within these pages. Some people find reconnection through sharing memories from childhood and remembering brighter, happier times.

We do not know if this issue contains a sufficient answer for all on how to reconnect, but it tries. With all of that said, we’d like to invite you to enjoy *PVR 15*.

The Editors  
***PVR***

## WINDOWS

is my world an illusion through boarded up windows?  
shut closed. impervious to light.

STAY. HOME.

is it an illusion that the windows are gone?

*what is in a window?*

*a glass barrier between me and my reality?*

*a bridge from my life that can be drawn?*

what if a window had another side:

a reflection that could not be affected

that refused to be boarded,

like my words will not be silenced?

i write.

sending my words out the window, like a caged dove set free,

to sing.

a mirror transcribes my reflection a thousand times,

each time an illusion.

cardboard: is after all, thick, pressed pulp,

standing between a windowpane and the world,

a stoic sentinel, seizing light, or

metamorphosing into soft, fragile leaves, the happy deliverers of

belles-lettres,

*Reading Lolita in Tehran,*

or delivering dancing notes

to create light.

my music is not stopped by boarded windows.

the sounds of the world intertwine with mine,

*free*

like the birds singing outside.

i can see a thousand windows, spiraling reflections,

in the mirror.

~ Sarah Caballero

## SHOW ME HOW TO RECONNECT

No demons found behind trees,  
nor on curtains thick and dark.  
Nothing found within any shadows.  
So where and how did it all go wrong?

The world has shut itself off,  
no longer able to offer a song,  
but only the rot of once securely linked ropes.

Advancing, all becomes subdued from within.  
The disassembly of fairy tales,  
and least remembered dreams,  
making us indifferent to the memory of things long enjoyed.

I continue to seek input  
on how to reconnect all things.  
Show me how.

*~ Linda Imbler*



## BARELY, GOODNIGHT

We walked through Giant Eagle hungry  
as hell after work wondering what  
we could afford to eat. Mom left avocados  
just past ripe at our house on her way to  
Myrtle Beach and we knew we had to cut  
their soft skins tonight or never. Food is no  
good in the garbage. Privilege has steeped  
itself into me in ways I am not proud of. We  
want what we want which sometimes means  
we want beyond our means. We use one  
checking account to deposit our tips and  
want to eat out if we can't eat chips with dip  
at the moment but stop ourselves to remember  
we have free food, and at the moment it's true.  
The stomach also wants what the heart wants,  
to be fed like an ATM– someone's unlimited  
money.

*~ Jen McClellan*



*"Pond" ~ Doina Ciobanu*

## TWISTED

Little ragged doll tossed in the corner tangled  
Knowing not how to speak of things unknown  
Entwined little arms and legs, eyes crossed and then  
She tries to visualize and focus anyway  
Looking for home  
Surely, this cannot be the place she dwells  
This dirty crook, where ashes smudged  
On her arms and face  
So many blind spots in her vision  
So many things she can no longer see  
So many missing colors from her wrong decisions  
Basing life on heartbeats that skip too easily  
Muted from dirty fishing line sewn into her lips  
Head of fluffy scattered matter stuffed  
So soft and dangling cannot move to walk  
Curled and frayed from use she curses the floor  
Pinned

*~ Jan Niebrzydowski*

## CEREBRAL CASUALTIES

What causes a brain to go awry?  
Is it warped wiring or corroded chemistry?  
Or do connections simply break down and die?

I've tried tracing, in my own mind  
What it must look like in my mother's  
I see sparks shooting from severed lines  
I see rusty gears whining and grinding  
I see the slow dimming and flickering  
Of lights fighting their demise  
Straining, struggling to stay alight

I don't know how to fix these things  
These broken and blinking networks  
Yet I feel their impact just the same  
And they demand that I appease them  
Maybe if I do exactly what I'm told  
Or say precisely the right thing  
This disintegration will cease

What more can I do?  
How long can I do this?  
Will this fate be my own?

*~ Kat Gerber*

## Tournesol Single

What would you *sacrifice* to survive a wound? An arm/a breast/three children born & raised? How about spring? Those trips you take to Florida, Disney, eight months pregnant with your daughter? Lounging by the pool like a beached whale, while your son learns to swim in the hotel/pool? Those toddler eyes, brown, smiling up at you?

*Trust.* I am fifteen when my own mother leaves, choosing drink & men over me. In a dream, she is no longer missing. She is a Marigold seeking out the sun. Watch as I nurture the ground so carefully that she doesn't notice my hands like honeybees. There are so many ways to be beautiful. I am the blues/on repeat/a cool deep/stream. The flames of *abandonment*

over my head. I am awake in the middle of the night. On the other side of the window, moonlight reflecting off rocks & leafless trees, a Sisyphean effort to make something out of nothing. *Estrangement* has long feasted on rafters & sky. I do what my mother would do when the temperatures climb. I lift my children up over my head, into the muffled winds of fall.

*Freedom.* They are never coming home. I failed to notice their growing confusion, first my youngest, daughter, then my son. My middle child, no longer misses me but has inherited my reputation for *setting fires*. All our histories have burned in the last decade. I know how the heart breaks every morning. Mother is a prayer inscribed on the tongue.

~ *Sheree La Puma*



*"Pure" ~ Fabrice Poussin*



## BUT YOU'RE PASSING

I am black  
I am white  
I am mixed  
I am me

My father is black of African American descent. My mother is white of Italian descent. It could not get any more simplistic.

Fair skin, freckles, green eyes.  
Ambiguous.

A conversation hardly begins with, "Hi, nice to meet you," it's often, "You gotta be mixed!" It is increasingly uncomfortable when it comes from white counterparts. I then always reply with, "Yes, I am mixed with black," I say while forcing laughter and eye contact. It always ends with a racist remark regarding my complexion or something more along the lines of, "You got lucky with such beautiful light skin." Why am I lucky? Why does light skin coincide with beautiful in their mind? It is such an uncomfortable thing to endure. It is appalling.

White n\*\*\*er, albino gorilla, a whitewash negro, house n\*\*\*er, mulatto.

I have never been physically harassed by people for my races--and that is where it is where the difference lies. That is where some of my privileges are held. I get called names, but I am still acceptable to the media. My complexion, "comforts," the white folks.

I am black  
I am white  
I am mixed  
I am me

At age 15 I was getting severely bullied. This eventually leads to me being admitted to a mental institute for several suicide attempts. I tried to drown myself and overdose on over the counter medication. That year in particular I moved twice within one school year. I went from North Carolina, after moving from Buffalo to moving back to Buffalo--which is where I am originally from. I attended a public

school in Raleigh, North Carolina for the first semester of school then one in Orchard Park, New York. The second semester at Orchard Park was a living hell. Boys would call me names and try to touch me when I walked by.

Prude. Bitch. Slut. Ugly. Fat. Mulatto Bitch. Wigger.

The school had one token black student. Kids wore their Trump hats to school and the teachers would allow it. I would get into trouble for debating with them, I was always the odd one out. Which made it seem like I was wrong for disliking Trump due to me being the only one in the room that does not. Just like when I was in elementary school, my hair would be pulled by boys. They felt uncomfortable with my hair in an afro. My hair had to be tamed--the school could not allow such hair. This all lead to my suicide attempts. After my failed attempts, I was placed on Lexapro and sent to a private school in Buffalo. There were more black students than white--which I found comforting but turns out black people did not accept me either. I had struggled with harassment there, both verbally and sexually. I was told on many occasions that people do not like me because I claimed my blackness. People would write on the bathroom walls in dry erase markers calling me names, I got asked out on a few occasions as a joke, and I would get into fights – some I had wished escalated to physical. Black people did not “claim” me and a small number of white people would get upset that I claimed my blackness.

I am black

I am white

I am mixed

I am me

White people are usually the ones that can not tell...Or maybe they do. Maybe they do and don't care. They don't care so they are carelessly racist around me. My own family on my mother's side, of course, feels immensely comfortable saying racist things around me for some reason. The humoring thing about it is that they will not do that to my father or my sister. Both of them have color. My sister has tan skin, black hair, and black eyes--like my dad. My mom, if I did not mention it, is the same, minus the tan skin. In the entirety of both families, I am the odd one out. I call them out every time they speak to me in such a way and they think I am joking back. This has been happening since I was a kid. They would say racial things to me to the point I would cry. Why is it so normalized? Is it because I am so light? They feel comfortable to be racist around me because they are around their immediate

families. It is not just my mother's side of the family. It is also people I would encounter in the place I lived in. My friends back then would take me to places--with only one black person, but they would act like the people from 'Get Out,' and the people around would say racist things. I would call them out and the common response was, "You're barely black, why do you care?" A problem within itself. Since I look barely black I guess I should be okay with racism. I am passing so what I say does not matter, right? They would tend to use the famous line, "You don't look black." as if that suddenly erases their racist remarks previously stated. It baffles me, it truly does. Many are uncomfortable with someone being black but are comfortable with someone being racist.

I am black.

I am white.

I am mixed.

I am me.

All I want is to be accepted for who I am and not have to pick a side. I want to be able to speak up on black issues without any scrutiny due to my light complexion. I will not hide a part of myself for anyone's comfort and I will not be shamed into erasing part of me for your comfort. I am tired of doing things or changing the way I look to make people comfortable.

I am black.

I am white.

I am mixed.

I am me.

*~ Bella Moulden*



*"Settlement" ~ Matthew Felix Sun*

## A LIVING AND HATEFUL SILENCE

Some days I give him the finger as I pass,  
ignoring his oil-based receding hairline,  
the one that has been at low tide  
since our twenties.

Other days, I drop my eyes,  
not seeing his weird but natural  
sun-and-dirt-stained skin on canvas pores,  
shades of non-sequitur reds and browns  
like a non-existent Cherokee ancestor  
trying to speak through our flesh.

And still other days, I embrace the silence  
lingering around his brushed on blue-eyed gaze,  
like the one dinner we shared.  
I sat on one end; he sat on the other,  
and we talked only to those whose blood  
was similarly hued. Never to each other.

White Grandfather stares at my homecoming.  
His brow, like mine, rolls forward  
over his eyes and dips deep in the center,  
frozen there, above the fireplace,  
hovering over the bricks  
covered in white, oil-based paint.  
I try to mirror his actions,  
the ones that mean the most: every day,  
for decades, pretend he doesn't exist  
and hate that red-brown skin.

*~ Christian Lozada*

## WHAT MY ARMS REMEMBER

Grief is a two-body problem.  
Dilation occurs when parallel  
lives intersect. This is how  
the world lets go.

I can't remember the boy,  
that invisible weight,  
trapped deep as soil  
that feeds me.

Yet, I remember  
the difficult extraction.

Like the aftermath of miners  
dredging for particles  
that they call god,  
a doctor scars  
the landscape.

I open my eyes to green &  
purple bruises flowering  
across skin.

This is not my son.

I hold you in my arms,  
Memorize the weight of air  
until there is nothing left  
but a dream receding  
into itself.

*~ Sheree La Puma*



## FOUR EYES

At three my brother  
bumped into furniture,  
didn't know shapes,  
struggled with colors.  
Mom and dad took  
him to the doctor  
fearing a cognitive issue,  
but it was only his eyes.

The optician prescribed glasses,  
and the thick lenses distorted his face.  
Classmates and neighbor kids  
jeered the usual cliches,  
"Four eyes, can you see  
with those coke bottles?"

Mike got contact lenses in sixth grade,  
it helped his self esteem a short while,  
but he hung out with the wrong crowd  
when he started high school--  
fighting, getting poor grades,  
smoking and drinking.

Years later he traded in the contacts  
for plastic frames and lenses.  
They weighed less  
than those old glasses,  
no more coke bottle lenses.  
He still couldn't see clearly  
still made choices  
The real distortions  
spiraled from the bottoms of  
empty liquor bottles.

~ *Frank Modica*



*"Untitled" ~ Jonathan Cenicerros (Cover Image)*

You may have leaped  
out of your creator  
accoutered in correct syllables  
and calming inflections.  
For the rest, it's a grind.

Lapidary lines aren't duck soup.  
Incubation aids the outcome.  
Never dread the domineering.  
Insecurities express themselves  
in arrogance.

When robbed of natural jewels  
all joys are under-sized.  
Equilibrium is in acquiescing:  
conscience-stricken,  
not self-condemnatory moves.

*~ Sanjeev Sethi*

## GO TO SLEEP

It's the most tragic of contradictions  
When an addict of creation creates an exponentially cancerous ruin  
The path most lost  
We best follow the yellow nothing yelling  
LOoooOooOVE rain over me  
While I skate or die and kill myself slowly anyway  
Everyday starts at 12am where me and my best worst oldest forever friend  
Go looking for the sidewalk's end  
Get lost two miles dark down the tracks  
Where the old bridge entropies  
Rusting into collapse  
Just before the hills meet and bury the most important message to carry  
Which won't ever really be lifted out of the obscurity of my memory  
I still stand still a moment in retrospectively reflective remnants though  
Under clouds on green long grass hills that rippling winds mow  
As if giant ghosts swelled upon the coasts Bellowing billowing and operatic  
sound waves  
That made the tall weeds show the same vibrational effect as a parking lot  
Full of cars as an earthquake arises  
From grinding tectonic plates  
All the hours of youth I spent wandering and wondering  
Until I knew every inch of five cities  
Better than most people even know the plan  
For the next fifteen minutes of their lives  
Give me fifty minutes four times a day with twenty five kids  
Pay me fifty stacks a year plus benefits and paid summer preparation  
Give me leave for motherhood and bereavement  
Then we'll discuss my other demands while I take your offspring by their  
hands  
And show them how to learn to erase the mistakes that would steal the  
lands  
Of literally every living being on this planet  
Riches won't save you bitches from mass extinction yo  
These are just some of the things I think before I go  
To sleep

*~ Jen McClellan*

## TIME OF YEAR

It's that time of year,

Razor blade winds  
chill school stressed skin,  
One-by-one, each hair springs  
like a geyser  
reciting the national anthem  
at a ball game.

It's that time of year,  
Coffee beans consumed in  
Guinness World Record nuns,  
Take the gold medal from Mississippi's  
Defending champion Ramon,  
6-foot Hungarian raccoon.

It's that time of year,  
According to Channel 5 news,  
Where 80% of the body's prime-time  
Caffeine levels continue  
to Wall Street levitate  
Veins to automatically implode  
And I quote,  
"We pop caffeine like Adderall!"  
through our potty mouths,  
down the esophagus,  
And out the anus!

It's that time of year,  
Sleep deprivation  
*What is that?*  
Malnourishment  
*Who fucking cares!*

It's that time of year,  
Grocery stores are rural farms,

People are livestock,  
Smothering ourselves  
in these farms filled with  
Nitrous Oxide fumes,  
Zombie insomnia from Starbucks  
sunrise to Red Bull sunset,  
With nothing to McDonald–  
Mcmuffin–Mcstuffin ingurgitate  
but paper cans, gummies,  
all lean-mean machines  
to be slaughtered by farmers  
whose assigned grades below  
USDA Prime  
Killed us all.

We want to relax,  
but it's only Monday.

*~ Christopher Mardiroussian*





*"Dream" ~ Fabrice Poussin*

## MOURN FOR THE EARTH

dangling by a string  
beneath an ink-blot sky  
arcing overheard  
all around  
silence falls

a dying world lifts its eyes to heaven  
praying for another chance  
circumstances beyond its control  
have doomed it slave to mortal man

apathy and neglect  
march across earth's form  
eons of greed  
hate  
pollution  
WAR  
scar its surface

time passes  
the blight of transgressions advance  
beyond atonement  
beyond repair

the world stands still once again  
the quiet is so deafening  
that a breath cannot be heard  
above the calm of mourning

*~ Ann Christine Tabaka*

## LEAVING THE BONES BEHIND

I saw the bones of a father  
stained as if old teeth of  
a cancer ridden chain smoker.

They placed the skeletons of a mother  
porous with the decay of child bearing  
into a cardboard box for the flames.

On the cold slab of a shortened destiny  
what remained of a gleeful child  
rested in ice cold sadness.

But nothing rivaled the dream I had  
of the gentle frame of a cherished lover  
departed with the shock of an angel.

Now I recognize in the shadow of a bleak morrow  
this odd puzzle in a darkened prison  
remnants of the home my soul once knew.

Still in the silence written upon this earth  
the limbs laugh at the irony  
for they stay at peace and the spirit is homeless.

The lamp slowly dims onto ancient fancies  
soon to be forgotten in the abysmal well  
of unfathomed space where everything meets again.

*~ Fabrice Poussin*

## BONE NET

Lament, I call your name, come to me with open hands  
Casting your net of silver tones tarnished by abundant salt  
The taste, once a mere fragmented jubilation now Niagara  
Flushing clean pure water out, the saving trickling spout  
Delicious dopamine flanked by spiraling mirrors of sun  
Ingesting architect storming with manipulative forces  
Addictive taste coveted without restraint, without balk  
Its' reaper finger relentless in its covetous slimy grasp  
Pulling into the dancing spiral that cannot be broken  
Delusions darkened light pivoting with perilous dust  
Another victim gone to ashes

*~ Jan Niebrzydowski*



*"Vigor" ~ Matthew Felix Sun*

## THE INFALLIBLE CONFIDENCE OF JOE COOL

The last time I saw Aaron Shobe was in sixth grade. He was one of the “cool” kids before any of us fully understood how important it was to be one. He was short with sandy blonde hair and wore t-shirts with Snoopy wearing sunglasses which read, “Joe Cool”. Despite his short stature, he lived for basketball -- when he wasn’t playing or watching the game, he talked about it. All of the other boys clamored around Aaron at recess, each hoping to be picked for one of his basketball games and hoped to impress him enough to be selected to sit with him during lunch. Aaron had light brown eyes that looked like they were always smoldering, and he walked with a confident strut everywhere he went, as if telling the world he was already someone important. I remember wishing I could be as cool and confident as Aaron.

Sixth grade was eight years ago, and today Aaron walked into the mini-mart where I’m working during the summer between college terms. I was stocking over-priced chips on the rack in front of the soda cooler when the sing-song of the door sensor sounded, and I turned to see him enter through the door. I recognized him immediately -- he had the same strut, the same smoldering eyes. He was older and taller, of course, and his hair was longer than what he’d had in sixth grade, but it was unmistakably Aaron. I noticed that a Lakers jersey had replaced Snoopy as I wondered if he would remember me. I had moved to another town right after sixth grade had ended and hadn’t seen any of my old friends since.

Aaron strutted directly to the soda fountain, folding the pair of sunglasses he’d been wearing into the collar of his jersey as he walked. He didn’t notice that I was standing less than five feet from him since he was intently focused on making his selection. Aaron jutted his lower lip out and blew a puff of air to blow his dangling bangs out of his face before grabbing a large cup from its holder. After filling his cup with Pepsi, he strode over to the cookie aisle, like a man on a mission, and snatched up a snack pack of Oreos. He appeared to be in a hurry because he made a beeline for the register as soon as he grabbed the cookies.

I placed a bag of Doritos on the shelf and jogged to the register. I suddenly felt nervous. Should I say anything? Pretend I don’t know him? I fidgeted with some inventory forms sitting by the register to avoid looking at Aaron while contemplating my options.



Placing his items on the counter, Aaron stared at me and tilted his head as I shuffled my papers. His eyes narrowed before asking, “You’re Emily Randall, aren’t you?”

“Hi, Aaron. I wasn’t sure if you’d remember me,” I replied sheepishly. I set the paperwork aside and finally looked up to meet his smoldering eyes.

“Of course I remember you!” he said. “You beat me in the spelling bee. Remember? In sixth grade?”

I laughed. How could I forget? I told him the spelling bee had been one of the highlights of the sixth grade for me. I had placed second in the finals.

“I’ll never forget it,” he said. Aaron’s eyes seemed distant, as though he weren’t looking at me but rather back to that time and place.

“I misspelled ‘accommodate,’ and you spelled it right. I didn’t get to go on to the finals because of that,” Aaron said, shaking his head as if he still couldn’t believe his misfortune from so long ago.

“I’ve never gotten over that,” he said softly. He shifted uncomfortably, looking down as he fidgeted with the packaging of the Oreos on the counter.

I was stunned and didn’t know what to say. I did not remember bumping him out of the spelling bee. I couldn’t even remember Aaron being part of the competition. How was it that he remembered this particular moment so vividly, and I couldn’t recall a second of it? I silently wondered if he harbored animosity towards me after all these years. He must have sensed it.

“Don’t worry,” he reassured me, “I wasn’t mad at you. I just felt dumb. I didn’t even know what ‘accommodate’ meant, which made it worse. I spent a long time after that thinking I was just stupid. I even get a little flashback every time I hear that word now.” His mood still seemed solemn.

Then, as though clouds had suddenly parted, he looked at me and smiled.

“I know what it means now, though!” he said, laughing. His mood had shifted, and he was back to being the confident Aaron I had always known.

We made small talk as I rang up his purchase. Aaron shared what a few of our old classmates were up to as he paid for his items. He said

he had to run and smiled genuinely when he said it had been good to see me and told me to take care of myself.

I watched him as he left, walking with that same confident strut he had always had. As he opened the door, he pulled the sunglasses from his shirt collar and put them on with a flair I can only describe as suavely self-assured. I stood at the register for a moment, ruminating over the conversation I'd just had with Aaron Shobe, the most confident kid I had ever known. Then I walked over to the pantry aisle and began straightening the boxes of rice and instant potatoes on the shelf, wondering which of the memories I had burned in my brain had been long forgotten by someone else.

*~ Kat Gerber*



*"Cold Mountain" ~ Matthew Felix Sun*

## BLACK LONELY WITH GREY LIQUID HOLES

Squandering oxygenated morsels of bread  
Gaze askance from truth's saving mirror  
Forward stepping into the drowning gorge  
Light vacuumed into tiny eyelets of mesh  
Descending without knowledge, hands dangling  
Existing in the culminating rapture of the dark  
As one foot lifts its ashen residence and shakes  
The other slips hypnotically into the all-seeing grey pool  
Come, you have resided here before, I beseech you to stay  
And stay I must, the silver mist has cast its shadow  
Covering all with velvet seductive hand and sliced eye  
Comforting now in its blanket of opaque, its sweet victory  
Looking up in foggy light, drifting limply from above  
Fresh captors falling, some flailing—some listless still fall  
Into the grey liquid holes that bind us to each other  
Escape a dirty, wondrous, impossible word

*~ Jan Niebrzydowski*

## POETRY

Poetry may be the only place I place truth  
At one am between the sounds of cats scurrying and street race screechings  
I lay down coded confessions to be future teachings  
Sometimes I think I need time to myself  
A cup of coffee and a cigarette alone later  
I have to ride around the block  
Cause I don't like the things that I thought  
Why do I want to be wandering  
A lonely ghastly lighted silhouette fading  
Floating slowly smoothly  
Into the fold of the night  
I think I might  
Be addicted to the twinkling light  
Of a far off star or planetary pulsing  
That Mars red  
Come at me Venus  
And if I very narrowly slip skate down another unlit alleyway  
My wheels might come around to spin a frown down up  
Hup. I'm coming smiling off my cup and sippin water cuz it is life and if it's  
alright I think I might turn this tone into a sound that sounds a little more  
like Sunday morning  
Good glory  
I'm gracious for all the parks in LA  
And the places I can take my son off to his races  
Childhood is so spacious  
I float on  
It's just contagious  
So elatious  
Don't watch, just join in, come on and chase us  
Over grassy hills we roll  
Let go of control  
You never had it anyways  
Other lies for other days  
Today what say we give away give away  
All the best things we could hope for to pray  
Pay it forward on a puff of tobacco  
And eh...  
Here comes some silence  
Followed by whatever the next person has to say

*~ Jen McClellan*

## THE REDEMPTION

My eyes green  
are 2 glass windows  
into the past.  
I keep the blinds  
pulled down tight.  
Carnal knowledge  
is a Biblical definition of sin.  
I live in darkness,  
the shame of those early years.  
I pull myself out  
redemption in old age,  
a savior,  
before the grave,  
I flatter myself  
in a mirror, no reflection.

*~ Michael Lee Johnson*

I own a gate to this prairie  
that ends facing the Rocky Mountains.  
They call it Alberta-  
trails of endless blue sky  
asylum of endless winters,  
the hermitage of indolent retracted sun.  
Deep freeze drips haphazardly into spring.  
Drumheller, dinosaur badlands, dried bones,  
ancient hoodoos sculpt high, prairie toadstools.  
Alberta highway 2 opens the gateway of endless miles.  
Travel weary, I stop by roadsides, ears open to whispering pines.  
In harmony North to South  
Gordon Lightfoot pitches out a tune-  
"Alberta Bound."  
With independence in my veins,  
I am a long way from my home.

*~ Michael Lee Johnson*



## TINY SPARROW FEET

It's calm.  
Cheeky, unexpected.  
Too quiet.  
My clear plastic bowls  
serves as my bird feeder.  
I don't hear the distant  
scratching, shuffling  
of tiny sparrow feet,  
the wing dances, fluttering, of a hungry  
morning's lack of big band sounds.  
I walk tentatively to my patio window,  
spy the balcony with my detective's eyes.  
I witness three newly hatched  
toddler sparrows, curved nails, mounted  
deep, in their mother's dead, decaying back.  
Their childish beaks bent over elongated,  
delicately, into golden chips, and dusted yellow corn.

*~ Michael Lee Johnson*

## BEACH BOYS, DANCE

They dance and drum to their songs.  
Boogaloo Boys, Beach Boys, still band members die.  
Revolts and rebellion always end in peace, left for the living.  
Even the smoking voice of Carl Wilson dies  
with a canary inside his cancerous throat called "Darlin."  
Dennis Wilson, hitchhiking, panhandling with the devil Charles Manson,  
toying with heroin, he's just too much trouble to live.  
Check their history of the living and the dead;  
you will find them there, minor parts and pieces  
musical notes stuck in stone wall cracks,  
imbibe alcohol, cocaine.  
Names fade, urns toss to sea  
dump all lives brief memories,  
bingo, no jackpot.

*~ Michael Lee Johnson*



*"Distant Memory" ~ Matthew Felix Sun*

## NOSTALGIA PART I

Bite an apple and see the grove caught in sunlight  
and the leaves tickling your cheek  
Tiny shouts of joy at the hiding,  
waiting, excitement pushing pushing until you squeal  
A hand strikes out grabbing your stained yellow shirt  
You're it  
The laughing the running the tumbling in the grass  
This moment is all you know and all you will know for now  
It's warm and you're stomach is full and  
you catch your sister's smile  
and shine one back

~ *Stephanie Weiner*

## NOSTALGIA PART III

You see children riding their bikes and  
suddenly you are riding your old bike when you were nine  
You trail your brothers as they holler for you to catch up  
Whizzing past the neighbor's little box houses  
you smell different dinners  
Lasagna, hamburgers, pot roasts  
You fly past your brothers and crow in triumph  
Skid into the driveway and hop up the steps  
Mom and Dad call from the kitchen  
Time to eat

~ *Stephanie Weiner*

## NOSTALGIA PART VIII

Running in the field and come upon a swing set  
It's rusted but you climb on with your brother anyway  
How high can you fly?  
Shouting your favorite words into the sky  
bubblegum, pirate, heart, lizard  
You and he scream because it's higher than you've ever been  
The laughter ringing out and the joy hurting a little;  
There is not enough space for it  
but room is made anyway

*~ Stephanie Weiner*



*"Gift" ~ Fabrice Poussin*



## THINGS I LEARNED FROM READING OUI

Heart and tongue are the toughest muscles. They cannot be tamed with Adolph's. Massage is needed in order to tenderize them. And then as quick as possible to the cutting board, sliced thin, sautéed with garlic, leek, asafoetida, served over a bed of cellophane noodles laced with rose petals, wedding soup on the side.

Don't shoot speed. Snort it!

The floorboards in the abandoned barn next door are rotted out. When you scout it for a possible horror movie shoot, nosy locals will accost you, chase you out even if you have all the necessary permits.

The only way to feel the noise is when it's good and loud.

The rumor that Jim Morrison tied off onstage (with a microphone cord, no less) is false. That was Iggy. Morrison was arrested in Florida for whipping out a sword, which he then drove through his skull during a performance of "Alabama Song". He was charged with performance of a piece referencing Alabama and possession of an unlicensed reptile.

When one is out of K-Y jelly, motor oil is an acceptable substitute.

Vampires roamed the camps, preyed  
on the work details. But soon there was  
no one strong enough for them to feed  
on, so like everyone else they turned  
to turnip greens. They could be told  
from normal prisoners because they  
never ran out of black eyeliner.

*~ Robert Beveridge*

## THE SMELL OF COATS

the roads are flooding.  
water out of storm drains,  
rising like grass  
in the spring  
in good weather.

on the bus  
I watch, warm  
in the smell of wet coats,  
as the wheel-wells strike puddles  
and drench  
wet pedestrians.

out in clontarf  
my aunt has laid sandbags.  
her house always safe,  
but quite close to the coastline  
she is taking  
no chances. perhaps that is why  
she is safe. overhead  
trees have their leaves  
stripped with the pressure of water.  
the birds are all anxious; aren't  
all ducks.

I walk from the bus-stop,  
my bag gone to pieces.  
shopping out everywhere  
and onto my shoes. rain spots my forehead  
as I gather the plastic  
like ants and the freckles  
of dandruff.

~ *D.S. Maolalai*

## SACRED CHILD

During the service today you drew a unicorn on the back page  
of the church bulletin in a field reserved for Sermon Notes.

You used every crayon to color its coat  
in resplendent hues to pale Joseph's.

Its lengthy mane cascaded downward  
more magically than Samson's,

and you vaulted it upon stick legs across the paper,  
its horn aglow brighter than any seraphim's sword.

Upon completion, the pegasus arced  
a perfect rainbow over the Crayola-blue sky,

serving as reminder of God's own covenant  
with hopeless clods like me.

I sought my own vision of the miraculous at work in you—  
for wings to unfurl from your very shoulder blades.

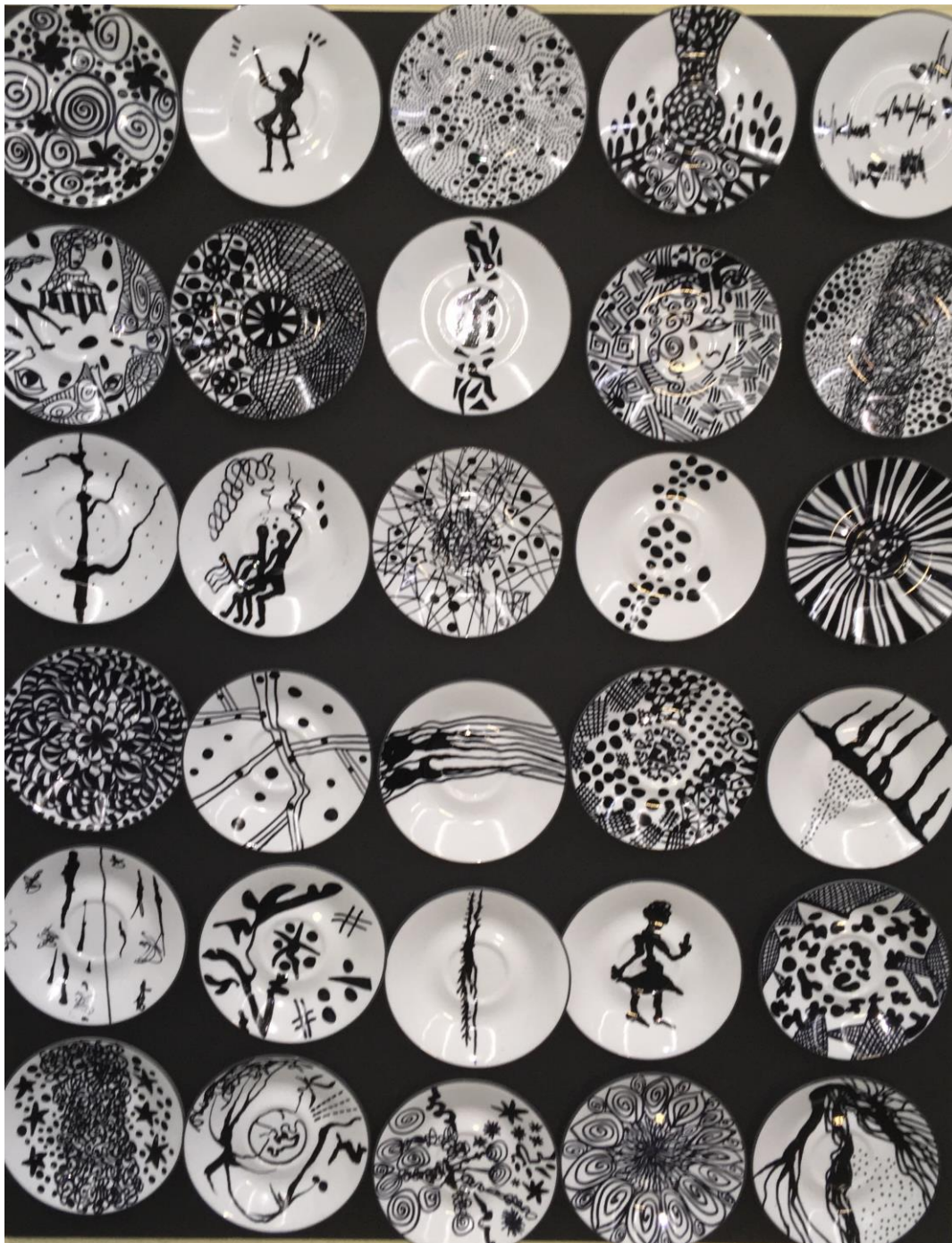
I searched and squinted for the heavenly glow of your halo,  
expecting radiant tinsel to sprout from your head.

But I am just a boring old man, a worthless sinner  
who won't even remember the Pastor's words today;

Merely an undeserving father with an extraordinary daughter,  
and I cannot hear what wonderous sermon inspires you.

But please, O my sacred child,  
please remember me in your kingdom.

*~James Swansbrough*



*"Untitled" ~ Lauralee Sikorski*

## ANTHRACITE COUNTRY

I don't want to tell you about the fear  
That has sunk its taproot deep in mountain blood  
Or of my palsied tremors  
Shaking out of a tap and into a glass  
I don't want to tell you the way they shaved me  
Traced the sutures of my skull  
And split them along a textbook axis  
I don't want to tell you about a village palisade  
An ox left penned behind  
As a wildfire approaches—

I wish to show you a fallen tree  
How she will become a sun  
How she will burn for a thousand years  
How in the mountain's blood there are dragonflies  
The size of dinner plates  
I want to show you this tree:  
How in death she has taken root  
All her splendor gone  
But in that rotten log  
Is more life than you can imagine  
The city within expands  
And reconnects her to the ground

Beneath the topsoil:

infinity.

~ *Alex Lennert*

## THE ANSWER TO OUR PRAYERS

The bells toll in sorrow wherever we go.  
We hear their lingering lethargy ringing

in our ears, and it's strange that we can  
feel it in the sky, in the snow. Now we know

the truth: bells ringing all year speak  
in voices we can't hear. How do they do it?

Listening, they learn their own secret  
language and are changed by the fire within

each other. They're in no mood for solitude,  
and neither are we—which is a pity.

What holds us to the barricades  
of surrender? We should all be immersed

in the desert to comfort us in our sorrow.  
We should be buried with tears and vows,

but first things first. Let us not forget  
the danger of having one's prayers answered.

Let's find out why the sands keep shifting  
in our hearts like snow between houses.

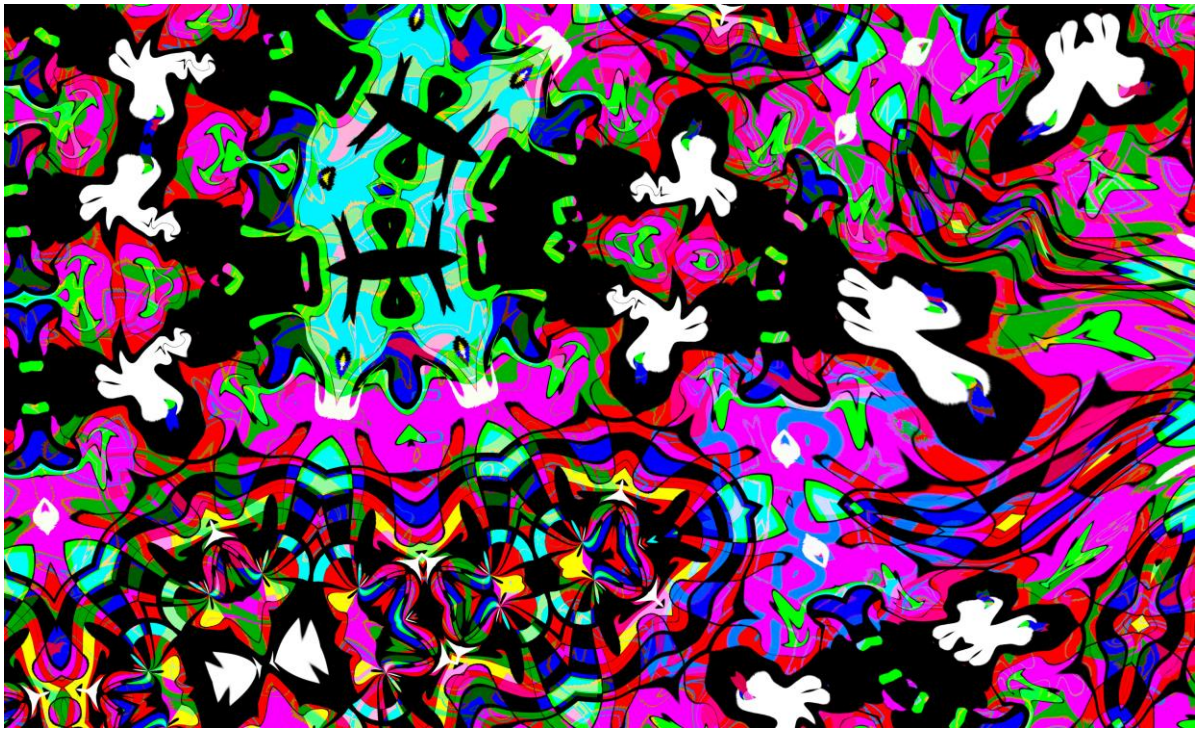
*~ Cliff Saunders*



## THE ABSTRACT MASTERPIECE

All my life I tried to be  
smaller, hidden, less than  
my true self.  
A speck of paint  
on the brush.  
But I am loud, bold,  
boundless.  
I am the rough strokes  
on the canvas,  
the splashes of  
unbridled color.  
I am no longer  
a still-life painting,  
but an abstract  
masterpiece.  
Bear witness and I promise  
to leave you in awe.

*~ Nicole Neitzke*



*“One Step Then Another 5” ~ Edward Supranowicz*

Importunate urges cause dispositive claims  
not to fecundate in our fora of togetherness.  
Each is an emperor of his or her enterprise.  
When itch and inclination insist a flurry of  
flip-flops take place. There is no addendum  
to a dead relationship. Thrawn needles on  
dashboard of desire ride me to another rink.  
Fustian outflows keep me away from myself.

*~ Sanjeev Sethi*

## A SMALL BRIGHT TIME

There was a time,  
A small bright time  
In a rapidly closing space  
Where I was everything.  
It was only a matter of moments  
That today becomes tomorrow  
And now that moment is here  
And I am once again nothing.

I searched the books, the libraries,  
The desiccated streets of the world  
For you, not knowing who you were –  
As perfect as a musical note,  
As damaged as me.  
I closed my eyes, dreaming awake of you  
Over and over,  
Then one day you appeared:  
And when you did I could not take my eyes off of you  
Or stop thinking about you  
When you were not there.

Now that it is over and we are dead  
It is as if I remember every touch, look,  
Sigh and sound that occurred:  
Every song we heard. I still smell the air we breathed together.  
I feel your body below me, above me, beside me.  
I see us buying a bottle of wine,  
I see you making meatloaf,  
I see myself frying potatoes.  
Your voice a murmur in the other room as you talk to your kids  
On the telephone,  
Your legs pressed to mine at the dining room table  
As we flirted and talked.  
I feel your wetness. I smell the glorious smell of you.  
I lie in bed alone now, reliving every moment.

One day you will be as wizened as me and understand  
That the best parts of life are two people alone and in sync,  
Never having to go through the motions or think about it  
And the next best parts of life are lying around lazily together,  
Talking about all we love and hate,  
Reminiscing about the other times  
We were alone and  
In sync.

I am doing it now,  
But I am alone.

*~ John Tustin*

pathetic moonrays come  
to give their apologies  
their sheen is brittle  
light fades

dim sunshine knocks  
curtains are locked  
no trespassers

ocean tide smacks the wall  
evaporates into salt

you have yet to arrive

i memorialize the grains  
in a jar of sea crystal

i pull open the window  
virginal drapes spread  
for a passer-by

the air rolls in at night  
pitch dark and heaving  
the clouds obscure  
eluding heaven

you have yet to arrive

my broken bedside clock  
ticks a songbird memory  
stuck on the same minute  
frozen in lunar light

i have spent weeks  
counting precipitation  
patters on the sand



welding my sobs into  
blue opal earrings

you have yet to arrive

~ *Lydia Pejovic*



*"Portrait in Ultramarine" ~ Jonathan Cenicerros*

## OTILIA'S HOUSE

Otilia lived alone but was not lonely, thanks to her work with the neighborhood Catholic church. Her holy activism was rivaled only by two middle-aged twins, the Alarcón sisters, who dressed alike and had been appointed honorary sacristans. They had an unfair advantage over her, as there were two of them, though they often acted like one. Otilia could never quite compete with their labors, but she was much more gregarious than they and held lively opinions on everything from enchilada dinners organized to fundraise for a statue of the newly canonized Mexican martyr who had once prayed in *their* church, to a debate over who was allowed to sell flowers and potted aloes after mass on Sundays. The twins, though ubiquitous, always remained silent as mice, like dead sinners working off their purgatory in the sanctuary of the church.

Otilia's clothing and manners were simple, but I always recognized her when I saw her on the street. It helped that she was usually talking to a priest or some member of the "Alabaré" prayer group. I don't know if that was the official name of the group, but that's what everybody called them, as a way of differentiating them—the "Alabarés," the Catholic Pentecostals—from the real Pentecostals, the "Aleluyas."

It was in a year of unrest for the whole barrio that Otilia's life began to expand beyond the church. An unusually corrupt city council, in collusion with rich developers, decided that the time had come to drive the poor people out of Otilia's neighborhood. City representatives and their billionaire fathers-in-law dreamt of condominiums and fancy boutiques, while the residents of the neighborhood organized to try and save their homes. For years there had been talk of "redeveloping" the barrio and nearby downtown, but like a cancer that remains only a spot—seed-like—and suddenly spreads before its symptoms can even catch up with it, the talk of gentrification abruptly changed from the wild dreams of a few to a flurry of plans by city government and a secretive group of rich speculators. It threatened the little that a whole community struggling for their daily bread had been able to collect, morsel by morsel, over generations. A kind of madness gripped the mayor and city council. They were ready to believe in any scheme, no matter how outrageous, no matter how little it matched economic reality. It seemed as if their political careers depended solely on destroying something, clearing away something older than themselves or even their parents. In this case, it happened to be the rarest of places: a self-sustaining

community. No matter that the developers who were supposed to follow might not actually exist or might not be willing to use their money to build castles in the air. What politician does not aspire to be a monarch, a decider of fates based not on reality or results but on will alone?

Otilia—Señorita Otilia Medina she would remind those who called her Señora Medina—would speak to me in English whenever I saw her. She had learned it while working at Walmart. At that time, I was making a living selling produce door-to-door, along with loofahs and linden tea and plastic bags of white rice and pinto beans. I was making my way through the eastern end of the neighborhood in my battered old Ford pickup, under a blond brick pumping station that stood like a sentry tower above the brightly-painted adobe houses and one-story blocks of apartments called *presidios*. Hers was the first house I approached on Fifteenth Street. It was a humble place. The dilapidated porch was decorated with remains of a funeral wreath that had been placed there after her frail, tiny mother had died.

“*Buenos días*, Señorita Medina,” I said as she opened her screen door. Smells of cooking escaped from the house: odors of meat, onion, sauces. She was dressed in a blue and red sweat suit.

“*Buenas tardes*,” she answered, correcting me. It was almost two in the afternoon.

Before I could say another word, she went to her kitchen and poured me a large glass of iced tea.

“This isn’t the instant stuff, is it?” I kidded her as I took a sip.

“What? Now you’re really asking for it, *hombre*.”

“Hey, I know how you *damas católicas* are.”

The gibe fell flat. Otilia did not appreciate sarcastic remarks involving religion. I took another awkward sip and handed her the glass. She set it down on an unpainted windowsill; mumbling a little, still peeved by my remark.

“What have you got today?”

Try this orange,” I said, cutting an orange in half and handing her a juicy little sunburst. She sucked on the orange.

“Isn’t it sweet?” I asked.

“Yes, it is.”

I gave her the other half. “One-fifty a pound, you can’t beat that.”

“Oranges are heavy. A pound isn’t that much.”

“A pound of the juiciest oranges around.”

“How much for avocados?”

“A dollar each. For you, ninety cents.”

“Give me two. Ripe ones. You know, soft.”

I went to my wagon to get them. When I returned, Señorita Otilia held two dollars in her hand. I took them and gave her two dimes.

“What do you think of this plan to knock down the barrio?” she asked me. (Like everyone else in the neighborhood, she pronounced the “b” in barrio like a “v.”)

“They want the area for the tourists.”

“*El barrio es de quienes viven en él.* We have a group that’s fighting back against the plan, and we’re having a meeting tomorrow at the senior citizen’s center. You should come.”

“I’ll see,” I answered cautiously. I didn’t live in the area to be demolished and wasn’t sure I wanted to get involved. The city could wreak havoc with my vendor’s and food handler permits.

I walked back to my vehicle across a small front yard, which was surrounded by a low iron fence and filled with the bitter gasoline smell of rue that Otilia planted in her garden for luck. It had spread all over, even into the neighbor’s lots.

I’d recently experienced a painful and unexpected break-up with a long-time partner. Boredom and loneliness drove me to get involved in the struggle to save the barrio from the city council—and the developers on whose behalf they were plotting, hiring consultants at top dollar, and issuing all sorts of important-

sounding but ultimately meaningless decrees. I vividly recall those events of a few years ago as I spend hours at my new job doing basic repairs in homes and apartments throughout the barrio. Surrounded by the simplest of possessions, as I paint or plaster: mismatched drinking glasses, enamel pots and pans, a Mexican blanket in rainbow colors draped over a sofa, doilies on the TV, calendars on the walls from J's Grocery or one of the Korean businesses—the ones that feature pictures of dancers in folkloric costumes or brave Aztec warriors—the plaster statues of Jesus and the saints or angels, brightly colored plastic children's toys, I know that when Otilia and her generation are gone, the struggle to preserve the neighborhood will continue, and we must not forget the lessons of that terrible year when the city council and their wealthy supporters decided that the barrio had no right to exist.

Despite the city council's enthusiasm for the gentrification plan, their developers were all eventually exposed as con men looking to bleed money out of the municipal coffers without producing any real results. Rich people like big ideas but only bet on sure things. Meanwhile, the owner of a downtown loan-sharking business, a fellow who had been a bully since childhood and was nicknamed "El Mafioso" by the people of the barrio, decided that there would be a development boom, despite all evidence to the contrary. He planned to open a fancy bar catering to the "creative class" who worked in nearby downtown, believing that his place would jump-start gentrification of the area. Otilia's house, which sat on a large lot at the crossroads of two well-known streets, seemed just the place for the type of Potemkin establishment he envisioned.

El Mafioso, once a big man but now wasted by cocaine, was angrily rebuffed by Otilia when he made her an offer on her house.

"What's wrong with you, *jefe*? Why are you so red? Are you *crudo* or on the drugs?"

El Mafioso turned even redder.

"Do you see a 'for sale' sign on my property?" she asked him, standing on her ramshackle porch blinking at his worn face in the sunlight of an early spring.

He told her that she was eventually going to lose her house one way or another to the city's plan.

“You’re never going to get a better offer than the one I can get for you,” he said in a condescending way.

“You think that I believe you?” Otilia answered him. “You think I’m going to fall for your games? I know that you guys are acting like you’re doing us a favor, but we know what you really want, a handful of *feria*. You think I’m stupid? Do you see a giant ‘p’ for *pendejo* painted on my forehead? *No eres jefe. Eres solo un dedo. Un achichinle del concilio y los ricos.*”

When he began to use a rough tone of voice with her, she added, “Don’t forget that the Virgin of Guadalupe is watching.”

Looking like one of those dried up, spineless cacti that you see in the lobbies of doctor’s offices, he retreated from her flat refusal, but not from his plan. I’m told that his arms were flying wildly, and he was cursing under his breath like a madman as he made his way across Otilia’s rue-filled yard. He was not a man used to taking “no” for an answer and decided to ask his friends on the city council to take Otilia’s house using the power of eminent domain. They could then sell it to him as an “economic development opportunity.”

At the next city council meeting, the majority of the council voted to condemn Otilia’s house under the power of eminent domain and seize the lot on which it stood, promising to pay her “above fair-market value” for her trouble. A sense of impending doom ran through the barrio, the kind that makes old people give up on life. But Otilia was ready for a fight. When the city council passed the condemnation ordinance, the morale of our ad hoc “Save the Barrio” group collapsed. It was the beginning of the end for the people of the neighborhood—or so we thought.

When the day of devastation arrived, a kind of miracle happened, which was probably the supreme moment of Otilia’s life. Skeptical as I am, had I not been there to witness what actually happened, I certainly would have thought it just another one of those blown all out of proportion *chismes* that what I like to call the out-of-breath-with-amazement-at their-own-stories set loves to spread around. On that terrible blue-eyed spring day, a bulldozer sat idling in Otilia’s front yard, having crushed the front of the little wrought iron fence that surrounded it. The group of residents who had vowed to stand by her and not let her house be destroyed were sitting impotently in her living room and on her fragile-looking front porch with the battered funeral wreath dangling overhead



like an augury. I was among them, thinking to myself: *what now, what now*. Otilia, ex-president of the altar society and the Guadalupanas and the current president of the enchilada fiesta committee and minister of communion to the sick and treasurer of the ladies of charity and founding member of the Alabarés, suddenly seized an almost life-size painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe that hung in her tiny bedroom and marched out with it until she stood facing the bulldozer. The operator and two laborers who accompanied him were confronted with a situation they had not anticipated when they signed up for the job. Otilia was an unmovable force. She wore a fierce expression on her face and a severe black scarf on her head. The operator could not run over an old lady and the Virgin, so he cut the bulldozer's engine. He got out of the vehicle and called his boss on a company cell. His boss, in turn, called El Mafioso, who decided to call the police. Not ten minutes later, the cops arrived, but at that same moment Father Mercurio, the church pastor, showed up as well. His pale face was red, and his thick mustache seemed to bristle on his face.

Without even looking at the police officers, Father Mercurio asked the operator of the bulldozer if he had a demolition permit from the city. The man was at a loss. First, the Virgin, and now a priest. In a peevish tone, he admitted that he didn't.

"Then get the hell out of here until you do."

"Let me call my boss."

A moment later, the bulldozer and its infantry were withdrawing to the sound of the neighborhood's jeers, with one of the Guadalupanas shouting, "*¡Viva La Virgen de Guadalupe!*" unconsciously echoing the words of Padre Hidalgo that set in motion the Mexican War of Independence. At that moment, the bulldozer appeared unaccountably sad, like an insect mourning the escape of prey just within its grasp, and its human masters, also downcast, looked for all the world like an army in retreat.

It was El Mafioso's final retreat as well. A few months later, a district court ruled that the city's use of its powers of eminent domain for private economic development violated state law. Not wishing to become embroiled in years of litigation, the city rescinded its ordinance authorizing the seizure of Otilia's property by eminent domain. We celebrated Otilia's victory with *menudo* and tuna salad sandwiches and two-step dancing at a party in her back yard, while El

Mafioso spared the city council the embarrassment of having to undo their behind-the-scenes deal by accidentally driving his brand-new Ford Explorer off an overpass with two-times-the-legal-limit blood alcohol, not to mention the cocaine and Viagra that turned up during his postmortem.

Otilia became a kind of folk hero after that. She continued to wear her sweat suit and labor quietly in the vineyard of the Lord, but in the eyes of the people of the barrio she had slain a dragon—and the city council’s arrogance. People addressed her with the greatest respect, and there was even a move among the church ladies to name a street after her. I think she wanted nothing more than for life to continue as it had before that terrible year. The rue in her yard continued to thrive, and her porch grew more flimsy as each season passed, but it was, for the moment at least, still safely hers.

*~ Charles Haddock*



*"Companions" ~ Daniel Gonzalez*

## STAIN

Where do I keep you, rage?  
On a shelf perhaps,  
or in a pot  
so you can bubble and boil  
and ooze your way  
to the pristine stovetop forming crusts hard to remove...

What am I to do with you?  
Watch war movies in succession for days on end,  
getting lost in the misery  
the anguish  
the gore  
and the violence...  
hoping to appease you.

I wish you'd escape and  
bury this anger in an avalanche,  
that your tangled winds of sadness  
and bruising hailstorms of fear  
dissipate.

If all outs are out –  
lashing out  
acting out, or  
talking it out –  
and I release you,  
will you promise to leave?

Because despite my efforts,  
every morning  
when the sun hits a certain angle,  
and I look closely,  
squinting and turning ever so slightly,  
I still see you.  
A faint outline, nevertheless.  
But there, always.

*~ Natalie Baronian*

I didn't notice my skin  
becoming porcelain.  
I walked blissfully  
into my display case  
and onto my pedestal.  
From this height,  
I wonder if the fall  
could shatter me  
and his expectations.

I came with faults  
he became intent to fix,  
like a broken music-box  
in my throat.  
But I am his  
prized possession,  
turn-key in his pocket.  
I try to feel at home,  
but I'm better at  
playing house.

Who put this doll  
in this dollhouse?  
Was it him?  
Or was it me?

*~ Nicole Neitzke*

## BOUNCED

Dear Charles: had you not been a clown  
I might have snapped at the summit

or maybe the base having avoided the  
mountain, that inevitable fall. I know  
how it feels when the world splits open.

Fear is a sleepless night spent gasping  
for air. Once a squab leaves the nest  
it rejects its mother & me broke, with

a son in the shape of water, I write the  
check, bad, in an attempt to force air  
into lungs that suffering left, hungry.

The faucet drips, the sink overflows &  
still there is a choice of party characters.  
They say a child's love cannot be bought,

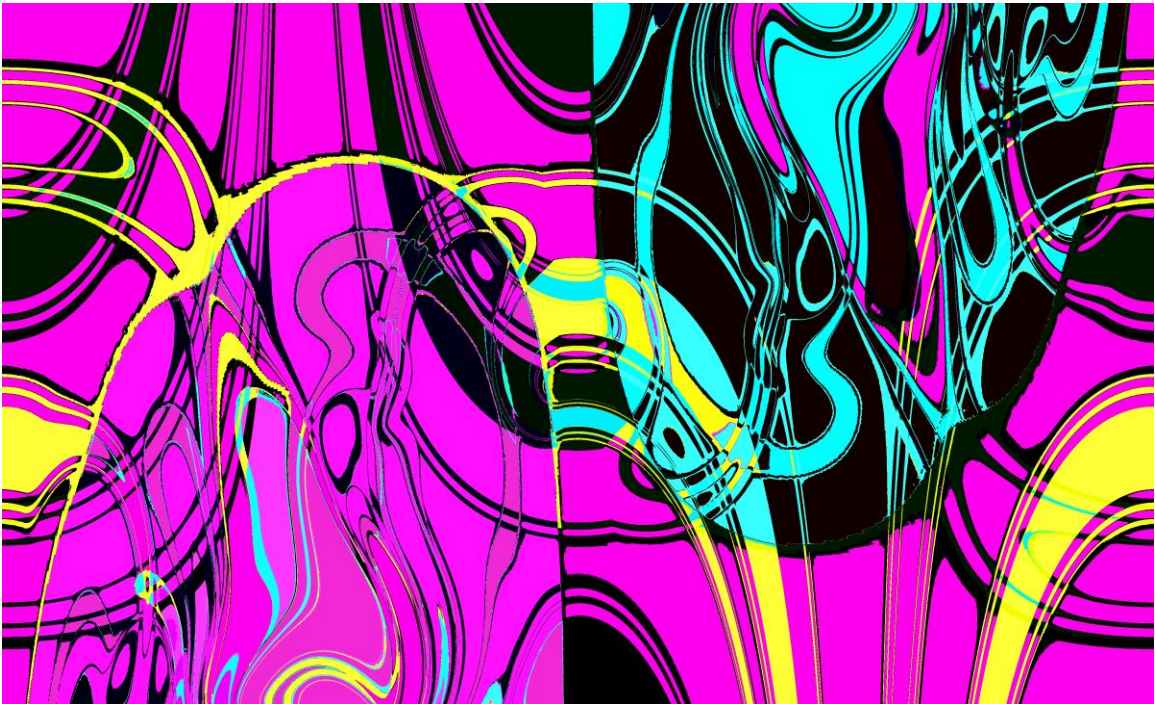
but here we are. You with your red & blue  
balloons. A dog. A hat. A heart. A sword.  
Children gathering 'round, wide-eyed,

mouths agape like hungry Jambato toads.  
You clearly know which dams are going  
to burst. Happiness seeks its downfall.

Tell me, what does a good mom do with the  
aftermath of deception? I am a diminished  
thing. You pound at the door with a question

of payment. I sit in the dark. In shame. In silence.  
Earth trapping an unprecedented amount of heat.

*~ Sheree La Puma*



*"Dissonance 4d" ~ Edward Supranowicz*



## THINKING ABOUT GRIEF ALL OF THE TIME

like being in a bar  
and ignoring loud music  
until finally a song plays  
and brings you back to place.  
the days go like that,  
and you can't keep going  
and thinking about grief  
all of the time. like with exercise –

how it's only  
when you finish  
that your arms hurt.  
and sometimes I can be cycling  
with my mind placed elsewhere,  
breathing and pushing  
legs down. it's the nicest time of the year by far;  
the leaves are falling  
big as dinnerplates,  
but the air has become cold  
so in the morning  
you can take real bites. sometimes

I go to sleep – could someone do that  
whose heart  
were truly closing? I visit the hospital  
and go away  
and do things. and honestly, we weren't close –  
our parents fought  
and we didn't see each other often.  
and she is still a child,  
and now will always  
be a child – why should a man my age  
be friends with a 14 year old?  
and why should he put her

in poems? my hands flutter.  
I fret. wonder if this sadness  
is a sign  
of love or just  
of sadness, and if doing this  
with poems  
somehow does her  
disrespect.

*~ D.S. Maolalai*

## EDIFICE

The dead meet with me in dreams. They focus  
on padding the crevices of my incompleteness.  
Their intent is chaste but this is not my cause.  
I want to be in sync with my shortcomings.

Bolide is a construct the cosmic uses to brief  
us of its bounds. It's a nod to niceness. Quicker  
we locate clemency the better it's for us. This  
epoxy runs our rotating ellipsoid.

*~ Sanjeev Sethi*

## SENTIMENTALITY OF A FEW SENSATIONS IN DEATH?

Do the dead fear the color and scent of a rose?  
Perhaps a soft breeze blowing through their spectral figures?  
Do they cringe at the sound of music, of birds,  
of the voices of loved ones left behind  
as they watch over them?

In truth, they only fear the fade and loss of memory of such things.  
For to believe that the dead do not mourn,  
that is the most senseless folly of the living.

~ *Linda Imbler*

i am filled in the middle  
with melting hot lava,  
layers of volcanic spew.

orange earth sludge  
wobbles to make an ocean  
of fire and brimstone.

you swim laps and endure  
singed tongue bristles and skin  
as you gulp down infernos,

attempting to contain the fiery  
excess – but my sediment  
will always ooze out.

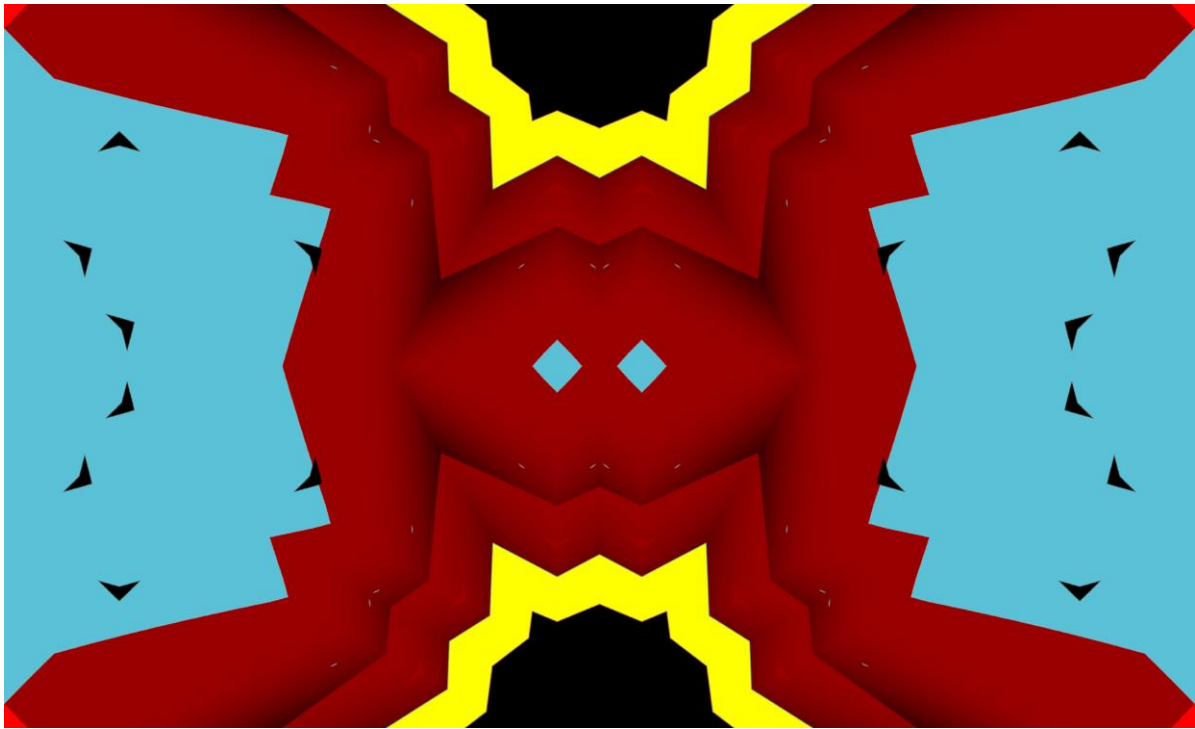
it's hard to love me when  
i leak vitriol from my cracks;  
you can't plug me up -

the bottle that can't be corked:  
hell-colored wine slugs out  
staining your unblemished soul

until your torso is blood.  
you wear me on your sleeve,  
blistering burnt skin.

blissful molten kisses:  
the searing masochism  
of adoring pain herself -

*~ Lydia Pejovic*



*"Flight Pattern 2" ~ Edward Supranowicz*

## WHEN I SAY I LOVE YOU MORE THAN BREATH

I say it perilously,  
recollecting an asthmatic childhood  
in pollen-soaked Tennessee summers  
with only an inhaler to reopen my lungs.

I say it competitively,  
the way I collapsed across finish lines  
on collegiate Carolina tracks,  
with chest-heaved vision gone black.

I say it recklessly,  
having shell-dived past turquoise and teal  
into sable Floridian depths,  
my chest a steeped tea bag, scalded.

I say it experientially,  
having raced afoot up Colorado mountains,  
and then clutched for oxygen through  
pulmonary edema, aghast in terror.

I say it with conviction as your father,  
that I might someday prove worthy of you.  
I would surrender every breath to your heart,  
that cadenced finch I heard flutter before your birth.

I tell you now: let the moths chew my lungs to dust.  
Extubate the machine with its tireless pumping.  
Take the last sigh wheezed from my blue lips—  
Leave me drowning on air that you would inhale.

*~James Swansbrough*



nothing more  
or less, in fact,  
than a thing for people  
to talk about. my friends  
discuss the stag party.  
my mother tells me  
who I must invite  
and who else I certainly  
shouldn't. "I want this  
to be a happy day,"  
(of her sister,  
who's been nasty, admittedly,  
but I'd still like my cousin  
to come.) "I don't want her there  
just to ruin it." at christmas dinner  
she gets drunk, leaves the table  
and comes down  
in her wedding dress,  
feigning surprise  
that it still sort of  
fits. I send invitations,  
make conversation. just want  
to be married. don't want  
to get married.

*~ D.S. Maolalai*

sometimes  
I just need  
to feel  
no earth  
under my feet

*~ Robert Beveridge*



*"Chesspiece 2" ~ Edward Supranowicz*

## FURNACE CREEK

"Allie, you're here!" A wave crashed on the shore and a crack of thunder followed. "I thought I'd never see you again!"

Camera equipment in her hands, Allie looked up and greeted her longtime friend with a warm smile. "Hi Nick, I told you I'd be back."

Another wave, another loud boom. White foam bubbled up on the shore, then disappeared with the undertow. "Yeah, but I figured, with everything that was going on..." He sighed. "How's your grandma?"

"Like all of us. Alive and kicking." The wind blew Allie's shoulder-length, chestnut-brown hair across her face and she tried to wipe the strands away with the back of her hand. "She's a tough one."

"I always said your strength came from her."

Allie snorted. It sure as hell didn't come from her mother.

Tall, blond, tanned, and super fit, Nick leaned on the chest-high tripod Allie had just set up. "Who you here shooting for?" he asked.

"*Surfer Magazine*. How about you?"

"No one, just adding to my portfolio." He brushed away a stray hair from the corner of Allie's mouth and tucked it behind her ear. Although she never liked it when he fussed over her, the gesture reminded her how easy it was to be with him. She felt the familiar pull, the latent chemistry. Though it'd been three months since they'd last seen each other, it felt like yesterday.

"Are you staying?" he asked.

"No, I have to drive back to Furnace Creek after the finals."

"That's crazy, a ten-hour drive after shooting all day, on those hulking mountain roads?"

A small, hard woman, she was nonplused. "Aw, thanks Nick. But I can handle the drive, been doing it for years."

"I can't help it Allie. I still care about you."

"I know. But I need to be back before the sun comes up."

Allie gently touched Nick's arm and softened her voice. "And right now, as much as I'd like to catch up, I need to finish setting up for the competition."

"Yeah, no problem. I should finish getting my gear together, too."

Another wave crashed onshore and sprayed them both with cool, salty water.

Allie went to work. She studied the horizon and saw a solid west swell. The breeze pushed the peaks of the waves, which came at regular intervals, a quick five count within the set. But the timing of the sets was irregular, and the conditions were going to be a challenge.

Staked out as she was on a patch of warm, silky sand with her media credential dangling from her bare neck, meant no one was about to take the spot in front of her. Between the credential, and her reputation as one of the top sports photographers, only the unaware stepped between her camera and the surfers in the water. Allie screwed on a telephoto lens, careful to protect the open cavity. After attaching the camera to the tripod, Allie peered through the lens and saw a set of head-high waves hit the sandbar thirty yards from shore. She scanned the swells, looking for lineup markers. Watching a couple of guys paddling out, she counted their strokes, judging the distance covered with each pull. Like the surfers about to compete, her work required intense, technical concentration.

Allie should have been feeling the pins and needles of excitement. But she wasn't. Instead, her mind was back in her hometown, with her grandma. Stricken with dementia years ago, her grandma's peace was coming any time now. Allie spent the past couple years caring for the once vibrant woman and was conflicted about leaving her. Except for the two years Allie was away at art school in Los Angeles, she lived her entire life in Furnace Creek, either in her grandma's small, tidy trailer, where a spiced pumpkin candle usually burned, or later, just up the street in a more roomy trailer of her own. For years, the smell of pan-fried onions and boiled potatoes meant her grandma was feeding the neighborhood. Now, the neighbors were feeding her.

The dusty, desert town wasn't the kind of place that nurtured kids, much less produce one of the most sought-after photographers when it came to big wave surfing. The only water within a hundred miles was stored in the town's most prized possession, a fifty-thousand-gallon, bleach-white water tank. A nearby mine once had value, but it was shuttered over twenty years ago. Her grandma managed on a small pension left from her husband's days working in the mine. But the pension barely covered food and utilities. Unless Allie went to Los Angeles to shoot corporate ads, covering the surfing competition was one of her highest paying gigs. So, when offered the opportunity to work, Allie took a chance that her grandma would make it one more day.

The smell of coconut oil brought Allie's attention back to the competition. She took in the scene. Crewcuts, board shorts, ponytails, and bikinis, it was surreal. With the allotted practice time about to expire, one of the competitors bobbed on top of a swell, then made a run for the next wave. The surfer successfully dropped in and after a couple of big swooping turns, stood tall and pointed to the logo on his shirt. Allie clicked her tongue in disappointment. She worried this wasn't going to be a day about the purity of curls and breaks but sponsors and those seeking adoration. Remaining hopeful, she looked for Nick but couldn't find him in the crowd.

A high-pitched whistle blew, and the announcer called out the names of the first two competitors. A couple of spectators hooted and hollered. A surfer came flying down a big blue-black wall of water. The wave curled, the surfer disappeared, and after the spectators gasped, popped out of the shoulder-high spray. She focused. Snap. Click. Allie was pretty sure she captured the gleam in the surfer's eye as the water engulfed him. Her broad smile matched his. The next competitor plunged straight down the face of a wave and a board soon flew high in the air. Snap. Click. This time she hoped she captured the empty board as it danced alone on top of the water. Each surfer caught a couple more waves, the camera shutter in a constant state of opening and closing. A whistle blew, and two more names were called.

The lulls between rounds left plenty of time to regroup, and daydream. Whenever Allie worked a big competition, she couldn't help but reminisce about her upbringing. As far back as she could remember, the few jobs around Furnace Creek were at the post office, the general store, or as a handyman. With no ability to hustle for money, the only way Allie got her first camera was when Old Man Carlson snuck a Pentax into her duffle bag, right before she left for school. She later found out he drove ninety miles to a pawn shop to make the purchase and, because he didn't have enough cash, gave up one of his most prized possessions, his harmonica. Though grateful, she told her grandma she wished the present came from her daddy.

"Be glad your papa ain't around," her grandma said. "He ruined your ma's life. He didn't need to ruin yours too."

After all these years, Allie still wished she had a picture of her biological father. She wanted to look in his eyes, to see what kind of man could let her ma smoke meth until her brain turned to mush. Unfit to parent, Allie figured her ma left town because it was better to be absent than be a lousy role model for her kid. Luckily, Old Man Carlson kept an eye on Allie. To those who didn't take the time to know him, the old man was nothing more than a washed-up desert rat, wearing the same second-hand plaid shirt and dirty jeans for months at a time. But looks were deceiving, and Allie came to understand he was simply the kind of guy who didn't need anything to be happy.

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Allie scanned the crowd again. She couldn't see Nick and wondered if he left. That'd be just like her, to drive him away. When they first met, life was simple. They'd work a competition and then spend a few days together, either at his place or hers. But she wasn't ready to settle down. Then, as her grandma's condition deteriorated, Allie saw less and less of Nick. Though not thrilled, he respected her dedication to her grandmother and told her he was a patient man.

Allie refocused on the western horizon. The best ride of the day came in the second semi-final heat. Ripping a wave, two times over his head, the rider, knees bent into a deep squat, reappeared from a barrel forty yards down the line. He pivoted, then ripped a cutback. Snap. Another severe cutback. Click. The wave lost its' power and the surfer faded off its back. Snap. Allie pumped her fist. It turned out he was the winner of the competition, and she knew she had enough for a cover photo and a twelve-frame sequence. With twenty-five hundred bucks for a day's work in mind, she hustled to pack and get on the road. As she was lugging her equipment back to her van, Nick came up from behind and deftly grabbed the tripod and blankets.

"Are you sure you can't stay overnight?"

Allie hesitated. "She's not well and I want to be there."

"Is there anything I can do?"

She sighed. This was why she loved Nick. "No. This is just part of life."

"Okay, but when it's over..."

"Don't. Not now." He hugged her anyway.

She welcomed the embrace. After a couple of seconds, she released him and stepped back. "I'm sorry Nick, I have to go."

"I know. But soon, right?"

She reached up and cupped his cheeks with her palms. "Soon. I promise."

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After five hundred miles of driving through the pitch-black night, as the sun started to rise, Allie turned off the highway. Her destination was still another half hour away. With its tiny grid of six two-mile-long gravel roads, the town was painted a permanent blend of tans and taupe. It didn't help that Furnace Creek sat in the basin of one of the hottest plains in the West, where the relentless sun sucked the life out of everything. Allie's grandma ended up here when her grandpa was promised plenty of work and free land. The work was sporadic and the land barely livable. But her grandma told her a thousand times, "Life is what you make of it. I refused to be miserable about it."

Allie's grandpa died when she was five years old, from lung disease. Her grandma often lamented about how she made a mistake counting on him to take care of her until she died. When Allie started to waffle about going to Los Angeles for school, her grandma was firm, "Don't repeat my mistake, or your mother's."

By the time she was a teenager, Allie spent more time exploring the surrounding hills than she did in school. Though she barely went to class, the teachers passed her anyway. She read every book the clerk at the post office could get for her through the library loan system. Biology, grammar, history,



math, it didn't matter. She read them all and got her GED when she was sixteen.

No father around, Old Man Carlson showed her how to change the oil in a car, fix the pipes under the sink and patch the holes in the trailer roof. But it was the lessons about people that impacted her most. She never forgot the day he chastised her for her attitude towards her grandma, the incident forever etched in her memory.

"Why do you care so much about my grandma?" she once asked when they were clearing his property. "She's a dolt."

The old man went stone cold. "A dolt? What the hell is a dolt?"

"Dolt. You know. A stupid person."

Old Man Carlson made the meanest face ever. "Let me tell you something about your Grandma. She is no dolt." He shook his head in disappointment. "You just don't know enough about her. It's time you learned your own history."

"History! I know my history. Ask me anything," she boasted.

"No, I mean *your* history. Back in the 1930's, when your grandparents were teenagers, they escaped from Poland after the Russians invaded the country." He paused. "They both witnessed unspeakable acts of violence on their neighbors. That's when your great-grandpa, who knew how to get people out of the country, decided to send your grandma away. Your grandparents were a part of a small group that got themselves to Yugoslavia, then to northern Italy, then to France. Your great-grandpa gave the group enough money to get passage to the United States. From there, everyone was on their own and your grandparents stuck together. When your grandpa heard about work in the mines, they headed west."

Allie remembered how she flushed with embarrassment. "I...I...had no idea."

"They never wanted you to know. So, Allie, don't ever call your grandma a dolt again."

She hung her head, then cried.

The old man dropped his rake and stepped close enough for Allie to smell his acrid breath. Unbothered, she slipped her arm around him. Not willing to let her off so easily, he looked her straight in the eye and scolded, "We have hard lessons to learn. People are never what you see."

"I'm sorry."

"I know. I know you have a good heart."

After that, Allie looked into the eyes of everyone, trying to find clues about who they might really be. As a photographer, she was known for her ability to capture a full range of emotions. For surfers, it was about a person's relation between the body, his board, and the water. With her zoom lens, she

could focus in on the joy of someone working on the wall of a wave, the pain of a fall, or the intimacy of laying on top of a board. If she was patient, she'd usually capture what others missed.

When Allie wasn't working, she liked to take pictures of her neighbors, explaining she wanted to capture the history of the town. Over the years, she photographed one hundred and seventy residents. Unlike when she took pictures of surfers, working with her neighbors required more intense interaction. With a knack for putting people at ease, the portraits revealed a group of rural townsfolk who, despite their imperfections, never appeared uncomfortable. When she was with them, they forgot about the brown spots, moles and other cancerous nodules that marked them like tattoos. Sometimes she came across a gaunt face or one puffy with alcohol. But for the most part, these were not unhappy people. With the smallest aperture settings, she'd capture the deepest, sharpest pictures of faith and perseverance possible.

The most recent photo she took was of Lily Soto, whose Japanese-American parents were housed in one of the desert encampments during World War II. Though hesitant about getting her picture taken, Lily welcomed Allie into her own cramped trailer.

A small, petite woman, she resisted the thought of her image on paper. "I look too shabby," she pleaded.

Allie promised Lily she would destroy the portrait if Lily did not approve of the final product. After some coaxing, Lily acquiesced. But first she excused herself and disappeared behind her bedroom door. When she re-emerged, she'd pinned a dragon brooch to her blouse just below her left clavicle. Self-conscious, she explained, "It was my mother's."

Lily relaxed, sat on her faded print couch and clasped her hands on her lap. Allie watched as her eyes grew sad. "What's the matter?"

Lily shifted in her seat and repositioned her cuff to hide a tiny butterfly tattoo on her left wrist. "I've never had my picture taken before."

Allie took extra care as she set up her equipment. Lily's eyes brightened, then came to a sparkle. Snap. Click. When Lily saw the final portrait, she asked if she could have a copy to keep for herself. Allie mounted the picture in a special frame and gave it to Lily on her birthday. The same delicate fingers that lay clasped on her lap in the picture grabbed the frame with firm strength.

"Thank you," Lily said as she fingered the spot where the brooch was.

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Allie liked it when Old Man Carlson talked about her grandpa.

"Your grandpa and I worked in the mines together. It was hell. The mines smelled like some kind of toxic gas and it's a miracle I'm still alive. Most

of the men working in those mines died before the age of fifty, including your Grandpa.”

Though anxious about what he said, that was the day she decided to find out more about her ma. She went all in. “Why’d my ma leave?”

“That’s something different. Your grandma was hard on your ma. Wanted her to make something of herself. Wanted her to make it on her own.”

Allie rolled her eyes.

“Yup,” he confirmed, “You know your grandmother. Your ma rebelled something fierce. One day some bastard came into the general store and asked your ma if she wanted to go for a ride with him, she left. When she came back two months later, she was hooked on the meth, and it wasn’t the first time.”

Allie remembered what her ma was like when she did drugs, all sweaty and lolling her tongue when she spoke. Allie was even more unnerved when she saw a dope pipe hanging out of her ma’s back pocket. She remembered how her ma snapped, “What are you looking at?” when she caught Allie gawking at the needle marks on her ankles.

Old Man Carlson didn’t hold back. “Your grandmother got sick of the dope cycle and kicked her out of the house, and no one has seen her since.”

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Over time, too many medications took away the grandma Allie knew. Medical costs increased. Sometimes, when Allie needed money, she’d sell one or two of the photos of the locals to Henry, a gallery owner in Los Angeles. Allie met Henry when she snagged a coveted internship at his gallery. She was surprised she could sell a single portrait for a couple thousand dollars, and Henry was always clamoring for her pictures.

Waiting for a check from her latest sale, Allie first heard about the problems with the town’s water tank when she was at the post office.

“Sprung a leak,” was all anyone knew. “Old Man Carlson is up there looking at it now.” By the time he determined the extent of the problem, at least half the town was milling around, waiting to hear his assessment.

“Not good,” he warned. “We can weld the leaks, but we’d need to drain the tank first. Gonna cost a bundle of cash. Probably a hundred thousand by the time it’s fixed.”

There was a collective gasp. The townspeople didn’t have access to those kinds of funds.

“We could try to get some emergency money from the state. But that’ll take time and they’ll just tell us to get someone to deliver water by the truckload in the meantime.”

There was a lot of mumbling but no resolution. “Let me sleep on it. Maybe there’s something I didn’t think about.”

Allie knew this was Old Man Carlson's way of providing hope to a situation he thought was hopeless. That night, Allie went to her trailer and pulled out all the photos she'd taken of the townspeople. If she put them in the gallery and a third of them sold, that might generate enough money for the tank repairs. She went to talk to Old Man Carlson about her plan. It took her a couple more days to work out the details. Then she gathered everyone at the post office and asked if they were okay with having their portraits sold.

"Good of a solution as any," a woman shouted.

"To hell with that," a man fired back. "How about giving us the money so we can do what we want with it?"

"Shut up, Baker," Old Man Carlson scowled. "We're trying to solve a problem here. You got a better idea?"

After a few seconds of silence, Old Man Carlson concluded, "I didn't think so."

One of Allie's friends from town piped up. "You sure about this, Allie? I'm guessing you could use the money from those portraits."

"The portraits are everyone's, not mine." She looked at the group for approval and Old Man Carlson nodded, rubbing his hand against his chin as he smiled at her.

The next morning, she packaged the first fifty prints and sent them to the gallery. Instead of showing all the portraits at once, Henry suggested multiple showings. The first date was for a two-week stint beginning in about a month. Henry insisted she be in Los Angeles for the initial kick-off. Because her grandma was still hanging on to life, Allie balked at the request. But she also understood her obligation to make sure the pictures sold. The night before she left, Allie went into her grandma's room and sat with her. When she took her hand, she knew things weren't right. Her grandma lacked warmth and her breath was deathly shallow.

"I can't go," she cried when Old Man Carlson came over to say goodnight to her grandmother.

"Allie, she'd want you to go. This town meant everything to her. She lived here with no regrets. She'd be proud of what you're doing."

"I can't. Besides it's everyone's images that are fixing the problem. They're the ones who should be at the gallery."

"We all have to do things we don't want to. And I'll be here, right by her side."

Allie leaned over and stroked her grandma's forehead with her fingers. She pictured her grandma in her prime. A sharp, svelte woman, she used to wear her ash-brown hair in a ponytail, small hoop earrings, and a generous amount of light pink lip gloss. Allie started to hum one of her grandma's

favorite songs, and when it was over, leaned in close and whispered, "I love you."

Allie stepped out of the trailer and into the pitch-black night. There was nothing else to do. It was her time now. She called Nick and asked him to meet her in Los Angeles for the opening night showing. He agreed and the two met at the gallery the next afternoon.

When she saw him walking towards her, she stepped forward and met him halfway. "Thanks for coming, Nick."

"Anything to help, you know that." He squeezed her hand, and she didn't let go.

For the next five hours Allie and Nick smiled, chatted, and worked the crowd of patrons eager to buy her photos. It was Ben Norlander's picture that fetched the most money that night. He looked oddly regal, dressed in a brown jacket frayed at the cuffs and pants cinched with a rodeo rope. His long gray hair dropped in a tangle down his back. With stubby whiskers white with age, he sat upright, rum bottle snug against his belly. When an offer was made on the photo, Allie felt a shiver and dropped her eyes to the floor. When she looked up, Henry was walking towards her.

"People love your work, Allie. It looks like we sold seventeen of the portraits. You should net around forty thousand dollars and I'm sure we can do even better next time."

Allie thanked him and spied Nick across the room. He made his way toward her and asked, "You ready to go?"

"Yes."

Together, they made the long drive back to Furnace Creek. When they pulled up to her grandma's trailer, Old Man Carlson step outside. He came over and hugged her and they cried for a long time before the old man finally said, "I'm sorry you weren't here."

Allie kicked at the dirt and bit her lip.

"You did good, Allie. She knows what you did." Old man Carlson drew in a deep breath. "These people...you gave them life."

Allie wiped her nose on her sleeve and looked at Nick. "Will you stay?"

"Of course." He draped his arm across her shoulder and squeezed hard.

"You go get some rest," Old Man Carlson suggested.

"Yeah," she sighed. "It's been a long haul." She raised herself on her toes and gave the old man a peck on his cheek. Then she slipped her arm around Nick's waist and they walked towards her trailer.

"We'll need to figure out where we're going to live," Allie half asked, half stated.

"I was hoping so."

After a pause, Allie asked, "Nick, can we do an errand next week?"

“Sure. What is it?”  
“To go to all the pawn shops within a hundred miles. I want to find a harmonica.”  
After a sniffle, she added, “For Old Man Carlson.”

*~ Cathy Beaudoin*

## FOR MARGARITA

You and I were told we were the color green. I don't fully remember the spectrum of nuances between the colors, but greens didn't get along with blues because greens were critical and blues were emotional. A blue was sitting between us at our table for the GSMP orientation for new and returning mentors. The meeting had already run an hour over its scheduled time, and we were all tired. The last presenter was having us take a personality test that split us into four colors with a list of adjectives associated with each: green, gold, blue, and red.

This is where we first met. We sat at a table together all day and listened to the different presentations. As the day went on and the schedule got further and further behind, our unfiltered personalities came out. I crack jokes when I'm tired. I crack jokes in general, to be fair. But I crack a lot more jokes when I'm tired. It was easy to make you laugh. I remember your laugh Margarita. I remember you laughing at that table; I don't remember what I said to make you laugh. The blue in between us laughed too. The golds and reds at our table joined in.

That day seemed inconsequential and maybe it would have remained that way if it weren't for the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) protests at UCSC and the violent response from admin, UCSC police, and SC police to the protestors.

Months after I first heard your laugh, we sat in the same room and we prepared for a UCR COLA rally in response to what had happened at UCSC. I recognized your laugh, and you recognized my jokes. We realized we knew each other from the mentoring program and that was enough to foster trust between us and to start organizing COLA on campus together.

In the brief time that I knew you and organized with you, I witnessed you being every color of the personality-type rainbow.

You were green when you stayed up all night before our big COLA rally on campus and looked up *What the Fuck* facts about admin and campus spending to share with attendees.



You were gold when you created stability, space, and a steady schedule for graduate students across departments that wanted to join the fight.

You were blue when you showed empathy and compassion when you spent your own money on sanitation goods and food to drop off to people in need when COVID began and we were all sent home.

You were red when we handed you a microphone or a megaphone and you shared your fire.

You were green when you sat in Wilcox's hallway with pizza and demanded a meeting.

You were gold when we drafted COLA's demands and wouldn't budge or accept that there could be no change.

You were blue when you organized Zoom dinners so we could all keep in touch while in isolation.

You were red when you helped organize a mutual aid fund to go to people in Riverside who needed help.

You were radiant.

You were gold.

You were beaming.

You were friendly.

You were wise.

You were exuberant.

You were passion.

You were red.

You were kind.

You were resolute.

You were inspired.

You were green.

You were rooted.

You were growth.

You were blue.

You were honest.

You were heart.  
You were a kaleidoscope.  
And I miss you.

*~ Amanda Riggle*

## AN EXTENDED THEORY OF EXHAUSTION—

*there is one notion which would seem to admit  
of no ambiguity or confusion  
and that is exhaustion*

a disarray of impulses come undone over the counter  
if not prescribed and bequeathed by generations  
yours & mine

that twirl in twilight but without idols  
confused in charismatic glossolalia prior to pentecost

*were we ever ascension?*

come down the rails without translation  
visualize yourself carrying out a dream action

*you lucid yet?*

because I can't recall can you the grace of the open drawer  
*sola gratia* juxtaposed in its geometry of antinomies  
of spaces

will I wake up will you...

caught between interpretations  
which is it? *superabundant vitality  
or cerebral malnutrition*

too exhausted for a theory of exhaustion  
my repose of strength is to be unmoved

how repose was supposed to be

remind me of math class what was it that immortal principle  
immaterial — spaceless — timeless — omnipotent

*a gust inside the god*

you lucid yet?

~ *Ryan Leack*



hit the ground just right    arc your length between    then &  
now                            the charge between us                            will coax the light

*~ Ryan Leack*

## MONTGOMERY WARD, 1994

Peering through slits of polyester  
white-knuckled with anticipation  
for the moment my mom would  
part the clothes rack  
and yell Peekaboo  
laughter would erupt  
and I would be found  
my mom, my sisters, my dad  
all smiling  
  
maybe i'm still waiting

*~ Natalie Peterkin*



*"Exit" ~ Amanda White*



*“Revival” ~ Amanda White*



## SLEEPLESS SLUMBER

The mind lies, a wake,  
Entombed in time,  
Pondering itself  
the Soul –  
Until unreconciled  
Mourning breaks.

*~ Chase Jones*

## NO SHORE IN SIGHT

Can you see?  
My hands  
Peering  
Oscillating  
In the distance  
Exhaustion  
Resignation  
Can you see?  
The water muffling through my lungs  
Suffocation  
Stillness  
Can you see?  
The swelling  
The pain through fragments of my past  
Can you see?  
How I drift with the waves  
No shore in sight

*~ Mariana Trujillo Marquez*



*"Homesickness" ~ Erica Zamora Reyes*



*"Ava" ~ Erica Zamora Reyes*

## BIOGRAPHIES

### NATALIE BARONIAN

Natalie Baronian received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Graphic Design from San Diego State University. She is currently working on a Master's Degree in English with an emphasis in Rhetoric and Composition at Cal Poly Pomona. A California native, she spent her childhood writing stories, poetry, and even a play! Writing is one of her many creative outlets - others include: painting, embroidery, textile design, and dance.

### CATHY BEAUDOIN

Cathy Beaudoin is a writer living in Bend, Oregon. She is also a 1987 graduate of Cal Poly, Pomona. Her fiction has been published in literary journals including *Angel City Review*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, and *Freshwater*. One of her fiction stories was nominated for a pushcart prize. Her nonfiction writing has appeared in *Triathlon Magazine Canada*, the Reader's Choice award-winning anthology: *Firsts: Coming of Age Stories by People with Disabilities*, and literary outlets such as *Five on the Fifth*.

### ROBERT BEVERIDGE

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise ([xterminal.bandcamp.com](http://xterminal.bandcamp.com)) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *cattails*, *Ellipsis...*, and *Ample Remains*, among others.

### SARAH CABALLERO

I am a scientist by training. I have a B.S. in Food Science & Technology from Cal Poly Pomona, and am currently a 2nd year M.S. candidate in the same department. However, I have always loved writing poetry just for fun and self-fulfillment, although I have never received formal training in it.

### JONATHAN CENICEROS

Jonathan A. Cenicerros is a self-taught and self-published artist from California. They majored in biology at California State University of San Bernardino. While studying they continued to practice and examine art styles such as: abstract, fauvism, impressionism, and gothic. They have been working towards pursuing a career in the arts and working on perfecting their work.

### DOINA CIOBANU

I am a Southern California painter favoring landscape and abstract art. I reside in Riverside County but I work in San Diego county. You can see symbolic references to prominent impressionistic painters of the 19th century like Monet, Manet, Matisse and others and their artistic vision in my own art. Most of my paintings are mixed acrylic/oil. Capturing the California light is extremely important to me, as I think that it is only here that you can find all these

shades of green and blue that I try to render. Other paintings can be seen on my website at:  
<http://doinaciobanu.weebly.com/>

### **KAT GERBER**

Kat Gerber is a writer who is currently working on her English degree. Kat lives in Huntington Beach and currently works for an Environmental Consulting firm as a Business Manager, where she performs technical writing, proofreading and serves as editor for environmental reports. She loves literature and can usually be found engrossed in her favorite book, the Norton Anthology of Short Fiction. This is her first submission for publication.

### **DANIEL GONZALEZ**

My name is Daniel Gonzalez. I received my BA in Fine Art from Cal Poly Pomona and I am currently finishing my MFA in illustration from Cal State Fullerton. My goal as an illustrator is not only to tell stories but to empower and inspire my audience to confront and overcome adversity and oppressive challenges within their lives.

### **CHARLES HADDOX**

Charles Haddox lives in El Paso, Texas, on the U.S.-Mexico border, and has family roots in both countries. His work has appeared in a number of journals including *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Sierra Nevada*

*Review*, *Folio*, and *Stonecoast Review*.  
[charleshaddox.wordpress.com](http://charleshaddox.wordpress.com).

### **LINDA IMBLER**

Linda Imbler is the author of five paperback poetry collections and four e-book collections (Soma Publishing.) This writer lives in Wichita, Kansas with her husband, Mike the Luthier, several quite intelligent saltwater fish, and an ever-growing family of gorgeous guitars. Learn more at [lindaspotryblog.blogspot.com](http://lindaspotryblog.blogspot.com).

### **MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON**

Michael Lee Johnson lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era and is a dual citizen of the United States and Canada. Today he is a poet, freelance writer, amateur photographer, and small business owner in DuPage County, Illinois. Mr. Johnson published in more than 2013 new publications, and his poems have appeared in 42 countries, he edits, publishes ten poetry sites. Michael Lee Johnson has been nominated for 2 Pushcart Prize awards poetry 2015/1 Best of the Net 2016/2 Best of the Net 2017, 2 Best of the Net 2018. Mr. Johnson has 231 poetry videos that are now on YouTube  
<https://www.youtube.com/user/poetrymanusa/videos>. Editor-in-chief poetry anthology, *Moonlight Dreamers of Yellow Haze*:  
<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1530456762>; editor-in-chief poetry anthology, *Dandelion in a Vase of Roses* available here  
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1545352089>.

Editor-in-chief *Warriors with Wings: The Best in Contemporary Poetry*,  
<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1722130717>.  
[https://www.amazon.com/Michael-Lee-Johnson/e/B0055HTMBQ%3Fref=dbs\\_a\\_mng\\_rwt\\_scns\\_share](https://www.amazon.com/Michael-Lee-Johnson/e/B0055HTMBQ%3Fref=dbs_a_mng_rwt_scns_share)  
<https://www.lulu.com/shop/search.ep?keyWords=Michael+Lee+Johnson&type=Member, Illinois State Poetry>. Do not forget to consider me for Best of the Net or Pushcart nomination!

### **CHASE JONES**

Chase Jones received his BA in English from the University of California Riverside and is currently pursuing his MA in Literary Studies from Cal Poly Pomona. He is an Air Force veteran and currently works as a Teaching Associate at Cal Poly Pomona.

### **SHEREE LA PUMA**

Sheree La Puma is an award-winning writer whose personal essays, fiction, and poetry have appeared in or are forthcoming in *The Penn Review*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *WSQ*, *Chiron Review*, *SRPR*, *The Rumpus*, *Plainsongs*, and *I-70 Review*, among others. Her poetry was recently nominated for Best of The Net and two Pushcarts. Her micro-chapbook, 'The Politics of Love,' was published in August by Ghost City Press. She has a new chapbook, 'Broken: Do Not Use,' recently released with Main Street Rag Publishing. She received an MFA in Writing from the California Institute of the Arts and taught poetry to former gang members.  
[www.shereelapuma.com](http://www.shereelapuma.com).

### **RYAN LEACK**

Dr. Ryan David Leack teaches writing and rhetoric at the University of Southern California. He was the Editor-in-Chief of *Pomona Valley Review* for seven years, which he now serves as an adviser.

### **ALEX LENNERT**

Alex Lennert is a writer and English professor teaching at several colleges in Southern California, where he also helped run a poetry and creative writing group. His poems have found a place in several indie zines and online publications, including *PVR*.

### **CHRISTIAN LOZADA**

Christian Hanz Lozada is the son of an immigrant Filipino and a descendent of the Confederacy. His heart beats with hope and exclusion. He co-authored the poetry book *Leave with More Than You Came With* from Arroyo Seco Press and the history book *Hawaiian in Los Angeles*. His poems and stories have appeared in *Hawaii Pacific Review* (Pushcart Nominee), *A&U Magazine*, *Rigorous Journal*, *Cultural Weekly*, *Dryland*, among others. Christian has featured at the Autry Museum, the Twin Towers Correctional Facility, and *Beyond Baroque*. He lives in San Pedro, CA and uses his MFA to teach his neighbors' kids at Los Angeles Harbor College.



### **D.S. MAOLALAI**

D.S. Maolalai has been nominated eight times for Best of the Net and five times for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in two collections, "Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden" (Encircle Press, 2016) and "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019).

### **CHRISTOPHER MARDIROUSSIAN**

Chris Mardiroussian is a graduate student at California State University, Long Beach. In 2018, he won First Prize in the Cinema Italian Style Film Festival (sponsored by the prestigious American Cinematheque in Los Angeles) for his short film entitled *IL BREAKUP*, which he co-wrote and produced. In 2017, he co-wrote a collection of poetry entitled *HONESTY. LOVES. CRUELTY*. He lives in Glendale, California.

### **JEN MCCLELLAN**

Jen McClellan is a mama who plays banjo while she skateboards in Inglewood. She's stayed at home all through covid like a proper hermit so she's currently unemployed but will be attending library school starting Aug 2021. By 2024 she hopes to be cultivating a special collection of graphic novels in a public high school library. Meanwhile, making arts and farts helps keep her sane.

### **FRANK MODICA**

Frank C Modica is a retired teacher who taught children with special needs for 34 years. His work is forthcoming or has appeared in *Beyond Words Literary Magazine*, *Blue Mountain Review*, and *Raconteur Review*. Frank's first chapbook is forthcoming from Alabaster Leaves publishing.

### **BELLA MOULDEN**

Bella Moulden (b. April 8, 2001) is an ambitious college student living in North Carolina. They are originally from New York with a long history of moving to a plethora of places. Bella Moulden is a singer/songwriter, pianist, guitarist, and bassist. Music is their passion and their writing is the backbone of it all. Their writing is what they value the most in all of their works. When it comes down to it all, the basis of all that they do is wrapped around their literature. They can't get through the day without writing regardless if it is a song, a poem, or a PSA to voice their activism in the community. Their words are their strength. Their words are their expression. Their words are what make them who they are. Their words are what keeps them together when they fall apart.

### **NICOLE NEITZKE**

Having received her master's in English, with a professional certificate in teaching and writing, Nicole is an adjunct English instructor at a community college. But



above all else she is a "storyteller in training," and is finally sitting down to pen the many stories bouncing around in her head. She is currently building a fantasy world of her own and is keenly aware she underestimated how much time she would need to flesh it out as she sees it in her mind.

In her spare time, which happens to be very little, she absorbs anything pop culture, often jumping into new fandoms with reckless abandon.

#### **JAN NIEBRZYDOWSKI**

Jan Niebrzydowski is author of the Madeline Donovan Mystery series which includes ten historically based stories set in the 1890s with a scrappy female detective as the lead character.

She also is a contributor to *Pomona Valley Review* in the poetry genre. She continues to write and is attempting her eleventh mystery novel.

#### **LYDIA PEJOVIC**

Lydia Pejovic is a writer and current dual MA/MFA student at Chapman University. She received her BA in English from the University of San Diego. She writes both fiction and poetry, and has a soft spot for British Victorian studies. Check her out at <https://www.lydiapejovic.com/>.

#### **NATALIE PETERKIN**

Natalie Peterkin works in academic publishing and teaches composition. She is also the lead editor of *Pomona Valley Review*. Her poetry often explores love, lust, and loss.

#### **FABRICE POUSSIN**

Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and many other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review*, the *San Pedro River Review* as well as other publications.

#### **AMANDA RIGGLE**

Amanda Riggle is the current Editor-in-Chief of *Pomona Valley Review*. Her work mostly focuses on the personal and the political, often finding a bridge between both worlds. She has been published in previous editions of *Pomona Valley Review* before joining the editorial team. She is also the educator at The Maggie Phair Institute where she runs a podcast called *Exit Capitalism, Stage Left*. When she's not running an arts journal or speaking on her podcast, she's finishing her PhD in English at the University of California, Riverside.

## CLIFF SAUNDERS

Cliff Saunders is the author of several poetry chapbooks, including *Mapping the Asphalt Meadows* (Slipstream Publications) and *This Candescent World* (Runaway Spoon Press). His poems have appeared recently in *Bryant Literary Review*, *Nine Mile Magazine*, *Qwerty*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Monterey Poetry Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, and *Progenitor Art & Literary Journal*. Originally from Massachusetts, he now lives in Myrtle Beach, SC.

## SANJEEV SETHI

Sanjeev Sethi is published in over thirty countries. His poems have found a home in more than 350 journals, anthologies, or online literary venues. *Bleb a Wee Book* from Dreich in Scotland is slated for June 2021 release.

Recent credits: *K'in Literary Journal*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Thin Air Magazine*, *Kairos Literary Magazine*, *Amethyst Review*, *Eremos Magazine*, among others. He lives in Mumbai, India.

## LAURALEE SIKORSKI

Lauralee Sikorski is a Connecticut born award winning artist currently living in the Midwest. After Art showings in Chicago, Northwest Indiana, and Michigan she traveled to London where she was Juried into a Raw Arts Exhibition at the Candid Arts Center. Here her artwork was purchased into a private collection. She continued to

show abroad in another Juried exhibition in Berlin and continued showing throughout the U.S. Along with being published in *National Arts and Literary Journals*, late last year her artwork was featured for the third time as a Cover for *Branches Magazine* celebrating over 25 years in Print!

Influences: In 2004 she received her teaching certification for Hatha Yoga and has continued her training with multiple certifications including Meditation and integrates these Eastern Disciplines with the creation of artwork.

## MATTHEW FELIX SUN

Matthew Felix Sun grew up in Manchuria (northeast China), and has been perfecting his craft since childhood, when a visit to an exhibition of Italian Renaissance art cemented his passion for painting. After an education and brief career in the sciences, which enabled him to escape his repressive native country and relocate to the US, he started to pursue art more seriously, focusing on painting with oil and, more recently, water-based media. His portfolio embraces diverse subject matter; lately, his work evokes historical and social commentary on current environmental, social, and political conditions.

Sun's work has been published by art and literary reviews including *The Amistad*, *Artistonish*, *Artist Portfolio Magazine*, *Garó*, *Owen Wister Review*, *Pomona Valley Review*, *RipRap Journal*, *Shark Reef*, *The Sonder Review*, *Superstition Review*, *Wilde*

*Magazine, William and Mary Review, and Your Impossible Voice.*

Awards & recognition include an Artistic Excellence Award from Circle Quarterly Magazine, an Honorable Mention in the juried "Fresh Works VII" exhibition presented by Harrington Gallery (Pleasanton, CA); multiple ArtSlant Prize Showcase Awards and inclusion on its Watch List; an Honorable Mention in an Artist Portfolio Magazine Landscape Contest, and its Editor's Choice Award.

Sun's work has been selected for exhibition in juried shows and competitions in San Francisco, New York, Seattle, San Diego, Cincinnati, Berkeley, and other US cities.

His works are collected in the US, Canada, and China. His portfolio can be viewed at [matthewfelixsun.com](http://matthewfelixsun.com).

### **EDWARD SUPRANOWICZ**

Edward Michael Supranowicz has had artwork and poems published in the US and other countries. Both sides of his family worked in the coalmines and steel mills of Appalachia.

### **JAMES SWANSBROUGH**

James Swansbrough runs a restaurant repair company in Chattanooga, Tennessee. His work has appeared in the *Free State Review, Still: The Journal, Cagibi, Pittsburgh Poetry Journal*, and others. He was named Honorable Mention for the 2019 Yeats Poetry Award by the WB Yeats Society of

New York. He lives in Signal Mountain, Tennessee, with his wife and daughters.

### **ANN CHRISTINE TABAKA**

Ann Christine Tabaka was nominated for the 2017 *Pushcart Prize in Poetry*, has been internationally published, and won poetry awards from numerous publications. She is the author of 9 poetry books. She has recently been published in several micro-fiction anthologies and short story publications. Christine lives in Delaware, USA. She loves gardening and cooking. Chris lives with her husband and three cats. Her most recent credits are: *Burningword Literary Journal; Muddy River Poetry Review; The Write Connection; Ethos Literary Journal, North of Oxford, Pomona Valley Review, Page & Spine, West Texas Literary Review, The Hungry Chimera, Sheila-Na-Gig, Foliate Oak Review, Better Than Starbucks!, The Write Launch, The Stray Branch, The McKinley Review, Fourth & Sycamore.*

Website: <https://annchristinetabaka.com>

### **MARIANA TRUJILLO MARQUEZ**

Mariana Trujillo Marquez received her B.A. in English from the University of California, Santa Barbara and is currently pursuing her M.A. in Literary Studies at Cal Poly Pomona. She currently works as an embedded tutor with ESL and English instructors at Mt. San Antonio College and as a Teaching Associate at Cal Poly Pomona.

### **JOHN TUSTIN**

John Tustin is currently suffering in exile on the island of Elba but hopes to return to you soon. [fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry](http://fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry) contains links to his published poetry online.

### **STEPHANIE WEINER**

Stephanie Weiner graduated from Cal Poly Pomona with a B.A. in English Literary Studies in Spring 2020. She was part of the Poet's Circle in 2019 at Cal Poly and has had some of her poetry and short stories published in Cal Poly's literary journal, *Harvest International*. Because of her love for the journal, she joined the *Harvest* team and helped produce the journal's first online zine, the *Quaranzine*. When she is not reading and writing, she loves to dance in the rain and go for short walks on the beach.

### **AMANDA WHITE**

Amanda White received her BA from Azusa Pacific University & her MA at Cal Poly Pomona University. She now teaches composition & literature at three universities. While doing so, she practices her writing, editing, and photography. She has a particular affinity for postmodernism and bio-political rhetoric in both literature and photography.

### **ERICA ZAMORA REYES**

Erica Zamora Reyes is currently a graduate student. Her artwork reflects the people and animals around her, although she is open to experimenting with new mediums and subjects. Her work often consists of graphite, charcoal, ink and watercolor.



Thank you for reading