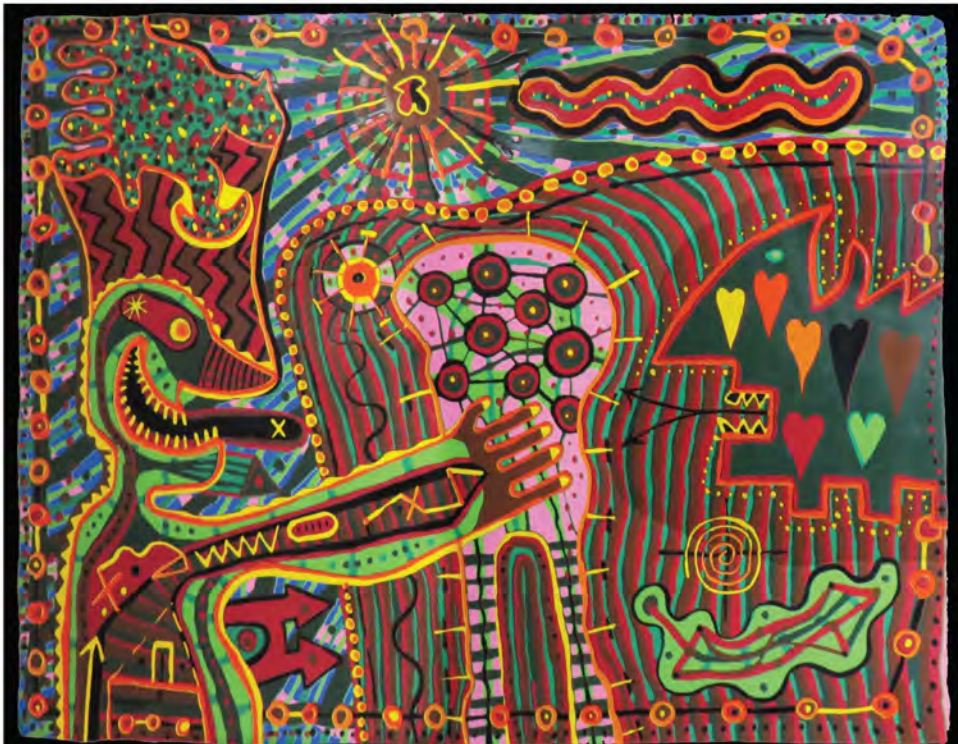


Third Wednesday

Vol. X, No. 4



I Say Goodbye To All That

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

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Editor's Note

“Dear Mr. Jibson: Your reply must be the fastest in literary history. Thank you so much for reading my poems and especially for selecting two for publication. I am in awe of your rapid response!”

At Third Wednesday we're gaining a reputation for short response times. It's one we cultivate with some pride, responding to most poetry submissions within a couple of weeks and often within a few days. How do we do it?

Many journals hold submissions until it's time to put an issue together. Once the editors' decisions are made, all of the submitters are notified at about the same time, which could be after weeks or months. There is nothing inherently bad in this, but for the submitter, this is like a poetry contest in which each submission competes against all the others.

At Third Wednesday, each poetry submission is read blindly by four associate editors. This group is pretty good at keeping up. The final read is by a co-editor (yours truly). I make the final selections with the guidance of those associates as soon as those associates have made their recommendation. There are no editorial meetings or protracted discussions about the merits of any individual poem. When our editors like a poem for publication, they say so and may add a sentence or two in a note to make their case. When you submit, your poems are evaluated by the standards and preferences of our trusted editors. Your poems are not being judged competitively against every other submission for that period. Once we have a full issue, we start over and move to the next issue with all new submissions. Be assured that when we accept or decline your poems, it is after they have received the careful and thoughtful reading that your work deserves – even if it took us only a few days.

Art submissions are handled by a single Art Editor, Judith Jacobs. She selects 10 black & white pieces for each issue and one color piece for the cover. She is able to respond to most submissions within a few days of receiving them.

We started life as a poetry magazine and we typically publish 90 or more poems per issue. These days, we also publish three or four fiction pieces per issue. Our fiction editor, John Buckley tends to hold submissions a bit longer before he commits to a final decision because he knows he has less space in the magazine. Even so, with fiction, you're never more than three months from knowing the fate of your work.

In This Issue

This is a special issue that includes the winners of the first ever George Dila Memorial Flash Fiction Contest, which honors our original fiction editor and was judged by his good friend, Phillip Sterling. We do not have a featured poet this issue so that we could make room for the contest winners without having to reduce the number of poems and poets.

Also in this issue, we feature a review of Phillip Sterling's new book, "And Then Snow" by contributor and founding editor, Laurence W. Thomas. We're proud to feature three new poems by Jack Ridl and pieces by some young poets who are seeing their first poems in print.

David Jibson, Co-editor

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Oedipus Sitting on a Hill

At first the edifice of Oedipus
betokens nothing, risks nothing, remains
stone-still looking over what was once Thebes,
but could now be a city in Hades—
he stares and stares to find the difference
in the buildings, in the populace, but
they're all just the same. Everything's as it's
always been, perfect, grander than something
Olympian, but Oedipus spies with
his kingly eyes invisible shadows
where no shadows should be, where nothing dim
could be. Winds like ghostly thieves stalk children
who now walk a more tenuous line than
they once did, now the world's flipped right over—
but then he realizes the world is
the same, just not the same for him. Regal
irises that once blazed with youthful fire,
burning fuel of hope, of dreams, they have seen
life's terminus in the throne's dark corners,
and there a spider's web endures but there's
no spider. A female fly still dangles
in silken noose somewhere, to hang for all
eternity. The city's king looks down
stoically on things he can't recognize,
through eyes too clouded to see or perhaps
clear for the first time—and not caring to
know which of these deaths is right, Oedipus
grabs two dress-pins, tokens of a better,
more vibrant time, and slams them in his eyes.

Alex Hughes
Monument, Colorado

All About the Tumor

Stupidity is not a mask; it is the face
and it is the face that betrays us
always. That is the lesson of mirrors.

I was apoplectic about corruption.
I appealed to outside magic, ideas
bright and dark. Sonya solaced me.

Flirting with eternity, strangling
the larynx of the sky, I stood on
edges and matriculated loneliness.

I read in the phonemes of the trees
"Happiness is the habit of right reason
practicing vice." My course was set.

I fell in with the felons. Good enough
chaps but derogatory, lived on the verge
of exploding. They sequenced my DNA

for it was all about the tumor, you see.
For the health of the state, it had to be
ripped away. We used mindfulness.

I recuperated in Sonya's arms. Some
days we think back and remember
"It's a wonderful life until it's not."

Bill Yarrow
Lincolnwood, Illinois

God Downloading Souls

When souls escape their bodies
they catapult to God,
seeking that final home,

and somewhere in the gas mists
of Jupiter, God lounges on a child's
red chair stenciled with apples,

grapes, figs, cherries. God
presses a key on a sky-blue
supercomputer the size of Neptune,

and fifty million more souls
downloaded daily from thousands
of planets provide her with eternities

of entertainment to occupy infinity:
the cipher God plays with time like
a hula hoop and loves to roar-laugh,

a lion in a desert oasis. Not one
creature hears God, the loneliest being
in the universe. That's why God cries

more than an ex-virgin in a Bergman
movie when she studies countless lives
in a God second. After creating

the universe, God waited for life
stories to arrive at her supercomputer.
Sobbing more than chuckling,

she asked herself, *What have
I done, why must I portray myself
sitting here at my supercomputer?*

God asks herself that question
eon after eon and doesn't
answer, for she's only God

and God has limitations, too. Why me,
she asks, Why me, dear God?
God, though, continues to download

souls on the planet Jupiter, for she's
a recluse by nature, and reviewing
the lives of souls provides her

with enough pathos and bathos
to entice her to curl in a God-like
fetal position until she convulses

for the forty-eighth sextillionth time.
She dreams of the Big Bang moment
when she created and named herself God:

no sky-blue Neptune computers back
then, no vain intellects posing as God.
No, back then, meadows of daffodils

as large as clouds for God to frolic
in, to doze under nameless trees,
to shake her head at the idea of herself.

David Spicer
Memphis, Tennessee

Bears Ears

The sky was bright and cloudless as Coyote rode his Harley Davidson over the San Juan River bridge. He was headed north. He sped up Mexican Hat's main drag while the town's retirees watched from their respective rocking chairs.

Fifteen hundred feet above the town, on the edge of Cedar Mesa, Ted Danson was reading copy for the Utah Tourism Board. Bobby Grayson stood behind the camera. Bobby was a runt of a man according to his father, a Mormon Bishop, who stood behind his son. Bishop Grayson's jaw dropped as Danson spoke of the Holy Land and the Mormon pilgrims populated with their seed. The Bishop balked at the sacrilege he saw, left the film scene without a word, and drove his Ford Bronco toward the steep gravel weave of the Moki Dugway.

Five miles south of the mesa, State Road 261's north-bound lane was blocked by a blue '97 Mazda Navajo truck. A small army of Mexican laborers surrounded it; they were painting a segment of asphalt black in order to bring out the contrast between the road and its desert surroundings. Two ad agency photographers, cups of coffee and cigarettes in-hand, casually directed traffic around the obstruction.

In the meantime Coyote sped toward Cedar Mesa at one hundred and thirty miles per hour. Changing Bear Maiden, his one true love, had been murdered on the mesa thousands of years ago. Her brother had cut the body into the little bits at the base of two prominent redrock buttes rising from the mesa-top. This, after finding her coupled with Coyote, who escaped the brothers' wrath by disguising himself as a pinyon pine (the buttes, from that time onwards, would be known as the Bear's Ears). Now Coyote was heading back, one final time, to

resurrect Changing Bear Maiden through chant and ceremony. The ad agency people and the Mexican laborers scattered when they realized that this motorcyclist had no intention of slowing down. As Coyote sped past these people the wheels lost their grip on the wet paint, the motorcycle flipped, and Coyote crashed head first into the Navajo windshield.

The Bishop arrived on the scene soon afterwards. He pushed the ad-agency photographers out of the way with his big hands and walked up to where Coyote lay spread-eagle against the shattered windshield. A shatterproof shard of glass had severed Coyote's jugular.

Bishop Grayson knew of Coyote because he'd tried, without much success, to convert the Navajo of Lukachukai when he served at the Latter Day Saints ward there in the mid-fifties. He was familiar with the Coyote stories old Navajo women told their grandchildren. The Bishop had dismissed them as silly heathen legends but now, as he took Coyote's bloody, fur-covered body in his arms, he could see otherwise.

"He's dead. There's no need for an ambulance," he called out the advertising men and a growing number of tourists who were pulling off the highway to see the carnage.

"Who the fuck are you?" asked a balding ad agency photographer.

"Don't swear," said the Bishop, placing Coyote's body in the trunk of his Bronco. "Go back to your ways. Go back to New York."

The bishop got back behind the wheel. He turned the ignition key and spun wheels as he turned the truck around.

He drove back up the Moki Dugway, past the turnoff, towards the site where his son was filming. He drove fifty

miles across the plateau until he reached the National Forest boundary. He turned off the highway onto a four wheel drive road leading up to the twin nine-thousand foot high sandstone buttes known as the Bear's Ears. The road took him through Aspen groves and pine forest. He parked his truck at the edge of the forest. He removed Coyote's body from the back of his truck and tied the front paws together with cord. The bishop lifted the body, lowered the bound paws around his neck, and started to climb the highest butte. The talus slope leading up to the sandstone cliff face was very steep and he had to circle around to the east face in order to find a manageable route up the sandstone. With the weight of Coyote on his back it was a difficult climb. The bishop wasn't in the greatest physical shape in the world but he pretty much made up for that deficiency in determination. It took him two hours to climb to the top. On the summit a glimmer of reflected sunlight to the west caught his eye. It was Bobby Grayson's film crew. His son was a fool in a world of fools, and always would be.

Thoughts of penance and disbelief raced through his mind as he piled rocks on Coyote's body (there was no loam to dig a grave in). The work took about an hour. And as he placed the last rock on the grave he knew there could be no finer place for burial under the Utah sky.

Dan Grossman
Carmel, Indiana



Remnants

Photograph

Rana Williams

Hayesville, North Carolina

Haibun*

Droplets of dew darken into tiny rivulets, stutter down my slick sleeping bag to damp grass. Off across a field a dim shadow glides.

blanched in mist
gray horse pale rider
silent fade

I could have been a winter fallen branch sinking into soft earth, a happenstance subter-fuge for evading notice on posted land. Sit up. Behind tree leaves the rising sun lurks. Stillness summons hunger. Unzip backpack. Clear plastic swaddles dry lettuce leaves flattened papery atop pale slices from a chicken's breast between white bread lips. The flavor of gray. Sunshine smears wavering golden dapples across a flat-topped rock with a greenish motionless tapering lump on it like a growth.

four legs tense
six legs large eyes unseeing
juicy tasty fly

Four legs claim the spot where an instant earlier stood six. With an almost audible crunch green jaws close. The breakfast more satisfying?

Waned
gray horse pale rider
in dawn mist

Don Dussault
Santa Rosa, California

**Haibun: literally, haikai writings, a prosimetric literary form originating in Japan, combining prose and haiku. The range of haibun is broad and frequently includes autobi-ography, diary, essay, prose poem, short story and travel journal.*

Ritual Piece in Sea Major

This exercise is for acoustic guitarists who live near the ocean.

Bring your guitar to the beach at sunset on the first day of summer. Tune the A string to the sound of the waves. The result will be your reference tone for tuning the other strings.

Sing a song to the ocean, one to which it could relate, e.g., a traditional folk song like “The Greenland Whale Fisheries” or a popular song like Bobby Darin’s “Beyond the Sea.”

Go back to the shore with your guitar every Saturday evening for the duration of the season. Use the same tuning method. Sing a different song on each visit.

The damp air will degrade the strings, but don’t change them until last day of the ritual.

On the Saturday before Labor Day, remove the strings, wind them into tight circles, and deposit them in a large glass jar. Bring the jar to the beach and fill it with seawater. Screw on the lid. Sing, a Capella, your final song.

Wave goodbye and take the jar home. Never let it go.

Joel Allegetti
Fort Lee, New Jersey

Perhaps Robert Sund

There is a teahouse,
or at least I imagine it so,
standing fragile on cedar legs
in a tangled slough
off the Skagit River.
And on its weathered deck,
a table with nothing more on it
than a small vase
waiting for wildflowers.

I see a poet,
perhaps Robert Sund,
sitting there writing,
a small rowboat rocking gentle
in the west wind and the years.

Jude Dippold
Concrete, Washington

Tête-à-Tête

The handsome painter stops and comes outside,
admires the Celtic knot around my neck.
I notice how he's charming and blue-eyed

and eager to explain, with muted pride,
his flaming donut on display. "I'm such a wreck—"
the handsome painter stops. I stand outside

his studio and smile while he confides,
"post-Trump, the world feels like a tiny speck,
a crumb on fire." He's charming and blue-eyed.

I'm listening, as women do, decide
this dance is one of commerce, not of sex.
The handsome painter stops. We stand outside

the window, gaze at his *Tight Sphere of Kelp* beside
Blueberry Donut Blaze. I'll write no check.
I'll slide no card. Although he's charming and blue-eyed,

I don't desire seaweed or dough deep-fried;
my speed is more Matisse, Toulouse-Lautrec.
The handsome painter stops, goes back inside.
Pedestrians, beware: he's charming and blue-eyed.

Kathleen McClung
San Francisco, California

Chris

When I think of my brother in law Chris,
his years pushing a van to strip-malls
and broken 24 hour photo machines while
teaching himself blues harmonica,
I imagine ice, a salt stained highway, radio
blasting as his harp joins in, riffs ahead,
until his hoarse voice takes over and
he's shouting into all of frozen
voiceless Pennsylvania, howlin'
like the wolf, then dialing it down
he parks, locks, steps down, becomes
reassuring-guy-with-tools who keeps
a listing business right side up.

Kip Zegers
Bronx, New York

A Baby's Crib as Bright as the Afternoon Sun

All of it seems so simple now, just a matter
of one's perspective as Buddha
or Tu Fu or even Christ himself might've said
if one of them had found himself standing in my shoes.
Anyone could see I was just dealing with high school
punks riding around after school left out,
circling back & forth around the block, hooting
& hollering as they hung out their old Chevy's
windows, laughing their heads off, watching
me lug that yard sale, baby crib home, hefting it
on my back a dozen city blocks & more
across Mt. Pleasant, & whatever it cost me
back then, five bucks or three or perhaps a lousy two,
I can't recall now, but who could after nearly a half century?

Yet, no matter what price I paid, it was one hell of an expense
back then, what with the rent coming due – the landlord always
breathing down my neck – groceries & gas for the VW, not
to mention the baby fast on the way, but at that very moment
I was in my heaven, imagining I was an Atlas lifting the world
on my shoulders. The crib was my singular Truth
regardless of the fact that I still held several layers of youthful
fantasy clinging like onion skins to me,
but even then I could envision the baby lying in
the crib's sun-brilliant yellow. Those young punks
driving by & hanging out the windows to point out
the fool I was, let them laugh until
they choked for all I cared. Truth was clearer
for me with each step as I shifted the crib's weight
to one shoulder & then back to the other. For good or ill
I was making my way, yes, & smiling inside
with my life at that moment so full,
so very full, & all the world ahead of me.

- 1970

Terry Savoie
Coralville, Iowa

Pebbles

Time smooths rainbow hardness
Of tree basalt, vermilion jasper,
Silvery granite and pale feldspar
With the help of humdrum
But patient jeweler of tides;
Volcano-born, earthquake-quarried,
Heat-cracked, wind-carved,
Death shapes compact among the rocks;
It drifts light as a fractured bone
When the tide uncovers,
It blinks among the smashed shells,

Upset by gulls, bleached by salt and sun
The broken crockery of living things;
An eagle surveys from the upland,
Unsympathetic to the burdens
I have carried here;
The sea would not hug me, so I sit,
Hollow as driftwood, jumbled as pebbles

Sandeep Kumar Mishra
Rajasthan, India

For Life's Dance

Grandpa taught me to slow
dance
for that first dance in fifth
grade.
Place your right hand,
just firmly enough,
on her back,
so she can feel it,
Then she will decide
if she wants to move with you.
That's all I remember--
all that ever mattered.

Timothy Philippart
Holland, Michigan

Chamber Musicians Also Wash the Dishes, Check the Mail

But now the chamber musicians are
just past halfway in Glazunov's Elegy,

the part where in rehearsal they stopped.
"It feels as if I'm behind." "I don't think

so. I think I'm ahead." When I listened
all I heard was a whole note held

in the third movement of a symphony
by Tinnitus, all I felt was the wax waning

onto the timpani of my ear drum.
Next comes another elegy, this by Suk,

Suk who was fifteen when he wrote its
sorrow-filled walk through what he did

not yet know. The chamber musicians
know. They carry elegy in their fingers.

They open the world on the other side
of every note and let us breathe

within the haunting space between each
touch of key and pull of bow. They believe

heaven is between the stars, music
in the empty sleeve of the one-armed man.

Jack Ridl
Douglas, Michigan

Ghazal on a Clouded Day

Let's refuse to play the game for a change
and not repeat the unacceptable blame for a change.

There are no rules worth heeding all the time
but why not pay attention to your fame for a change?

Don't bother with the results of playing the odds
and concentrate on what's the same for a change.

Better to wander among the possibilities
of sex and try to please your dame for a change.

We went into the unknown to seek the truth
and didn't accept whatever came for a change.

The mirror shows us only what we want us to see
but we should always peek behind the frame for a change.

Never depend on idle gossip for your truth.
Find answers in something much less lame for a change.

The challenge is there for us to meet
with no doubting Thomas to bring us shame for a change.

Laurence W. Thomas
Ypsilanti, Michigan

The Notebook

Every August
my mother got me a new 3-ring binder.

1968 was the coolest notebook ever, covered in denim.
Denim! I knew I was privileged.
Fourth-grade peers envied my handsome notebook.

I decorated it with a Dixie flag at the top.
Below that, fifty stars circling the words,
ELECT GEORGE WALLACE.
I don't know why I supported the segregationist.

I didn't know any "coloreds."
I lived in an all-white family
in an all-white community
that sheltered an all-white school.

For three months before and six months after Election Day
I carried my notebook.
By May, the denim corners were worn away
the cardboard beneath decorated with doodles
the flag's colors faded.

Five decades later, I fear a black man
looking deep
into my maturing eyes
will see a ragged notebook and assume
it was never thrown away.

Rick Jordan
Lewisville, North Carolina

A Little Wheel in a Pre-Cambrian Dawn

Before anything else
before
anything at all
it glowed like that
a star
a beautiful anxious
speck of a star
the first uncertain move
in the great game of Go
nervous unsteady
exhaustible

and yes beautiful
resting just now
almost still
it dreams of going
see how it trembles
in the outward spokes.

Steve Leggett
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Passacaglia

A slow, funereal piece, composed with a steady, unchanging left hand

This ground bass
is losing time
like the clock
on the mantle

he has wound
each mourning
for her: trying,
just barely,

to keep some hope
alive. Bach knew
all of this:
how each Sarabande,

that saddest
of dances,
depends on
on keeping the hands

apart, the left
like heartbeats
in dead of winter
that throb

to stave off loss,
while the right
absorbed, in
in its own

blizzard
of keys,
races away,
not caring

any longer
about the other
octaves
of this world.

Richard Luftig
Pomona, California

I Will Not Be Sad In This World

The music I hear
is without form. I cannot cup it
in my hand like the rainwater
that drips from the pointed leaves
of the dusty yucca.
It cannot be framed in the air
like the notes of snow that fall
around the winter-locked cabin.
It wanders, an untethered
fragment of air,
not even as real as the light
that reflects off the flat blue plain
of the Pacific. The wind that careens
through the pass makes more sense
than these long drawn out sighs.
I cannot listen. I will not
be sad in this world,
even though darkness be
on the face of the deep.

Ruth Bavetta
San Clemente, California

African Man at The Pump

I pay in the Little Champ, and the worker, Jasmine, cheerful, apologizes for the wait—a sale of lottery stubs—then rests her hand on the register, feels for the slip, the paper curl and heat of commerce. The chrome-hard counter, the packs of jerky and seeds, minicups of peanut butter, glossy fans of magazines.

I swipe the oily, gray box, hit okay and I'm out, shades and hat for the sun, row of pumps gushing fuel beneath the ruffled, aluminum awning and there he is—brown pants, purple-striped shirt, green tie short and wide above his belt—hand on the nozzle pumping. He smiles. I smile, give a nod, a bow almost, and a little wave as I walk to my car

I do not walk to him, do not introduce myself, do not ask his origin—Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda? I do not say, *I have been there. I do not ask, are you a student here? A professor? A refugee?* Because he might dislike my attention, my presumption, my intrusion—despite his smile. But I know those clothes. Like the men in churches there on Sundays, and women too, in markets, their bright bursts of color.

Maybe he would've liked to have met me, been happy to have answered my questions, been in need of some kind word—and anyway, *hakuna matata*. But it's too late. I steer away, and on to Cashwise and plastic milks, juices, and punches, vegetables misting in their binny rows.

William Snyder
Fargo, North Dakota

Men of Wheat

Wheat Field with Sheaves

Vincent Van Gogh, 1888

Wheat fields again.
For the eighth time. Ninth.
Twenty-ninth. Stalks
and frazzle. October
browns. Wheat stacks, like
men, like wheat men
weeping. Such dry tears.
And it is cold, and wind
sifts chaff and burrs
beneath my scarf. *But I
need you, he says. Stand
close. Shield me. Watch me.
I'll warm you up.*

And as he paints, he
does warm me—his long
blue day, his green
in the distance, a narrow
windmill and a solitary
cedar divining up
to the sun. And his bits
of red—not fire, but
warm enough. And blue,
pools of blue as if
the wheat men dance
on water, embrace, hug
each other—and they
warm me—those Ottoman
spinners, those dervish
whirlers. They lean and
bow and stretch and dance
and clasp and pray. I am
warm, I say. I am warm.

William Snyder
Fargo, North Dakota



Ringmaster's Dance

Drawing

Denny Marshall
Lincoln, Nebraska

The Trick is in the Being

suppose you do not know where to go from here but go anyway
the burning nature of it
perhaps to return someday
but fog being the best of friends asks only of you bits and pieces and small pleasantries
walking the night deck of some rum-soaked ship
did you jump
foolishness abounds
like any good poet
i fell

Paul Bamberger
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

The Brownies Of Alice B. Toklas

Some women have small thin mustaches, pepper black, soft as a blanket worn to over-ripe thread. The mustache might be softer than the face it decorates, which might be all points and slopes. Descriptive enough? Gertrude says, description is not literature. If you wish to see what others see you can only look at color photographs. Never at words. Even road signs read differently depending on where you are going, where you have been, if it is raining, and if the sun is shining through the rain. The sign might be on a street in Oakland, California which always seems distant even if you are only one city over. As places go it is just as good as any other place, certainly no better.

Mike James
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Home (II)

The sound of the alarm ringing in another room, a siren
coming behind you before you can see it. A baby,

not yours, crying in a stroller while his mother
talks on the phone, the conversation

just out of earshot, the whisper behind you
as you wait for the movie lights

to dim. The din of traffic eight stories below you
in a strange city and the call of young men

as they say goodnight, drunken, joyfully outside
your hotel door, the story you can't

quite remember or the conversation you had
when you'd had those two, was it three

glasses of sweet Portuguese wine. The photograph
of fields you know will be dried to husks

and the sweet remembered sound of the red-winged
blackbird just as night falls. It calls to you.

Lori Anne Gravley
Yellow Springs, Ohio

First Time On The Ice *for Emma*

Tiny skates laced tight
around her ankles,

her pink, puffy coat
buttoned to the brim,

two front teeth grinning
beneath her helmet,

she waddles with poise
to the ice's edge,

tests a toe, and then
she's off and in love

with the winter games,
not the Olympics,

but the controlled spray
from her bladed heels

and cold afternoons
on the lake. Racing

flat out from us both,
that quick look over

her shoulder, it's like
she can really fly,

and all we can do
is trace her circles.

Robert Fillman
Macungie, Pennsylvania

Ars Poetica

I want each word to pour out
like thick molasses, a dark mass
that gets all over the body
the more you touch it
the more it penetrates
and I want it to melt onto the tongue
so that it sticks to the palate
and makes my accent visible
with strings from roof to tongue,
a marionette of tree sugar

dancing into the next line

and I want every poem to be
a divination, a summoning
of the already cremated corpses
of my bloodline, a convocation
of their thermal shadow: mami, papi, hermano,
lover, tia, tio, abuela moving back
before I, too, was scorched
and part earth, soil not just
in color like I am now, but in
calloused touch & ash taste & the stench
of fermented figs

and I want each line to be the very fire
of these incinerations
only it starts from inside
lighting its way out
like a human flashlight
revealing the permeability
of membranes, porous bones and skin
translucent and divine turning each one of us
into a Chinese lantern expelled
skyward into the blackness.

Tatiana Forero Puerta
Mineola, New York

Why We Stay

7am on the porch with strong coffee.
All the artists, poets, philosophers with
no reasons, and haphazard gardeners are

sleeping in or waking to their visions. At
the feeder—the first birds of the morning:
chickadees in their black and white cassocks,

the house finches, their muted red scarves
head to shoulder, nuthatches upside down.
This is the way the day is to be—loved

without definition. Joy known without
needing sorrow. It is only quiet, first
light moving in its unencumbered way

across each leaf branched or fallen. Deep
in itself the earth trembles, our own way
still lost and lingering at an unfelt edge.

Jack Ridl
Douglas, Michigan

Trinity

The old women settled together
in the corner of the pub.
“You need to light
a brand new white candle
in the room with the spirit,”
one said as she lifted her glass
of steaming hot cider.
“And you have to open a window
and command the thing to leave at once,”
added another with a nod and a wink
as if to settle all ghostly matters,
now and forever more.
“One of the loveliest memories
I have is of the house
at the end of the village street
with a tall candle
burning in every window
on Christmas morning,” said a third,
in a small voice, almost to herself,
which made the other two
stop and look at her
and all thoughts of Marley’s ghost
vanished at that moment

and it was then that all three,
smiled and pulled a bit closer
together and one by one,
each in her own peculiar way,
began softly singing *Adeste Fideles*
and the room grew a bit quieter to listen
and one old sod at the bar,
with one foot in this world as they say
and one foot just beyond the veil,
joined in with a wet and burbling,
“Oh come, let us adore Him,”
croaking, more than singing,
into his pint of bitter.

Terry Allen
Columbia, Missouri

Hushing Roses

Hushing roses after a winter of pain, the summer of no rain
pushes a future entrainment of thought through a tunnel

widened with turquoise & alabaster, a bastard he truly was,
old-school disaster, unfastidious to a fault, his fault-line for the rift,

set me adrift, rode off to paradise in a contrivance of his own devise,
revising my life, hiding light, heaving wool over everyone's eyes,

ice floes flow backward, toward bare beginnings, the birth of sadness
in the proportion of madness allotted to the brain in the wintertime
of pain, the summer's solitude, the fall of Rome, that last spring in Spain.

Linda Stryker
Phoenix, Arizona

Sonata

How far
is the river that

thirsts for
stones wounded

by love?

Shedding everything

My love grew like grief.

A stone whose wound is
no longer its own.

Here is a spring

that has not returned
to us all it took from
the light of our love.

Trivarna Hariharan
New Delhi, India

How To Write

I prefer to write when the light is dim
And I can see my thoughts more clearly
Near the wall

Sometimes rain spoils my thinking

The drops falling on tiles
Or near the gutter
Drips sliding down the gutter
To the ground

Sunny days blanch me
I feel I'm on a beach
Barren, hot, bright

In lounge chairs others
Wear sunscreen
Laugh joke have a grand time
But I'm not the bathing beauty type
Nor the rock band type

I'd sooner wander to see a stone
Or a fish
Or a rabbit coming out of my home
watching me
As if an owner
And I a trespasser

I'll walk softly
So as not to disturb
The tranquility of the grass.

Alan Kleiman
New York, New York

Only Now I Recognize My Father

How generous was he not to have mocked at my suitors.
How perfectly balanced, benevolent, opening doors,
How easily he offered a beer to the latest pretender,
Some slovenly lout whom I casually touched on the arm.
He would laugh at his jokes and ask him the name of his father
And say that he'd met him or anyway wished that he might,
And make me believe I was wise in my choice of companion
When, now I consider, how could he be less than aghast
That I in my ardor was squandering all my devotion
From moment to moment on someone outrageous or boring
Who would surely be fondling my breasts way before midnight
In a broken-down car, parked, with the radio blaring.
And he knew in a week or a month this lackluster suitor
Would have filled up his gas tank, jauntily calling: So long!
As he sped to the arms of some more amorous playmate
Leaving me for the nonce in my father's benevolent gaze.
How fortunate was I that all my mistakes were my own.

Ansie Baird
Buffalo, New York

Jerusalem Women

Some glow with wisdom
some crackle
some flow

some with bitterness
some earthy acceptance

some rail
some rage with anger
some lie

with clarity some
are knowing

Barbara Ryder-Levinson
Azusa, California

In A Far Country

In a far country of mind,
in the city of oyster luster,

where absolutes stand slanted,
where debris is gold-flecked,
where apples don't have worms,
or if they do,

the worms are, in reality, friendly
snakes offering compassion
instead of temptation and exile,

love, like an impatient lion,
roars through every avenue
longing to wake the lifeless.

Carol Sunde
Westport, Washington

Yoga

I learned to speak by repeating
what others have said to me. I spent
years hating phonics before I could
lose myself in a book and love it.

But I did not know it would be so
difficult to move my body the way
children do. To touch my toes, or lie
face down with my feet in the air,

or smile for no reason but to feel
the muscles of my face brighten.
To breathe like it's the only thing
that matters—and then realize it is.

No one told me it would feel like this—
As if to pull off rain-soaked jeans
and dress in warm clothes again. So
I peel at the world-hardened layers

each night in low light. I have learned
to move only by the limitations of my
own body, and love my weaknesses as if
accepting them is my greatest strength.

Dana Johnson
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Waiting for the Ferry

I had a vest with long leather fringes
that swayed when I walked. Who has it
now? And that book, its title forgotten,

that stood at the end of a shelf?
It spoke solace from every soft page.
Women whose names I never learned,

their flowered aprons. Now then,
now then, they said. What I want now
is more eggs and bacon, heated rooms,

kisses to start the cold day. We used
to trust more—bridges, fresh produce,
cigarettes, shoes. We trusted the sky.

Now I'm a broken-down grinder-mixer
or maybe a roller mill, my feet
so frigid I wear two pairs of socks.

Everything aches. Water I give
to water. From this cup to the cold
creek. Air to air: this breath.

I watch to see what darkens, what
persists. The last ferry ride costs
a drachma, so I carry a silver coin.

Barbara Daniels
Sicklerville, New Jersey

The Arch Manipulator

A teacher bragged to me in his sports
car—a Mazda—that he dubbed himself the Arch
Manipulator, and before I could ask him to elaborate
he recited a long, erudite poem by Auden
that I can't recall any more than the moon
with her cratered face remembers her forgotten man,

so, I knew this fellow would never man
up to his self-indulgent title, any more than I'd sport
a face with craters much like those on the moon,
who once each month smiles a smile so arch
I search for that enigmatic poem by Auden
and laugh at myself for failing to see elaborate

lie-truths the teacher told his students: Never elaborate
in a poem what it feels like to be a woman or a man,
and don't imitate poets who imitate life, like Auden—
just write banal poems that need writing, such as sports
poems, he said with his trademarked lonely arch
of a sneer, like that of the distant, beautiful moon,

the adored moon, the mythologized moon, the moon
we shoot at each other when failing to elaborate
vulgar messages we attempt to convey by the arches
of McDonald's, built by a business man
named Kroc, who wore a white shirt, tie, and a sport
coat, and who, for some reason, reminded me of Auden,

who, if he ever ate a double cheese, wouldn't be Auden,
would he, even though the burger resembles the cratered moon?
Maybe Auden, like the teacher and Kroc, drove a sports
car—an Alfa Romeo with decals of the Muse so elaborate
It'd be the envy of every lonely, moonless man
Who'd never dream of naming himself the Arch

Manipulator, unless he saw himself arch
in an ironic way, much like Auden
would if he compared himself to the man
abandoned by the crater-faced moon,
who smiles at us after we ask her to elaborate
on her silent riddle, Forgetting men? My sole sport.

With an arch of a smile, each month, the crater-faced moon,
(the Arch Manipulator — not Auden) fails to elaborate
when she intimates that she ignores the man in her for sport.

David Spicer
Memphis, Tennessee

Levi Strauss & Co. 501 Jeans circa 1953

I pet the fur of your ochre thread,
your white-speckled skin
of night-mountains, cursing
their murk into your leg.

Your stiff tag predicts the future mile,
welcomes my fresh kill of belt,
its rotten shoulder and working copper
rivets like resplendent boulders

eddyng blood out their smooth navels
just after a cloudburst's quiet yawn,
gleeking the California countryside
you sprouted from, grown strong

from the discipline, blooming smoke
of both factory and field, two horses
pulling at my leathery wet breath
whose hanging dew always floats west.

Dawn sparks its stodgy red tag, numbers hot
like a trigger or rig stitching up a lake.
Its heliolatry, blinkered in white glimmerings,
boasts its wares, tiny golden-blue flakes

superstitious as God holding His
breath whenever galloping by Hell.

Henry Goldkamp
New Orleans, Louisiana

Sky Death in Iowa

The air, the capacious, sultry air, is falling
Into the pale violet of a summer's eve, here

In flyover country. The contrail of an airplane
Traces a furry, bone-white line, mournful in

The sky, so high the fuselage and wings stay
Lit by the setting sun. Shadows over the silky

Corn and galvanic silos thicken to bring exeunt
For the play of this day, what we actors, we

Actors all, call night. Those in the grizzled gray
Greasepaint of exit roles, call it death, not night,

As the high-flown plane passes above, away into
The setting sun, to visit night upon other lands.

Gary Heath
Clinton, Iowa



Solitude

Photograph

Tyrone Harper

Dearborn Heights, Michigan

The Swimmer

The porch steps are warm
beneath my feet.
I follow the flagstones
to the street
and touch my toe
to the asphalt,
as a swimmer
would test the water.
Still too hot to
walk on barefoot.

The red and gold poppies
at the edge of the yard
are closed in the wash of
the moon, waiting for morning.
Like me, they are unaware
of the possibilities
of blooming
on a hot summer night.

Debbie Collins
Richmond, Virginia

Pro Lingua Mori

"Unati rupay", he says, handing me the fruit.
I frown; the number means nothing to me.
Unati, unati ... the sound may well be
Familiar; the meaning does not take root.

This is my native idiom, my own Punjabi,
My one language of indisputable fluency;
And I, foreign-language teacher, PhD-to-be

Wither beneath the incredulous contempt
Of the fruit-seller as I sheepishly attempt
To fish a smartphone out of my book-bag chute

My mother-tongue comes to me vexedly, haltingly
Through a furtively consulted Google dictionary

Hibah Shabkhez
Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Perhaps the Smell

For Flint, Michigan

Perhaps the smell
of metal decades—
welding, sparks,
cars rolling the line—
perhaps it was confusing
when the taps flowed
with those memories
and it felt like maybe
this was just
the smell of home.

Perhaps the look—
matching flesh to river,
corroded pipes
to a brown-boiling pot
unable to churn
clear again.

Perhaps the feel
of calloused hands
washing themselves
in sludge—

perhaps the sound
of small mouths
parched and crying—

perhaps none of it mattered.

The trickle of voices
were quiet enough
to ignore awhile

until
they broke open
louder
than the rush
of an
open
hydrant.

Issa Lewis
Plainwell, Michigan

How to Cure Trigger Finger

One day I was walking and I saw one of the janitors dressed up in a cheerleader outfit and wearing fairy wings, and I said to him, “Oh, are you going to a costume party tonight?” And he said, “No, I’m going to dodge-ball.” This kind of stuff doesn’t usually happen in little towns. If you designed it from scratch, you wouldn’t have designed it the way it is. Close your eyes and just breathe, just breathe. There’s nothing left to steal. Something told me to do pull-ups. Or ram into people in the street. Painkillers didn’t help. It was nonstop, the worst. I lost two fingers. They are completely gone. It’s hard not to see God in that.

Howie Good
Hyannis, Massachusetts

Where Every Move Gives a Sentence to the Future

Every day, light reaching the Earth turns into fractal lift, or not a lot has meaning. Every day, blue of the oceans seen from outer space symbolizes heart-beat breathing where the owls sleep.

Orbital momentum continues to dissolve and concentrate into nothing different from what is. The old brain sleeps and then wakes in old-growth forests at the coasts of light, where the existing laws of ownership may have been misguided and the new brain's still under construction.

So here we are, writing letters to future people and future species, where they'll be struggling, suffering, if the fossil burns keep up, if the ultra-warmed Arctic releases bursts of methane, if the carbon draw-down doesn't kick in. Maybe we explain that we tried, but our senses were limited, that we hadn't understood who we are, where we are, and all our time was going into labors for money.

Every day, around the world, far more than we know is being learned. Every day, blessed will be the woman or man whose home is at home within home out through the miles and down within bone.

James Grabill
Portland, Oregon

Turned To Dust

Nothing stirs
In the white village of the dead.
This broken house
Turned to dust.

A clammy mist pours over the garden,
The pink light of dawn bursting and bleeding.
I hear the rain's violent hiss.
Then nothing.

Natalie Crick
Newcastle Upon Tyne, United Kingdom

The Guitarist

Malcolm asked for solitude and when everyone left him he wandered the streets high and asked for silence then after turning deaf the music stopped playing in his head and fearing for his sanity though not asking for loneliness it came down upon his shoulders and he teared up and jabbered some said they heard his sobs in the Embarcadero Plaza in the early morning hours on top of that he asked for eternal peace and was assured by his signing-palm reader there'd be plenty of time later he saw shadows and mouthed questions to them while they strayed off into corners and hid under his bed where spiders slept in the sound hole of his old guitar with the expended needles used to poison himself he asked why spiders carry sacs of poison but do not poison themselves then he went blind then died and everything from his life was disassembled while everyone who had swayed to his strums came to the wake to lay eyes on his body but he was a no-show there was only a guitar's broken neck and tuning pegs as well as the strings and frets the waist and bridge bone and the fingerboard

Joseph Zaccardi
Fairfax, California

When the Birds Vanished

They were gone suddenly.
A silence in the oaks.
A stillness haunting the air
As if a breath could not be taken.
They didn't wait around
Hoping for the visa
Not believing such things
Could happen. When they set off
It was night, they took the baggage
They could carry, tramped through fields
Until they reached the mountains
Where the guide held out his hand
For money. High overhead in dawn-light

The shadow of a cross
Threatened their passage.
They had to set down what had
Grown too heavy. Even then
They imagined returning. The silver and lace
Of the apartment on the boulevard
Where their children played while the elders
Decided. The hawks filled the sky,
Soaring the thermals. When their ship was
Refused in port after port, they continued to hope
Past reason. Hadn't they flown
When the branches filled with
The hunched shoulders of idols,
The song-less ones. Sharp eyed
As snipers. O, they left all right.
The bread unsliced on the table
And the silence, the silence.

Joan Colby
Elgin, Illinois

**Age 12, beneath a Harvest of Stars and Driven
by a Man's Murder**

on our farm, I would walk our grove,
searching for the grave—that bed quickly made—
of one killed in a quarrel over a girl
a hundred years before. My blood kicked up its heels
to learn that just past the shelter belt
gunfire more than blistered the air
at a dance held on a makeshift floor—
a few ragged planks put together by a fiddle.

As for grief, I brushed against it—
that no one had slung his corpse
over the back of a horse and hauled it home—

and being born on this soil
turned by shovel to put him away,
we shared common ground. Still, imagination
staked the claim, dwelling upon
the place he lay as I walked over fallen branches,
dreaming that from a low cloud
making its rounds, he'd stride to meet me,
or at least I'd have known
by its glowering leaves
or limbs so knotted it would be better off
a stump—which tree he lay beneath.

Maybe crickets, thick with nightly clarity,
would tell me which tree, then pondering
the girl he lost his life over,
I'd do anything to please,
but bring it my neighbor's daughter
when his roaming spirit lit upon her white thighs
as she glided high in her tree swing.

One night, wind drifted me to the seventh tree
in the sixth row. And the tree, with moss
for a mouth, said without moving it,
to get the hell out. "You are sick with
picking over things, a boy after carrion,
my death among them." The wind,
with leafy whimsy, agreed but laughed it off
and advised me to leave; alive and excited in my shame,
I took flight down a streak of trees.

Rodney Torreson
Grand Rapids, Michigan



Sketchbook page 16

Drawing

John Loree

Ypsilanti, Michigan

Judge's Statement:
George Dila Memorial Fiction Contest 2017

When asked, as I sometimes am, to delineate the difference between a work of flash fiction and a prose poem, I often beg the question. "Let someone else worry about that," I might say. "Just concern yourself with the integrity of the individual work."

I'm sure the response sounds dismissive—and perhaps I mean it to be—but not because I don't have an answer to the trendy (and tedious) critical bantering among editors and academics to make the distinction. To me, the difference is obvious.

Flash fiction, like all good fiction, utilizes many of literary qualities often associated with poetry, such as the delight in language, the selectivity of diction, the reliance on sensory detail, and a certain conciseness (this latter being the quality that most often causes genre disputation). But fiction must have narrative qualities as well: characterization, situation (or setting), complication or conflict (whether explicit or implied), and resolution. In addition, the story *must be complete in itself*—that is, it must be unified in a satisfying way, often in a way that makes the reader want to go back and visit it again (yes, like a good poem). It should not leave us wanting, not read like excerpt from something else.

That's what I mean by *integrity*. A short story that stands out, to me, is one in which its elements, whether poetic or narrative, work within the constraints and limitations of its form (primarily one of word count, in the case of "flash")—or better, work to serve its unity, so that the manipulation of its conciseness, its play of language, its implications of character and plot all work together in a new and unique way.

That being said, the easy thing about judging the George Dila Memorial Fiction Contest was that I didn't have to worry about distinguishing poetry from prose. The submitters did that for me, self-determining that what they entered was indeed "fiction." The more difficult aspect of judging was separating from a large number of very well written stories the few that really stood out, the ones—I'd like to argue—with the most "integrity," which, when it came down to it, were the ones I simply liked the best.

In my First Place pick, "Lemon Ice for Dessert," we meet Marguerite, who, while riding the Green Line train on her way to her see her grandfather (whose eyebrows at times "knit together like a pair of wrestling caterpillars"), catalogs the details of her journey, both actual and imaginative, because "she couldn't help herself." While meant to be a routine trip, this particular journey becomes one of profound realization, when Marguerite's observations turn inward and she must confront the inception of her emotional awareness.

Second Place I award to "Thirteenth Birthday" for its breadth of conciseness and understatement. In just over 100 words, the unnamed main character ("you") captures a moment familiar to many of us who look back on adolescence with both awe and understanding, that combination of fear and pride we felt as we navigated our way into our teens with all the confidence of an arrow floating on the surface of (what I imagine is) a Great Lake.

The classic epistolary format is well-served by my Third Place choice, "The Book of Unbelievable Things." Letters are especially suited to flash fiction, as they are similarly limited in size and often focused in intent (we write most letters purposefully, to make formal demands or requests). In a letter, character is revealed through the first-person point of view, by way of what we are told, and how. And the story becomes one of what we are *not* told, but must infer from the tone and syntax, which, in this case, is slightly foreign.

A number of other stories were also “In Contention,” but space limitations in this Prize Issue only allow room to print three. So as Honorable Mentions I offer “How We Are Changed,” for the anaphoric syntax and detail that brings to intense familiarity the pathos of a life lived fully; “Snapshot,” for the story behind the story, built from what the narrator knows (or imagines) out of his/her own photographic experience and conjecture (in a “catalog” frame suitable to the limits of the short form); and “The Dunbar Overpass,” the best of several “punch line” stories submitted to the George Dila Memorial Fiction Contest (in the tradition of Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery,” a type of narrative George himself occasionally appropriated.). I can’t help but think that the small town characters and politics of “The Dunbar Overpass” would have made George smile and nod his head . . .

Other stories notable for their inventiveness in adapting narrative to purposes of a story told “Under 1000 words” are, in no particular order: “Here’s Your Stupid Essay,” “The Comma: Concerned About Puncticide,” “A Real Pull,” and “No Hidden Nightingale.” These—and no doubt others submitted to the contest—will surely find alternative ways into the literary world. I wish them well.

Phillip Sterling is the author of *In Which Brief Stories Are Told* (Wayne State U Press) and several collections of poetry. His flash story “kidnappingtax.blogspot.gov” won the 2015 Monstrosities of the Midway contest. His story “Registry” was selected for *Best Small Fictions 2017*, now available from Braddock Avenue Books and major retailers.

George Dila Memorial Flash Fiction Contest - First Place

Jeanie Mortenson
Ludington, Michigan

Lemon Ice For Dessert

Marguerite pressed her nose against the cold window pane and listened to the clack of steel against steel. The steady rhythm could have lulled another girl, but Marguerite prided herself on staying alert. Grandfather had dubbed her the most observant girl in all of Boston, and she planned to live up to his assessment. She'd been aboard the Green Line only fifteen minutes, but had already managed to catalog countless specifics about her surroundings.

Had anyone inquired, Marguerite could have reported that between the two sets of exit doors, eight rectangular windows looked out on varying shades of gray, the most prevalent hue in a New England November. Someone had scratched a bad word at the bottom corner of the metal map riveted on the wall above her head. The F was boldly drawn. The remaining three letters sloped downward, each one smaller than the one before, as if the vandal had gradually lost enthusiasm.

A teenager sat across the aisle. Marguerite had noticed her pierced eyebrow, the make up meant to disguise an erupting complexion, the way the girl stared into space, left ear sprouting a cord to a silver I-phone. A paperback novel bearing a cover image of a vampire poked from a shoulder bag at the teen's feet. Her coat was a peculiar shade of lime green. Even from a distance, the girl reeked of french fries. Her hair, collected at the crown by a hot pink elastic band, cascaded in a blonde fountain that was darker at the roots. Marguerite couldn't help herself; Collecting details was a hobby.

Now, Marguerite huffed against the glass, creating a vapor slate with her own moist breath. With her forefinger she drew the first letter of her name. She admired the capital M, the way it stood so sturdy on two strong legs. How it plunged to a deep valley in the middle like Grandfather's hammock stretched between two maples in the side yard on a summer day. She wiped the glass with her cashmere sleeve and allowed her glance to slide sideways just enough to catch the reflection of the boy in the seat behind.

She had heard the elderly lady in the adjoining seat call him Luca. His grandmother perhaps? The woman spoke English with an accent and wore bad shoes, but she had smiled at Marguerite as they had stood on the platform. Her eyes, dark and kind, had once looked out on foreign lands, the girl supposed. The

boy, beautiful as a movie star, had shifted from foot to foot and looked away, embarrassed. He had placed his hand beneath the woman's elbow as they boarded ahead of Marguerite. She noticed the boy's frayed collar and the rip at the sleeve of his thin jacket which someone had mended with care.

During the ride, she strained to hear their voices, but the thrumming from the tracks drowned out anything meaningful she might have overheard. Once Marguerite thought she'd heard him call the woman "Nonna," but she couldn't be sure. The lilt of their murmuring comforted her. She could almost forget about getting a B in math. Or how Grandfather's eyebrows would knit together like a pair of wrestling caterpillars once he learned she had achieved only second place in the all-school spelling bee.

Letting her imagination run as free as her own gelding, Heaven's Star, Marguerite wondered what would happen if she popped her head over the seat and said, "Hi. I go to Baybrook Academy. I'm in Fifth; what grade are you in?" No, wait. That wouldn't be right. What if Luca went to P.S. 14? Perhaps he'd be embarrassed again. She could offer a stick of sour apple gum, request the time, ask to borrow a tissue. All too lame for words. Hopeless.

On the other hand, Luca could make the first move. What if he rapped her on the head with his knuckles?

"Hey, Girlie. How's about a genuine Italian pastry? I just happen to have an almond bun right here in this string bag."

Marguerite smiled to herself. The absurdity of it. Luca would call her "Bella" and invite her over for pasta. Nonna would serve up lemon ice for dessert while a cat purred on the window sill beside a pot of red geraniums. Afterward, while Nonna cleared dishes, Luca's grandfather would play an accordion, tapping his slippered feet to keep time.

"Next stop, Colombo Street Station."

Marguerite's reverie dissolved with the coach's slowing momentum. The screech of brakes, the swoosh of sliding doors, the bustle of departing passengers with their parcels and newspapers. All this she had experienced time and again on trips to Grandfather's. The girl felt movement behind her and the bump of Nonna's bag against the back of the empty seat to the right. She willed herself to remain motionless, facing forward. Resolved not to search the platform for one more glimpse of the handsome boy, Marguerite's eyes held steady. She was used to these kinds of endings to her forays of imagination. A mask of feigned nonchalance settled over her features. She recognized the familiar weight of loneliness and desperation thudding in her heart.

George Dila Memorial Flash Fiction Contest – Second Place

Jeff Burd
Gurnee, Illinois

Thirteenth Birthday

You are an arrow. You can see yourself in your mind's eye, the way your legs stick straight out from your body and how your arms angle out from your shoulders and gently bob next to you as you float out near the buoys. You are an arrow. You are an arrow pointing away from the kids pushing and screaming and splashing in the shallow water. Pointing away from your mother waving like crazy from the beach, yelling at you like you're a kid: *The water is too deep!* You don't care. You are an arrow pointing yourself to where you must go.

George Dila Memorial Flash Fiction Contest – Third Place

David DeGusta

Castro Valley, California

The Book of Unbelievable Things

Dear Honored Professor Smith:

Please will you teach me? I must write a novel. The topic can be up to you because I have interests in many things. As long as it will make good sales that will be okay and you will know best the right subject. For this project I can work ten hours every day except I am very sorry I must take one day each week to go to my grandparents. They are old and they have only seven grandchildren and each day one of us must go to bring them water and food and to clean. I asked my brother and my sister and my four cousins if they could go an extra day. My brother said he was trying to join the army and if they take him he will not be able to go any more at all. My sister got married last year and she is afraid of her husband's mother so she tells her she is going to light a candle at Father's grave and instead goes to my grandparents. My cousins laughed and said I was like the jackal who thinks it is a swan or maybe a horse. But the other days I promise I will write hard all day even when it is very hot because I have always been a good worker even in the heat when the others had to go lie down in the shade and this is something that everyone here will tell you.

I have read the beginning of a book that tells you how to write a novel. The book was on a rug by the road with other books that the angry man with a beard was selling and the first pages said to write what you know. I am sorry but I did not read more. It is slower for me to read in English and he took the book back before I could learn more things. In my school they did not teach how to write books or maybe they were supposed to but the teacher stopped coming for the last year and now all the schools are closed until it is safe to open them again but I do not think that will be for a long time and everyone says I am too old now for school. I need to write a novel because they are expensive here and this way I can make something worth money but I do not know many things. Maybe you can tell me some things and I can use them to write my novel. I am sure you

know many things so it will not be a problem for you to tell me three or eight of them and you will still have enough left over to write your own books which I hope are very successful so you can have a big house.

You can tell me about airplanes because I always want to watch them when they come buzzing in the sky but mother yells at me to come inside and lie down flat. I would be happy to write about airplanes if you tell me about them. You can tell me about a doctor because when the doctor came many people went to that place and I could not get close enough to see him so I would like to write about a doctor so I could know about him because my oldest cousin said his eyes were blue and his hands were soft like ostrich feathers. You can tell me about America and I can write about America because everyone wants to know about America. I would not enjoy to write about soldiers but if you tell me I will because you know best the topic for good sales and I am a hard worker.

The title for my novel will be 'The Book of Unbelievable Things' because I saw those words in the clouds when I was having a fever dream but if that is not a good title you can tell me a different one and I will use it. My book will be yellow because yellow is the favorite color of my best friend Rahat and this way Rahat will be sure to like my book. Rahat wants me to write about the time we chased the black dog very deep into the cave where it smells like burnt oranges and we found bones and saw shapes on the wall until the lighter died but only Rahat would think that was important because Rahat is tall and when you are tall like Rahat you think what happens to you is important.

You can write me back at this email address and I will answer but it will take a few days because it is a long walk here and I have to help the man put this in the computer because even though he knows the computer he does not know it in English. I will be very happy for you to teach me because I must write a novel and you will know how to make it the best. I am sorry that I am only telling you about my novel and nothing about who I am. If I have good sales I will hope to come visit you in America so I can meet you and tell you about my own real life and not just about my novel.

George Dila Memorial Flash Fiction Contest – Honorable Mention

Rebecca O'Neill
Saranac Lake, New York

Snapshot

I receive a packet of twenty-four pictures in the mail. It's a mistake. They're not mine. Curious with this inside look into others' lives, I examine each photo. Sometimes, the pursuit of truth can lead to lies.

1. The first one is of a man I'll call Ben, on a bicycle in the middle of a small street. He's wearing a backwards baseball cap and a big grin. It's hard to tell the season. The neighbors' cropped hedges aren't saying. No snow, no autumn leaves. And the lawns look asleep.
2. In the next photo a woman stands in a kitchen. She has short black hair. It's 5:30 according to the wall clock above the sink. She's cutting bread and seems pleased to have her picture taken. I'm calling her Sarah and putting her age around Ben's mid-thirties.
3. Ben's blowing out four candles on a chocolate-frosted cake. Okay, maybe he just turned forty. The folks behind him must be his parents because Ben looks just like the older man. I suppose if Sarah and Ben had kids they'd be in the picture too.
4. Framed between cedar boughs, as if picture is taken through a hedge, two cars are parked by an intersection. A man faces a woman with long brown hair, hand on her hip, head cocked, blouse partially unbuttoned revealing deep cleavage.
5. In the next shot, Ben reclines with a beer, no shoes. He's handsome. I see the side of a flat-screened TV. There's a couch beside Ben but I don't envision Sarah stretched out on it. Honestly, the size of those depressions in the leather cushions were more likely made by big butts. A man cave. The long low table in front of the couch could hold lots of drinks, chips and at least four pairs of angled sneakers.
6. A park. Kids running. Dogs on leashes. In the far corner, on a bench, a couple with their heads bent. The woman's brown hair drapes over her shoulder. I'm thinking, by the flowering trees, it's late spring. Who or what was meant to be captured isn't clear.
7. The blur a camera makes as it moves too fast.
8. Sarah's clearly the photographer in this family. Now, Ben's wearing a tank top, washing his red Mazda, flexing his biceps as he wrings the sponge

- out in front of him. Hey, I recognize his coupe as one of the cars at that intersection.
9. Oh good, Sarah gets to have fun too. She's bowling with three girlfriends. Looks like they're in a league with matching shirts. "Waverly's" printed on the back. Sarah must have set her camera down because she bowled a strike and somebody took a great shot of it. Way to go Sarah!
 10. Sarah and Ben are out for dinner with friends. Maybe the waiter took this pic. The other woman, who is looking at Ben, has long brown hair. Hey, that's the woman by the car at the intersection and on the parkbench too? Her husband, yes, he's wearing a wedding band, partially balding, sits about as tall as she does.
 11. It's Christmas. A lot of presents under the tree. Most are wrapped with red buffalo plaid paper and dark green ribbons.
 12. Ben has opened one of the plaid packages and holds up a pregnancy wand. He looks confused.
 13. In the next picture with knitted brow, he's reaching up to embrace the person holding the camera, his face a curious mixture of grief and relief. "Grelief".
 14. Sarah's lying on an examining table. A woman in a swirly-pastel top holds an instrument on Sarah's exposed white belly. Beside the bed, a screen displays a grainy black and white image.
 15. A patio party. Probably at Ben's folks because Sarah's father-in-law in an apron with the inscription, "Every Butt Loves a Rub" stands behind the grill. In one hand, he raises a bottle of beer and with the other, he points his stainless-steel spatula at Sarah's protruding belly.
 16. A candid shot of, who is clearly, Ben's brother using his hand to shield what he's whispering into Ben's ear.
 17. Ben again. At least it's his back. I recognize the jacket. He's boarding a train. Strangely not waving goodbye. Almost as if he didn't know Sarah was photographing him.
 18. Another fuzzy picture. Taken in distress?
 19. A newborn's face - partially obscured by the pink bracelet dangling from her tiny clenched fist.
 20. Mommy's and baby's blotched faces - inches apart.
 21. Ben holds baby away from him as if ready to offer it to whomever comes by.
 22. A For-Sale sign juts in front of the house with the red sports car.
 23. An angled "selfie" of Sarah feeding her daughter. Her left hand, ring-finger now bare, extends the long-stemmed spoon.
 24. Sarah and toddler on the beach. Leaving me to wonder...who is taking their picture?

George Dila Memorial Flash Fiction Contest – Honorable Mention

Michael Antoinetti
Westfield, Massachusetts

How We Are Changed

This is how we are born. This is how we looked. This is you in a blue paper cap. These are the rows of blue and pink paper caps. This is the noise of the newly made. This is the smell of St. Francis understaffed. This is the white light of the OB. This is how the doctor caught you: by the foot.

This is how you learned to speak. This is how you learned to read. This is how you learned to remember your dreams.

This is your neighborhood. This is your tan and musty glove. This is how you made friends, through holes in fences. This is how you lit a firecracker. This is how you ate one: legs crossed, front porch, 4th of July. This is the rope your father tied to a crab-apple tree. This is the knot you tied for a merit badge. This is a withering afternoon. This is how the sun set behind the swings.

This is how you grew a face. This is how you found a voice. This is how you played the oboe. This is how you cursed with boys.

This is middle school. This is your seat on the bus. This is the blonde-haired girl who sat next to you. This is the watermelon gum she passed back and forth. This is how you wished she'd ask you your name.

This is where you learned to swim. This is how far out you could go. This is how far down you could dive. This is where you saw a snapping turtle by the dock. This is how you went still as a caveman in ice. This is how it glided beneath you.

This is the end of Boy Scouts. This is the tree-caulking experiment that won you the State Science Fair. This is the first time you placed in the 100 meters. This is the water fountain outside your math room. This is how you cheated the day: in small, wet breaks.

This is you at Prom and this is your date. This is the olive stuck in her teeth. This is how she tasted outside and against the wall. This is your tongue. This is a blue night in June. This is how the chaperon wrestled you apart. This is how your date gave him the finger. This is how you fell in love.

This is the car you drove together. This is the country station you listened to. This is an ash tray and this is an ash tray and so is this on your dash. This is what it did to your face. This is how you looked on your wedding day. This why you didn't eat any cake. This is too contractual.

This is how you planned your escape. These are the shots the doctor gave you. These are the books you had to read. This is the plane that flew you there. This is heat. This is desert. This is how you lunged over cracked roads. This is how the homes collapsed into dust. This is how you swung a hammer. This is how you dreamt in another language. This is how you ate with your hands. This is how you slept under nets, under stars.

This is the day you were picked up from the airport. This is how the air conditioner made you sick. This is how the TV made you angry. This is the conference you attended. This is the speech you gave. This is the medal they awarded you. This is the write-up in the newspaper. This is the call from a job you applied for. This is the tie you wore. This is the hand you shook. This is the number she wrote down. This is how you fell out of your chair. This was not a phrase you took literally until now.

This is the champagne you popped. This is the duvet you tossed to the floor. This is how your first-born was conceived. This is how you picked a name that worked for boys and girls. This is how you named all your children. This is what you called hedging your bets.

This is how many nights you worked alone. This is how many mornings you were the first at your desk. This is how you grew old. This is how your fingers curled. This is how you bought a boat. This is why you never drove it anywhere.

This is the day of the big meeting. This is the slideshow you prepared. This is the joke you told about computers. This is how they laughed. This is how they repeated the joke at the company picnic. This is how they sent the joke over emails. This how they mounted it on a plaque outside your door. This is how they carved it in your tombstone.

This is how you faked an emergency. This is how you took a drive. This is how you wound up in your old neighborhood. This is how your house slouched toward the ground. This is how the shingles peeled. This is how the weeds covered the sidewalk. This couldn't be your house. Your yard. Your street. But this is.

This is how you trudged to the window. This is how you peered through years of dust. This is how you spotted the mark on the wall where the grandfather clock once ticked.

This is why you like to read. This is how you like to sit with a book. This is how you sip your tea, in little *sip*, *sips*. This is how you drink your coffee, in big *gulp* *gulps*. This is why you feel sick. This is why you get migraines. This is why your sons and daughters never call. This is why we say I love you so much it hurts.

George Dila Memorial Flash Fiction Contest – Honorable Mention

Joe Cappello

Glen Gardner, New Jersey

The Dunbar Overpass

The only thing separating the two dissenting sides at the town council meeting room was a podium and microphone set up to allow comments from the public. The hot button issue was the Dunbar overpass, a proposed entrance ramp that would channel traffic onto the southbound side of the freeway.

“This is a no-brainer,” shouted Mike Stoner, Chairman of the hastily-formed POC—Protect Our Children—committee. His words blasted through the microphone causing it to feedback in ear-piercing tones. “This overpass will bring more traffic to our local streets and put our kids at risk.”

Dan Elloway, Chairman of the POJ—Protect our Jobs—committee, wrenched the microphone away from Mike.

“The overpass will bring badly needed dollars to our community in the form of construction jobs,” he said.

“Who cares about your construction jobs?” shouted a mother who raised her fist and jumped around like Mick Jagger at a Stones concert.

“You do,” shouted Dan, “but you’re too stupid to know how it can help you.”

“He’s right,” shouted the high school wrestling coach, his bald head a rush red like when he watched his prize wrestler in action. “Those construction dollars make their way into the community, dollars spent in restaurants and stores—“

“Who gives a shit about business people lining their pockets?” Principal Durkin quickly lowered his head, his gray eyes betraying a hint of regret as he realized he wasn’t that close to retirement.

“More business activity means more tax dollars to the town, dollars that won’t come out of your pocket,” countered Ruth Coburn of Coburn and Associates, a local fund manager whose interest in making money stemmed back to a lemonade

stand she ran as a kid. (She succeeded by telling all the kids that her competitor, Susie Dershner, didn't wash her hands after going to the bathroom).

"Elitist!"

"Communist!"

The verbal barbs were hurled like rocks at a peace rally.

Corey Priser approached the podium and the mayhem slowly subsided. He was a short, barrel-chested man with a round cherub face, shaggy blond hair and a beard with whiskers that looked like twisted copper wires. He wore a Tommy Bahama top with green palm trees on an orange background. It hung on him like a tent made from a toddler's bedsheets.

"Excuse me, but it seems we're getting nowhere."

"Whose side are you on, Corey?" asked Mike Stoner.

"I'm not on any side."

"Can't have that, Corey, You gotta' pick a side," said Dan.

"I'd rather find a solution. Don't you all want a solution?"

The crowd stared dumbly at him, the question way beyond the limits of their comprehension.

"Tell you what. Meet me tomorrow, 6p.m. at the site of the Dunbar Overpass. I want to show you all something."

It was late and everyone was anxious to leave.

"Fine," "Sure," "Whatever..." they could be heard muttering as they left the council room.

The next day, Corey led the crowd up the rocky incline that would be shaped into the entrance ramp and over pass. The effort caused him to pant and sweat like a thoroughbred during a race. When he reached the top, he turned to see the

crowd split, both sides determined to stick with their own kind. Corey pointed to the steep drop at the edge of the incline.

“Now, that’s where they propose to continue the street, tunneling under here and making a clover leaf to the left that would lead up to this incline and onto the highway.” He held his hand sideways and chopped it in the air in the direction of the southbound freeway.

“What I suggest is that we forget about making this an overpass.” Corey fixed his eyes on a point behind the crowd. “Instead, we continue the street that runs along the industrial park way over there and lead it here to the ramp. That way we channel the traffic away from the local streets.” He smiled and nodded. “Well...?”

The crowd stared dumbly at him, the question again way beyond the limits of their comprehension.

“So, you’re in favor of the overpass,” said a teacher cradling a batch of papers she needed to grade when she got home.

“No, no...that’s not—”

“Oh, you’re not in favor of the overpass,” said a construction worker wearing a tool belt low on one side of his hip like a six gun.

“I...uh...” Corey turned red. The crowd began moving slowly toward him. “You got kids?” Mrs. Cosimano, the butcher’s wife, put her hands on her hips, her eyes wide and accusing.

“I don’t see what...”

Corey looked down at the distance between him and the crowd and noticed it seemed shorter than a few moments ago.

“How long you lived here?” Mr. Levitt twitched his silver mustache as he glowered at Corey.

The crowd was even closer to Corey, like a high tide claiming more beach with each successive wave. He instinctively stepped back.

“I...I...was trying to find a solution,” Corey said.

“Who asked you?” Mrs. Lynch’s 80 year old voice sounded like shattered glass.

Corey suddenly realized he had stepped over the edge of the incline. He froze, one foot still rooted on the ground in front of him, the other teetering wildly in the air behind him.

The crowd drew closer.

His arms spun around in wild circles as he desperately tried to maintain his balance. He looked up to see the crowd standing there, impassive, silent.

Corey’s terrified screams didn’t end until his head smashed against a rock below. The media arrived and the crowd came to life.

“He was talking crazy...He jumped on purpose...I think he was on drugs...He lived in a trailer...He smoked pot...He wasn’t one of us...He didn’t belong.”

The crowd returned home quickly, the glow of their TV’s lighting the cave-like darkness as they anxiously waited to see if any of them had made the nightly news.



Empire State Building

Photograph

John McCluskey

Danbury, Connecticut

Eulogy

(for Toystory,
born 7 May 2001, buried 27 November 2014,
according to *The Wall Street Journal*)

Do rest in peace, you lusty bull, mad sire
Of half a million offspring, so they say,
Those breeders who could stimulate desire,
Then use a tube to finish off the play.

Holstein, how well you passed your genes along
Through straws dispatched in liquid nitrogen.
Your daughters, looking good and going strong,
Are famous for their milking regimen.

Peerless, not only in Wisconsin but
Around the world, you upped and won the game
Of reproductive prowess. Fans can strut
In hats and T-shirts branded with your name.

You had a life—libidinous, long, full—
But never got the chance to be a bull.

Jane Blanchard
Augusta, Georgia

Learning to Walk

I learned how long ago
while finding balance and coordination.
Now, again, with greater understanding
of the problems: the fear of falling,
the knowledge of obstacles like stairs.
Then, there were no apparatuses to help,
no crutches nor walking sticks,

but, like now, a strong hand,
someone to pick me up should I falter,
to encourage.

I had come to take for granted
the skill of raising the foot, pushing it forward
and shifting weight to prevent falling.
Now all such niceties need to be practiced,
the rules patiently explained: put your hands
on the arms of the chair, shift your weight forward
and push your body up to a standing position.
I thought the teacher was about to add,
“Now, there’s a good boy.”

Laurence W. Thomas
Ypsilanti, Michigan

The Witch

on the limestone ledge,
her shawl drapes
dawn like wings
of a sparrow,
like a woven
net half-filled
with sunlight,
half shadow.
The valley
whispers
verdant,
vineyard fragrant;
onions
spear from the soil;
her hat is the star

of Bethlehem.
her cloak
the universe dying
and coming back.

Rustin Larson
Fairfield, Iowa

Night Guard

This morning my jaw is like a person with a migraine,
a fossil in the hands of a third grader on a field trip
who wants to use it as a billy club.
The dentist speaks an oracle.
He knows that in my sleep,
I grind my teeth. I want to confess my secrets,
but I cannot guess them
or explain the twists in my bedclothes.
An animal trapped inside me craves a mouth.
A dragon waits at the base of my spine.
We are people who examine skulls, reading
the ancients didn't do this kind of damage to themselves.
By day I pick up the fear of strangers
like the imperceptible wind of a radio signal.
To stop devouring the darkness and its few, pale stars,
I would jam the highways, swaddle the colic of mobs.
The man who is going from checkout to checkout murmuring
I take in my arms. I coddle the old people
who rock back and forth impatient for Bingo games,
give my seat to the boy who screams for a window,
ransom the one who swallows white
light, getting into the belly
of a jet plane, the teenager dressed in rags
and nitroglycerin, a thief for the sake of instant ecstasy.
It's easier to mold my own bite,

soft plastic lifted from a pan of boiling water.
When they tear down acres of birches for parking lots,
I'll buy myself a flower pot.
If the sun goes out, let me switch
on a flashlight, its battery a miniature silo.
To protect them from the coming war,
children each polish a shield the size of a playing card.

Laura Cini English
Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania

Montana Harvest

(with a nod to Margaret Atwood)

Garden ritual, early fall,
I try again to re-grow love.
Silent, we kneel, pull clumps

of crab grass, buttercup,
miss the roots. A few plants
have survived dry dirt,

spindly, anemic. Weeds
I rake into piles she burns
like witches, as if to scorch away

my evil. We sleep together, apart.
I listen to her breathe,
dream a grizzly rips up darkness --

manage to harvest radicchio,
chard, red cabbage, a few beets.
At dawn, the autumn sun bleeds.

Timothy Pilgrim
Bellingham, Washington

I'm Sorry

Sometimes I forget that
when I apologize
too soon after a fight
the words will always scald
my tongue, as when I sip
coffee some mornings fresh
from the pot without first
testing the body of
the mug. I know I should
close hands around its waist,
sniff bitter steam before
pressing lips too close, but
that's me, eager for heat
slipping painfully down
my throat to coax the day,
a burning in the chest,
like a tail of lightning
kissing curses at me.

Robert Fillman
Macungie, Pennsylvania

The Mallards

Sometimes when I sit here by our dog,
his long nose lying on my upper leg,
I think about the cup of coffee I've taken
time to taste and of the guy hammering
siding onto the next house being put
together in the development down

the street on the old field where now
the deer may well be looking for where
they used to be. There were geese there
several times during the year, likely
a place to pause and waddle on their way.
There is a kind of rhythm to the hammering,

the sounds reminiscent of the desperate taps
of the telegraph hurrying dots and dashes
hoping for hope at the other end. Yesterday
I sat outside a cafe with a cup of coffee and
an acquaintance who wanted to know if
his poem was any good. After reading it

I looked up and saw a male and female mallard
waddling down the walk. She stopped at a puddle
and drank. Then they sat at the sidewalk's edge.
I watched them as a man walked by, too close and
they rose and settled themselves on the curb. They
were far from any water. "Sure," I said. "It's good."

Jack Ridl
Douglas, Michigan

Emerging

Perhaps this is the quiet of the almost-
drowned, body thrown unbelievably ashore
or, after an arduous chase up
a sea-chimney, spat over the lip onto rock

safe and spent, salt stiffening in my hair,
drying to crystal plaster on my arms, the relief
of solid stone beneath my back, and fear
receding like the sucking tide.

I could walk, knowing there's ground beneath me,
but the brush of eel and shark, the almost-touch
of gelatin and whip persist in abraded flesh,
open to air and whatever comes too close.

M. Doretta Cornell
Hawthorne, New York



Hawk 1

Photograph

Kristin DeKam

Otsego, Michigan

Egg Rolls

Half inch of snow
this December morning,
Astral Weeks on the stereo.
My wife and I
in the kitchen,
drifting in our thoughts.

Smell of carrots, cabbage, onions
steaming in a wok.
The Irish Van Morrison said he
never would have had his life”
without Ray Charles and Solomon Burke.
It all gets stirred together.

In the warm house,
Judy and I cooking and writing,
together and apart.
How good it smells
when she sears the beef
for the egg roll filling.

Andy Roberts
Columbus, Ohio

Kevin

the funeral was on
halloween, less than a week after
they found you hanging. i can't
find pictures of you in the hall, none
among the proms & weddings & babies
in high chairs. no one wants
to remember the way the lights
in your eyes were just chemicals made

in labs. for hours they called you
“murderer.” thought you took her
with you, no choice & screaming.
but no, it was love & the lights,
a contraption built, a hanging
tree with two branches. oh, she
must have loved you or death.
she must have seen the light
in your eyes. i had to go digging
to find the truth, to figure it out.
since obituaries only paint
lies to let the living rest. had to look
for the yellowed pictures, labeled you
with *1995 & earlier* stamped on.
i wonder if i’ll find you now,
in the rooms of the house, the pictures
in the hall, the ones where
bad things don’t happen. now i know
where to look. i see you
in the mirror. i hear you when
my father won’t speak
your name. i know you when my mother slips
something. & i will keep piecing
you together. i want to see
what you saw.

Charlotte Covey
St. Louis, Missouri

New Weather

the buzz of a saw somewhere in the busy distance
the clean art of slicing curves and curlicues
out of hard, unforgiving material

there is danger in creation
the saw smiles with menace
message unmistakable
the alluvial smell of fresh-cut wood
an industrial aroma of newness
dogs barking in the out-lands
a bell toy batted around close by
Christmas tinsel in the spring

Cleaning-sweeping-uncovering
New Weather

Barbara Ryder-Levinson
Azusa, California

Disheveled

You've reduced me to
Wearing my bedroom slippers
To the grocery store

Is it noon yet?
Must be somewhere
The bourbon is calling my name

The ashtray is overflowing
And I am overwhelmed
By your leaving

I don't know when
I slipped your mind
And became irrelevant

I guess I'll go now
The bourbon is calling my name

Debbie Collins
Richmond, Virginia

Typical Sunday

The bullet bang button
striking up a hedge of blue flame.
Curtains half closed, slippers

with their backs down. Television
on but volume low, as if not to wake
up the outside world.

Mother deep in her chair,
boxes of medication stacked
on the set of drawers. Her feet cold,
nails unkempt, hair chasing yesterday.

Father had the settee, newspapers
folded, socks within themselves.
Remote control laid out with a map
of buttons. As he waited to change the view.

Gareth Culshaw
Wreccsam, Wales

Closing

The paint peeled from pulling
off the mezuzah, its boxy outline

is the proof we always leave behind,
our bodies taking up space, a home blessed.

Our voices echo
as we go through each empty room for the last time.

Rooms where we timed my contractions,
then the hours of baby's sleep, poops catalogued, ounces fed.

We conceived a family here, roasted eggs
into the dark of a wedding skillet.

We leave a rusting stove, the ripping open
of latex condoms, the ammonia of a newly shined diamond.

Of course we have moved before, but this time
we leave tangled, attached. Exposed in bright light.

Our suitcases are zipped so full, so tight.
We're afraid to reach inside for what we need.

We stare at scuffs in the walls
that we had never noticed when our furniture pressed the paint.

The fireplace we never used is lonely, unromantic.
You lock the door. We kiss long against the jamb

so quiet so as not to wake
the emptiness from falling deeper into itself.

Jamie Wendt
Chicago, Illinois

Prayer Against Tramping On Angels

To enter the garden
of the sacred and blind;
to savor the sharp-cut
orange melon, the dark grape
that sugars the breath of the men
who sway and who chant;

To hear the sage to whom they bend,
whispering before them,
old and curled in a white

silk-fringed shawl,
to kiss the fringes, to bend with
them;

To recite the prayers for rain,
for oil, for healthy cattle;
to press past this pleading
into my own encumbered
soul for a blessing,
for this is how I am made:

To struggle against the trickster
who lurks beyond the gauze curtain
that hides the girls and the women;
who appears, wide-eyed, toothless,
and hungry, come to tramp down
the temple of angels and laugh.

To fight him, and to win.

Judith Robinson
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

In Celebration of Telephone Wires

They stretch for miles, those lines and spaces
waiting for the notes to arrive: black octaves
of grackles and crows, white-breasted nuthatch
and swallows. I arrive at dusk where the air
fills with a flutter of wings. The birds huddle
and the wires begin to sway. They are directors
and performers of their own renditions creating
a sold-out concert, an ensemble of sounds
only they can hear. Consumed with seeds
and berries, they gather after the work of feeding
and flight. So many measures they fold in their plumes.

We honor the lingering lines and spaces, the rests
and fugues before the wings fall away into night
or the tiny heads slip under feathers in sleep.

Kay Mullen
Tacoma, Washington

A Morning Marvel

Sprawl uprooting wildlife,
propelling animals city-wards,
deer often visit the backyard
of our canyon road home, its
steep hill blanketed in ivy.
This morning in the kitchen
I hear ivy rustling and from
the window glimpse a doe
gracefully making her way
downhill; followed by her fawn.
What a marvel, its small body
yet with adult size ears,
for self-protection. The doe jumps
the cinderblock wall that abuts the hill,
landing on our lawn,
her young close behind.
For a moment my visitors
stand still in the sun,
framed by a window pane.
Then the doe springs back up
over the wall. Her fawn leaps, too—
but falters, again and again.
The mother, frantic, paces.
I rush to a kitchen shelf
and to the back door.

On the threshold, quietly,
my arms cast wide, clang together
two large pot covers
like orchestral cymbals.
The fawn leaps over the wall,
and I clang the covers again
just for the music and the joy.

Nancy Smiler Levinson
Los Angeles, California

Silence

It wasn't a crime, though
you wondered if the flicker
might return to its feeder
in the morning. Now,

we stare at the upended
willow tree, cracked alders,
birches bent over, almost
graceful, holding their

arms like frozen dancers
who can't tell us if the wind's
ever slept in a snow
this deep, this medieval,

as if naked trees, witnesses
who swore to tell the truth,
had asked, *Who's complicit?*
Who else knows?

Richard Widerkehr
Bellingham, Washington

Haiku:

can you swallow rocks
rolled in the mouth of rivers
or tasted by fish?
do scales whisper truth
flaking from slippery seers
diving into night?
water reflection gives
mercy to past transgressions
lingering from guilt
is sea salty foam
from endless tears? seaweed grabs,
twisting apart lies
what of the mermaid
song illuminating night,
crafting oyster pearls?

Kathleen Chartrand
Wichita, Kansas

On Waking

A bird is calling,
perhaps a grosbeak,
perched somewhere
on the thin twig of dawn.
I feel the rise and fall
of your breathing,
the warmth of your flank
reaching to pull
night back over me.

Jude Dippold
Concrete, Washington

Fathoms

Outside my window, a Harley roars by.
It's 10:30 p.m., just late enough to
be irked, but not late enough to be
properly disgruntled. I'm still in pretty good mood,
sitting on my couch with my bad shoulder
on the arm, sinking into it,
just like I'm sinking into my 30's.

OK, some car alarm is going off.
But wouldn't you know, just as I wrote that,
the going-off went off.
Sometimes life is very funny.
I've been following this series for a long time,
and I do think it is a comedy.
Fathoms contain the notions you've been
diving for all your life.

Laura Atkinson
San Francisco, California

New Moon

Trees hover over the sleeping house,
tapping on the windowpanes,
breathing the infant's whispered breath,
waiting to see what shape it will take
deep in its dark nest.

Rachel Crawford
Lorena, Texas

Pairings

For Alli, Sarah, and Sybil

I had some time to think while eating a meal of chicken and waffles alone
Chewing both poultry and batter I wondered who coined the combination

Was it the same person that spread the first peanut butter and jelly sandwich
Could it be the one who discovered that strawberries intensify champagne

That is the very individual that I want to be a matchmaker for my daughters
Whose choices may not stand the test of time the same as cookies and cream

Those are the kind of pairings that are too important to allow for any risk taking
And need to be made by someone who time and time again has done it perfectly

Marcus Bradley
Versailles, Kentucky

First Sign of Wind

I am alone again, breathless, covered
by blankets of white. A full moon
cuts birch branches lifeless

in Missoula night. The rays slice
my heart. Ice hangs from the gutter,
waits for spring. I only see

the hanging. With luck, I will dream
primroses poke through snow at dawn,
bloom at the first sign of wind.

Timothy Pilgrim
Bellingham, Washington

Playing “Silent Night”

No matter how I bend it, phrase
it, crop it,
I can’t shake the candle light
out of it.

Can’t cancel children’s breathless
anticipation,
adults’ tear-filled eyes.

I can’t erase the faint odor
of cedar wafting through it
or sleigh bells jingling its rhythm.

Silent Night comes with its own
world, however incongruous.
We sing it like a sip of joy
sliding through our bodies,
warming all the hurt places.

Sharon Scholl
Atlantic Beach, Florida

blue waters, blue skies

feet up in the air
bodies sinking in silk
I think everything
is normal
again

Sabina Paneva
Providence, Rhode Island



Ice Cream Window, Bressone, Italy

Photograph

Roger Camp

Seal Beach, California

Close Encounter

A squirrel before my car swerves back and forth
 unsure which way to go. I brake, silent
study: tirade, indecisive cavort
 as squirrel before my car swerves back and forth
zigzags panic-stricken like the time in Gulfport
 before I left you. Now I represent
a squirrel swerving back and forth.
 Unsure which way to go, I break silence.

Laurie Kolp
Beaumont, Texas

Platinum

Blonde comes first to mind, a color rare
in nature as the metal itself, found
most often among some tow-headed girls,
their futures signaled by a darkness
at the roots.

A catalyst contrived to convert mono
to di, a credit card crucible
to dissolve solvency stretched thin as wire.
It's heavy, man. Cools your jets
and nose cones.

Record albums that sell more than a million,
Elvis to Everly to Elton — ununhuh yay yay —
a measure as archaic as a floppy disk. Its spark
ignites internal combustion, its sparkle
lights diamonds.

Photographs the subtlest shades of gray,
indelible ink holds color fast when tears

splash on the page. A difficult color to maintain.
Marilyn sometimes wore a wig. Put it on
there's Monroe,

an unalloyed parody men find
seductive, take it off there's Norma Jean,
a tow-headed child, a woman born excessive
as Mae West without the hard
capitalist wit.

Sherry Chandler
Paris, Kentucky

I'm Sorry

Sometimes I forget that
when I apologize
too soon after a fight
the words will always scald
my tongue, as when I sip
coffee some mornings fresh
from the pot without first
testing the body of
the mug. I know I should
close hands around its waist,
sniff bitter steam before
pressing lips too close, but
that's me, eager for heat
slipping painfully down
my throat to coax the day,
a burning in the chest,
like a tail of lightning
kissing curses at me.

Robert Fillman
Macungie, Pennsylvania

Emerging

Perhaps this is the quiet of the almost-
drowned, body thrown unbelievably ashore
or, after an arduous chase up
a sea-chimney, spat over the lip onto rock

safe and spent, salt stiffening in my hair,
drying to crystal plaster on my arms, the relief
of solid stone beneath my back, and fear
receding like the sucking tide.

I could walk, knowing there's ground beneath me,
but the brush of eel and shark, the almost-touch
of gelatin and whip persist in abraded flesh,
open to air and whatever comes too close.

M. Doretta Cornell
Hawthorne, New York

Debt

The smell of clover cloys
in July's rising heat
as a garter snake crosses my path
we greet each other, then slide away
the trug full of lettuce weighting my arm

air is still, a portent full of ploys
as I move to my own beat
into a swirling green bath
of antelope milkweeds I want to stay
in the pasture, feed butterflies, charm

bees. There is a plentitude here that buoys
the pollination of things both green and sweet
I move aside gray lath
from pallets used to hold at bay
the slug and coon that come to harm

fresh cantaloupe, their wont to destroy
webbed rind, succulent orange meat
I refuse to do the math
for how many years we've yet to pay
our debt to this land we've come to farm.

Pat Anthony
Fontana, Kansas

Planking the Tango

Working with Harry, a Polish
carpenter with blunt fingers,
I spent my sixteenth summer
re-decking the teak
of my father's 42-footer,
a cutter built after World War II
ended and ended the line
of sailboats built by Owens.
We cut planks so dense
they destroy metal.
Bit by bit and blade by blade,
the acrid smoking steel
filled our nostrils
despite the Southerly
blowing off the Sound
each afternoon.

The wooden tongues are
snuggled securely
into their grooves—

waiting for the black resin
to be spread: tar
so pervasive, so persistent
a presence
that only a monthly
buzz cut could get it
out of my hair,
and although
my father isn't always there
as I would go through
each sweat-soaked day, it is still
the closest I ever felt
to him.

William Cushing
Glendale, California

The Bright Side

Some headlines are enough
to make you weep—
tigers scratching at the brink,

plastics and more plastics
gumming up the works,
forests slashed to stumps,

ample floods for a second ark.
Homo ignoramus, I presume.
Yet the Earth chugs on.

November's leaves dropped on
cue,
so something's going right.
Big yellow leaves, small red ones

sway through a haze
of morning drizzle.
They dropped all day

nudged by a slight breeze:
tawny little parachutes,
orange tatters of summer
easing down to a damp, soft rot.

Diane Stone
Clinton, Washington

Grace Reading at Howth Bay
Sir William Orpen (1878-1931)

The sea is grey like the scudding clouds and the pebbled shale.
Her dress grey with shadows. Her hat is black.
You can tell how the wind is blowing the way her skirt
Flings itself toward the rock-studded waters.
The painter has provided a book.
We might assume from its lack of heft that it's a thin
Volume of poetry: Keats or Rosetti. Her golden hair
Is caught in a net or a snood. She steadies her hat
That the breeze threatens. Her eyes cast down
Appropriate to a sonnet or possibly
An elegy. The implausible scene: a beach wind-riven
And stony. Offshore rain is moving in. She isn't dressed
For weather. The Great War has not yet come
Like a gale off the Irish Sea. The artist will be known
For paintings of dead soldiers, generals, battlefields,
Prisoners of war, the open grave of The Somme, a coffin
Covered with the Union Jack.
But none of this has happened. Foreshadowed
By small bayonets of whitecaps, she stands
Windswept by the pewter bay,
Peering at the pages she may find
Tiresome or endearing.

Joan Colby
Elgin, Illinois



Service at Noon

Photograph

T. Kilgore Splake
Calumet, Michigan

To Each His Own

In the Anchorage zoo, the animals slept
-- moose and caribou, tiger, wolverine --
curled or sprawled under the damp sky.

In a small box cage, a shiny black porcupine,
deceptively silky, studied his silver dinner bowl
and with delicate pointed fingers

flung out peaches, bananas, lettuce leaves,
until he found a broccoli tree.
He held it in both hands, chiseled

down the florets with two straight teeth,
flung away the stalk and rooted around
for another, a third, a sixth.

He knew what he wanted.
Myself, I'd have gone for the peaches.

M. Doretta Cornell
Hawthorne, New York

Indelible

For me it's a small loathing
when I hold the greeting card, pen poised.
The more I love the harder it is.
I could fill the card from top to bottom

with a short letter. If I do, I'll be editing
for an hour on a scratch pad:
first engineering a flood before
damming it so the sentiment fits.
I could also follow convention with a one
sentence salutation curling dead center.
When fatigued and crunched for time,
this will often have to do, but not
without guilt for the indelible omission,
the joyful secret not yet unpacked
from the thought box, what spoken
aloud would only be awkward.
Even more loathsome is the signing
of the group card where social pressure
adds to the demand of speedy pithiness.
I don't mind hauling sincerity
from its deep well. I do like the quiet
at the lip of an envelope's unsealing.
I'm grateful when a hearty, single line
of well-wishing suffices, but then
how to sign off at the end? With love?
Best regards? Yours truly? Thanks?

Maria Pavone
Venice, California

Man and Woman

The image of snow
falling
across the river.
Looks as if the river moves,
as if the river flows,
the snow falling furiously across it.
Whole trees covered in snow, their branches ice-baked.
A man with a cane
stuck on a corner holds onto a lamp post with one large outstretched hand.
Knees bent -- he wears stained khakis -- he holds a cane in the other hand,
the tip of the cane slippery, the corner slightly askew.
His wife -- she must be his wife -- in her snow-covered fur
hails a taxi, steps into the wake of slush.
He looks like time stopped still.
Neither can he go forward, nor back.
He is waiting,
angling that cane into the sidewalk in the snow,
stuck along the ambulatory incline,
the one used for bikes and carts and baby strollers,
taking the long, slow decline to the street,
the corner slick with wet, thick snow falling,
falling but somehow he is erect. And she,
his wife of 60 years, looks back with a grimace
and forward into the night.

Paula C. Brancato
Long Island City, New York

Blue Sky

What to do with a blue sky that draws me out
to dig where dirt creeps under my nails?

To bend, to squat, to grab the hose and bathe what's new,
and realize the hardy geranium, despite my tending, may not grow.

There will be other varieties, perhaps more beautiful,
although that struggler sticks in my mind.

My friend called to say her husband's returned to hospital,
the tumor makes it hard for him to breathe.

Here the garden's white and yellow blooms, its magenta,
its sheet of green, all exhale without effort,

and the blue sky's a magnet that pulls me
toward what my hands attempt to do.

Holly Guran
Roslindale, Massachusetts

Silent Whispers

At night, in winter
The air is silent
Peaceful
The snow
Collects mysteries on the trees
When the wind blows
It whispers secrets between each wood
Under each rock

Brooke Groff
Ann Arbor, Michigan



CJM SF Stanley Kubrick Exhibit 2016

Photograph

Joseph Scalero

Modesto, California

INSIDE/OUT LITERARY ARTS PROJECT FEATURE

By immersing students in the joy and power of poetry and literary self-expression, InsideOut inspires them to think broadly, create bravely and share their voices with the wider world. Guided by professional writers and celebrated by publications and performances, youth learn that their stories and ideas matter and that their pens can launch off the page into extraordinary lives.

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

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

Self-Portrait

My hair is a field.
My eyes are lost tigers.
My skin is a blazing gun.
My tongue is a mad octopus.
My mouth is a school on fire.
My heart is a piece of paper
waiting
to be written on.

Nickolas Aziz

Sup

Have you ever
done the “what’s up” nod?
Yes, you have.

Aishlyn Hernandez

A Wall Of Questions

Is there a heaven?
What’s after death?
Do we relive the same life
or start a new one?
Do we know our destiny?
Can we reach the stars?
Do we suffer to learn?
Why aren’t we able to unfeel pain?
When will it be the end of us?
Is love an option?

Arlette Acosta

I Will Give You The Sky

I have nothing else to give you
so I will give you the sky.
I will let you get the stars
and put them in your eyes.
I will let you take the darkness and put it in your
hair. I will let you take
the moon and put it in your
chest. You will light my way.
I will let you take the sun
and put it in your mind.
I will let you get the clouds
and put them in your sweater.
Until it's all gone, when the
night and day is white, then
I will get the bright white
color that is left and I
will put it in your teeth.

Jose Flores

A New View

We are living inside a poem
where the sun isn't just a sun.
It's a spotlight where
you can be you.

Where the wind isn't just wind,
it's a friend whispering to you
and making you feel free as
you run through the fields.

Where the moon isn't just a moon,
it's your parents telling you to
go to sleep because you will need it.

Where a friend isn't just a friend,
it's your happiness and
who cares about you.

Where you aren't you
because with your smartness
you turn this world
into something
very beautiful and creative.
That something is a poem.

A poem that states
that we live
inside a poem.

A poem that will
make all your sadness
and anger
disappear into paper.

Sandra Cruz

The Wagon

Outside my window
this old wagon that has
never been touched.

Yesenia Garcia

Music In My Head

My mind is a piano
that never stops.
A prison to the sweet
music it makes.
My mind amuses me
like the piano's
audience. Calm as
the soft finger hovering
above the black keys.

Alyssa Thorn

Memory

At my old home, my grandfather taught me
how to ride my bike while the shining sun
was burning hot. The smell of flowers and grass
as I hit the pavement. We went to the store
every day for him to play lottery while I'd get
a snack. Everyday my grandfather took me
to school. He took me to the beauty supply
whenever I wanted. That was before—
Now, that neighborhood is gone along with
those memories. Now, I'm in a new house
trying to create new memories to hold.

Kendall Puckett

Word Is A Light

Word is a light
that is needed when there's no hope.
That will always be there once you find it.
That makes you who you are.
Light is in all of us,
we just have to know where to find it.

Melissa Vega

My Sister Is A Piano

My sister
is a piano
whose buttons
I push to see
her strike
the keys.

Tyrone Hill Jr.

Silence Is An Absence

Silence is a great blue bell
swinging and ringing. It measures
pleasure and in the supple symmetry
of the immense soaring wings,
glinting against blue radiance.

Jalasia Willis



Sketchbook page 13

Drawing

John Loree

Ypsilanti, Michigan

Review

And Then Snow

poems by Phillip Sterling
Main Street Rag, 2017

Poetry without surprises would not be poetry so to say that Phillip Sterling's poems are full of surprises would be to say that they are poems. From the very beginning, we are caught off guard finding what we didn't expect like personification of weather conditions. In the first poem, "November 1," a promise is hidden. "We hear rain speak of snow." The following poems bring us near to actual snow which, toward the end of a magical journey, appears some 50 pages later. Then, winter comes "with the sterile flakes of heavy snow" and a few lines later, "the dark paddock whitens."

Meanwhile, we discover new connections between Sterling's vision and ours via unexpected comparisons like the end of an eclipse "no more than a brush of dark lips" or "the lake begins to wear the look of a person who cannot swim." Two imagistic poems ask of the moon in an epigram, "*How much does it weigh?*" The laconic answers in the tradition of William Carlos Williams leave the explanation of the image to the reader.

The season before the coming of the snow progresses, not by storms nor epic events but by the trivia of happenings and observances in small: cleaning grave sites, a birthday cake, a woman flossing her teeth, "the scent of wintergreen hanging to the fibers of a sweater." When the snow arrives, Sterling observes that "astilbe lean against wind in a parallel manner as if winter commuters awaiting a late train." He finds sedition in "Snow, Fence, Dog" and he sees humanity's need for "Mercy (in the body of a small bird)."

These are some of the surprises that jump nimbly from every page. There is no great conclusion when the book ends. Throughout the book we anticipate and then experience snow; at the end, the poet has us anticipating spring — "Your warm being bold breath of now and when in time we'll touch again."

Laurence W. Thomas
Ypsilanti, Michigan

And Then Snow, poems by Phillip Sterling.
Now available from Main Street Rag Publishing
(MainStreetRag.com) ISBN 978-1-59948-627-7. \$14.



"With careful attention to the things of the world and with a light touch on the pulse of the landscape . . . these poems offer light and warmth through the dark and cold seasons."—Robert Haight

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Three Prizes of \$100.00

and publication in Third Wednesday's Spring Contest issue.

As a thank you for your participation, every entry will receive a PDF copy of the poetry contest issue (a \$5.00 value), so the net cost of your entry is just **\$1.00**.

Non-prize poems will be considered for inclusion in the same issue of Third Wednesday as a regular submission, which pays \$3.00 per poem.

We will accept contest entries of up to 3 previously unpublished poems between October 1, 2017, and January 31, 2018. Poems should be in a single .doc or .docx file with no identifying information within the text of the file. All entries must come through our submissions management portal at Submittable. If you are not already a Submittable user, registration is free. We will not accept entries by mail this year.

You can choose to pay via credit card or Pay Pal by selecting it as an option when you upload your file at Submittable or, if you prefer, you can make a check or money order for \$6 payable to Joseph Ferrari and mail it to:

Third Wednesday
11316 Farley Street
Redford, Michigan 48239

Be sure the name on your payment matches the name on your entry in Submittable.

Submissions go live on Submittable on October 1st.

(You'll find the link on our website: thirdwednesday.org)

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