"If I Can Stop One Heart from Breaking"

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.

- Emily Dickinson
House of Poetry Program

Wednesday, April 6, 2016

On the campus of Baylor University, Waco, Texas

All events are in the Armstrong-Browning Library

(Follow the link for directions; enter at the portico of the Cox Entrance Foyer off James Street)

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* Ashley Mace Havird is a poet and novelist who grew up on a tobacco farm in South Carolina. She has published three books of poems: The Garden of the Fugitives (Texas Review Press, 2014), which won the 2013 X. J. Kennedy Prize, Sleeping with Animals (Yellow Flag Press, 2014) and Dirt Eaters (Stepping Stones Press, 2009), which won the 2008 South Carolina Poetry Initiative Prize. Her poems and short stories have appeared in many journals including Shenandoah, Southern Poetry Review, The Southern Review, The Texas Review, and The Virginia Quarterly Review. ashleymacehavird.com

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Linda Banks

A Dove Tale

For days the dove comes, like Goldilocks, trying out the flower baskets. She lands on an edge, lowers her head to inspect the center, causing her tail to stick up above the foliage. The basket is transformed into a lady's flowered hat trimmed with feathers. Her mate watches from first one tree, then another. She wriggles until her head, her body, and most of her tail feathers sink into the pink petunias. This basket is just right.

She calls to him, now perched on the roof. She calls once, twice, again and again, until he flies to her side, snuggles against her, deeper and deeper into the leafy love nest until out of sight. Later, they leave the rumpled bed, flowers flattened, tendrils drooping along the pot's rim.

She comes and goes, sits briefly, coos to her mate, on a ladder nearby. He hops to one step, then another. They do this again and again. At last, she returns to lay her eggs, to sit the nest, day after day.

I know how this tale ends. The babies will grow and hatch under my watchful eye, then they will fly away, leaving behind fragments of small white eggs and my shattered attachment.

Previously published in A Book of the Year, Poetry Society of Texas, 2005
Linda Banks

On the Cusp of Change

*The cardinal’s song has been described as “a prelude—to nothing”; but I think it is a dull ear that does not find that gorgeous whistle its own excuse.*


Air is still and heavy with left-over summer.
Trees refuse to remove drab and dusty leaves.

Sparrows dine on seeds in high-rises of sunflowers, rustling of brown, dry stalks mapping their search.

Zinnias fade and flop as Monarchs stop by for sips of sustenance before continuing south.

Everything seems to move in slow motion as if waiting for a surprise, when one suddenly happens.

A flame flares from fence to empty wooden feeder, then extinguishes itself in tall hedgerow’s foliage.

From dense shade comes a whistling “prelude to nothing” that is a splendid something in itself.

Previously published in A Garden of Verse, Poetry Society of Texas, 2013
Gilded Edges

Gilt pages, shiny, new—
Slick, smooth – flashy too.
Beautiful gold reflecting light.
Soft leather, bonded tight.

Worn pages, marked, bent—
Softened by hours spent
Seeking to know from Heaven above
The Holy Father of Love.

Yellow pages, scarred too—
Holding words just for you.
The king has spoken – did you hear?
“My child, listen! Draw near.”

Frayed edges, creases, cracks—
Ribbons gone, broken back,
Flecks of gold in the light.
Truth flashes clear and bright.

God moved the gilding,
To the heart most yielding.
My Bible is worn – I am too,
But God only quits when He is through.
The Fifth Day

On Creation morning
I can only imagine that
the birds sang an anthem
much like they did today
outside my kitchen window
while the golden jonquils –
awakening from hibernation
stood at attention to salute
the royal pink phlox densely
assembled in fertile soil.
Nearby, the graceful willow
trees pirouetted and bowed
in adoration beneath
the virgin blue sky.

As I look out upon God’s
rich canvas, I contemplate
the peace He must have
savored when the Earth
was fresh and unadulterated
hearing only those songbirds
amid the sanctifying silence.
Now, on this new spring day
my soul is filled with praise
for the majesty of Creation
the radiance of Nature
blessed and made holy
by God as He smiled
and said, *It is good!*

Published in NFSPS *Encore, 2014*
Barbara Lewie Berry

The World’s Hostess

“Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” Rom. 12:13

Hers was an open table.

When we arrived every Sunday afternoon, we jumped from the Pontiac station wagon, bound for the open arms of the woman who married our Grandpa when he was fifty-five. We called her Franna, and she taught us about love and life.

We never knew who would be there and today was no different. The aroma of baked chicken permeated the lake house, green beans simmering with garlic, butter-drizzled biscuits, squash casserole and warm blackberry cobbler awaited us.

The table was draped in blue linen with cloth napkins and Fiesta dishware in all colors – just like her guests. Red and yellow, black and white assembled there; she introduced each one while Grandpa lit the candles.

The lonely lady from the cosmetic counter
The new professor from Ecuador
The porter who cleaned the church on Saturdays
The bakery clerk who lost his wife last week

We encircled the table holding hands joining our differences. After the meal, we sat out on the dock sharing our stories; while the stereo played “I want to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony” we learned lessons in hospitality.

This rotund woman with silver hair taught us the responsibility of welcoming those whom the world considers strangers. Week after week, we dined at her home and met new friends. Franna died that winter. Rose Chapel’s pews overflowed.

Hers was an open service.

Published in PST A Book of the Year, 2011
Barbara Lewie Berry

Wasted Effort

You can go anywhere in my house
except that one closet in the back room
where papers and pictures from my past
rest in boxes upon boxes upon boxes
awaiting that certain day – the one
when all chores are done, all poems
written, all books read, all volunteer
work completed – I will then resurrect
them one by one by one from their tomb,
separate the sheep from the goats,
the memories from the necessities,
alphabetize and categorize the remains
into new boxes upon boxes upon boxes
clearly labeled and identified by year,
awaiting that certain day – the one
every adult child dreads – when houses
must be turned over to the wild-haired
lady with reading glasses and clipboard
to advertise and monitor an Estate Sale.

Published in *Galaxy of Verse, 2012 Fall*
Christine H. Boldt

The Other Way

*If they give you lined paper, write the other way.*
--William Carlos Williams

With the fretsaw of her fixed attention,
she had cut careful scrollwork poetry
from her intensive life experience
and, then, fastened it to prim white pages:

intricate meanders, invariant
as the embroidery on a chiton,
lines that offered not surprise, but polish,
words that, though lustrous, were never more than safe.

But, as time passed, she learned to slosh her words
from overflowing buckets of pure fervor,
to attend the drips and dribbles that splashed
on old copybooks, envelopes, and bills.

She found in prodigality’s muddle
more charms than her cautiously metered phrases
had once provided. Heedless, in excess,
she enjoyed every blemish, smirch, and smudge

that dared the once-tidy heart in her
to a recklessness which had its own precision.

Previously published in the *Enigmatist* (2014)
Christine H. Boldt

Regnier’s *St. Matthew*

Regnier called me out of darkness
into his canvas, just as Christ had done.
He set a book on the green velvet cloth
before me, an artifact that fixed us

in his world rather than in mine. “Write,” he said;
and placed an angel at my side to give me
inspiration. We two were caught, flood-lit:
each feather of the angel’s wing athrob

with holy light against the black. I bent
my ragged locks, furrowed brow, gnarled hand,
reluctant to begin, again, the red work
of giving life to story. “Write,” he said.

The angel rested one hand on my shoulder,
a finger on the page to show me where.
I turned to pluck a pinion from its wing.
Then, once again, I did as I was bade.

Previously published in the *Texas Poetry Calendar* (2013)
Cassy Burleson

Legacy In Black And White (for Great Grand Mama Brooks)

(Written in the 1980s; revised in March 2016)

Born out of my father’s discontent and my mother’s mixed emotions,
I see you standing there as a wall against defeat. My oven of living,
I baked up golden, hot with curiosity, and sometimes Southern biscuit flakey
Under your patient gourmet tutorage – Pillsbury Doughboy not invented yet.

This photograph of us has gone crumbly with wear-wrinkle-ings of viewing.
This Kodachrome in black and white, bearing testament to another time
When grapevines meant excitement, and a cottonwood tree on a path
Between two houses was the half-way mark for my best friendship.

Those days are gone now, and so are you – except I see you standing there
Behind me in this photograph, and I can hear you whispering in winter, when
Each frost flake reminds me of the firelight I could see in the mirror while you told
Tales as you unfurled your tight and tiny bun into a long stream of dark and graying hair.

Your shawl of love and love of stories surround me,
Even now.
Cassy Burleson

So Much Light ... Too Soon Gone Before ...
(Written Jan. 24, 2012; revised March 2016)

Some things strike you cold and hard like gun metal on your temple of beliefs.
This was the death of Callie Tullos, who was blind-sided on a central Texas road with unexpected
curves. Callie went pell-mell into a tree before she or her best friend could half-blink – or put down
roots.
Way too fast, but soon enough for some kind of blessing in that little quirk of quick mercy, at least.

It was a heaven-versus-hell birthday celebration. And the hell of it was, Hell won for those left
behind. But Heaven’s better off with you there. Still, we’re sad. We’ll miss what you could have been
immensely. For you, Callie Tullos, were a jewel, pristine as an artesian spring – and in your prime
and on the cusp of Even more accomplishments. You had only half a chance to tip the pitcher of life’s
nectar to your lips.

Just a sip of life at only 24 ... success waiting just around the next corner. Yet one’s next corner can
be a Long-off thing, sometimes. Like the line at Wilkerson-Hatch tonight, four hours full of warm
tears and Long hugs. And those cowards who cut in line or left early because they couldn’t stand the
sadness, Once they saw the line, or got inside and saw those photographs of you so full of light and
life-so-gone.

Count me in the latter group after three hours of feet freezing, thinking “be-of-courage” thoughts
Talking to two of your friends “from kindergarten through senior year of high school” and then,
The quiet pharmacy worker who, like me, had only met you recently and yet, couldn’t believe she
would Never hear you say, “Hey, girl!” again. That “Hey, girl” was your trademark, your signature
salutation.

The funeral guys never heard you say that. One thought you were beautiful but never met you, and
The older fellow let me out the door gently ... with the understanding eyes of “too much loss too
soon.”
Callie Tullos, you were “that kind of girl,” a woman wise beyond your years, a woman full of small-
town Values, long-term friends and swells of love. Waves of friends ... most of whom you hadn’t met
yet.

Speaking frankly, it’s damned hard to understand a death like this – or a cold God like that.
So I didn’t take down the Christmas tree on my front porch tonight. I turned ON all the lights again.

You were so full of this kind of light. So much kindness ... so much promise ... now gone ... way too
soon.

And if you’re looking down to say goodbye, I hope the Christmas scenes left ON make you smile
again ...

Because our darling Callie Tullos, you always were a sparkler ...
Looking for a celebration.
Missing Summer Camp in Maine

(Written in 2008; revised March 2016)
For Darryl J. Strickler, who “went out for a row and passed into eternity” Oct. 12, 2016

That which has always been,
Has found everlasting newness,
All white and delicate, like Queen Anne’s Lace –
Forsaking other substances to grasp the shadows
As our futures continue to peek out from behind the next rainbows,
You laid down in dandelion dreams, perhaps
Making last wishes for the happiness of others.

You found the nirvana you predicted as you
Eavesdropped on the water’s whispered tides,
Coming in and out, then out and in again,
As you rested along the grassweed shores,
Pushing out from rocks along the banks
And rowing past the curves like a push broom
Through overhanging trees and into everlasting sunlight.

Something there is now that is like that which has never been,
Nor ever would, or could be but always was, for now you finally see … the joy of is.
Susan Maxwell Campbell

By the backdoor

you’ve grouped
an uneven collection of geraniums, some new
cuttings, some thinning toward the compost pile,
and here, please pay attention to their odor,
not unpleasant but deliberate as if they’re half
way to spontaneous combustion—
and of course, always a look-at-me strength
though the terra cotta pots are mineral encrusted
and some a little chipped on the rims. Maybe
others would say the leaves recall hearts with ruffles,
but you don’t really believe all that. The plants
safely ignore the stilling air—for the dawn cool,
you had propped open the door, but now
sun and shadow mount toward noon and
begin to wash out details shy of your brush.
How many shades of green on those thickened
stems! Not dying really, but drying,
those modest petals that crowd
into blooms like fresh sea foam on sand,
and now they’re looking away as if they tire
of your paints and your words.

The flowers of the wall paper, flat and pale
and jealous ....

Paul Cézanne, The Flower Pots, 1883.
Gouache and watercolor on paper, 7 x 11 inches.
Musée d’Orsay, Paris
Susan Maxwell Campbell

Fossil Hunter Meditation

The long-ago river’s permanent stories
of insect crisscross, mindless small mammals
pat-pat-paw-pause, greenless leaf, broken leaf,
skeleton leaf—all this in sand bars, mud plains
—sunrise footprints carelessly writing
their little lives—Cambrian, Permian—
cons and ages forgotten, hardening, hardened
crescents, puddles, dimples: sandstone, lime stone
and heavier, heaviest memories of the long-ago river ....

    summer, autumn, winter, then winter softening
    and today he’s alone, today he’s at work ....

Memory licked up the land,
now let it slide out dry—the gravel bank, splintered
boulders, pebbles piled by water’s pressure,
seasonal flooding drawing ribs, rippling the ribbed waves,
preserving the planet’s spring time .... the odd snail,
the snail-like thing, and here perhaps a fish—and there
surely a bone, a bone, a bone .... Find one .... soon, perhaps.

Now soundless
noon-heat’s shadow swallows the digger
as empty cumulus head somewhere
for tomorrow’s humid refill. Early afternoon,
and there’s no breeze on the sloping hill.
His shovel following fissures
unwraps that silent layer
of sun-made leaf from the darkness.
They tell no secrets either—
The Keeper of the Purity of the American English Language

Oh yes, I’ll be its Defender, its Saint George.
First I’ll rule out cute spellings for businesses and products
    *Kwik Kopy* and *Duz* and *Biz*
for the very good reason that the confusion
of grade-school children would forever perpetuate
such second-rate language. As Tsar of Our Good Language,
I will institute seminars for those public speakers
who confuse *between* and *among* and for those
whose inability to count leads them to switch
*each other* and *one another*. There will be conferences
to stamp out *between you* and *I* and *such that* and
the weird interplay of *further* and *farther*.
Certain expressions will require public service reminders:
“Say *You’re welcome*, and banish *No problem*”
with the long version on TV explaining yet again
how job descriptions include politeness, not cavalier nonchalance.
The Office of Unadulterated Language will require
seven-year plans to address mispunctuations:
“Thank you”. [sic] And as Supreme Leader,
I will place at the top of my agenda the unsplitting
of infinitives even as I insist boldly on no apologies
to fans of *Star Trek*. I’ll introduce programs to raise
cliché awareness since freedom thrives on thinking
outside everyone else’s box (Ah ha! a decent example
of minimally varying others’ chains).
I haven’t mentioned other problems (*mu-cu-lear* for *mu-cle-ar*
and *drouth* for *drought*). And here’s a major target:
mass misagreements: “Everyone has their books.”
The Department of Pure Language will establish
a critical sub-department responsible for inculcating
respect for differences within the true code of American English.

*Ah, such a chaffing and a polishing there!*
What about *yeah* and how to distinguish that level
from the cultural horror of *’Sup*? Will regional
and ethnic variations be able from time to time
to put on tuxedos instead of cutoffs?
Always the motto shall be Biblical:
What comes out of a man’s mouth makes him impure,
not what goes in. And also for women.
Paul Chaplo

Animal Lab

As I lay my wet face on
The still breast of my passed collie
I remember some austere place

Lit with mustard light
And walls all the same and washable
The tables concrete monolithic
Like an Aztec altar

This austere place
Before habitation
Like Auschwitz after construction
Move-in ready

But here primates and dogs
Will be scrutinized
Raised so carefully
And deformed in a controlled way
Bonsai trees of flesh
Sacrificed and parts harvested

Trusting eyes
Look the last time
At those who fed you for this moment
To harvest an eye or part of heart

As in all such places
Numbers for names
To somehow hide the hand
Like a cheat with a foul roll

I wonder what these now virgin walls
Will witness on this concrete tables
Where life will take its last breath
For some fashionable convenience

I wonder if that
Was the Mighty intent, that for beauty
The beautiful of Creation
Should fall

And so I remember my dog's trusting eye
As I had him put to sleep
Try to draw line between evil
And miracle
And wonder where the shadow
Fall across me this time of day

And wonder if my life
Is waiting to be caged
And plucked for a coin
By some trusted selfish hand
Paul Chaplo

Ice Fishing

When I write
I am too small to make the walk
Onto the lake
And must be pulled on a sled by my grandfather
With metal runners that fishtail
With every one of my grandfather's strong steps
Walk on water over a land
Where my logic fails me

To me there is only surface and ice
To him there is terrain
Shallows and depths below us
And he knows the deep holes
Where the pike lurk in winter

In my grandfather dreams he is there
Helping me chop a hole through thick ice
And scoop the ice chips out with a ladle
Hook a minnow mute through its lips
And send it sinkered into the abyss
Then sit with patient hope on a plastic bucket
In this impossible setting
Of a frozen lake with no shelter

Until something stirs
Grabs my line and tries to pull me
Into that dark hole
And I wrestle awkwardly
Like Jacob with an angel
Until she blesses me
With a little poem

And I heave it through the hole
And throw it onto the ice
A walleye pike alive and prickly
In the upstate sunshine
Paul Chaplo

Summer

The cicadas continue their endless
worship
Of the heat
Like committed monks
Singing a raspy Tibetan hymn
Clinging to the tarry creosote
Carcasses of utility poles

Their endless insect drone
A soundtrack to my overheated
impatience

This black garbage bag
Breathless asphalt parking lot
Suffocation
Screaming me-me sun sizzle
Is stealing my last breath
Narrowing my vision into darkness
Putting lightning bugs streamers
Into my fading peripheral vision

Gasping catfish searing on a john
boat
Bottom, praying for
River water salvation

I need your blue syrup shaved ice
eyes

To cool me
I need your creamsicle kisses
To bring me back to life

Swirling my past and inconsolable
present
My memories half-mixed, half-
halted
In the frozen tumble of night
As I squirm sweaty languid sleepless
in dreams
In the cedar incense of Possum
Kingdom burning

Outside the expressway traffic
Hovercraft on heatwaves
Join the insects in their single chord
harmony
As they loop the city
Robbed of logic by the heat

While I suffer
Under-rock reptile
Scaley shadeless torment
A panting lizard dog man

And write your name
In the bubbling asphalt
Of my desire
Cherry Day

Whisper Soft

Our sleek black lab lies serenely on the deck,  
meditating, perfect in her stillness.  
She senses whisper soft sounds too muted,  
too highly pitched for human ears to hear.

When anoles slide their belly scales on lily blades,  
or wrens feed hours-old hatchlings in the oak,  
or pocket gophers scoop out sand beneath the sod,  
she knows this without ever lifting her head.

She alerts to coyotes stalking game in far pastures,  
tree frogs repositioning their feet on pliant stems,  
the nighttime cries of bats echoing for location  
or any hint of squirrel chatter in the neighborhood.

How rich is her world with its clever voice,  
its intimate sounds of furtive flights,  
its secret urgings, its muffled rustlings impossible  
for humans to discern or understand,  
but she does.

As the earth breathes its whispers around her,  
she looks at us with knowing golden eyes  
rich with a knowledge she can never convey  
and we could never appreciate.

So, I wonder, when she lifts her paw  
and presents us with her silky chest,  
whether it's her gesture  
of consolation.

Previously published in "Rusk County Poetry Society Yearbook 2016"
Marie Dixon

Vincent's Night

Genius eked from his essence and dribbled off the tip of his brush
    as he fought the universe---
for his sanity.

The constant images in his mind
    fought with each other and with him,
for their place one day
    upon...
    his canvas!
They held their positions of renowned acclaim.

Seemingly, immortal adulation was theirs

    for centuries--- after
he was done with them.

But...
    on this one special night
all the stars in the heavens--
    called his name.
    A Starry, Starry Night
was born.
Marie Dixon

Night

Night veils the light to paint that shadow in the hall then creeps across the sky to fill the scene from sunset's hues to twilight's blues before pulling the shade of darkness...quiet. Nightfall beacons souls and seduces minds to play the game of slumber.

Sweeping the last dust of day beneath her carpet covering all sunlight corners with her blanket. Minds find rest beneath her sheets. Nightfall takes her hands to comfort the weary traveler--sometimes covers deeds of the lost and lonely.

Dreams are the treasure that she brings. Slumber is the restful tune she sings she touches eyes with darkened skies to offer those at peace...rest.

She hides memories of...nightfalls past under her thick black cloak. Nightfall ends the day, yet paves the way for something new.

Where does she go running towards morning
tired bodies heal and beg her to stay. She appears to be chased by a sunrise and never greets one ray of sunshine. She is not mine to keep; yet she puts to rest the meek...make lover's seek...
each other always count on her to come. She is not mine alone ---- I am grateful for her gifts and unwrap them slowly.

She mends broken pieces - whole then fills the gaping hole torn between yesterday and tomorrow filled with dreams of days to come...golden rings...love and things...pillows and children and castles and rainbows and horses and...and...
Marie Dixon

Solitude

Lone tree stands near water's edge tilting unsteadily---
as her embankment becomes a precarious
ledge silhouetted and bathed in moonbeams
    of iridescent light. This tree
once stood with pride and might now dances
    with the
moon playing games with the night
    She does not hide when the water
tickles her feet.
    Intrigued by glowing water and
clouds she remembers time ago
when she was watched embraced adored.

Then he was forced
to let her go
    as time erodes the firmness
    of their footing
    but cannot take her memories love
    and courage...

This tree will never stand---
    alone.
Michael Elkins

The War Goes On

I stroll along old battlefields,
Recall the time I was the winner.
Back then I sowed ambitious plans
To hopeful seeds, tomorrow's yield;
But stronger weeds have killed this sinner.

I sheathed my sword, took plough to hand;
Too soon I've claimed it glorious,
The war not done within my heart;
And still I till this poisoned land
With ghosts of foes notorious.

Their will informs my work and art;
They threat to shred my mind apart.

Previously self-published online at "furaffinity.net" (2016)
The Age Of Regret

I know the time-bomb of old age;
Nature's curse upon the unwise,
Causing a hell in life for the regretful,
The fearful and . . . "If onlys" would
Fill the head with self torment.

"Your youth will leave, and what a shame.
From there it is a losing game."

And I don't know yet what to do
When even the wind gives advice.
Still parallel truths run, nearly
Clashing, within my weary mind.
My body, now idle. My soul, still hungers.

"Your youth will leave, and what a shame.
From there it is a losing game."

Again I pause to think, and think . . .
And think!! I plan to act, but often fail.
Then I stumble over that repitition
Of thought, from cycles before it,
As a record reset to the music before:

"Your youth will leave, and what a shame.
From there it is a losing game."

..."Your youth has left, and that's a shame.
So long old man, you've lost the game."
Michael Elkins

A Natural Love

Although the woods will suffer snow,
And trees may die from freezing cold,
Will natural love throughout still show?

In Spring and Summer, trees would grow
And Autumn leaves would turn to gold,
But now the woods will suffer snow.

The weary bear in peace will go
Where many nature's beasts are told,
Yet will a natural love still show?

Within are nature's hunting pros,
The packs of wolves in chase; behold
While all the woods still suffer snow.

Their prey, a deer that proved too slow,
Was swiftly felled by strikes so bold.
And where's the natural love to show?

For though the winter's wind still blows,
These wolves will feed the pups they hold;
As all these woods will suffer snow,
And still a natural love will show.

Previously self-published online at "furaffinity.net" (2015)
Patricia Ferguson

For a Little While

Do you know where I am going?
Are you going that way, too?
If we should find each other
On a road that's not forever,
    May we ramble together
For a little while?

Have you heard the song I'm singing?
Can you sing a little, too?
If we can sing in harmony,
    A short, sweet, timely melody,
May we sing together
For a little while?

Do you know where I am now?
Do you? Are you out here--cold, wet, too?
If we are here without another
On two roads that run together,
Can we hold each other
For a little while?
Patricia Ferguson

I Merely Play

I am the breeze that, sniffing, ambles by. I stroll, window shopping. I lift a new leaf to peer beneath; I cavort; I skip; I drop things as I caper. Smiling branches nod at me. Crisp, white curtains let me peek. I run my hand across the meadow, caress the warmth of white and pink and yellow flow'rs: primrose, daises, dandelions. They spring back behind my touch. I do no harm. A little good.

I am not the power which blows away dead leaves and dead thoughts, shaking out the moldy dust before the cleansing rain, driving yesterday away. I am the breeze; little sister of the wind. I lift the leaves, and whirling them around, I drop them back on to the hungering earth. I am the breeze.
Leila Fincher

Why I Write

Why do I write?
I write for joy.
bursting July fireworks
bouncing baby squeals
bright yellow daisies
jiggly bubbles

Why do I write?
I write for sorrow
crushed pulpy bleeding heart
salty torrent tears
flat charcoal rain-skies
broken spirit

Why do I write?
I write for fear
inky corner shadows
yellow slanted eyes
spindly groping arms
ghouls and phantoms

Why do I write?
I write for pleasure
sticky-rich chocolate cake
warm fuzzies in winter
giggled conversations
family and friends

Why do I write?
I write for anger
searing white-hot flashes
glowing orange coals
Mama bear roaring
ice blue knife blade

Why do I write?
I write for life
“Let there be...” “And there was...”
vibrant green growing
toddler energy ball
words on a page
Leila Fincher

Tribute

come and go or stay awhile
but we can't be the same
you may not feel your consequence
or see the lives you've changed
actions have eternal sway
words outlive the voice
this world, my life, a better place
because you made a choice
the choice to live, the choice to work
and love and cry and play
though now we've had to say farewell
your memory remains
so we will laugh and we will love
we'll carry on the flame
that through our lives and through our hope
the world won't be the same
Pat Hauldren

When Morty Comes A Callin'

When Morty comes a callin'
Who shall I say is in?

A brave adventurous soul
With new paths to unfold?
Or a child full of fright
Trapped in a husk skin tight?

When Morty comes a callin'
How will he appear?

Surely not a female with ample rear.
Probably a cowled head,
Shadowed face, a crusty beard,
Not like Mick Jagger.
More refined...Cary Grant?
Not like Atom Ant!

When Morty comes a callin'
Will I be old?

Will I ever have
All my stories told?
And the books I've never read.
After fifty-one years
Facing hardship and fears
Will I burst from this life
Free from time, free from strife?

Or will I scurry and slither
As to out distance bad weather?

When Morty comes a callin'
Where will I hide?

Where can I tuck my soul inside?
Will it suck me dry?
Like the great Vacuum Cleaner of Life.
Will I go feet first
While the hands of my soul
Cling to known dimensions?
Just what is Hoover Heaven's extension?

When Morty comes a callin'
Would you think less of me?

If I walked out mid-sentence
As if to flee?
Or will I bother to remember
The thirst and the wonder
While I'm gasping for breath
My heart beating like thunder
To keep me alive just one second
more?

When Morty comes a callin'
Who shall I say is in?
Sandi Horton

Sonnet of the Carnival Barker

Carnival Barker on alert
Frozen on a warm day
Exercising keen awareness
Decoding silent messages

Suddenly he dashes away
A blurred streak
Moving horizontally
Then up and down vertically

The ever tenacious Chihuahua
Spicy mustard eyes
A ginger nose
Ears like twin steeples

A squirrel looks down
On the tiny Carnival Barker
Sandi Horton

Jim's Funeral

Death, life
inside, outside
Lent, Easter
the union of opposites

Inside the church
the organ plays
tears roll out many eyes
then chuckles are muffled

Outside at the columbarium
the organ is faintly heard
as the priest pours out ashes
the birds begin to sing

A fine man has died
we celebrate his life
the season is Lent, yet
we all say ALLELUIA!

(written on Saturday, February 27, 2016 after the funeral of Baylor University Professor, Dr. James Barcus, who served as head of the English Dept. and later as Graduate Program Director; his special interests were Romantic and Victorian Poetry)
Sandi Horton

The Poems of Charlotte

I chew and chew the rich, textured meat
I love its flavor, but it's hard to swallow
I try to digest the complex words until
There's a lump in my throat

My eyes begin to tear
No onions are near
I desire to eat more
although my eyes are sore

My poet alarm sounds at 2 am
The world is dark and silent
Charlotte's book is closed
But her words will not be silent

Her kindred spirit disrupts my slumber
My eyes are heavy and want to sleep
But there is more to chew
Where is the tenderest petal?

(This poem was written after reading the book of poetry, 'The Tenderest Petal Hears' by Charlotte Renk.)
Christine Irving

Red Wagon in the Rain

Stopping at a light, peripheral vision
catches a bright red wagon
standing amid weeds on the unkempt
lawn of the Methodist church, verdant
grass unmowed since the latest cloudburst
saturated every garden, turning earth
to mud more liquid and viscous
then Texas dust has any right to be.

The scarlet wain, briefly glimpsed,

framed by crooked trees, resembles
the symbolic bridges traditional
Chinese landscape artists paint
into seasonal landscapes.
A wagon seems a kind of bridge,
spanning difficult ground, daunting to traverse by foot.
Pioneer travelers floated Conestoga wagons
across unbridged waterways and flooded fords.
I picture them floating in line across the Ohio River
linked by common purpose, a determination to cross
echoing the intent of Roman engineers
whose clever pontoons spanned
Rhône, Seine, Danube and Tiber.

It's raining again, sky full up,
heavy with cloud that dims the light to gray.
The crimson color of that wagon
glows like a lantern in my mind
connecting the gaps between
pioneers and Romans, Methodists
and Oriental art. Past, present,
future melt and meld, moving
in slow currents beneath my day.
Gazing into them I see,
I am that red wagon,
I am the bridge.
Christine Irving

“World Enough and Time…”

Some say, one day a celestial Dipper
tilted to spill out star people
who drifted through space
like cosmic dandelions
seeding planets with consciousness.
Some say sisterly Pleiades
danced down to Earth in spinning
pirouettes
trailing blazing streamers of stardust
to mother humanity.

I find Gaia miracle enough-
our own humble rotating rock
humming quietly to herself,
generating life
like any earthly mother from
resources
close at hand, fanning the first spark,
weaving ninety-eight elemental
threads
into myriad elegant patterns, every
design
complex and beautiful as the last,
dovetailing
one intricate prototype into another,
plaiting
each creation into the unified living
whole
we call home.

“Home” contains “om”
the primal sound of making,
the origin of everything -
first vibration
and the anti-matter
that is no-thing.
This tiny fractal
holds all the information of its
mother.
Perhaps, ll matter contains in its
being
a blueprint of the universe.

If this be so, then surely
Newtonian and quantum facts
embedded in our matrix manifest
in individual dreams
and cultural myths
as art and allegory
driving humankind heavenward
to search among stars
for the beginning place.

No wonder we yearn towards
Polaris,
Sirius and the lovely Pleiades.
I do not find it strange the w(W)ord
Goddess, God and Spirit
in many tongues is also,
the very word for home.
Christine Irving

“Oh Lord, Ain’t It Hard To Be Humble?”
or
How I Stopped Hating Country Music and Learned to Love Merle Haggard

So here we are in 1971

living the ex-pat life in Ecuador,
hanging with the hippies,
hobnobbing with the local gentry.

I am a Gringo Goddess.

They love fertile mamas here and I have a little boy
whose hair glows copper in the equatorial noon,
a baby daughter so beautiful I am tempted
to shave her head to ward off jealous angels..
When I walk downtown, bouncing my full breasts,
tossing my naturally curly hair, men hiss at me,
whisper, “Reina, Reina” Queen, Queen under their breath.

Do I miss
suburban labyrinths,
political double speak,
shopping malls,
traffic jams,
country music?

No. Particularly not country music.
I hate country music.
It makes me think of trailer parks, bad rhymes
Gomer Pyle, Stuckey’s pecan shoppes
moon pies, and Confederate flags.

It reminds me why I left…
Gay men beat to death in city parks,
little black girls burned in southern Sunday Schools,
back street abortions, all the KIA’s and MIA’s
who never came home again.

Homesick is not a word in my vocabulary.
Though I admit, it can get a bit too quiet
from time to time, south of the Equator.
When the Silver Slipper Saloon opens
in downtown Quito, of course we check it out.

It's quite a sight—red velvet drapes, scarlet carpet,
ivory painted booths and bar stools.
I turn my nose up at the kitsch
but we order drinks; early yet—eight pm,
practically noon by local standards,
still as a morgue till the jukebox starts.

“Okie from Muskogee”
blasts right through my heart like a hurricane.

Next thing, I'm sobbing in my beer
big salty tears of lonesome, missing
abraded red rock canyons, cornfields
high enough to hide an elephant, Arizona sunsets
and sunrise on the Outer Banks; missing
English everywhere and the sweet anonymity
of looking, walking, talking like everyone else
the incomparable comfort of belonging.

I miss HOME.

That night I get it—like it or not
I'm not just me—unique Christine
I'm conglomerate, a melting pot
of race, gender, class and country.

Now I sing along with Merle, Tammy, Johnny,
Hank, Willi, and Loretta.

It’s roots, Baby—
maybe a little twisted, a little strange
but all mine.
Catherine L’Herisson

Fall Planting

Even though her time was short,
the advent of cool weather
beckoned her outdoors,
wooed her to wander in nature.
If she were lucky, she might have
a couple more months to live.

As days grew cooler still,
her thoughts turned to winter,
then forward to spring, urged her
to leave a legacy of beauty,
buy bulbs that deer or squirrels
would not find tempting.

She planted slowly, painfully,
buried snowdrop, daffodil,
hyacinth, and allium bulbs,
dead, lifeless-looking things,
hoping for resurrection
come next spring.

Published in A Book of the Year 2014
by the Poetry Society of Texas
Catherine L’Herisson

Like a Fisherman

Cast all your anxiety on Him because
He cares for you. I Peter 5:7 NIV

Lord, like a fisherman,
I cast my cares out to You,
then reel them back in,
over and over again,
sometimes not even
giving You time to take
my troubles off the hook
before I yank them back.
Give me faith, patience,
to leave them alone,
let them sink down,
way down deep
into Your heart of love.
Let me lay down my rod,
rest, wait in peace.

Published in Windhover: A Journal of Christian Literature
April 2011 Volume 15

Reprinted in A Galaxy of Verse Fall/Winter 2011
Volume 31, No. 3
Catherine L’Herisson

Secrets I Should Know

He wouldn’t talk about it when I was growing up. I married young, moved away, raised a family, had grandchildren before Ken Burns’ film, The War, brought up buried questions. Next trip home, I wanted answers. He said I was too full of questions, was reluctant to answer until pressed. First, I wanted to know the date his plane was shot down by the Japanese. His eyes teared up; November 10, 1943, my mother’s twenty-first birthday! What a terrible “gift” she received—her husband shot down, missing-in-action, and she expecting their first child! He would survive twenty-two months of captivity before the war ended.

Staring at our reflections in the mirror, I noticed his top lip, how one side was a little higher than the other, made a remark about never noticing it, was surprised how emotional he became, how he said he had always been so self-conscious about that, how he reckoned scar tissue was heavier, made his lip hang lower on one side. “What scar tissue?” I asked. “From the cuts, the beatings…” His voice trailed off; he could not go on. I did not have the heart to pain him more, ask about other things I needed to know, like the scars I had seen on his back. My father is growing old, frail. I am afraid he may go to the grave carrying secrets I should know.

Published in A Book Of The Year 2014
by the Poetry Society of Texas
Patrick Lee Marshall

Bright Gold

I moved many times growing up.
New places found me missing stuff.
I never accumulated a lot,
knowing I would soon move again.
Packing was not a favorite pastime.
Lost, misplaced, and items given to
friends and charities were a constant.
Along the way I lost a dear item,
precious words of love from school days.
Memories fade but words are not forgotten.
We traded poems one day in the ninth grade.
The year was 1960—

On a spring day in 2011, moving into a new house,
A slip of paper fell from a book I was placing on a shelf.
And there, in her handwriting, were these words

"Bright Gold"

Possessions can crumble, and coins can tarnish
All worldly raiment be stained and rent
But the bright gold of love will
Wrap you in splendor
And grow in firm volume the more it is spent.
Patrick Lee Marshall

Messengers

I saw one today
sitting on my bird feeder
signaling the change
butterflies are heading south
autumn approaches full bloom
days will grow shorter
Red-wing blackbirds will return,
beckoning winter.

First published in “A Galaxy of Verse” (2015)
Hibiscus Twilight

Almost sunset, evening light anxious
as it approaches the horizon.
Against the shaded fence a single hibiscus
stretches her glorious burgundy face and petals,
hoping to catch the last dying rays of the sun—
one more spoonful of warmth.

As dusk settles she wraps her petals around her
like a blanket to embrace the memory of this day.
Perhaps she realizes—
morning will not bloom for her.

First published in "Merging Visions: Collections V" (2015)
Budd Powell Mahan

The House at Red Cloud
At Willa Cather’s Childhood home

A garden, orange with cosmos,
simmers beneath the window
of her attic room.
Reedy stems resist the summer wind,
rage and flail against brute nature.
They are tender and plaint
as a young girl’s arms,
desperate as the struggle of the teen
who met her reflection in these same panes.
A century of gardens have
lit the slant of this ceiling,
where she must have lain in the
wrestle to sort her story to a happy ending.
Womanhood came as surely as weeds
to the flowers, and she fought to hold
the truth of it all, her arms raised
like ferny leaves that try to herd a gust.
She rose from this earth,
grew to a greatness that was
unimaginable in the cold fallow of winters
when snow crackled the view.
Now gawkers fall silent,
stand in the awe of a bedroom,
gazing out to the promise
of the cosmos.

Published in A Galaxy of Verse Spring 2013
Budd Powell Mahan

By the Virgin River
Zion National Park

Perhaps, these sounds that the river
babbles are the first language.
Before human conceiving
water spoke the vocabulary
of its journey,
hailed the leaves that
kissed its rippled skin.
An idiom of breathless gurgle
whispered to stones,
bellowed cascades,
roared the waterfall,
assured with purl against the
fragile root.
All these were the words,
a sacred text known to
fern and stir,
man’s first cells singing
the lyric of thunder and murmur,
a blessed song
captured in our genes,
heard when we are
all alone --
and still.

Published in A Book of the Year 2013
Budd Powell Mahan

Hitler’s Colored House

*Art has increasingly become the concern of the artist and the bafflement of the public.*

Paul Gauguin

He saw himself as master,
painted in the strict definition of what he considered creation,
but his critics called him copier,
uninspiring, unoriginal.
Twice the portfolio failed him,
his work judged too mundane
to gain entrance
to the Vienna Art Academy.

I am intrigued by the strokes of the 19-year-old who would move from art to genocide, wonder what his creation lacked – what nebulous standard he failed to meet.

A museum puzzles me with proclamation, calling the seemingly ordinary, 

*genius.*

In the Yad Vashem the walls hold horror, 
a kind of anti-art,
the darkness born from
the same hand that painted pale paper.

*Colored House,*
holds no scar of worthlessness,
no glimpse of the depravity behind the stroke.
It masks the murderer,
who surrendered his palette,
left his easel to scrawl the epithet of his name
across eternity.

Published in A Book of the Year 2014
Masood Parvaze

I wait for the night

When eyes ... slowly ... start seeing in the dark

The poet sheds his cocoon ... flexes his wings and prepares to fly

Sifting through darkness ... I find myself ... in the company of many

My characters ... some imaginary ... some real

Moving curtains of mist and clouds, come out of darkness, wearing rags and crowns of twisted flowers ... paint cans and brushes in their hands

The night ... with no colors ... no lines ... no words

... A clean slate, now becomes a canvas

Brushstrokes in frenzy ... climbing ladders to fog and rainbows

Colors emerge ... the colors in my mind ... which do not exist on the pallet

Dark becomes darker; meteors with bursting flames pass by

Shadows of my characters move closer ... we talk ... we write ... we color

Sometimes, we disagree ... and they just get up and leave

And ... when rain beats up on the shingled roof

We call it a song
Masood Parvaze

A bath in the Pond

I was sixteen then
In and out of a perfect hormone storm
Sitting by a shallow pond . . . where clouds bathed in its dull green mirror
That's when she appeared from the oleander wall
Shedding all her coverings aside
Light and shades from willow trees, dancing on curves
Her only costume for the masquerade
Swaying hips in a syrupy motion
She tip toed then stopped . . . deciding; which cloud to step on
Birds held their song . . . my eyes forgot . . . how to blink
Blood rushing inside, unbound . . . from cell to cell
She tip toed, into the murky pond
Oh no . . . no . . . no . . . no
Don't lower yourself in . . . gray clouds
I will hold my breath
Till you emerge
Like a flame tongue
From a deep draw on a smoking pipe
Masood Parvaze

Another Dream

I shall build me a house
On a street called “Cockeyed Cat”
In the village of Gumushluk
A few hundred yards from hotel with white walls... and blue windows
Umbrellas and chairs for rent
Where brick street ends
Dogs and cats... just lurk around
Knowing... that dead fish do wash up on shore
I shall make it
With leftover stones
Find me drift wood... for windows
Fishing nets, boat oars
Sea shells, beer bottles
And large earthy caldrons
Get mud from the cave... where Cleopatra bathed; on her journey to Rome
Oleander fence, stone chairs
Some grape vines for home brew
Some olive trees
... a lantern for light
Maybe; a paper and pencil
To write a poem
Jessica Ray

The Fountain

Hold on - don't look down!
A bold, high jump that could have ended in disaster
instead led to a life-long journey of love.

Why the desperation - the risk?

The scene: Moscow, mid 1980's, Vladimir Horowitz,
world famous concert pianist is performing to a full audience.
The sign read "sold out."
So, making their way through the abandoned building next to the concert hall,
a young couple climb the steep stairs to the upper gallery -
then to stairs leading to the chandelier deck sixty feet above the stage
where they witness the performance of a lifetime through
prisms of glimmering crystals.

A few years later Alexei, now himself a famous musician,
the once daring young man on the chandelier deck -
enjoyed recalling that evening of great music with high proportions and hilarity.

The hands who saved the love of his life, Dace
were the brilliant hands of Alexei Sutanov,
winner of the International Van Cliburn Piano Competition,(1989),
performing Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto #2.
His performances were so brilliant that one critic said it sent his audiences
into the unchartered territory of celestial rapture.

"America the Beautiful" was Alexei's last performance,
his final tribute of inspiration to the land he loved.
Dace played the left keys, Alexei played the right keys
of their piano.

So now,

it is Dace who plays - not the piano - but the cello- Alexei Sultanov Tribute Concerts
Holding her instrument close to her heart it seems to become one with her as the mellow, healing
tones of beauty emanate from it,
remembering Alexei's words,
"Hold on, never, never give up."
words that will flow like waters from an inspirational fountain
which Dace envisions some day will come to pass.
Jessica Ray

Getting to Know an Artist

As you step into her space,
sea shells greet you at every turn . . .
reminders of home by the shore of Matagorda Bay.

Even though she now lives
Where the West Begins
her heart remains by the sea.

Her name is Henrietta.
Her smile is beyond describing . . .
she has a special gift and she knows it.

"I'd rather be shelling,"
reads the sign as you enter her apartment.
At ninety-five Henrietta finds making shell art sheer joy.
Even friends passing by outside her living room can hear a tapping on the window,
welcoming then into her magical space where
angels stand atop mountains of carefully chosen exquisite shells;
while a flying anemone is captured in time, forever in motion,
or a circular mirror surrounded by art formed only by the sea itself
for millinea of ages.

A French philosopher said it best -
there is nothing more beautiful than
cheerfulness in an old face.
Henrietta is cheerfulness and more!
Robert Schinzel

The Long Walk Home

My squaw dress couldn’t stop the cold
that shook me to the bone
as mother lay beneath mesquite,
her body cold as stone.
Her eyes like black obsidian
were staring through a veil
of frozen dew as I left death
and tears beside the trail.

In memories I relive the time
one violent winter day
when Colonel Carson came with war
to capture all Dineé,
a name we call our people by,
though Kit says “Navajo.”
Some called this man a paladin,
but knights don’t bring such woe.

My warrior brothers fought him at
a Canyon named De Chelly.
So many died within the caves
while more were marched away.
The days of hunger, horses dead,
of sheep destroyed, all starts
with Carson’s raids on sacred land
and bluecoats’ with no hearts.

They made us take the Long Walk east
to barren prison yards
in lands far off from Dinetah
to face the hateful guards.
Some tortured young and sick and old
and called our faith a cult.
I missed Kinaalda’s holy chants
that help girls turn adult.

Five frigid winters passed along
the Pecos River shore
until they sent us back on paths
of pain like those before.
We each endure the long walk home
while hearts forever bleed
for thousands lost and hogans gone,
for white man’s power and greed.

I walk the trail as woman now,
no longer child that’s lost
and join the spirit giving strength
to end this holocaust.
Should Kit return to Dinetah
to steal again our land,
I’ll fight those biligáanas who
attack our ancient band.
Robert Schinzel

Decisions in Mid-Flight

A ruby-throated hummer at lightning speed
with flutter of feathers like filigree
soars in a blur of translucent color.
Suddenly, a pause in flight,
decision time – hover or fly.
It makes me ask why I streaked to this very spot
only to stop and question my choices.
I’m in good company with uncertainty.
Like the ruby-throat, I’m drawn
to the brightest flowers, to the sweetest nectar.
The hummingbird is pretty sure what it wants;
it just has a hard time prioritizing.
Jeannette L. Strother

Notification

December 1979
A large black bird flew down my chimney and skirted my bedroom. I was startled, yet unafraid of this ordinary occurrence; birds are always entering someone's home at one time or another. I chased the errant black creature out the window. Two days later, my brother showed up at my door. I was glad to see him unannounced. He stated, "Mommy is dead."

September 1981
I heard a rustling sound in my dining room. Standing on my table was a large black bird. I was afraid, I could not think clearly at the time but for some reason I did not like finding a wild bird in my home. Two days later my brother-in-law and my brother stood again at my front door. They stated, "Daddy is dead."

June 2000
I walked down the hall to find my dog had laid a large dead blue jay on the carpet. I shuttered while clearing the mess. A dark foreboding filled my days. Two weeks later, I cried, "My husband was dead."

December 2002
I found blue feathers on my bedroom floor. The rest of the bird laid inert on the living room floor. I chastised my dog. I shook and feared to answer the phone. Ten days later, my sister called. "Our brother was dead."
Satin Slippers and Pink Ribbons

Première
With her heels and knees together,
toes pointed out, forming a V-shape.
She stands straight, her head, back
and pelvis aligned. Her arms softly
curved in front of her torso.
Her pale face sets in determination.

Second Position
She turns her legs out from the hips.
Her feet shoulder length apart, in a V-shape
She rounds her arms and put them out to her sides.
She hears the diagnoses...leukemia.

Third Position
Her legs turn out from the hips,
she crosses a front heel halfway in front
of the other foot. Her heels touch one
to the other at the middle of the feet.
She raises her right arm overhead
in a semicircle and extends her left arm.
Her bone marrow transplants begin.
Her hair thins in response to chemotherapy.

Fourth Position
Her movements are stilted. She is exhausted
by treatment, reactions and countermands.
She develops a new language; infection,
anemia and depression.

Fifth Position
We cross her legs one in front of the
other to turn her side to side.
We lift her arms to raise her up in bed.
Échappé, she has no escape, no return.
The Early Fall

As the universe turns
the climatic seasons evolve
a long winter effaces spring and morphs into summer.
Not a normal warm-hot summer
but one straight from Hades,
torrid and searing,
burning all grasses brown, vanquishing sweet green
from trees and bushes with no mercy for delicate
floral displays.
Leaves flutter en masse, rain down
to cover the ground
in an early fall.

Mother lived in rapture,
leaping from teen to womanhood
by-passing knowledge to survive
the complexities of life.
Torrid and searing,
she burst into flame, beautiful and vibrant,
rushing through her environment
singeing the gentle lives she touched.
Snuffed out way before her time,
ashes rose and rained down
soot to cover us
in her early fall.
Faithful Friend

Faithful friend
To the end,
Always by our side.

Roaming the pasture,
Checking for sure
We were still in his sight.

Jumping on his bed,
He came to dread,
So, Cooter lay on the floor.

At times he’d give a yelp,
Possibly calling for help
For meds, more and more.

Finally, his pain was so bad
We took him wrapped in a pad,
Hoping the vet could aid.

She said he was worse
A Retriever’s curse
His health continued to fade.

With a degenerative spine,
He didn’t even whine,
Just lay there quietly.

Maybe she could see
The answer to our plea,
Was to put him out of his misery.

It was time for good-bye
Although we never knew why;
Our pet needed peace and rest.

Through tears and words, we bid him adieu.
There was nothing more they could do
For our friend Cooter, the best.
Carolyn Tarter

Mysterious Geodes

Round, lumpy rocks,
Some large, some small;
Not revealing
Their treasures at all.

What could it be,
Hiding inside,
A slice of agate
Six inches wide?

Or maybe crystals
Shimmering white
Or different colors;
Oh, what a sight!

Children, like geodes,
Come in all shapes and sizes;
Mysteries inside,
With amazing surprises.
Carolyn Tarter

The Old Barn

Old barn, withered and worn,
Tattered planks, peeling and torn,
Remind us of times before we were born.

Of years stacking bales of hay,
Row after row before they could play,
Until work was done for the day.

Awaiting the birth from a favorite cow,
Anxiously, patiently wondering how
Long it will take--the time is now!

Maybe a home for a horse in a stall;
Maybe a donkey or no animals at all.
Through it all, the barn stands.

The old barn squeaks, creaks and moans,
For years of use, it still groans,
Reminding us of its antiquated tones.

So celebrate the sight you see;
The musty smell left for you and me,
Reflecting the need, the need to be.
Sharon Taylor

Silvery Dust

He loves me,
he loves me not,
she whispered as she pulled
each petal from a field daisy.
A peculiar way to prove love,
but Oh! How wonderful
if the remaining petal
confirms her dreams.

Still, not leaving
anything to chance,
she picks a fuzzy dandelion
and Inhales deeply to blow
its silvery dust
into the wind.

If every feathery strand
flies into the air,
that’s proof
enough to her
that he really, really
does love her!
Sharon Taylor

The Culinary Poet

Admire the culinary art
of a tasty slice of coconut pie.
Sense the nutty chunks
as they roll around your mouth,
integrating with fluffy bright meringue
toasted to perfection. Savor a hint of
salt from the fancy braid of crusty rim.
Have another bite, and another
until you’ve pleased your palate
with the luscious confection.

Write a poem in the same flavor.
Relish every word
as it pours from your soul.
Combine words to form savory lines.
Mix them together in your thoughts
to create scrumptious stanzas.
Carefully, space them sweetly
into a delicious poem that will bring
uniqueness to your taste, your love,
your passion for creating.
Lustrous

A necklace
of porcelain pelicans
undulated in winged choreography
above the East Texas highway.
Bright morning sunshine burnished
each pinkish pearl
with the golden iridescence
of an oyster shell
turned inside out.
The jewels nestled
against blue velvet,
a string of shimmering light
floating gracefully beyond reach.
A gift to anyone looking up.
A 1933 Story  
(With Two Endings)

The cocky young man was aimless,
His folks were done; he was nameless,
With conscience gone he was shameless,
   In the small town he lingered on.
(It was a dusty little place in Missouri.)

His swagger she took for lameness,
He teased in spite of her plainness,
She couldn’t stomach his vainness,
And told others she wished him gone.
   (He was 20, she was 17.)

He took a bride yet was wifeless,
His hands were bloody but knifeless,
Her cold, young body was lifeless.
They hung him on the court house lawn.
   (He went loudly cursing.)
Marlene Tucker

Christmas Passed

No more cookies left on the plate,
A scrap of ribbon blown against the gate,
Empty boxes telling money spent,
Discarded wreaths that have lost their scent,
It leaves me sad and I just can't shake it,
Christmas came and I didn't make it.

No "Merry Christmas" on the 26th,
No carol singing, no Santa flicks,
No need for tinsel or mistletoe,
Friends and family are packed to go.
I never got the holiday spirit,
Christmas came but I never got near it.

The lights are off and the tree is down,
No sleigh bells ringing, no reindeer found,
Gone is the rush of seasonal cheer,
It's all put away, at least for this year.
I wasn't ready; I don't know why,
Seems I let Christmas pass me by.
Marlene Tucker

A Good Morning Cup of Coffee

Good morning coffee,
    Full of sunshine,
No one’s up yet,
And, well, that’s fine,
    While I sip,
And make my plans,
    For the day.

Trees full of green,
    Quiet sidewalks,
A steamy cup,
While no one talks,
    Makes me smile.
I like my morning coffee
    This way.
Thom Woodruff

Compound/Accelerate

These hairs turn white, then leave
These eyes strain, then demand glasses
These ears rattle with tinnitus.
Before you praise the NATURAL, ask
what will we do with our ghosts?
Shells and husks -hollow, thin
wait like waifs for our attention.
All your ancestors were once in skin
now just stories told to children.
You may not be forgotten
Those lines on gravestone or furrowed forehead
are time's inevitable entropy./we

will be /differently dealt with /in time
forgotten/lines.\
TIME, GENTLEMEN!
BICYCLE YOUTH
Pedestrian future.

YOUTH IS LEARNING
Give them time.

LONG WORDS
Short life.

WE RECOGNIZE EACH OTHER
as strangers

COMPANION ANIMALS
Rescue us.

AFTERNOON
Siesta sleeps in (again).

EARLY EVENING
Tintoretto Rubens skies paint clouds
Reflections

SURVIVAL A SONG?
(Just have to learn the words

LOVE LINKS US
To what loves us most.
Thom Woodruff

You Do Not Have To Be Young

Nor in altered states-to move away
from all you knew before. To walk out your door
walk, cycle, motorbike, car, van, hike your way
across any continent in which you take your stay.
This urge to GET UP AND GLOW! is eternal
or as long as you have a skin to move within
You can leave whenever you want to
Borders demand visas and passports
but there are forests and rivers as yet unseen by you
They will wait until you feel the urge
to rise, to open your door-to close it behind you
as you voyage-into the New.
June Zaner

After hurricane Ike, reburying the dead...

Aunt Tilda lay just there, right under that overturned oak tree
Before the surge struck...it’s like before...her casket is out again.

She rode the waves all the way to Cameron in the last storm
And ended up in a floating bed of seaweed and bait buckets
She had yellow rope twisted through her casket handles and
Something orange was leaking out.
They drained her for a week and every day we’d come and sit
Beside her casket and sometimes sing to her... “Abide with me,
Fast falls the evening tide”. it seemed just right somehow.
When she was all emptied out, we asked if we could open the casket,
Have a look. Aunt Tilda wouldn’t mind, she liked children with a
Curious mind and by now she would be dry and maybe even salty looking,
Like a pickled egg left in the brine too long.
Of course they told us no, for we were still children that year.

When Aunt Tilda took her leave of the cemetery this time we didn’t
Rush down to check on her, to see which way she’d headed.
We knew that she had always loved Cameron where a boy she’d dated
Once lived, before he broke her heart and moved away.
We figured that when the sky became a rolling solid wall of wind and
Sea that she would high-tail it past the cement angel sitting at her head
And hitch a ride to Cameron on a mat of shingles and vinyl siding.....
Maybe her ride would be easier this time and we wouldn’t have to drain
Her for so long. We’ll look for her next week...we’ll put on our tall
Rubber boots and head out for the flat boats that take folks into the
Shallow waters where everything piles up when the storm has past.

I won’t ask permission this time to open her casket, but leave her dreaming
Of her beau from Louisiana and all the dances that they yet might do...
A liquid, watery doe-see-doe, carried into secret corners and hiding places
Where the music repeats itself over and over and over, fusing silence into sound.
June Zaner

At the Edge...

On my 78th birthday...
Bridges over canyons began to interest me
From the casual rolled log crossing to the
Lacy steelwork of suspension bridges tight and
strung with such precision that a bird landing was
cause for rioting somewhere down the lines.
Winter bridges, glistening with danger and the unknown
Slip, the loss of grip, the birds crying from the wire
Cages down below where all those stacks of dreams
Had fallen and lie now in death’s unrelenting embrace.

Crossings look so easy before you start them
But evolve with each moonrise into something
With many thin arms and eyes that cannot open,
Cannot see. I think that age must be a dying into some
Beginning where we slide and fall forever.
I’ve never been afraid of heights and flying in silver planes
And love to cross a beautiful bridge in Houston, held
There in a net of tight yellow wires, like a trapeze net
Strung to catch the clouds and hold the sun...it’s only
The approach, the edges, the awesome edges ...
Learning the soul of a mountain...
In memory of Bill Zaner, an artist

A reporter stood at the edge of the canyon
Interviewing an old artist at his easel, squinting
And intent upon his work... “Why do you keep coming
Back to paint this same mountain over and over again?”
Without taking his brush from the canvas, the artist
Responded to the young man.
“An artist can paint the same mountain for all his life
The sun gives it a different stroke every minute, every hour,
Even as we study it, and in every season of the year. The trees
And grasses change, flowers bud green, bloom red, turn brown.
The moon is ever the unfaithful lover to the mountain,
Caressing it in one spot and hiding in its shadows later until it
Moves quickly on - finding a new attraction elsewhere...
Rain and snow remove all the brush strokes and wash
Clean the mountainside, the beauty running away in
Little streams that glow or sparkle or freeze into jewels.
The artist pauses with his brush upon the canvas and
Smiles. It is no easier to be a mountain than it is
To be an artist...painting that mountain would take a
Lifetime...”
Repetitions

I once upon a river etched in dust
Came and stood in silence there
Before the dry, once-rhythmmed ribs of sand
Proceeding each by each in solemn grace
Like old ones holding, hand in hand,
The final moment when a flute of wind,
Sweeping down the breathing river,
Breaks between the buried weed
And the further reach of the sea.

Unbound from time, the usual move of things,
The sun beat hard on the unmoving river;
Spilled it with busy shadows
From a hawk’s slow-circling wing,
The river then seemed as if remembering
The angry rains which like a hurried hell
Would rip across this place from which my hand
Now gathers dust and vagrant seed.
I then watched my hand move out and trace
Those unused currents, held mutely now,
Poignant memory of how a troubled word
Murmured in the night is forever said but once.
Suspended and alone, my hand held the river
In a palm of sand and knew its touch,
Its birth, and threading sand, moved on and knew
The dry, inevitable death of dust:

And in the quiet of the moment grew in my hand
The sudden green of a living reed.
R. M. Zaner

The Death of God

The days run ruin, unleashing raw
Resentful, sweeping hate, and men
Lips thin with broken grins
Rob meaning of its peculiar flaw
With words that all fall deadly on
Minds bewildered by Leviathan.

With each cool dawn the swords of ink
Announce with knowing gear and wink
The holy causes of the tribe, seed
Riots, surging from itchy feet,
Hiding beneath mere shibboleths
Of honor, and send children to untimely deaths.

The times are fig-ripe for the spoiling sting,
People busy singing adoration
To billion-footed gods in trivial oration:
While they curse a dead God for dying.

(forthcoming in Red River Review, 2016)
R.M. Zaner

The Rhythms of Reaping

I suppose there might have been a time
— a time of apples and children
    of women and glances,
    of rain, snow and wild winds —

When things now usual and plain
Were just themselves, shining, when we
In innocence could let them be
    (as be they might
Driven in our eyes like eagles
— or in silence shared a while
with no need of words —
Only a holding-fast, keeping by letting them
be, unashamed, what they (and oh, yes, we) are:

I suppose there might have been a time
— of saying like the rhythmmed reaping
    of grain, plucking of firm fruit,
    hands like land, deep and gnarled —
An understanding of the flesh, of earth,
— a doing unfamiliar with the feel
    of straight steel or fingers inched
around a hard butt of gun, rifled and
    triggered for death

— Beneath a sheath of trees,
    There is a time of talking, whispering together
like faintly shifting leaves (or singing)
slipping through the quiet air (like birds' wings)
our minds like picnics
spread softly around a mound of quiet grass —

If such times of knowing (being
    are what it's all about
then what is time? Quick paradox of inwardness
(yearting on the further edge of living) for what was
and ought to be (or have been)
and bear the burden of repetition.
    But are we free to give ourselves
(like Plato) to such supposings?
    as much sweet myth remembered, these,
as any madrigal that was and is no more.
This yearning in time for time
my self's deepest, faintest
longing for a truth my very own —
put into figured stories (sly indirections)
felt silences (faintly mocking)
the diffident episodes of youth —

To whom offer such celebrations,
these prefaces for remembrance?
On whom depend for understanding:
where we stand under, beneath the bows
of trees, lying, on our backs,
thinking of home and apples,
children and glances from women,
listening for the moving voices
(like birds sleeping in the leaves)
to tell us (now)
in this needful time,
the time we are,
and who, or why?

(published in The Literary Nest, January, 2016)
The Beall Poetry Festival
The 22nd Annual Festival
April 6-8, 2016

A three-day celebration of some of the finest contemporary poets, with readings, a panel discussion and the Virginia Beall Ball Lecture on Contemporary Poetry.

About the Event

Baylor University's 22nd annual Beall Poetry Festival is supported by the John A. and DeLouise McClelland Beall Endowed Fund, established in 1994 by Mrs. Virginia B. Ball of Muncie, Ind., to honor her parents and to encourage the writing and appreciation of poetry.

This Year's Event

Evening Poetry Readings (all at 7 p.m.)

- Amaranth Borsuk (Wednesday, April 6)
- Nicole Cooley (Thursday, April 7)
- Kevin Young (Friday, April 8)
- All evening poetry readings will take place in Bennett Auditorium

Afternoon Events (all at 3:30 p.m.)

- Wednesday, April 6 -- Annual Student Literary Awards
- Thursday, April 7 -- Ernest Suarez will deliver the Virginia Beall Ball Lecture on Contemporary Poetry
- Friday, April 8 -- Panel discussion with Amaranth Borsuk, Nicole Cooley, Kevin Young and Ernest Suarez
- All afternoon events will take place in Carroll Science Building, Room 101

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