

The House of Poetry

Poetry Reading Session

2012

"Until"

*She cupped her hands
Behind his head
Glenching the short curls
And hoped her grip
Was secure --.*

*Cause she wasn't
Going to let him go
Until he kissed her
Good and slow
Til she forgot
To breathe in-and-out!*

Feathered Brained and Giddy with Delight!

As a small child I lead a very plain and prim existence.
There was sickness and quiet desperation in our home.
My grandpa suffered with dreaded Parkinson's Disease
And its presence haunted our every waking moment.

I was constantly being told to be quiet
Or else I was ferreted out the backdoor
And set on pillows on the porch swing like a fancy ornament
So he could rest after his seizures.

There was no humor in our household except
On the days when my Great Aunt Polly would arrive.
She'd sash shay her way in to house, unannounced
Wearing peacock plumes and ostrich feathers.

She was not a featherbrained female
But she always paraded wherever she went
In her big wide brimmed picture hats
Decorated with ostrich and bright colored feathers!

Anyone who ever saw her never knew
She was a silk weaver, who wore roller-skates
And scissors on her nimble fingers.
She was instead the embodiment of frivolousness!

She had rouge painted on her cheeks
And her blue eyes twinkled.
She'd pinch my little cheeks and tell me to cheer up
When there was never anything cheerful in our old house!

Her invasion of our home was like a breath of fresh air
Because she was single, footloose and fancy-free!
Whereas my Grandma was tethered to the house,
And only escaped infrequently to go to the doctor's office
for more medicine or to the pharmacy for more pills,
That didn't seem to do anything except to empty
her meager change purse of its pennies and dimes.

I still find myself smiling
When I think about those dull old days
When Aunt Polly came to visit
Wearing a riot of colorful feathers,

A silk purse dangling from her rhinestone encrusted wrist,
Black gloves and brightly colored high-heeled shoes.
Her infrequent dutiful visits to her shut-in sister
Were like the carnival coming to town!
Making me giddy with sheer bemused delight!

A Lovely Thought

Our eighth-grade motto
was “Hitch your wagon to a star.”
I never really understood
just what that meant.
It was a lovely thought,
a pretty picture,
but in 1956 no one drove
a wagon any more.
T-birds were all the rage,
and speed limits
were made to be broken.
Elvis was the king.
Poodle skirts,
can-can petticoats,
ducktail hairdos,
black leather jackets...
these were “cool.”

We lived every day
to the fullest,
having fun,
falling in and out of love,
rocking around the clock.
Now here we are,
more than fifty years later,
still talking about how great
the Fifties were.

Few of us got what
we really wanted out of life.
But those who did,
I wonder if they understood
what hitching a wagon to a star
was all about?

Miss Alta

Fear stole the summer between eighth grade and freshman year. We would be minnows in high school, a not-much larger pond than the elementary school where we drifted through the same subjects in a slow progression. We dreaded the new curriculum, algebra, chemistry, even home economics and agriculture, subjects unfamiliar to us. Most of all, we feared English, even though our eighth-grade certificates attested to our mastery of basic language-arts. It was a deeper, more complex fear. Upperclassmen taunted us with truth gained from experience: the English teacher was strict and mean.

We were mixed-up like milkshakes by the first day of school. We arrived on time, loaded down with new supplies and an armload of oversized apprehension. In the English classroom, *she* stood at the chalkboard, writing her name, *Alta Hawkes*, in beautiful cursive, white dust trailing her hand. As she turned to face us, she pushed her glasses back from the tip of her nose, magnifying hazel eyes into beacons we soon found out didn't miss a thing.

Her hair was the color of a used string mop, shingled short around her pudgy face. She had a short, stocky frame and a booming voice. Our dread had become reality. She *was* strict. She *was* scary. She yelled when someone dozed or didn't do their homework, but she wasn't quite what we expected. She liked to hear and tell good jokes. She made English fun, even diagramming and poetry memorization. Best of all, she brought in a case of cold Coca-Colas to celebrate success.

With grudging appreciation, we learned grammar and a lot of literature. We even made mangled efforts at writing a poem or two. Every year throughout high school, she guided us down rivers of learning. We never told the younger kids the truth, just passed along the legend, telling it the same way it was told to us.

Love Me Tender, Love Me True

I was there the first time Elvis died,
a dramatic demise in black and white
on the big screen of the Grand Theater.
Four friends and I sat in the prickly seats
of the back row on the left side, sniffing
in the dark. When the lights came on,
we blew into tissues as we single-filed
through the lobby. A male voice taunted,
“Aw...Elvis is dead...” It was 1956.
Although we had grown up on make-believe,
our grief seemed real as we walked
into the twilight of innocence.

When I heard someone repeat those words
in the taunting technicolor reality of truth,
I thought of my friends from the Fifties,
how we loved dancing to *Blue Suede Shoes*
and *Don't Be Cruel*, how all of us fell
under the spell of the Sixties
to *Can't Help Falling In Love With You*,
how we lost touch with each other,
and how Elvis lost touch with himself.
That August night in 1977, the lyrics
of *Are You Lonesome Tonight?* haunted me,
and I knew this grief would last forever.

Two Haiku

Jan Benson

thunder snow
as rare in Texas
as a winter peach

spring snowfall
through anorexic trees
freeze-dried American Beauty

(previously published in *small canyons 6 anthology*, 2011)

Emblematic Poem

For my Granddaughter, Valentine's Day 2012

s n i a f i g u o n
a t n o t e t f i
e g u o l t h i
q u i c kly; in a whisper I burn like mountain sage
i b u r n I m i
c r I k e e v
; i n l One smudge and gray-green smoke
i n l h i d e s m e
n a Drifting breezes lift my scent erasing my trace
a m a
w making me light enough to live in Karennia's heart
f i m
i r
s e
p

CANYON ROAD, SANTA FE

two unspoken monologues

The Shopper:

A jumble of Spanish Colonial
artifacts against white, expensive walls:
a shop on Canyon Road in Santa Fe.
The clerk, an art major, pre-recession,

says she loves the pieces, as if they were her own.
She introduces us to this new world:
an infant Jesus, carved and crowned,
circled by *milagros*, silver shoes, meant

to hasten His return; candelabra
repoussées, clusters of crucifixes,
smoky *retablos*; *bultos*: every sort
of *santo* that might have urged the Spaniards

to kneel, repent, adore, their tortured Lord,
in cathedral or in hacienda .
On a ledge, above all this commotion;
Christ's bleeding head, flanked by two half-men; each

(as the clerk explains) in his own purgatory.
These scabbed figures, perhaps eight inches tall,
meant to perch in holy niches, are licked
by circlets of gilded wooden flames.

The one on the right is negligible,
Made -- even I can see -- by hapless hands.
The fellow on the left, a master work,
though at first glance he calls to mind cartoons

in which men gamble all their clothes away
and strap on barrels to hide nakedness.
Flames of wood ! As difficult for my eyes
to credit as the hell they represent.

"But," the clerk suggests, "Look *through* this Eighteenth-
Century device at the writhing figure."
He is an old man with a staved-in chest.
His skinny arms implore us passively.

A marvel of gesso over wood, his face
has a domed forehead, the sunken chin
of someone whose every tooth has been pulled.
(There are all sorts of purgatories.)

His glass eyes, glittering in painted folds,
seem almost kindly as he inclines, more
concerned to caution viewers than to seek
his own redemption. Was he done from life?

The sculptor's father? Perhaps a patron,
one whose commissions had been generous?

The *santero* carved wood to make the head,
sawed it from side to side, then gouged two holes

in from behind, to set the eyes in place
(the clerk has told us how such craftsmen worked),
before he sealed the whole, applied the coats
that evoked features of a well-loved face.

What were his thoughts as he worked the wood,
and curved his hands to carve each tongue of flame?
Did he hope to hasten heaven by making
the fire brighter? The flames higher?

A *conspicuous tormentorum* that need not
touch the body, but by its very sight
might purge the represented figure.
Could he guess that, once it left his hand,

the piece would undergo another test:
the *peine forte et dure* of Time, that cracked
the gesso laid on with such care
and allowed the woodworm to infest?

Or did he simply carve what he believed
he must, and leave to God's deciding things
he could never know? And so, with his tools
and hands, perform his own *auto da fe*?

The Clerk

These two folks show all the signs of having
seen enough. Their glazed eyes and crumpled maps
say they caught this shop coming down the hill.
He is bored. But since coming through the door,

she has become attached to holy things
made to caution men against desire.
I could tell her much about such feelings,
but I keep my counsel, hand *her* my business card.

This couple's wardrobe is not by Gucci
Their jeans and shoes are ragged. Their cameras,
Easy Share. If she returns, it will be
to yearn for, not to buy, the little man

who burns in his perpetual fire.
And perhaps a second look will tell her
something of that hungry flame: how we, each
and all, dwell within its glittering wreath.

^ Chris Boldt

Cassy Burleson

A Woman's Experience

Copyright by Cassy Burleson, August 23, 2011

Thinking of starting another semester with too few resources ...
And now, nearly delirious from the smell of mothballs in my attic,
I went to Wal-Mart to get in touch with God and the prevailing ethos and
Came home to plant an *Anacampseros rufescens* from South Africa on my porch.

I'm calling her "Annie" for short, and like me, she's drooping in some places somewhat,
But she's reported to revive to form small fabulous rosettes with her fleshy leaves, and
Turn royal purple in bright light. And Annie's also reported to produce bright pink blooms.
Imagine that. Pink flowers on a cactus plant So I figure if Annie can survive the ride, so can I.

Annie and I are two peas in a pot, metaphysically speaking, both worried about adequate drainage,
Cramped in there with the industrious ants and damp dirt in this summer's relentless August scorcher ...
And Annie's in the same blue pot with a "scrambling" aloe from South Africa, whose healing powers
And orange and yellow flowers attract hummingbirds – and that scrambling aloe is already inches taller.

I'm feeling a little wilted myself tonight. You know it's never that I expected to be a plant protected,
But at this point, some difference to age and enthusiasm would be respected, especially by me.
Yet Annie preaches resilience. "Drought tolerant," she says. Protect from frost. Provide bright light.
Water thoroughly, when soil is dry. Young Annie is wise beyond her years – and I am still ... optimistic.

Ego Is Not My Relative

Feb. 7, 2012

I know what it feels like
To be the smartest woman in a room
And look over to the smartest man, and think,
"I got that."

Men must feel this way all the time.
Power is a wonderful high, even when it's illusionary.
And I'm sure it's the opposite of how I feel when I hear a commercial
That says "Which also may cause ... erections lasting more than four hours."

And I'm sure the smartest man in the room feels just the same.

Hail Padre, Full of Grace

Summer 2005

By Cassy Burleson

Rich blue-veined urbanites hit the beach hard in their BMWs,
Red hair blazing on pearlized skin. But they're not half so bright
As the natives in the local tourist shops who make change
Over coconut scents wafting over plastic trinkets and sand castles,
All courtesy of Jimmy Buffet breezes, third-world labor and Wal-Mart ...

Tourists roll their ice chests, hurl Frisbees and place umbrellas over
Bright new bikinis pasted on slathered down bodies. These folks haven't
Been licked by that lucky ole' sun in decades ... maybe ever.
Ultra-violet rays lap up those clouds and clouds of lard AND the
Perfectly aerobicized bikers and Zumba-ites with equal abandon.

Twilight moves to night moves ... and sunrise drives some to hideaway places
Where only drug dealers and weekend natives feel safe, and then fantasies
End all too fast, even faster when tourists return to big-city sounds, and
Some are left with restless, sleepless, sad and lonely aloe vera nights,
Beached, bleached and bronzed. Some still waiting ... for the afterglow

Our smiling Padre waves hello, goodbye, come again soon, all caught by Kodak.
And it all becomes bigger and better with each new telling and re-telling in
Circles of water cooler chatter and wind-burned retrospection. Hello ...
Goodbye ... Come again soon Padre of happy beginnings, ever-after endings.
Get your shot at paradise right here. And they do because they think it's so.

So Much Light ... Too Soon Gone Before ...

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 quick, but quick enough for some kind of blessing in that little bit of mercy, at least.

It was a heaven-versus-hell birthday celebration. And the hell of it was, Hell won, especially for those left Behind. But Heaven's better off for it. Still, I am so, so sad, and I'll miss what Callie could have been Immensely. For Callie Tullos was a jewel, pristine as an artesian spring – and in her prime and on the Cusp of success. Yet she was never given half a chance to drink deeply of life's nectar

Just a sip of life at only 24 ... success waiting ... just around the next corner. One's next corner can be a Long-off thing, sometimes. Like the line at Wilkerson-Hatch tonight, four hours of full of warm tears and Long hugs. And some 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 Callie so full of energy and life-so-gone.

Count me in the latter group after three hours of feet freezing and thinking "be-of-courage" thoughts While I talked to two of Callie's 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.

The funeral guys seemed sad, too. One young man thought you were beautiful but never met you, and The older fellow let me out the door gently ... with the understanding eye 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 ... some of whom you hadn't met yet.

More's the pity. Frankly, it's hard to understand a death like this – or a God like that. And so tonight, I didn't take down of the Christmas tree on my front porch. I turned ON the lights again. Callie, you were full of so much light. So much kindness ... So much promise ... And gone ... way too soon. And so, if you're looking down tonight, I hope you like those Christmas lights left ON for you tonight.

Because sweet Callie Tullos, you always were a sparkler ... looking for a celebration.

Sky Cleaner

The naked elm tree roused itself,
and, nursing at the mother's breast,
nourished root and trunk and branch,
and, wakened from a winter's rest.

Shivering in late winter's chill,
bursting bark to bud and bloom,
It eagerly swept the dusty sky,
and cleared the grey with blossom broom.

Elm, sky cleaner of the spring,
demanding a payment for the deed,
draws its life from mother earth,
and repays her with its seed.

Solution

One morning, I asked Baby Doll
if she had seen Santa Claus?
She answered "Yeahow". I believed her.

I asked her if she had been
a good girl?
She answered "Yeahow". I believed her.

Two months later, I asked her
if the four tiny babies
in the sewing room corner were hers?
She answered "Yeahow". I believed her.

In the next 6 weeks, I am going
to have Baby Doll's "Yeahow" fixed,
You CAN Believe That!

FIRST VISITORS

Alone, in circle,
and, by row
they wait so humble
heads bowed low.

They come when winter
nears its end,
announcing “spring’s
around the bend.”

Though much too shy
to meet our gaze,
they seem to note
our smallest praise;

that which we give
with lavish hand,
applauding the bounty
of their stand.

Salmon, peach,
yellow, white,
technicolored
blooms, so bright,

painting the landscape,
vales and hills,
those blushing, beauties,
Daffodils.

xicanismo haikus

uno

lechuza on a high wire
a sparking transformer
the air waves sing in static

a crying woman has drowned
her children in a river
my ears hide behind shut I's.

darkness spills out a crack
my closet door ajar
el cucuy el cucuy whispers in the dark.

devil at the baile
cool red jacket
dancing all night long on hooved heels.

as I lay sleeping
bed made of dreams
a huevo hides under my bed.

dos

the rio grande river
redundant name
my home mi frontera caliente dry

indios and spaniards both
in line at the checkout
speaking neither tongue.

mexican american chican@
I like winter stand between
summer and spring NO FALL!

bless me grandma
I am not catholic
I cannot afford it!

tres

sitting in the corner
dunce cap on
father, why speak Spanish in class?

dressed for Saturday night
my sister's quincenera
she is a woman for tonight.

cactus nopal cactus nopal
prickly spines in my nalgas
oh ancient plant I cannot love you!

mom spins cures for grandma's hands
spider webs for stitches
aloe vera for soothing a coke for headache.

fajitas on the (mex)quite grill
beers in my tios' hands
tripas in the ground it's Saturday night.

cuatro

susto got me in my sleepwalk
can't wake me up
might kill my dream in mid-belief.

I've never had mal ojo
my grandma says
never let bad thoughts inside.

raining, pelting, hailing outside my bathroom
not like Mary on Sunday
more like Jesus hanging on velvet cross.

poets were killed on the day after
conquest of the indios
can't have colonized minds reading.

dreaming and reading make me write and sing
no stringed instruments or airy notes
just me, mi voz, quiet like a lion purring for the pride.

cinco

karakawas guerreros danced on South Padre beaches
mextiso children sell chiclet's on concrete bridges
los flores reynosa e matamoros progreso mcallen and brownsville

driving down 281 in buick skylark with purple clouds
dancing with bright sunshine and windows
rolled down breeze on the cuff of my sleeve.

bats in the bark sucking sweet nectar
from nefarious looking grapefruit tree
dad with a shovel SPLAT!!! last sound on radar.

greened coke bottle filled with water
very dry on the other side
grandpa says it keeps the dead quenched.

tlacuache running on my roof slips and spills
can hear scurrying no more
now on ground with lost footing ego bruised.

torn summer swing rocking back and forth across America
cold and dripping sugary raspa
red plastic straws stabbing holes for memories to fill.

Kite

The morning dawned breathless and long-listening
Until a freshling April breeze
Moved through the new leaves of the red oak.
And a kite, silver and black,
Like a knight in fulgent armor,
Floated weightlessly overhead.
I watched his bouncing, lilted, lyric course
Across the meadow,
Riding the currents of the air
On slender, elegant wings,
Then back in one long sweep
Until, almost overhead,
He barrel-rolled like a circus tumbler,
Seized a flying bug
And devoured it midair.
If you must be predatory,
Be graceful.

The Minstrels

Where have all the minstrels gone
Who sang when I was young,
So young I believed that rainbows were real,
Like the rocks and trees around us?
Where have all the minstrels gone?
We welcomed them as they came over the hill
In their colorful tights and their piebald jackets
And their lutes inlaid with rosewood and ivory.
They had bells on their caps and their sandals
And their songs were warm and full of laughter.
They weren't afraid to be foolish
And they weren't afraid to be tender
And to sing of honest lovers
Who did not change when the west wind turned
And the north wind blew through the valleys.
Where now have the minstrels gone?
Oh yes, there are singers of songs
But their eyes are hard
And their songs are hard
And the children who follow them are so old,
And the children know, O, they know
That lovers love only 'til daybreak
And that rainbows are mere refractions.

**The Girl
(1931-2011)**

Four! There were four of us in all,
And we were the middle, she and I
I was second and she was third.
She was petite and lovely;
I was always glad of that.
The girl should have the looks, I thought,
The girl among the boys.
She had her own room, she being one,
And we, we shifted around—
The sleeping porch, the basement room
That was OK; we liked it that way.
And when the church lads and the neighbor lads
Began to gather round,
Woe be to him who raised his voice to her
For she was my sister.
But I never let her know.
I never let her know
We were laughing one day
And remembering and cherishing.
And recalling how much we were the same,
We two in the middle
And she was beautiful,
Even then.

Hodie

Hodie Christus natus est,
The stars of night fade in the west,
Hope and life are newly born
Upon this pristine Christmas morn;
Hodie! Hodie!
This day embracing every day
This mote in time enfolding every hour,
Purging our stygian dark at last away,
Bringing the snows of human grief to flower
Breathing upon us heaven's thawing breath,
Banishing in birth the pain of death.
Herein is life's bitter heart made sweet
Herein is creation made complete
Herein are earth and heaven wholly blest,
Hodie!
Hodie Christus natus est.

What Child is this?

What child is this,
Welcomed by such wondrous auguries,
And yet as full of flesh and blood as we?
Fingers, toes, as any nurseling child,
Eyes to peer and wonder,
Lips pressed to Mary's breast.
What child is this?
Not stifled by omniscience
Or blinded by the glory of the Father,
But senses to feel, to laugh and be surprised,
And, Ah, a heart to love and grow in love.
Lacking no jot of my humanity,
Blood of my blood,
Flesh of my flesh.
Yet herein is the mystery unfolding,
The sacrament of God incarnate now at last.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Finitus capax infinitum!

Beasties

Thank God for beasties, feathered. scaled or furred,
Leopard, lizard, beaver, bass and bird,
Creatures of the wet and of the dry.
Things that run or wriggle, flit or fly,
Things that peer above the waving grass
And fix their eyes upon me as I pass,
Curious of this strange, bipedal thing
That strides their April meadows like a king,
For creatures frigid, temperate or tropic,
Vast as Leviathan or microscopic,
For things that live and love and swarm and teem
And--Who can say?-- perhaps like me, can dream.
How tedious to live our days alone
With lifeless, stolid dust and silent stone,
Never to know the throbbing world before us
Nor waken to the woodland's morning chorus.

LINKING

For DW Seat. 11. 2010

The churning water & wind
of the Caribbean drove
Hermine far inland & flooded
the home of a friend who installed
large fans to turn all night

to dry the floors, but fans
malfunctioned & fire broke out.
& the dog that used to sleep
at the foot of the bed wasn't there
any more to rouse her mistress

who was asleep at home
because she declined a friend's
invitation to spend the night,
& cause of death was listed
as smoke inhalation & burns.

BONE COLD

The ice hangs from the eaves
like a harvest of parsnips.
My walking stick stabs the ice
and I take a small step
toward the mail box,
but an icy blast demands
a turn about. My shoulders
haunch over and dead leaves
swirl about and stick
in pockets of snow at odd angles.
Strip off the mittens, and ivory
finger tips reveal Raynaud's
syndrome aka deadman's fingers.

Feb. 2. 2011

Artifacts of Life

In memory of Bob Hill, 1939-2011

Always moving hack in time,
you spent much *of your* life
seeking pieces of the long ago.
You rode the weathered ruts
of westering wagons, found
the fainter trails of unshod ponies,
the winter camps in riser canyons,
found the arrow points spear beach,
stone knives and scrapers, tools
and weapons of the ones who came before,
Clovis, Folsom, Apache and Comanche,
all the ages of the tribal plain.
“Walk into the sun,” you told me,
“flint reflects a different light”
I never saw the flash you saw,
never found an arrow head
and you collected hundreds.

You told me you once rode
into a clearing on a butte, into
a ring of grinders and grinding stones,
manos and metates, In a partial circle,
its sacred gap open to the rising sun,
one water-polished fist-sized rock
lay in the work worn center
of every rough sandstone slab,
as if tipis still stood behind the stones,
as if women In deerskin dresses
had just stepped work
and on mocassined feet
slipped unseen into the evergreens
at the sounds of your approach.

In my half-dream-world of writing,
I see you riding now
weaving through the junipers and pinons,
weaving through the centuries,
through a hundred centuries
from one into another
with each stride of the horse.
Hat pulled low on your brow
against the brightness of the day.
eyes shadowed, swceping.
searching for that special glint
of new sun on ancient flint,

you ride and find
tipis in a partial circle
open to the morning,
women kneeling at their grinding stones,
whispering behind shy smiles,
the armorer at his stack of points, waving,
calling you to see his work.

End Piece

It is a sudden country,
this Colorado corner
as if God just turned away
in the middle of its making
and left everything—
not so much incomplete—
as misarranged or unaligned so that time, in its coming,
hovers first
in the unforeseen and unexpected.

Perhaps, it was the last piece
in the entirety of creation
and, weary of the task,
He took no time
to add the final polish,
leaving form rough-edged and raw,
immensity unadorned,
beauty so abrupt
as to threaten the eye
and dare discovery.

He might have started here
and fresh, experimental,
sought the balance
between bounty and desolation
that makes survival possible
but never effortless,
and finding the test here too severe
for most of those he'd send,
went on to cast the farther world
from softer, gentler molds.

It is a sudden country;
death always easier than living
no challenge in the dying
any fool can rush to that.
To find gumption enough to run
together the days that make a life:
Ah, that demands an inner steel and flint
to strike a daily spark to light the search.
Those who bear that fire endure--
unrelenting like their land.

Patricia Ferguson

The Grasshopper's Ode to the Ant

Because the Grasshopper has a point of view

For Gail, the equipment works,
the coffee pot, the ice machine,
the wheels of society that never,
never turn for me.

For Gail, with efficiency,
can bake a pie or mend a roof.
I have satisfactions, too,
but little built.

I know the rhythms each by name
and can discuss the use of each.
I understand the art of rhyme,
but Gail can spell.

I reap a harvest sown for me
by Milton, Donne, and Blake. I parse
the passages of time. For Gail,
the work gets done.

Patricia Ferguson

I WISH I WAS A STAR

I WISH I WAS A STAR

HIGH IN THE SKY

I WOULD SHINE SO BRIGHT

THE WORLD WOULD KNOW

THAT NO CHILD WOULD EVER CRY

FROM FEAR OR WANT

I WISH I WERE A STAR

HIGH UP IN THE SKY

SO BRIGHT, SO BRIGHT

I WOULD DESTROY ALL THE

WORLD'S WEAPONS OF

MASS DESTRUCTION.

THE CHILDREN WILL NEVER CRY AGAIN.

JAMES CARROLL HERRING

JULY 26, 2011

LASTING PRESENCE

In the stillness of the early morning,
Your fragrance comes to me and I am awed.

I smell your touch, and feel your limbs,
Slowly reaching for mine.
I know your being and want to be ever so much
closer.

You came and stayed with me in my darkest night.
Your presence was eternally there.

Your will guided my thoughts throughout.
And now, as dawn approaches,
I anticipate your lasting presence.....forever.

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3-21-2012

BAYLOR LADIES

They're not little girls anymore.

No dolls or buggies

Just a ball

A basket ball

Why Baylor?

Why Mulkey?

Why Waco?

They came from many miles away.

Some flew, some walked, some drove.

Texas, Arkansas, Michigan

From all over the USA

They want to be Champions.

They have not lost a game.

They are 40-0

God be with them

as he has been since Day One.

Go Lady Bears, Go Coach Mulkey.

James Carroll Herring

Just Past Pin-High

I love my pitching wedge, all that weight
on the club head, and a length that enables me
to propel it better than any other club in my bag.
Then again, that's my problem.

When I use the wedge I swing all out
and the ball flies farther than it should.
And when I try to finesse my pitching wedge,
I miss entirely or miss enough to dribble
a gashed golf ball into the waiting rough.

But one time in Abilene I was hitting
into the wind on a very short par three
and I swung that wedge like I always wanted.
The ball flew into the clouds as if it were
my messenger, and when my golf ball reached
Heaven's door perhaps God blew it back.
My ball dropped from the skies about five feet
beyond the flag, bit grass deep and spun back four.
It stopped one foot from the pin
and for an instant I had a vision of perfection.

I have swung my pitching wedge
hundreds of times since that day,
but neither God nor any wind has ever again
overseen my golf ball according to my fantasies.
Still, every time I swing my pitching wedge
I remember Abilene; I remember a white sphere
falling from the clouds, falling just past pin high
... near perfection.

J. Paul Holcomb

Published first in *The Texas Poetry Calendar*.

J. Paul Holcomb

The Sputnik Challenge, 1957

Southwest of Abilene they tried
to join the rocket race. They planned
the launch to save our U.S. pride.

With Sputnik as the process guide
these college guys made their bold stand
southwest of Abilene. They tried

to send forth first a mouse named Clyde.
He'd be the hero if he manned
the launch to save our U.S. pride.

A left-out music major cried,
"Wait a minute, we need a band."
Southwest of Abilene they tried

just once--the rocket rose, then died.
The platform burned. Our brave men canned
the launch, to save our U.S. pride.

The college president just sighed,
ignored their bid (but thought it grand.)
Southwest of Abilene, they tried
the launch to save our U.S. pride.

J. Paul Holcomb

Published first in The Texas Poetry Calendar.

Vincent Van Gogh, Self Portrait, 1889

I know that guy; Red Carter was second string on our freshman basketball team. Would've played more if he'd practiced more. The coach couldn't trust him. An inability to control his middle finger, right hand, didn't help either. He got pitched once for extending it toward the referee, another time for aiming it at the stands. Fans booed him and Red didn't like it.

Our art teacher tells me that's the portrait Van Gogh painted of himself in the nineteenth century, but I know better. That's Red Carter and Sarah Cornelius painted it, probably in fifth period. Miss Metcalf helps me to appreciate art, and I appreciate this piece. Red's eyes stare daggers from the canvas; I think his boiling temper is about to blow. I'll tell Big Luke. He told Red to calm down or he would rip his ear off. If Miss Metcalf shows me another portrait with an ear missing, that will prove it's Red. He hasn't calmed down.

J. Paul Holcomb

First published in *Illya's Honey*.

WHITE IS CHINESE FOR DEATH

so she ate only Green for growth
no refined -just rough,raw,real foods-
no white bread,sugar,flour,white cancer cells
more Brussels sprouts,broccoli,peas,beans-thin foods
that passed and did not stay with her

Color meant a lot to her-
pink blush of high blood pressure
pink skin where sun burn kissed with cancer

She loved brown mud earthen colors
Shades that sang of tree and bush,earth and water

All she digested,she became.
She had no name
Gaia.

AS YET UNREAD

books awaiting eyes and time
movies i may never see
places i may never visit
things i may never accomplish
IT IS ENOUGH!(says this ant
when looking@the Pyramids
Mountain can only be mountain
Water can only be flowing
Stagnant or still,loses vitality /energy
like birds in a cage or animals in a zoo
We lose who we are when borders and limits
Sky ends somewhere near space
Rain needs clouds to displace
We need each other more than i can say

BARBER SHOP VERSES

You clip your hedges and your hedge funds
You hedge your bets by twice digesting
People like the sheen of applied enamel rouge
I hear blood beating beneath the skin

Once each and only original and unique
Each of us a co-creation. Cut your cloth
according to your art's fashion
Allow me form experimentation

Most confusing? Response ability-
when i criticize rather than appreciate
how many languages we are
how much lost in translation

Walk your footsteps-you are in them
Notice how in time we all arrive@different destinations?

THOM O JOY March 21,2012

Confession

It was not how she wanted
to spend her Friday,
any Friday for that matter,
but especially not this one--
Good Friday before Easter.
Her husband was going
to be off work that day,
kept nagging her about
taking this class, reminded her
of their long road trips,
how they sometimes drove
through rough or remote areas.
So on Good Friday, instead
of focusing on the suffering
Saviour who laid down his life
to pay the penalty for her sins,
she found herself listening
to a vulgar-mouthed policeman.
Later, wearing ear protection,
gripping a semi-automatic pistol,
she shot the orange B-27
Dillinger body target fifty times,
felt as if she had been the one
that had betrayed Jesus,
had pierced His body,
spilled His blood,
shattered His heart
with her very own hands.

Published in *Voices Along the River*
by the San Antonio Poetry Fair 2010

Only a Candle

Lord, you are All Light.
In your service are lesser lights--
from floodlights
that bring great illumination,
to small nightlights
that dispel fear in the darkness.
And yet, I would count it privilege
to be only a candle.

Catherine L'Herisson

1st place Printed in *A Book of the Year* 2008
published by the Poetry Society of Texas

What Imagination Can Do

She shifts in summer sun,
leans her head back on the seat,
turns her hearing aids off.
With eyes closed, she relaxes
on a beach in the Bahamas.
Sweating, she is glad
she dressed in sleeveless top,
shorts, beach thongs, this morning.
Occasionally, a slight breeze
flows through, caresses her cheek.

After a while, she sits up straight,
reopens her eyes to blazing sun,
turns the hearing aids back on.
Her husband is still cursing
as he tinkers under the hood
of their stalled car
blocking the left-turn-lane
in this city steeped in Texas heat.

She leans back in the car seat,
turns her hearing aids off again,
closes her eyes, returns to the beach.

Published in 2012 *Texas Poetry Calendar*
by Dos Gatos Press

Willow By The Water

Willow
By the water,
So small and pliable,
Will you survive the wind and waves?
Stand strong.

Alone
And by yourself,
You've learned to draw away
From wind and waves that threaten you.
Stand firm.

Rebuffed
By strong gales from
Opposite directions,
You sometimes lean toward the waves.
Stand straight.

Willow
By the water,
Growing over the years,
Opposing winds have made you strong.
Stand tall!

1st place Printed in *A Book of the Year* 1989
published by the Poetry Society of Tex

June

I don't know what happened, only that June
Rushed into my life like a summer storm,
Nights filled with thunder and lightning.
Laughter filled days, air perfumed with joy.
Passions fires exploded anytime, anywhere.
Laughter and love, songs we sang to each other.
Like the flood for forty days and forty nights
We tasted love and life, all of its delights.
As the sun left, at the end of a summer day,
June just got up and quietly slipped away.

As I Lay Dying

When I lie dying,
As they say.
I will pray to see her.
Though I will not anyway,
My love,
She's half a life away.

Note: Title Borrowed from William Faulkner

Shadow Wars

A lightning bolt, a brilliant white
Shatters and wakes up the night
With an instant thunderous boom
Drives all shadows from the room

Dark creatures in the shadows stay
Detest and cringe at the Light of day
They move more freely in the night
Devoted to creating needless fright

When daylight comes it's no mystery
Back into the shadows, they all flee
There they may rest, but never sleep
When night returns, back they creep

On the brightest days creatures thrive
Buried in the shade, they stay alive
Continuously move to avoid the sun
In corners creep and along curbs run

Hide behind objects, trees or walls
Slipping over fences like waterfalls
Ever moving, slinking and crawling
Hideous apparitions, deeply appalling

These creatures try to take the sun
With darkness surround everyone
Shades of gloom, opposed to Light
Through the ages these two fight

In storms they quickly jump around
Followed by lightning and sound
Endless battle thru time and space
Light fighting, the darkness to erase

When the dark clouds seem to win
Here comes lightning screaming in
Awesome power, intensely bright
Leaving no shadows, even at night

Started eons ago, this war still rages
And it may go on for countless ages
But there will come a wondrous day
When Light will drive shadows away

Through Rose Colored Glasses

Another set of pictures arrive in my in-box. An email with friendship pictures attached. You know the kind, cute photos of animals and people. Messages imbedded amongst the pictures and at the end a promise that if you will send this message to seven of your friends something wonderful will happen to you tonight before 11:23 p.m., something you have always wanted. This isn't a joke, don't break the chain.

I wonder how much of this needless chatter clogs the internet bandwidth with messages spreading like viruses in a warm humid bathhouse. And to what end? "Hope springs eternal," and some people will be compelled to reply with false hopes... or nonchalance... telling themselves, "It couldn't hurt." And time and time again they follow these instructions like sheep lead to shearing, if not slaughter.

Many of these are God fearing people believing that all things come from Him and forgetting that He is not easy on any who hold to false images or hopes above Him and yet they still pay tribute to these charlatans who reference Him, but are not representing His Word.

The thoughts are sweet like a woman's lips that can lead you into temptation, enticing you to gamble on this idea and see what happens, luring you into a habit that can become addictive and non productive, sitting for hours in front of a screen serving a god of light, fast flashing colors, and sound.

I chuckle at the innocence and absurdity of it all; recalling when people truly believed they could see the world differently from everyone else, simply by looking through rose colored glasses.

Piece by Piece

My kitchen is filling up with the remains
of people whose families have taken care
of the business of dying. Cleaned-out closets
and attics eulogize a life with boxes
of bargain-priced items from widowed houses
they will re-label as starter homes.

Mr. Ludwig officiates these ceremonies.
Like a mourner, he follows obituaries
from street to street, house to house,
hosting the estate sales in our town,
his moveable shop the card-tabled rooms
of my remembered friends.

Knowing I will come to pay my respects,
Mr. Ludwig, like a pastor, sets aside sacred cups
and trinkets for me, wraps them in newspaper
stories I read as solace when, in my loss, I ask
how I will go on without my precious neighbors.
His practical sacrament offered piece by piece.

Spring

2/11/2012

My daffodils sprouted green leaves,
felt the cold and refused to bloom.
The Yellow Cowards!

The peach tree is poking out picture-perfect
pink blossoms. The squirrels are excited.
Save me some!

Our Red Bud tree caught fire overnight,
Ablaze with fragrant fuchsia flowers.
The bees are frantic.

The new Red Oak, applied a tender bark,
Cat sharpens his claws on the new find
Mine! He claims.

The pecan trees are silently sleeping
They won't budge until after Easter
Sleepy heads.

Texas Mesquites, wise beyond their years,
Wait, and wait until the last frost is over.
Then it is spring.

Baby To-Be

3/19/2010

We're pregnant, shouted the to-be Mother.
We are so excited, said the happy Daddy to-be.
Can I tell my friends, asked the to-be Grandma.
I'm only six-weeks PG, exclaimed Mother to-be.
I can't wait very long, chided the to-be Grandma.
It's about time, added the grinning Granddad to-be.
We'll paint the basinet, persisted the to-be Greatgrampa.
Start a savings account, chimed the Greatgrama to-be.
Another grandchild, announced the experienced Granddad
A new baby to love, cooed the Grandma of three.
I'm running away from home, purred the cat!

Cat's Under the Couch

1/25/12

It was a dark and dreary night
Thunder rumbled, and crashed
Lighting flashed its eerie light
And the cat ran under the couch

Our deaf neighbor came to bore us
His great, gravely, grinding voice
reaching 100 decibels, or more.
And the cat ran under the couch

The doorbell's incessant ring foretold
a young child's impatient arrival.
The door opened to peals and squeals
And the cat ran under the couch

"Turn the TV down." he hollered
"It's a commercial," was her shout
"I hate loud commercials!" he railed
And the cat ran under the couch.

Firefly

She is blinking bright
bioluminescence haunting night
when she breathes into
the darkness in my life.

I am led afield
in staggering pursuit
only guessing where
and when she
next might shine.

Once or twice,
when I thought that
I was close enough,
I tried to hold her
for a moment
in the net of love.

I was naïve to think
that she could live
within my airless jar
or that she might shine
just for me.

When she felt release,
she shone again
with the cool green glow
that lights within each breath,
like a beacon
warning my soul's ship
away from rocky death.

The Window

The window looks up
at Sandia, a mountain
royal purple before the
dawn of morning sun,
namesake “watermelon” red
in the day’s last rays,
wishing it could be
there once again, or
in the semi-arid sandscape
between them.

The window looks in
across a cluttered room,
lit as though
it was an afterthought,
wishing it could be
a solid door, unlocked,
latch thumbed and pulled
or tripped and pushed,

or an open bedroom door,
whose knob gets
touched, turned and polished
every now and then;

or a bathroom pocket door,
fingered in its slight depression,
slid open,
its hook tricked open,
being closed again,

or even a hollow closet door
that gets more than
its share of action.

The window sees
the front door swing,
get propped open
by the rock, then
the approach, the reach
the touch of hands
a quick release
Aaahhhh,
a breath of fresh air.

But then,
warm and wet, or
cold and dry, or
splashed, icicles hanging,
snow collecting
on the sill,
locked down tight
or opened up,
clean or dirty,
you always could
see right through me.

The Breath

I held my breath to hold that blue-gill perch,
the first of all the fish I ever landed.
I held my breath in taking from the mist-net
the first hummingbird I ever banded.

When they started to announce in Fort Worth
that my physics project had won, I held my breath;
and then again, my freshman year at Baylor
when the Science All-Stars national TV show was run.

I held my breath when I first saw, in the cafeteria
that fall of '94, the love of my new life.
I held my breath lying with her on her parents couch
when she said she'd be my wife.

When we took Téléphérique, the bubble tram
in Grenoble, above the Isère River, I held my breath;
and then again, when the valley views from
Bastille Hill, high above the city, made me shiver.

I held my breath as we stood in Cathedral Notre Dame,
becoming acutely aware of all its architectural power.
I held my breath to see her birthday smile in Le Jules Verne's
upper restaurant deck of the sparkling Eiffel Tower.

When I looked up inside the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican,
in Rome, Michelangelo inspired such awe, I held my breath;
and then again, beneath the dome of St. Peter's Basilica,
where his moving sculpture lives, the Pietà.

I held my breath when I looked down at the Azure Coast and sea
from the hills just to the east of Nice, purest poetry.
I held my breath and clung to cliffs overlooking Monaco;
saw cactus garden miracles that will ever seem to glow.

From so many mountains, highs, hillsides and caves,
scenic drops to valleys far below,
great times I've had with folks in the villages and towns
around the many worlds in which I go,

to lofty snow-capped peaks, the Alps, the Continental Great Divide,
strong feelings I have so deeply felt while standing quietly astride.
I don't know, now, how for so long I have so often cheated Death,
but for so long, such scenes of beauty I have beheld and held my breath.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

I'd forgotten how that smile

The way you look in my eyes

Makes my heart laugh

Draws my soul to you.

Here you stand after seasons

Of salty rain

And rainbows

And frozen flowers

Bringing back the memories of how ready we were for Christmas

In the endless summer.

Sailing emotions soothe the truth of

How you reduced me

To the best

And worst of who I am.

And yes, we were good.

It's true that together, we had more than we deserved.

Even though you stand here, unable to remember

All the reasons you left my door,

As you stir once again the molecules knitting my soul,

As you remind me why I loved you so fiercely,

There is something overwhelming up that I know to be true:

This broken butterfly that was

is not

recyclable

And the beautifully messy parts of who I am

were not made to be

re-useable

At least, not for you.

Terri Poff

Sunday Nap

above us,
the metronome of fan blades
hypnotically sways
the suspended crystal heart
your hand in the small of my back
your knees behind my knees
I breathe where you breathe
rise and fall of our breath
becomes our rhythm
somewhere in the soul entwined afternoon
between the edges of
duty and dream
my
heart
has
enough

Invisible

Even with the cold winter winds of winter
it seems to be a Sunday morning ritual
near the sanctuary
but just outside

Clothed in a sari
she sits erect but serene with detached interest
as curious worshipers pass by
Black eyes gaze from her heart-shaped face

But now it's another day
Caught in the fierce north wind
a frequent passer-by notices a limp
soiled cloth lying where once sat the
familiar figure in white.

In a flash of Sunday morning memories, he recalls
"There it lies but she's not there"
Had icy invisible fingers lovingly shaped
the white cloth in the familiar form
of her own body

Could it be that she is a great old soul
come as an Egyptian female pharaoh to share her wisdom or ...

perhaps Mother Teresa revisiting
the poor the downtrodden the outcast or

Could it be the resurrected compassionate Christ come to Earth
in one of his "distressing disguises"*

What is she looking for in her isolated statue-like rapture ...
What does she hope to find ...
redemption ... love ... healing ...

Once she quietly confessed
"I'm a private person ...
the only color I wear is white
my name is ... Grace"

*Mother Teresa's thoughts of ministering to India's poor and outcast

Snapshots of Nature in the City

*Cobalt blue over arches Earth
as diamonds and silver
brighten heaven*

~ ~

*High on a balcony
gentle breezes whisper peace
to mother dove nestling in
twigs and purple hearts*

Connection

*Only through the eyes
of love
do I see you,
truly know you*

~ ~ ~

*Memories ... fantasies ... dreams
swirl through my soul
like a subterranean river racing silently
through the desert
Passing through many waters -
then past the birth pangs of new life
Breaking through to the thrill of love's light
I ride on the wings of the wind*

~ ~ ~

*Only through the eyes of love
do I see you
truly know you*

~

*Last night ...
you took my hand
and . . . led me to paradise*

Brenda Roberts

A Harem of Light Spirits

The music seeps into my bones
I watch as veils flow retreat and
return and the hips follow.

The undulations!
The zells!
right, right, left, right, left
cover the music

laughter entwines
first the arms
the shifting movements
rapidly chasing brass

Oh to dance!
My hips, seated, protest
each attempt to reach up
to join this
harem of light spirits

Flirty eyes, smoky above
the sea of shimmering scarves
flutter into
brief butterflies

Oh the dance!
Myeyes close and
my spirit climbs
into the ethereal

I feel myself again
dancing on a twilight sky
She does physically
what I do ethereally

Oh to dance!
slowly brass fades
hip scarves quieten

and I am returning
from some other world

The music playing
my body, seated,
and yet I dance.

Brenda Roberts

River Dance (a haiku sequence)

the flames rise
as if from her shoes
 flamenco dancer

flames spread into
wings tipping the edge
of her red skirt

thunder!
the frantic tattoo
of dancing feet

from sun to moon
the flirt of a flute
 change with the seasons

a circle within a circle
their feet not touching ground

bodhran, violin --
violin saxophone
jive versus jig
a war of senses

spring festival
all the haiku images
no time to write

Cliff Roberts, a.k.a. kawazu

in the drawer --
a dry pen, blank pages and
her obituary

(in memory of Peggy Zuleika Lynch)

march winds
if only I were a kite
soaring ... soaring

morning sandwich --
I feed the birds
my bread

mid march --
three more peach irises
than yesterday

slate grey sky --
the colorful shops
of Dublin

spring equinox --
stone bowl half full of sun
and shadow

Letter from Ogden in the Mid-West

My Dearest Frances, Isabel and Lanell:
How great! My daughters have rhyming names.
I may need any rhyme I can find after my welcome
in Tulsa and OKC. Hollis Russell, the bookseller,
did sell 200 books at his 3-7 soiree, so thus
I am writing this with limp arm
from shaking hands, shaking hand from signing
books, each recipient requesting "just a short, short
rhyme with my name" How many different ways
can I use "anther and panther" "Driscoll and Episcal"
"Brown and crown" "Doubleday and Hemmingway"?
in the swamp of oil barons with only my verse and
Free Wheeling to defend myself?

I was rescued by my host and chauffeured
To what I thought would be a quiet dinner
And early return to the Biltmore. (Note their fine
Stationery.) Not so, a mansion full of guests
who parked their oil wells outside, were inside
for more autographs and by now the advertised
short verse. I was once told: When you do something
two times, it becomes tradition. Maybe I can call it
An Oklahoma tradition. Tomorrow I greet the Texas
Cattle barons. Maybe I should buy boots and chaps
with the \$51.00 I received for two poems from the New Yorker.

I close with all of the love that keeps me in good spirits
When I know that we will be together in a matter of days,
hours and minutes now. I think of you constantly, even
the train hums your names, Frances, Isabell, Lanell,
Frances, Isabel, Lanell as I retire to my berth.

All, all my love, and.

Goodnight my adorable ones, Ogden
Daddy

p.s. So far no one has asked me to recite

Burgess' *Purple Cow*

Naomi Stroud Simmons
Published NFSPS Encore, 2002

Naomi Stroud Simmons

From the Inside Out

Come on in if you wish while I'm cleaning house or should I say cleaning out more like sorting and rearranging these thoughts that are hung in corners waiting to be used like the blouse I saved for years knowing occasions would arrive when it would match the day or the mood or the style but the last few times I've sorted through these deep closets, it has felt too tight through the shoulders and the sleeves are a fraction short and the design is from too many seasons ago when I was younger and plainer, the more basic appealed to me like simple verbs which now I expect to be more durable, more active, more complicated and suggestive, but the problem still comes with discarding them because they cling to the wall and if I pull them loose they cling to me with the static electricity of rubbing nylon on wool or whatever starts this urge to discard useless lines, collected nouns, outdated phrases, passe´ vocabulary, outmoded styles, dots, dashes, no caps, no punctuation, but as I said I'm sorting and they will end up like the blouses in boxes marked DISCARD . Then, yes, as you may already suspect, I'll be ready to put them on the curb, but not just yet.

Jeannette L. Strother

Midnight Feasts

There once was a lady named Gracie
who found her nighties getting lacy.
when she turned on the light
in the middle of the night
she caught the moths making them racy.

The Blues

You are fully consumed by life's bruises,
you are like
him, the dark skinned man
showering people with wild blue sounds.
Those work songs of love and pain
that teach staggered summer
evening secrets floating in the wind.
A liquid, blossom tongue you have let us hear
so like the pronounced smells
of early morning bouquets wet with dew.
This sweetness of musical strains
seeks a warm comforting home,
a refuge in waiting and wanting souls.
The name for these sounds is The Blues.

Rainy Day Blues

I opened the door into the morning air
to watch that rain come pouring down.
I stepped onto the porch
just looking at that wet, wet ground.
It ain't a burying day
with everyone just slipping around.
We got to lower him down
into that Mississippi red, running ground.
Six white horses won't draw this coach;
this ain't 'Nawlin's Beat'.
Six cylinders will pull this Chevy
though Tupelo's streets.
I tilt my head into the air
and nature covers my shameful face.
While catching the rain in open eyes,
I think, dying is a lover's disgrace.

Jitterbug Jive!

Jitterbugging nerves bebop in rhythm
with thumping hearts,
a brain rush that could last all night.
In and out goes that staccato, mamba beat...
it pulls, it pushes us together
then apart
In ecstasy, hand tremble and shake.
This ain't caffeine baby,
It's :LOVE...love.

Jan Nichols Strube

LESSONS OF MARTIN COUNTY

As you reach the top of Ranger Hill,
On the interstate going west
The land begins to look barren
It seems you just left the best.

After a while you'll notice
Mesquite trees and hills of sand.
On this stretch of geography
You recognize this is God's own land.

Look closer and you'll realize
There are lessons of life from this earth.
In traveling life's roads, we learn
About faith, doubt, and self worth.

Mesquite bushes look quite worthless,
But they are survivors for sure.
Why doesn't the wind just blow them away?
Through centuries they endure.

Mesquite trees are not quitters.
In droughts the roots grow through rock.
They provide land's creatures with moisture,
And shade for relief of livestock.

The blinding sandstorms give us grit,
And strength to help through the night.
Encouraging us to hold fast once more
We find it is worth the fight.

Ah yes, this land is fertile indeed.
Please do not pass it by.
There is much to learn from the promise
Of the vast Martin County sky.

Jan Nichols Strube

THE NICHOLS' PLACE

If the little farm house could tell the tale
Of how it came to be
How thankful we were for the good cotton crops
Of 1952 and '53

At last we would have our beautiful house
And it would become our home
We eagerly watched as the walls went up
We would each have a room of our own

Moving day, I remember it well
As we claimed our special space
Jan's room is still in that little house
Ever known as the Nichols' Place

Sometimes the weather was stormy there
And life would bring wind and rain
We'd wait in the cellar for the storms to go by
Until the sun came out again.

The house that we built all those years ago
Another family now calls their own
God bless the new family on our old farm
But sometimes I long to go home.

Jan Nichols Strube

SHADOWS AND LINES

We are here for a while
In this space and time;
Weaving and wondering
Thru shadows and lines.

We lose and then we find
Our way again.

We rise and fall.
We soar and then we slide.
Under autumn leaves.

Winter stars are bright with hope;
And latent possibilities.

The new sun of spring
Beckons us to live again.

We glow in the summer light
And bloom with a newfound thrill;
Until the winds of August
Bring harvest and autumn chill.

Charles Taylor

Imagine

for John Lennon

Imagine you're standing next
to Russian genius novelist
Fyodor Dostoyevsky with the
other members of the
radical Petrashevsky group, about

to be shot by
fellow soldiers from your
own former military units.
You're pissing in your
pants, standing in the

December cold, shackled and
hooded; the priest, carrying
Bible and Cross, has
given God's blessing on
your death, the sentences

have been read, the
tall golden spire on
some church nearby has
gleamed in the clear
sunlight, Dostoyevsky has whispered,

"We'll be with Christ,"
and his friend Speshnev
has replied "A handful
of dust," The soldiers
take aim from fifteen

steps away from the
scaffolding, "I understood nothing
before I kissed the
cross," Dostoyevsky later said.
"They could not bring

themselves to trifle with

Charles Taylor

the cross.” He remembers
Zola’s *The Last Day*
of a *Condemned Man*,
and feels a profound

indifference to both life
or death. He thinks
how if he is
spared life would seem,
every second, endless, and

that would be unbearable.
Suddenly someone appears waving
a white cloth and
the soldiers lower their rifles.
A carriage clatters into

Semenovsky square, and a
sealed envelope from Adjutant
General Sumarkov is presented
and read. It is
the Czar’s sudden pardon.

The joke’s over. When
they untie Grigoryev, they
find he has gone
mad. The rest of
the prisoners feel nothing.

“They could just as
well as have shot
us,” says Durov. Petrashevsky
demands not to be
touched, to put on

his own chains. He’s
placed in a troika
and sent into a

life of endless exile.

Charles Taylor

Dostoyevsky gets four years

in a Siberian prison
and then must be,
till death, a soldier.
Later he is pardoned
and we have this

gift to the hearts
of all who love
to read and seek
wisdom. Imagine, when your
poor heart feels like

torn tarpaper; Imagine, when
you hear the killing
and torture; imagine and
learn to dwell in
a hope not born

and imagine what Jack*
wrote to Joyce* from
the Slovenia headed for
Tangiers. The ship nearly
floundered in mountainous waves

five hundred miles out.
Jack discovered inside a
luminous calm and wrote:
**EVERYTHING IS GOD, NOTHING
EVER HAPPENED EXCEPT GOD**

Patrick Allen Wright

Seaming the Karma Eclectic

I.
It begins with the packing
 like for a long trip
 or to move
 or to heal
a deep cut
 which has become inflamed
 lanced and sutured

then knowing

of the coming tissue
 a thick scar for questions
 and answers
that re-inflame.

II.
Our vessels fill,
 empty
lie dropped, chipped, cracked,
 broken

ready to be remade
 repainted an expectant lavender
 a reluctant blue—because
that comes to every body.

A new convergence of the twain
 rises from titanic depths
 from fathoms of the ice-blue
North Atlantic—murky also
 from the *Bismarck*, Oslo's slip,
 a new Russian craft
the still black sea.

Those cold waters breach
 the warm Gulf Stream
visit our coast.

Back then, Christopher sailed
 southwest to reach East
and now we climb East

to meet West
our new dawn in nothingness:

Patrick Allen Wright

Being comes from non-being

caring, sharing and showing that

born with nothing
but faith
emptiness fills with use.

III.

Tranquility

blows harshly
picking sands into the eyes,
blurring the scheme into
reality.

We walk straight-lined crosswalks
over the tracks,
lie
beside the timeless soul pool
and watch
helicopters and training planes
fly.

Each of us carries autonomy
in-belly
to become jetsam
flotsam
fornication almost forgotten

forgiven.
So now virgins again
we,
a single unit
never before
just
nor fair,
move
in this time
our gift.

Meanwhile
anthropologists
scientists with clip-
boards and calculators

further the development
of primitive societies

Patrick Allen Wright

making them
 new
 disregarding spontaneous
combustion which yields
the open universe.

In their death, we take their die
to cast our vessels new—recreated.

IV.

Nature orders.

Poets remain the watchdogs of God,
 and also the secretaries of state,
the recorders of music sounding from
 lips whistling through a mouthpiece.

Our craft floats allusive and aesthetic
 picking the reader personally
and carrying
 through turns
surprises giving
 shimmers and glimmers
of depth moving
the reader to reread
 and reread
 meanings

on our magic carpet ride
 through an early morning
open
 art gallery
 in a garden
clipped by God.

V.

We live as we believe in ourselves.
 We grow, becoming as we wish,
 more or less,
but also we imbue what we seem to others.

We love
 the Chambered Nautilus
with the intricate simplicity

feeding and floating in time.

June Zaner

Senior Prom Redux....

If I could do it all over again maybe I would
choose the lavender tulle gown and forgo
the dusty rose lace with the mermaid bottom,
which left me looking mother-of-the-bride
instead of prom queen, not the me I was at sixteen,
when being sixteen and having long brown hair
and dangling earrings was the best thing in the world.

That night, prom night, if I'd been young, acted young,
and dated a boy who danced instead of holding
his Baptist principles to his chest, and not me,
wearing my long white gloves with the little pearl buttons
and the pale pink roses beribboned at my wrist.

Or....maybe I should have worn pale blue tulle,
pinched and gathered in tiny ruffles to the floor, strapless
and boned and soft to the touch, sighing softly
as I sat with my silver slippers tucked under the skirts,
not moving with grace, not moving with my hands
clasped behind his freshly barbered neck....
gliding on the polished wood of the Rice Hotel ballroom.

I had dreamed of this night all year.
this night, this magic night, this incredible
once-in-a-lifetime night, which we had been aiming
toward as surely as an arrow shot from a bow.
I never thought my dusty rose lace would, all these years later,
remind me, not of that night, but all the others, when the
right choice was so obvious and I made the wrong one.
I looked 30, maybe his teacher, maybe an older sister...
and he looked like a young Paul Anka, only frozen in stone, as he
stared with a hunger he could not quite conceal at the
blonde blue-eyed teen, in the lavender tulle ball gown, who
swirled away from her date and then back into his arms with
the ease of one so sure of her footing that she floated on the
waxed glittering floor of the rented ballroom...as sparkling as the
mirrored globe she danced beneath...one step ahead
of me, and me, glamorous it's true, but not even part of the race.

© by June Zaner, February 21, 2012

Drama at Possum Kingdom...

We knew that Possum Kingdom lake was shallow at this point. Weeds grew along the shore, concealing old cardboard bait boxes, beer cans, now and then a painted lure lay flaking with rusted points. It was a hiding place for rabbits, birds, and the snakes who lived there. The afternoon had grown too cold and windy to fish and the lakeside reclaimed the muddy shore where we children stood, puzzling why a wooden boat lay half submerged in the murky water, lost....

We'd stopped there to eat a watermelon under a tree my Dad thought would protect us from the chill...salt, pepper, melon, newspaper from the car trunk, and last the old wooden-handled butcher knife he always kept in the glove box, just for this purpose, and who knows what other use he might have had for it.....it always scared me just a little as it sliced through the melons, juice running down the side like blood, staining the news on the paper below....bringing ants to crawl up our legs.

My brother and I would eat awhile and swat awhile, legs growing numb with cold and bites while our parents quarreled, a buzzing sound we knew might turn at any moment into threats and cursing and tears...we waited. Then we watched as my mother, always terrified of water, lifted her skirts and waded out to the old boat which promptly sank with her slight weight tossing her into the stinking water, waist deep, and mortified that her dramatic suicide attempt over some bit of well-rehearsed trivia had come to nothing, no recue from her children or her husband, no life-saving attempt and then hugs all round....just a cold ride home in wet clothes, her shoes filled with the lake's bitter mud, water-bugs smashed against her stockings...

we had always known her world would end, we just didn't know how.

© June Zaner, February 10, 2012

fred & ginger

in that holy space between dream and reality
there occurs a slight victory over time
the pair, speckled as guinea eggs, lean
shoulder-to-shoulder, fighting the wind
that tries to tear them one from the other...

as somewhere a record drops
and she lifts her hand, he takes it into his,
circles her waist, recalling all the evenings
and all the morning songs which
called them to the dance

somewhere a radio plays a gentle, swirling song,
one fred astaire would have lifted ginger
up to.....hanging just a moment on the floating notes...
all pink and silver in the air...

he rubbed his eyes, another day begun,
and turned to stop the alarm which had
broken into his dream, another flaw in
that whole sleep thing that people seem
so fond of touting...

he tapped his silver cane down the hall
to where his mono-breasted lover sat at
her writing, slower now than yesterday,

still, both up at day-break, eager for
whatever might happen, the shine of butter
on the breakfast egg, the steam from coffee,
the skin sliding from the peach in their mouths...
they have loved each other long and well.

he lifted his arms and assumed the pose
and placed his cane beside her chair
she slid, in her flowing gown, into his arms
and they both hummed as they swayed
in time, in tune....."We'll meet again, don't
know where, don't know when, but I know
we'll meet again, some sunny day....."

Richard Zaner

Beneath A Cool Modigliani Print

---© 2012, R. M. Zaner

I was, I suppose, too young really to appreciate
most things in that house, rented but still the one I called home.
Signs of my mother's efforts to make our mostly rented houses
seem cheerful, less gloomy, wherever we happened to be
at any time, nomads almost, moving from here to there
while I was trying so hard to grow up and get out.
I remember that hanging on one wall of the house
was an old print, caged in a cheap frame, glass cracked,
adding another dimension to it. It hung there
on a wall, yellowed with age, across from another wall
riddled with appliances hung as if in mockery of that print,
dulled gadgetry hinting at our actual style of life
There on that wall, nail sticking out, it
hung for all the time we lived in that house, there,
in that tiny town on the high New Mexican desert,
a place on the map only because through it ran
the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad,
as did old U.S. Highway 66—the "Mother Road," it was called
even back in those early days of my life. Beneath that cool Modigliani
print, I would sit and think, knowing I was as out of place as was it.
But there it hung and I knew it held
hidden and curious messages like those
Michelangelo is said to have embedded in that
wonderful ceiling in old Rome, many still un-deciphered
and furtive as that old print on our rented wall
in the hallway next to the kitchen. I would sit beneath it
on the bench my mother had picked up somewhere, and
I, eyes closed, would daydream of brilliantly colored futures
where other walls would be draped with strange gadgets,
bright medallions of a style of life I would then have,
in a then spacious room, where I would, I knew, find myself
safe and secure in one of those bright futures.

When Death Ensues

from my storehouse of early memories, isolated yet
textured like a palimpsest, is this:

I am walking on a sidewalk bouncing a ball,
when a man shouts at me; I look up and see him
standing on the porch of a house, he is angry for he yells
at me, “stop the damned noise,” and he says, more softly,
“there are people in here, who need it quiet,
don’t you know, so stop bouncing that ball.”
I grab my ball, walk up to him and ask ‘what’s going on?’
He raises a hand, points inside the open door. I follow his pointing
finger, look and see a man lying on a table, eyes closed,
hands folded on his chest. He isn’t moving. Others surround him
sobbing, solemn, all looking at the tabled man—
except a woman, who turns and looks at me looking at her;
she too is weeping, staring at me staring at her.
I shudder, turn around and leave, but don’t bounce my ball.
That was the first time I’d ever seen someone dead.
Later, I asked several dead friends about that scene,
but so far none have responded, not even when I
insistently asked one, when he was laid out, barely
conscious, in a hospice bed, still alive but fading:
“Be sure to let me know,
Dear friend, what your journey is,”
the one, I meant, that had not yet
Begun, but was surely on its verge—
I couldn’t tell whether he had heard me ask.
Later, when I was not in his room,
he spoke the last words any of us ever heard:
he said, I could swear he was talking to me,
when I had earlier asked my question,
while he held my hand tightly,
grabbing my eyes with his, barely opened:
“I have no answers,” he said, to no one it seemed,
but I knew, sadly, he was speaking to me.

Richard Zane

Consider the Moth:

who on rapid wing conducts a
ritual flirting with its death;
yet, innocent of that, dances
dizzily about a dancing flame
and, with a sudden dip, plunges
to the flame,
ecstaticstill quivering:
dying from too much life.

--© 2003, R. M. Zaner

House of Poetry Program, Wednesday March 28, 2012

All events are in the [Armstrong-Browning Library](#)

***(The Cox Lecture Hall and the Cox Reception Hall
are on the ground floor.)***

8:45 a.m. Registration and Coffee Reception—*Cox Reception Hall*

SESSION ONE: [*Cox Lecture Hall*]

**9:15 a.m. Welcome: Dr. Richard Rankin Russell, Chair, Beall Poetry Festival Committee,
Department of English, Baylor University**

9:30-10:30 Readings from "The House of Poetry" Volume XXIV

10:30-11:00 Break—*Cox Reception Hall*

**11:00-12:00 Presentation by Moumin Quazi, Editor, *CCTE Studies*, Co-Editor,
Langdon Review of the Arts in Texas:**

"State of the Arts and Poetry in Texas Today"

Noon-1:00 p.m.: Annual Luncheon—*Cox Reception Hall*

SESSION TWO: [*Cox Lecture Hall*]

**1:00-2:00 Poetry Workshop by Jan Epton Seale,
2012 Texas Poet Laureate:**

"'If I had my life to live over': Beginnings and Endings in Poetry"

2:00-3:00 Open Floor Readings and Session Closing Remarks