

Front Porch Review



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Close Kin
- Victoria Doerper

I talk to most everything these days:
The ginkgo tree, the frying pan,
Our honeysuckle-burdened wooden fence,
The wobbly flagstones, the ferns,
Even the earth in the northeast corner
Of the front yard. My tongue waggles on
With words of encouragement, questions,
Expressions of thanks. Plant, metal,
Wood, stone, mud. Who knew
These were my close kin?
By some molecular sleight of hand,
I turned out to be human.
They seem to tolerate my babble,
Patiently waiting for the day
When I speak their language,
When I'm a rock or pond or tree.

Honor Your Elders
- Marilyn McVicker

As I grow older, sicker,
waiting in the car
in the parking lot,
while Ellen shops,
I notice older women, mostly,
getting out of cars,
hoisting themselves,
pulling upright,
standing slowly
with pain that cannot be hurried,
despite husbands, children
standing impatiently.

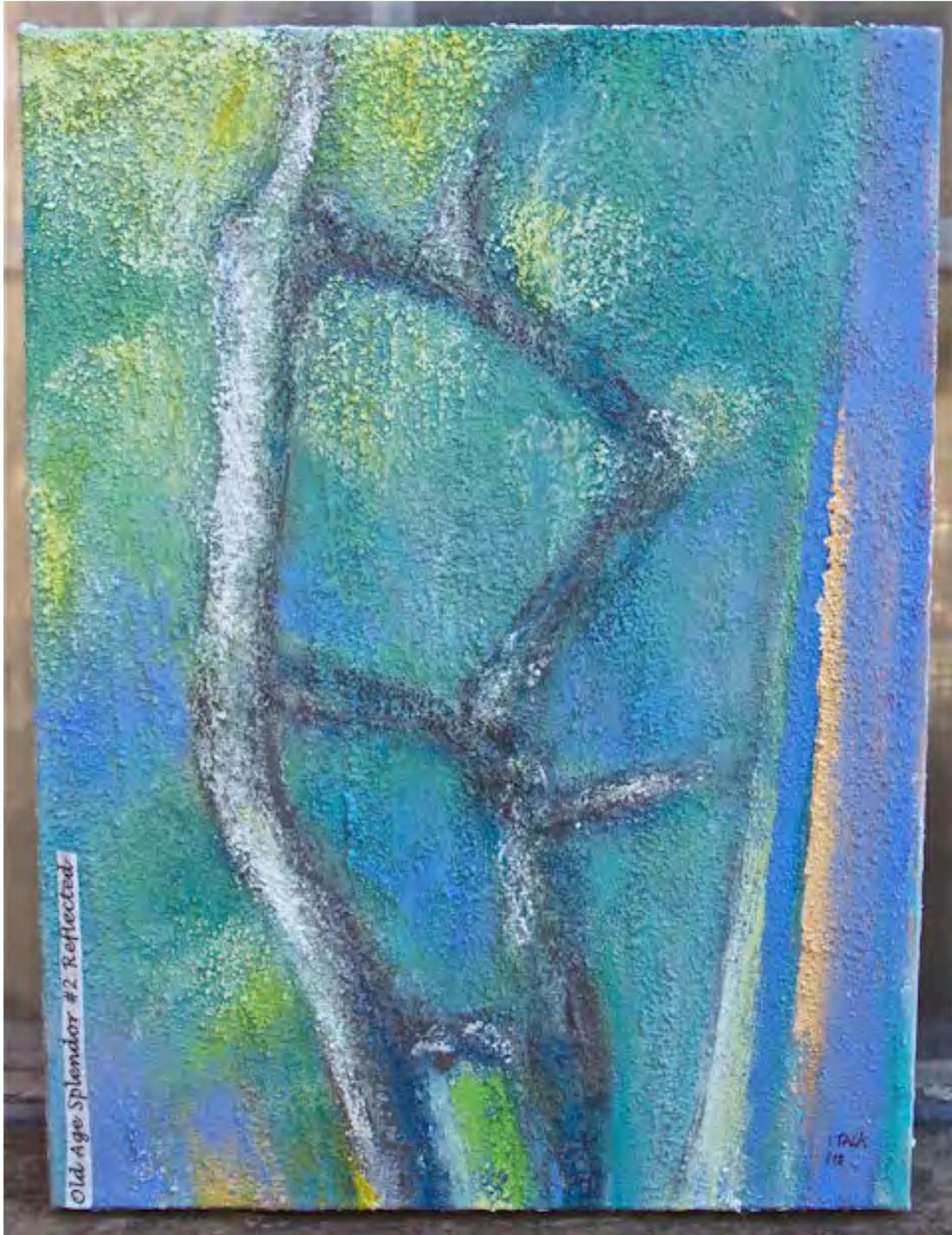
I think of the pain that has gone before –
Grandmothers knitting sweaters with arthritic fingers,
Great aunts sewing doll clothes, heavy with cataracts and glaucoma,
Grandfathers with diabetic neuropathy, hoisting trousers
to sit on the floor and play checkers.

I think of the noise and bustle
enveloping them as they entered our home.
I think of their love
I think of their endurance.
Mostly now, I think of the pain they carried,
standing in the driveway, in the cold,
holding onto the back of the bicycle seat
teaching me to ride a two-wheeler.

I wonder, in this youth-enchanted,
health-inspired, elder-negligent world –
I wonder where was the voice that said –
I wonder where was the voice of reason and inclusion
that said, “Honey, it might be easier
for your Grandfather
to play checkers at the table.”

Old Age Splendor

- Itala Langmar and Jim Merriner





Support Group on a Winter Monday
- Jeremy MacK

When the liturgy reading ends, the circle falls silent
aside from the scrape of metal chair on cold floor, a soft sigh,

coughs offered into the center of the room, hanging there
like confessions hang in our throats, like posters

hang on the walls, plastered reminders of what we need to be
to be better. One man talks about how he forgot his belt today,

and how once he realized that people didn't care enough to notice
it became easier to live. Another voice jabs at the silence like

a woodpecker on rotting wood, speaking rapidly as if he fears
making the hole too large, fears making the tree collapse beneath him

but knows that he must do this because this is what he does, this
is routine. A small breeze comes in through a cracked window, left

open for God knows how long – we can all feel the chill seeping in,
but no one closes the window, even as the meeting adjourns

and we step out into the cold, letting it do with us
what it will, each of us fully exposed in our own way.

Tell the Sad Tale
- James Piatt

...about rumor and
honesty, truth and lies, of what has
happened and not happened to our
world,

...as we sip our miso
in a Japanese café in downtown
Moscow, and choke on fortune cookies,
and sweet and sour lies,

...about hate and
love, and charcoal pictures of a political
clown drawn on torn yellow parchment,
coated with India ink and bitter inanities,

...about the air
filled with yellowish gray scum and
rhetoric sewn together with mystical
slogans filled with burned rice and bottles
of rancid Sake,

...about people
who care less about humanity, and
adore piles of tarnished green lucre with
which to wipe their consciences, and
cover the blackness of their souls.

Birds of a Color

- Len Kazmer







Yevgeny's Redhead
- Nancy Scott

Hers was a serious winter, acres bound in snow
and ice, stoked embers to keep them warm,

venison cured and hung in the cellar, fresh loaves,
and steaming tea to stave off hunger.

Still, long nights of sleepless wolves
broke down conversation, extinguished all desire.

Those months she never smiled.
He had liked that about her.

He dwelt in her auburn hair, set aflame by slivers
of sun, which disturbed the frozen windows.

When ice turned to rivulets, she filled a rucksack,
gathered a twill herringbone cloak around her.

Forgive me, she said, and disappeared
into the mud-splendor of early spring.

Previously published in U.S. 1 Worksheets

Dusk

- Paul Bernstein

Sunset

Fades to shapeless

dark. The moon's black horses

stamp their hooves and whinny. A dream

awakes.

Costa Rican Colors

- Joe Glaser







The Yonsider
- Tammy Huffman

It would not, he hoped like hell, be fit for his epitaph. He, a strong-willed young man determined to vindicate injuries and insults to his family in ways punishable by the state, first had to worm out of going to his grandmother's birthday celebration at an old folk's home. Some outlaw he was.

Junior worked his hands under the metal rim and wrenched open the hood of the truck. The rusty hinges begrudged the disturbance and screeched a complaint. He propped the hood open, waved away billows of smoke and gazed at the motor with bemused awe. Through the years his father had spliced hoses and gaskets together with baling string, masking tape, glue, barbed wire, bubble gum and spit. How many harvests, he mused, had the poor old truck borne crops to market, slow and lumbering under her loads as had an earlier generation's muddy, hard-driven mules?

"Grandma's mind's gone anyway. She lives in the past. Old gal won't know whether I'm in the room or not." He threw this excuse over his shoulder to his father who was standing behind him, watching, unmoving, but tense as a cat hunting mice in a ditch.

"Yep," his father replied in his deadpan way. "Your grandmother will turn ninety-eight. Hell of a note, but the years are starting to show on her. Me, she'll miss like a butt boil. But she'll know if you're at her shindig or not. Even if she mistakes you for somebody else. She'll feel your absence in her old dry bones."

I hain't got many hoe downs and camp meetings and wheat threshings left, his grandmother pouted, last time they'd talked. *I mos' likely won't keep another year*. Junior had yawned sarcastically, told her she was too cussed mean to die, and then he'd wrap her in a playful bear hug while she squirmed fitfully and complained he was jarring her preserves, and vaguely, somewhere, he'd felt the lonesomeness of losing her like a vice squeezing his chest.

Junior sighed as he tugged a grease rag out of his hip pocket. He had more exciting things to do than light candles and cut cake. Dangerous and notorious things. Lester McGuffy, the hired man' also rambler, gambler and opportunistic thief, promised a good time with a couple of city girls followed by a slap-assed robbery scheme he'd concocted while plastered that Junior wasn't really clear on yet. Lester had heard tell of big, fancy house crammed full of valuables at a private lake in an isolated cove. Nobody around. Apparently the owner only stayed there during the summer. Lester's plan involved sneaking in by boat by night, flashlights, masks, gloves, wire cutters, a crowbar, and twenty-five to life if things went wrong.

His father wasn't making it easy for him to cut loose and extract his revenge, which was on his behalf, after all. Old man ladled the guilt on thick, said, "Your granny lives the past in the present when you're there. You being the spitting image of her daddy and all."

Jeeze. I am not that man, Junior reminded his grandmother over and over again when he visited her at the retirement home. His grandmother's mind could no longer corral people, places, time and events, so she drove all of her memories together in one vast, echoing canyon. She called him by names that belonged to the long-dead; asked him about teams of gray mares and wagons he had not driven; land he had not cleared of stumps and boulders; children he had not birthed nor buried. I am not that man, grandmother, he told her. You have herded names, faces, voices and mannerism into a fathomless, unsortable mix.

The smoke cleared. Junior used the wadded rag to turn the hot radiator cap. He wasn't deeply focused but even in his distraction he could feel an expanding pressure under the heel of

his palm. He gave the cap a wrench and heard a hiss. His father grabbed his shirt collar and yanked him back just before the cap blew off. The metal disc whizzed past and nearly clipped his chin. In the next instant a rush of steam shot out of the radiator's belly, a geyser of pent-up, sour-smelling spume.

"Careful there, son." His father patted his shoulder. "She'll scald you hide and hair and all. Let the water boil out." Then the old man turned, leaned on the truck, and watched the progress of the combine in the field. Lester McGuffy, the driver hired by his father from a custom harvesting company, was turning the behemoth around at the end of the corn rows.

And that was that. Junior rubbed his Adams apple where the collar had caught him. He knew he could have been badly burned by the radiator steam as it had singed the hair in his nostrils and blanched his face. He'd been saved from himself – saved by an old man in a John Deere cap and denim jeans and work boots rather than by a god or an angel or an armored warrior. Saved as a matter of course. Without hullabaloo. Without much notice for that matter –but saved, nevertheless. And? And he was grateful, he supposed.

The radiator water sputtered and spumed a bit more and then slackened to a burble. With nothing to do but wait, Junior raised puffs of dust down the dirt road as he looked for the radiator cap.

Junior's face was tanned the buff of hill-top clay, and his hair was the color of new barley. When he was meditating or daydreaming, his green eyes sifted his thoughts like murky pond silt sifted sunlight. He was home for the weekend from college where he was studying agribusiness. It was a major so tedious, Lester laughed him to scorn to hear of it. Why did he give a damn what the combine driver thought?

I knows why. Lester McGuffy is a rebel rouser. I knows his type. His granny smoked a corncob pipe. She wore a dress of gingham covered by a white, coffee-stained, tobacco-sprinkled apron. *The onery cuss has wrassled bar, horse traded, lost in dice and won at poker, run moonshine and, well, twat back sliding, devil may care, spit in the eye sin hain't he been into? You think he is bad and insultin' and intreeging all at oncet, doncha, Yonsider?*

Well, yes, he supposed he did. He had never caused anybody any trouble in his whole damned life. He was a shy and quiet child and an industrious and obedient boy. What was this new and insistent surge in his blood that bucked and reared and caused such commotion? It was a wild force wanting to snap halter and strike hoof – but whether looking for a fight or looking for a holy grail remained to be seen.

In Lester's eyes, at least, Junior was proving to be a promising young man. Lester needed a lookout and a driver for this caper he was wanting to pull. "I need your cool head and your fast reflexes, kid," he said. They'd been in the shade, changing a tire and tightening lug bolts. Lester was slurping down a six-pack. "We'll be turning the tables on a rich kid's son, a banker's son. It'll be easy pickings. All you gotta do is stand outside and keep watch."

Junior was embarrassed for him and not at all interested until Lester mentioned a name. A name he knew. If his own family name brought to mind powder horns and puncheoned floors, tractors and saddles, the other family name recalled steel vaults, bank notes, and the death rap of an auction gavel. The home owner was kin and heir-apparent to one of the area's most influential agricultural dynasties, a conglomerate of cattle, lands, grain elevators, feed mills, implement companies and banks.

And it was this, this banjo-strung tale of hardworking people forced off their land by ruthless oppressors, the cowboy, the Indian, the share cropper – swearing to rebel, vowing to take revenge, cutting through fences and telegraph wires and holding up trains – this fabled

romance that compelled him to agree. Before Junior could catch himself, though, he'd stammered something about being expected at his grandmother's birthday party the same night of the heist. Some outlaw he was.

Lester crushed his last beer can, smirked, and said, "Yeah, and the grand dame will miss her wee Yonsider, won't she?" And then he spat a glob that landed very near Junior's boot, turned on his heel, and strode off.

The spit didn't get to Junior. But the name, Yonsider, now that bothered him. How had Lester known about that name? Only his grandmother called him by that nickname. Only his grandmother was allowed.

His father broke in on his thoughts. "You look a might peakid, son. Don't start hallucinating on me. Drink some coffee. There's dregs in the thermos. The grounds. Black as tar. That'll kick-start your engine and settle your nerves."

"I'm okay, dad."

"You haven't had a wink of sleep. I can get in this last load myself. Nap in the truck, why don't you?"

"I'm okay."

Junior found the radiator cap in some cotton weeds and laid it on the truck's manifold. His shoulders ached. When he stirred them, he felt the sweat sticking his shirt to his back. It was mercilessly hot. The eastern clouds, big with rain, were under-girded with bulging dark blue veins. The approaching storm hurried and harried them. They had hauled corn to the grain elevator all day yesterday and through the night trying to outrun it. They had rushed through flat tires and overheated engines and eaten on the run and gone without rest, never mind sleep.

His father fetched a jug of melted ice water from the cab and poured it into the radiator. "Are you thirsty old gal?" he asked. He always talked to the truck like it was his girlfriend and gave it names to fit his mood, or hers. Bessie. Maude. Angelina. Sierra. "Are you tired? We're almost done, Ol' Clementine."

His father replaced and tightened the cap on Ol' Clementine. His jeans were stained grass green. Yellow gloves stuck from a back pocket in a wilted bunch. He was the one who looked worn out. It had been too rough a year on the old man. Busted machinery, bad weather, slow market, government mandates, debts, and a loan he'd been counting on that fell through at the friendly, neighborhood bank – the one with the family name. That had really knocked the wind out of the old man's sails. Stoop shouldered, his face was tracked with worry frowns, and the creases were caked with dust. He's a broken down sod buster, Junior thought. A sharecropper with nothing to show for it but calluses and scars and debts.

Yet epochs of seedtime and harvest could be read in his father's eyes, and he built family loyalties tough as black locust that couldn't be bent, nor split, nor hewn. From generation to generation his people bore stubbornness and pride as unchangingly as the river bluffs shouldered the sun, and his father laughed in his sleep and slept through thunder. And Junior wondered....Twat?

Lester was making the last sweep through the field with the combine. The huffing beast left a whirlwind of dust as it crashed through the dry corn stalks. The rotating head gobbled the shafts, tossed the full ears into its belly with a clunk, then shat out the cobs. Her pulled the combine expertly beside the truck. The chute swung over the bed, and the corn poured out in a splattering, clattering stream.

Junior climbed into the back of the truck and took a scoop and leveled the flow of corn.

He sank knee-deep into the shifting quicksand.

Lester was still in the combine's cab and had a cell phone to his ear. In another life he would have appeared a madman or a drunk, gesturing and talking to himself that way. The conversation settled, Lester jumped from the combine to the truck bed. He hung over the truck's side railing. "It's on. Your gal's name is Daffodil, if you need to know. My gal has a car and they'll pick us up at Lock Springs. We'll drive to the lake from there."

"We should stop by my house first and clean up," Junior said. "For the girl's sake, I mean. I'm dirty and smell bad."

Lester snorted. "Daffodil isn't fresh as a daisy herself. Look, kid, don't lose your nerve, sooner or later you'll sever a strain with your old man, and you might as well get some fun out of it." He jumped to the ground.

Sever a strain. Lester used old-timey words worse than his granny. That is why Lester was doing this. Junior scooped. But not him. It was not the same for him – nothing so small as envy or so simple as greed. For him it was a higher good, a nobler cause, a –

"Look," Lester said, as though Junior's thoughts had caught him and turned him back round. "You don't fool me, kid. You have your own personal reasons for sticking it to the man, now doncha?"

Did he? What were they? Boredom? Restlessness? Some late stage adolescent rebellion? What thunder hooves in his heart's blood pawed dirt, blasted nostrils, and threatened to bolt and flee?

We yell cross river banks twixt doom and hope, spectin' an answer, his granny told him as she rocked and knitted in a web of oldness and old smells and old stories and old ways. Who hears us on the yon side? Twat voice hollers back and says this here's home?

Junior scooped to keep up with things and thoughts sliding first this way and then that. He heard Lester speak to his father. His voice was thick with contempt. "I have shucked more grasshoppers and jack rabbits than corn today," he said.

In a few more minutes the combine's hopper was empty, and the bed of the truck was full. The crop was finally out, and this would be the last trip with grain to the elevator at Lock Springs. Lester got behind the wheel of the truck. His father sat in the middle with his legs to one side of the clutch. Junior sat by the door. The smell of sweat and gasoline sopped the air in the stifling cab. A horse fly bumped and bumped between the glass and the dash like a question repeated. Junior shifted his backside in answer to the prod of springs working through the worn upholstery. He felt a shotgun nudge his heels as it slipped from under the seat. Annoyed, he kicked it back.

The lane through the river bottom was lined with trees, and fall leaves were orange and purple and gold. The stormy sunset puffed red as though fluted by a baffle. The old truck, free-hearted on unpaved roads, glided between the ditches full of dragon lilies, cattails and willow trees. The truck made its own warm splotch of color with its red cab and green bed and load of yaller grain.

Junior eyed and tried to take a bearing on the hired hand Lester as he drove. When the work in this area was finished, Lester would move on to the next field. He traveled all over the country with the custom combining job. He never spoke of his home or family or friends. He had an air of unknowable about him that belonged to jail bait and drifters, troubadours and cavaliers, rovers and rogues.

Knows the type, his grandmother said. Type twat lit a shuck high-tailin' it away from

trouble or more likely harrying towards the same. He stays a step ahead of the law, pays no taxes, answers to no bankers and, in general, has it made, Junior said.

A Yonsider mayhap be a rebel, she said. *But he haint no radical.* She sniffed huffily and, toothless, gummed the pipe stem like a mad dog.

Lester clutched, and the truck's gear shift ground. They'd reached the twin hills, the last of any high ground. Atop the first steep hill the truck seemed to teeter and rock while the bed jolted against the cab, and then it rolled thunderously down and climbed the second hill with ease. The indulgent earth kept it righted in a deep rut, and the truck coasted for a bit as graceful as a hippo swimming underwater. The road leveled to the flat river bottoms, and the truck charged fast. A wheel hit a rock, and a hubcap flew off.

"We are losing her piecemeal," Junior's father said.

"The steering is loose, the gears are shot, and I have to pump the brakes to get it to consider stopping," Lester replied. "Why don't you junk this scrap heap before it nickels and dimes you to death?"

Junior looked closely at his father to see how he took Lester insulting his beloved.

His father said nothing, just stared out the window at a field of raised snow geese, swirling like smoke.

The truck came to the river crossing. His father told Lester to stop on the bridge. Lester groaned, and Junior sighed at the inevitable delay. The shallow river running beneath the bridge was log-jammed and smelled of bracken and moss. The bridge had been built back in the thirties with sledge hammers and spikes and white-hot rivets and ranks of men and mules and was forgotten by the county road crews. It still had massive round pilings and cable supports and wooden planks. Lester stopped in the middle, the supports clanged, the bridge swayed and the truck rocked in the iron cradle.

"Why are we stopping?" said Lester.

Junior knew why. His father stopped here every damned time because the family cemetery lay in a grove of trees in the river bend, and he wanted to get out and look at it, which he did. They could never be in too big of a hurry for the old man to get out and look about his dead. Junior got out, too. He leaned over the deck rail of the bridge and watched his father climb down the bank. The bank fell away, and he slid with the roll of soft loamy silt and rotted black leaves to the bottom. The cemetery grove was enclosed by river rocks. Junior could barely make out the markers amid the briars and brush and saplings. Many of the stones had been knocked from their bases, and some were buried under the dirt. His great-grandfather's stone was leaning, tired even in death. He and his great-grandfather and his grandfather and his father shared the same name. That was his name on the stone.

Lester got out with the shotgun. He paced the timbered deck and sighted at the geese flying overhead and pretended to fire. He was bored, impatient, vexed.

"Hey, Yonsider, can you shoot this gun? Make some racket, at least? What's a Yonsider anyways?"

Junior pried loose flecks of rust from the iron girder. A Yonsider is both the called and the calling, both the felt and the feeling. A Yonsider is not so much between worlds as he belongs to both worlds. But he didn't think those things out loud. He was not going to reveal such sacred, granny-inspired truths to the likes of Lester McGuffy. Instead, he cleared his throat and said, "There's a story behind it. I'll tell you that story."

"You ever been in a fist fight, kid?" Lester asked. "Or a knife fight? Could you hurt

somebody if you had to?"

"My ancestors were among the earliest settlers of the county. They hewed log houses and built a mill near the river. They were not settled long when illness struck their small village and ran rampant. A cough, body aches, the fever – an ague. An ague is – "

"I know what an ague is. Fits of shivering. Sounds like you memorized it."

"I did." His grandmother had written the story on onionskin paper and placed it in the family Bible between paintings of David and Goliath and Samson Pulls Down the Pillars. She made him memorize it from kiver to kiver.

"One by one they succumbed."

"They died. Succumbed. Kicked the bucket. We all gotta die sometime. You can die famous, if you go about it right."

"A peddler brought news of a patent medicine. All they'd been using up to then was herbs and roots and homegrown fixings. Turpentine, wild ginger, dandelion root and the like. They sent a boy from among them to fetch the medicine. The boy was my great-grandfather. He was only ten. He set off on an old work horse named Ben and rode nonstop to Chula. He ducked swamps, highway robbers, Indians and wolves. He bought the medicine from a sawbones and headed back."

"Sawbones is a doctor. I'd of kept right on riding."

"A storm came, a steady downpour. When he reached home, the river was flooded, bank full. He called for his kin from the village."

"Let me guess."

"Yonsiders! He hollered until he was hoarse. Finally a kinsman appeared on the far bank. Using his shirt for a sling, my great-grandfather pitched the medicine bottle across the river."

"Is that it?"

"And so he saved them. Just that and only that – a strong arm and a roundhouse toss." That was the story. One among thousands handed down. Those not written down were beyond name or number. The memory ballads, the hillman stories, these were the legends of his own people, and of himself.

"What happened to the boy?"

"They found him holed up in the hollowed-out trunk of an old cotton wood."

"Id of stayed hid. What about Ben?"

He had asked his grandmother the same questions.

Oft, I have speculated if my daddy ever thought to just keep riding on way pas Chula or kept hid in his hidey hole. Twat you recon called the yonsider back?

"I don't know what happened to Ben."

Lester said to his father who was climbing up the bank. "This corn will go to seed if we don't get on." They got back into the truck. Lester gave the truck some gas, ground the gears, and crossed the bridge.

At the grain elevator other trucks lined up waiting to be emptied. Men milled around. They sat on running boards and leaned on cabs and talked and smoked and gossiped (*worse'n womenfolk at a quilting bee*) his grandmother didn't have to say it. Lester drove the truck onto the scales to be weighed. A worker clambered up the side and stabbed a meter device in the corn to test the grain for moisture.

The grain elevators rose in shimmering sheet metal with ladders and crisscrossed rigging on top that resembled a space landing post. Along one side of the gravel lot railroad cars waited

on the tracks. Bored teens had spray painted many of the gritty black cars with purple and orange hearts and rainbows.

His father got out of the truck. "I'll get the paperwork," he said. "Roll the windows up. Don't breathe all that dust." Junior frowned at him for talking to him like a little kid, but he rolled the window up.

When it came their turn in the line, Lester eased the truck forward. The barn was open-ended. There was a young boy waving his arms to direct them. Junior knew the boy. He was the nephew of the man who owned the elevator. Another member of the dastardly family enterprise. He wore a straw cowboy hat sideways and baggy blue jeans hitched with a red scarf for a belt and the bottoms rolled and a red bandana tied around his neck. All he needed was a muzzle loader tucked in the sash. And a bottle of rum.

When the truck was positioned inside the barn, Lester started the hoist, and the bed of the truck began to rise.

"Bring the shotgun," said Lester as he was halfway out of the cab.

"What?"

"Bring the shotgun with you. And some shells."

Lester couldn't get his cell phone to work inside the shed, and so he went outside to the gravel lot. Junior got out of the truck as well and stood at the entrance of the barn. He watched the boy remove the tail gate of the truck. The corn gushed out and fell onto the cement floor and made clouds of dust. Junior watched the corn spill through a slotted metal grate in the floor. Under the grate were augers. Blades on the augers spun the corn into a pit in a hectic rhythm. The corn would be cleaned of chaff and weed before it was loaded on the box cars to be shipped out or else stored in one of the big metal bins.

The boy took a broom and swept the overspill of bouncing grains back toward the grate. The pirate was trying to listen in on Lester's phone conversation. He lazily shuttled the broom back and forth. Junior was listening, too. It was the tone of sinister stuff, and the turbulent corn whispered premonitions and madness. It said, Bring the shotgun, bring the shotgun, bring the shotgun.

In one surreal instant Junior saw the boy's broom go flying one way and the boy's cowboy hat go flying the other. The boy slipped on the kernels and fell, partly catching himself with one arm, but one foot slid and struck the edge of the grate and moved it. The cuff of his pant leg caught in the auger. Suddenly he was scooted forcefully forward on his bottom. His clear blue eyes were shocked.

In the next instant Junior grabbed hold of him and yanked him back so quickly and with such pure adrenaline force that the boy's jeans tore, and he was free of the machine. The boy gaped up at him. For an instant there was a look in his eyes as though he'd been saved by a god or an angel or warrior complete with shield and spear. Junior laughed and pulled him to his feet. He slapped him on the back. "Careful there, son," he said. "She will skin you slick as a butchered hog."

The kid was too addled to think of anything else to say, so he said, "You're the man."

Lester was at the door. He jerked a thumb over his shoulder to a car that had pulled into the lot and parked under a tree. "Come on," he said. "They're waiting."

Both Junior and the boy looked across the lot. The girls waved at them from the car.

Junior looked across the other end of the lot. His father was talking to another farmer while squatted in the shade of a building and petting a fat dog.

"Naw," Junior said. "I reckon I'll pass. I've a dried-up old lady in the poor house to see

before the buzzards pick her plumb clean.”

The pirate grinned at him and nodded as though they'd been in cahoots all along and some secret message had just passed between them. Then the boy trotted away and slapped the side of the truck to indicate it was empty and needed to be moved out of the way. Junior got into the truck and drove it out of the barn and picked up his father. And now old dog hide was added to the other smells inside the cab.

In the parking lot, Lester didn't even look his way as he got into the car. Junior heard the girls shriek at the first drops of rain. They sped away and were lost in the dusk and the rain-pitted dust.

“Should we stop for gas?” Junior asked his father. The clouds burst. The rain poured. He turned on the wipers. The blades wallowed the rain and bird droppings and bug spatters and dirt into a clay-like mix.

“Naw, she'll coast just fine on fumes.”

“Well, come on then, Ol' Clem,” Junior said, and drove the truck onto the gravel road that would take them home.

Family Dinner
- Terry Tierney

Table seldom used for dinners,
a place to rest bags and boxes
from car to bedroom, cellar
to storage, books we might read,
photographs we should hang.

Family shifts on stiff chairs,
cushions covered in plastic, hot
in summer air, while I joke,
recalling dinners with my parents,
father at the head of the table
filling the shortest silence,
all of us attentive, lest he notice,
mother apologizing, the later times
she fixed my favorite meal
hoping I might show up.

Children cross long legs,
remembering words
I still avoid, boxes
from my parents' house
piled in the attic,
never opened.

Late Evening
_ Mark J. Mitchell

Warm milk circles –
counter-clockwise,
blank as a page.

All else is still
as a black cat
posed and waiting
over wild prey.

Rain waits, ready
to break the peace,
drop in straight lines

to drill small circles
like counter clocks.

Her Name Is Iris

- Lois Wagner



Meditation From The Edge Of The Bed
- Marty Marcus

Clean socks
I salt the powder in,
draw up new-bought shorts,
starchy, they scrape
my unseen places pleurably.
My sleepprint there, burrowed,
a mold of me in the other world.

The mess of morning falls
around my feet like rabbits
or some wrinkled dogs.
The scene, I think, is not mirrored
in Nature – the waking of bears
and housecats stirs
little that had been smooth;
birds make their beds once,
fly off in their comforters.

My old skins hang over doorknobs,
baskets, they will have to be
renewed. Future socks,
like fuzzed tongues, stick out
of slit-mouthed drawers, taunting.
All the dim things for my pockets
lie staring at each other,
blinking in the glary air,
gulping it like boated fish

In the world I will go today
where ideas are awakening,
try to find them before they tire,
before I tire and come again
to the man-cave newly smoothed,
straightened, perhaps to dream up
other rumples mornings
with a second mold overlapping.
But now the day!
I start off like a new toy,
stiff, but shining.

Previously published in *Troika V*, 1994

Moment

- Jerry Durick

It's an old one, as far as concepts go,
the business of painters and poets
the eternal moment as Browning saw it
"that despite of time future, time past, –
this tick of our life-time's one moment"
time frozen in a perfect moment of
love and beauty, the sunset outlining,
defining the mountains across the way
the day together as we forget the past
for this once and not looking forward
to this or that, the business of time and
aging left out, left off, this one moment
is all we have, all we need, if only we
could stay right here, inside this perfect
moment, sitting here on the verandah
together, the sun setting, so calm that
we should stay like this forever.

Yawn...Another Political Tale
- Lois Greene Stone

It's always politics time, not that the word-games politicians use are ever too far from daily living. One of the favorite topics is medicine.

In 1991, when William F. Weld became Massachusetts' first Republican Governor in sixteen years, his goal was to heal the state's financial condition so wounded by Dukakis' universal health insurance. Interesting way 'heal' gets used by legislators.

Previous New York State Senator Clinton, not born, raised, nor educated in that state, announced, when she was First Lady, that she was a big broccoli eater; but that stamp-of-approval for a vegetable wasn't a public health problem, and a broccoli diet shouldn't make one automatically a health expert. Yet, she attempted to 'fix' American health care.

California Democrat Jerry Brown wanted a health plan similar to Canada's... unless he needed elective hernia surgery or elective anything and had to wait, wait. And Republican Harold Stassen encouraged health-care reforms, had been a presidential candidate nine times in fifty years, and died at age ninety-three; guess our health-care system hadn't been too bad for him.

When former President Bill Clinton emphasized prevention with his promoted global health care, why didn't he require every citizen to be thin, active, non-smokers, moderate drinkers, live away from electricity poles, and to alter genetic make-up? Did he really think doctors withheld sound advice and self-responsibility from their patients?

Physicians need to be better politicians. Since Congressmen legislate MDs, doctors really need business-sense MBAs. They could also use a decoder-ring to identify OSHA, HMO, HIPPA, and such. Oh, the 'smartwatch' is the 2018 decoder ring.

New York State medical residents 100+ weekly work hours encouraged a 1990 plan to shorten non-emergency working time to a mere eighty hours a week and no more than twenty-four continuous non-sleep hours. The old Ben Casey television series could work like that, portraying the rebellious "doc" with his collar unbuttoned serving beyond the call of duty, but none of the medical residents and interns, etc. at fictitious County General's ER want such long hours. Post-grad MDs' ears have caught the 'shortened working hours' phrase as long as New York State school children have heard high school State Regents exams would be abolished, and the classes in the 21st century are still taking Regents tests. The truth: the state hasn't funds to hire added medical residents and supervising doctors. It's doubtful that the other forty-nine states have solved this puzzle.

Here's something that was legally inventive, circa 2004, in New York State: loss of life enjoyment became compensable! Pain and suffering's ho-hum. Let's put that on politicians' platforms along with alternating views of gun control, capital punishment, defense, environment, terrorism, and so forth. Make this issue national!

Restriction of physicians' incomes is big business. With hostility, we read of a super-specialist who received a large fee for an unusual operation. We don't scream about salaries of ballplayers, television game-show hosts, corporate heads, Hollywood superstars, or even lawyers. We're unemotional about \$1 million or more for each fragmented Super Bowl commercial. Entertainment is worth any price, but health care is simply too expensive.

If socialized medicine comes to pass, and a President insists illness prevention is possible, we hope he or she will have to take a waiting-number as an ordinary citizen, or, better yet, never get sick.

Shadowland

- J.R. Paradiso







The Float Raft
- David Hart

From a hillside of hewn paving stones I watched
my father and his father as they measured, cut and sawed
the two-by-six planks into a frame to float
atop the lake, to rise and fall like a tethered island.
They worked, a seamless team, to prise up the
frame with two by fours and lever in the fifty-gallon
drums of air. This was the force times physics
lodged within them, given by the one to the other.
Standing in the waist deep shallows, they jammed one plank,
anchored beneath the frame, hard down upon the barrel until
it must slide up and under and come to rest
in its fitted space.
One side and then another, until the raft became the thing itself,
rising until it rode in its place on the water.

That was a time when expectations could be met, when life
was close at hand and could be shaped by well-planned force.
Here was a good-willed give-back by the elements,
an accommodating “make it float, let it ride” within its own rhythm,
a thing well made by hand.

The Process

- Jeanette Robertson



Beginning



Middle



End

Biographies

Paul Bernstein, in previous lives, was a graduate student in medieval history, library worker/antiwar activist/weekend hippie/ aspiring poet, radical journalist, medical editor, and managing editor of a medical journal. He resumed writing poetry some fifteen years ago. Recent work has appeared in *Big River Poetry Journal*, *River Poets Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *U.S. 1 Worksheets*, *Magic Lantern*, and elsewhere. He currently lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he participates regularly in open mic readings

Joseph ("Joe") Glaser, originally educated in science and technology, spent most of his career in computer-related activities. In retirement, he immersed himself in liberal arts and began writing poetry in 2008. Some of his poems have appeared in *The Journal*, published by Northwestern University's OLLI program, the online journal *Front Porch Review*, the online *Decades Review*, the online *Muses' Gallery* of Highland Park Poetry, the published *Journal of Modern Poetry* (JOMP-16 best modern poem prize), and *Distilled Voices* published by the Illinois State Poetry Society. Joe is also a candid photographer, especially when traveling, and his photos have been published in some of the same media as his poems.

David Hart was born and raised, more or less, in Galesburg, Illinois, a small town and birthplace of another poet, Carl Sandberg, who was heartily detested by those locals who knew him. The main diversions in Galesburg were dating, beer and golf. David didn't play golf, but he did manage to read a couple of books before he left for college. He majored in English at Northwestern with the hope of being a writer — fame, women, wine and long hair — but decided he could make a better living at something less reputable. He attended Harvard Law School, practiced in Chicago for about thirty years, retired early, lost his hair, and is dependent upon his wife for support in his dotage.

M.J. Iuppa lives on a small farm near the shores of Lake Ontario. For the past eight years, she and her husband Peter Tonery have been committed to food sustainability. She has numerous publications (poetry, fiction, nonfiction and plays) in national and international journals as well as two full-length poetry collections *Night Traveler* (Foothills, 2003) and *Within Reach* (Cherry Grove Collection, 2010) and five chapbooks; her latest prose chapbook is *Between Worlds* (Foothills, 2013). She served as the poetry adviser (2007-2012) for the New York Foundation for the Arts, and since 1986, has worked as a teaching artist in the schools, K-12 for a variety of agencies (RCSD, BOCES 2, Young Audiences, Genesee Valley BOCES, Project U.N.I.Q.U.E. and V.I.T.A.L. Writers & Books, and others) Currently she is Writer-in-Residence and Director of Arts Minor Program at St. John Fisher College.

Len Kazmer, born and raised in Chicago by parents of modest means, was blessed with gifts that have served him well. The first is curiosity, initially about how things worked; this led to his teaching himself about electronics, astronomy, and physics. The second, related to the first, is the strong desire to pass on his knowledge, however limited, to others. These efforts caused the development of a number of demonstrations along with a variety of slide and tape presentations on scientific subjects which he presented at local schools, libraries, and astronomy clubs. An offshoot of this work was the need to generate a number of pictures, thus came an interest in

photography. The third gift is his love of music. As he often says, “A day without music is like a day without love.”

Itala Langmar, an art therapist, born in Venice, Italy, began writing poetry at the age of ten. It was not until 1995 that she felt she had sufficient command of English to create poetry in that language. In 1996 she placed third in the National Library of Poetry contest with *Midnight Gladiolus*. A finalist in the 1999 Gwendolyn Brooks’ poetry competition, she writes poems depicting talented but flawed personalities. She takes pride in her twenty-four Odyssey poems and accompanying abstract paintings, each pair inspired by a chapter in the Homeric epic. In this work she highlighted the tensions within and among the characters, their mental landscapes, and their attitudes, regrets, strengths, and weaknesses. Itala is now working on a series of poems as homages to famous women in the arts, such as Georgia O’Keefe, Louise Nevelson, and China Pattway, a quilter in Gee’s Bend, Alabama.

Eventually each of us comes to recognize his or her unique life assignment. For **Marty Marcus** it has been to prove that every one of his myriad fears, up to and including death, could somehow be made light of (he even wrote a comic novel about the Great Depression, *Hollywood Park*). Influences: Romain Gary (*The Dance of Ghengis Cohn*), Bruce Jay Friedman (*Stern*), Hitchcock, Serling. Marcus has also written some mordant poems, essays and non-fiction books including one in which he admitted to "a heart the size of soda cracker." Marcus’s wife/best friend, Sue, who does not have the same sense of humor – although an excellent one nevertheless – may be pleased to see herself noted here along with their four adult children, nine grandchildren and ageless dog, Rupert Jr. Marty and Sue Marcus live in Northfield, Illinois, a place on the map.

James L. Merriner, an award-winning journalist and author, has written five books about politics and history. He served as political editor of two major newspapers, the Chicago Sun-Times and the Atlanta Constitution. A resident of the North Shore, Merriner also is an arts photographer who often displays his work with those of his partner, the artist Itala Langmar.

Mark J. Mitchell was born in Chicago and grew up Catholic in southern California. He is fond of baseball, Miles Davis, Kafka and Dante. He lives in San Francisco with his wife, the film maker and documentarian, Joan Juster where he makes his meager living pointing out pretty things.

He studied writing and Medieval Literature at UC Santa Cruz under Raymond Carver, George Hitchcock, Barbara Hull and Robert M. Durling. His poems have appeared in numerous periodicals over the last thirty-five years, as well as the anthologies *Good Poems*, *American Places*, *Hunger Enough*, and *Line Drives*. He is the author of the poetry chapbooks *Three Visitors* (Negative Capability Press), *Artifacts and Relics* (Folded Word Press) and *Lent, 1999* (Leaf Garden Press) as well as the novels, *Knight Prisoner* (Vagabondage Press), *A Book of Lost Songs* (Wild Child Publishing) and *The Magic War* (Loose Leaves Publishing).

J. R. Paradiso is a recovering academic in the process of refreshing himself as a photographer and writer. A recipient of the Freedoms Foundation's Leavey Award for Excellence in Private Enterprise Education and a retired Professor at an Illinois' college, he holds graduate degrees in

both Business Administration and Philosophy. To visit his online gallery, please go to www.jamesparadiso.com

James G. Piatt is a Pushcart and Best of Web nominee whose poems were selected for inclusion in *The 100 Best Poems of 2016, 2015 & 2014 Anthologies*, and the *2017 Poet's Showcase and Yearbook*. He has published three collections of poetry: *The Silent Pond* (2012), *Ancient Rhythms*, (2014), and *LIGHT* (2016), as well as 1,000 poems. His fourth collection of poetry will be released this year.

Nancy Scott, a University of Chicago graduate, began writing in the mid-90s as a way of recording the many stories she'd heard in her work assisting homeless families and abused children. She has authored two full length collections, *Down to the Quick* (Plain View Press, 2007) and *One Stands Guard, One Sleeps* (Plain View Press, 2009), and two chapbooks, *A Siege of Raptors* (Finishing Line Press, 2010) and *Detours & Diversions* (Main Street Rag, 2011). She has become enamored with online journals and their far-reaching audiences, as well as with the juncture of art, poetry, history and memoir, having completed a manuscript of ekphrastic poems, *On Location*, mostly after Russian artists, as a tribute to her grandfather. More at

www.nancyscott.net. **Emily-Sue Sloane** lives on Long Island, New York, where beautiful natural landscapes offset crowded roadways and far-too-abundant stores, if you just know where to look. She recently retired from a career in business magazine and scientific journal publishing, affording her the time to revive her long dormant writing practice. She does yoga, walks three to four miles a day, reads voraciously and is always ready to travel, whether to discover new places or revisit familiar favorites. She is her singer/songwriter wife's biggest champion and reliable roadie. Writing poetry helps Emily-Sue to observe and think more clearly and to frame her personal experience — and personal truths — within a more universal, sometimes humorous, context. Her poems have appeared in *Medicinal Purposes*, *Literary Review of the Performance Poets Association* and *Creations* magazine.

Lois Greene Stone, writer and poet, has been syndicated worldwide. Poetry and personal essays have been included in hard and softcover anthologies. Collections of her personal items/ photos/ memorabilia are in major museums including twelve different divisions of The Smithsonian.

Lois Wagner was born and raised on the south side of Chicago and now resides in La Grange, IL, a western suburb just outside Chicago. Lois has come to find senior citizens to be of special interest to her, even more so as she approaches her sixty-fifth birthday. After many years of caring for her mother and helping her husband care for his aging parents, she has a new perspective on the act of aging. You might say she finally sees the beauty in growing old. Lois volunteers at her local Senior Center and finds great happiness in engaging her clients at the Center in the lively art of conversation.

Submission Guidelines

We publish thoughtful, provocative fiction, poetry, essays and visual arts.

Submissions are accepted year-round.

- If accepted, submissions may appear in any quarterly issue.
 - Biographical information will be requested for accepted submissions.
 - If your submission was previously published, please cite the reference.
 - Simultaneous submissions should be accompanied by a statement stating so.
 - If your work is accepted elsewhere prior to our evaluation, please notify us.
 - No erotica or works which rely on explicit language or gratuitous violence.
 - All work must be original and in English.
-
- Fiction and essays can be up to 5000 words.
 - No novel excerpts
 - No memoirs
 - No genre fiction; e.g., horror, science fiction, mysteries
 - Fiction should deal with critical, universal aspects of human behavior.
 - Essays can be on any topic but must express a reasoned opinion.
 - Poems should have strong images and concise, evocative language.
 - Visual arts which elicit the comment, "How interesting!" are desired.
 - Submit visual arts as **.jpg** files; do not send **.tif** or **.bmp** files.
 - Accepted visual arts may be reduced to fit the available space.
 - Prose and poetry may be accompanied by one or more relevant photos.
-
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