

Nymph, Dun, and Spinner

We drive to narrow shops in distant strip malls
searching mink underfluff and peacock herl,
deer hair, seal fur, and black bear hair.

We knot the nymph, dun, and spinner, wind
the small unsinkable bodies, jerk the hairs
into the muddlers, add the hooks. It takes

years of experience to calculate
a hook, judge the length, consider the weight,
know how *ephemeroptera* touch down

on water, how trout thrash and lunge.
We celebrate artifice, we factor panic,
hunger is not the same as pride

for man, woman, or fish. It is all practice,
no theory, tying the knots tightly,
knowing they will hold. Father and daughter,

our river races between granite shores
where gaunt men once sharpened scissors
and knives, shivering in noisy factories.

The town runs on waders and canoes now,
on February Reds and March Browns,
rapids and whirlpools, stars leaning into dawn.

We murmur the names: Parachute Adams,
McMurray Ant, Barret's Bane, Cahill.
We could be two monks chanting a litany

as we guide novices to water and hills,
mark the hours, demand miracles—
Goddard's Last Hope, Dambuster.

The skill in the tying, the skill with the rod,
the need to endure, my father speaks—
and of course, I listen. It is not pleasant,

far from my down-filled comforter, my thighs
deep in the rush of the hard river. I respect
his thousand facts of angling, I mark

the lure of his stories—R. S. Austin
tied a female spinner of fine yellow wool
from ram's testicles in 1900. After he died,

his daughter sold "Tup's Indispensable"
for twenty years. Like her, I'm second generation.
From my father, I learned birth,

mid-life, and passing—the agile nymph,
the olive dun, the drowning red spinner.
When I place my feet in the freezing river,

I map the geography of patience.
When I hurl a winged impersonator concocted
of blue cock hackle and red seal fur into the dawn,
I tend the history of fiction, pass it on.

Dolores Hayden

Nails

Plato having defined man to be a two-legged animal without feathers, Diogenes plucked a cock and brought it into the academy, and said "This is Plato's man." On which account, this addition was made to the definition: "With broad flat nails."

—Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*

We take them for granted: the body's horny tips,
enablers of the signal, little flags
that wave together or apart and strut
their messages in paint—or otherwise.

The ancient Asian emperors who let
their nails grow hooked as fiddleheads, then sheathed
them in bejeweled gold to show disdain
for manual toil, would surely understand

the Safeway check-out girl's extensions, curled
like sleek exotic insects round my change,
her knuckles tapping at the cashbox keys;
but find Jorge Posada's fingers bland,

a constellation painted white, their cues
distinct from home plate to the pitcher's mound
at night; and rue the editor's worn stubs
quite nibbled to the quick by troublesome

misspellings, dangling participles, truth
or lack of it.

At Lex and Sixty-Fifth
a mousy guy hawks manicures: silk wraps
or paraffin or aqua tips. He has

to stand there till he has no flyers left
to give. Reluctantly, I take one, hear
my now long-dead grandmother's righteous sneer,
"So tawdry, dear, as if your hands are dipped

in blood," but challenge that New England line
of relatives and contemplate the sheen
of candy pink, big-apple red, tea rose,
shipwreck maroon. Enameled nails!

Ignore
their winter-long imprisonment in gloves,
eclipse by socks. Let sandals flaunt them, rings
enhance. Paint every finger, every toe.
Nails make us what we are.

Carol Stevens Kner

Ex-Lead Singer Day

On Ex-Lead Singer Day, free concerts
around the nation honor those men
and women who so bravely served
themselves and the pop charts,

those preening front people who sang
and posed away as if no band thrummed
behind them—no drummer or bassist,
no lead guitar. On this holiday,

these men and women are lauded
as heroes, not as the selfish
deviants who broke the band up
in the first place, but as visionaries,

ones always willing to dye
their hair strange vivid colors,
rocking face paint, to wear something
plunging and uncomfortable. On this day,

schoolchildren scribble essays
with titles like "Why Peter Gabriel
Left Genesis" and "Why The Group
Should Have Been Called Diana Ross

and the Supremes All Along."
University seminars probe such subjects
as "How to Fake Your Own Death" and
"How to Generate Consumer Interest

in Your Artistically Superior Solo Work,"
offering symposia on Spandex Studies
and Groupie Public Relations. Available
on Ex-Lead Singer Day to any ex-lead

who wants them: free detox, rehab,
liposuction, plastic surgery, alimony
cancellation, and debt relief. Once a year,
for twenty-four hours, no one dares

mention how much finer
you sounded back then,
how much cooler your band
mates were, how much sharper.

Allison Joseph

My Father's Kites

were crude assemblages of paper sacks and twine,
amalgams of pilfered string and whittled sticks,
twigs pulled straight from his garden, dry patch

of stony land before our house only he
could tend into beauty, thorny roses goaded
into color. How did he make those makeshift

diamonds rise, grab ahold of the wind to sail
into sky like nothing in our neighborhood
of dented cars and stolid brick houses could?

It wasn't through faith or belief in otherworldly
grace, but rather a metaphor for moving
on a street where cars rusted up on blocks,

monstrously immobile, and planes, bound
for that world we could not see, roared
above our heads, our houses pawns

in a bigger flight path. How tricky the launch
into air, the wait for the right eddy to lift
our homemade contraption into the sullen

blue sky above us, our eyes stinging
with the glut of the sun. And the sad tangle
after flight, collapse of grocery bags

and broken branches, snaggle of string
I still cannot unfurl. Father, you left me
with this unsated need to find the most

delicately useful of breezes, to send
myself into the untenable, balance my weight
as if on paper wings, a flutter then fall,

a stutter back to earth, an elastic sense
of being and becoming forged in our front
yard, your hand over mine over balled string.

Allison Joseph

After my mother's miscarriage

My mother thinks, "one,"
Watching her only child play alone
In a backyard peopled with toadstools, legos, moss.
She thinks down a long road of imaginary friends.
Of no hand-me-downs,
Of no parroted cuss-words, no aped bad habits,
Of the cathedral quiet in the backseat.
No so-and-so's sister,
Trailing me through grades like the tail of a kite,
The dusty old teachers that'd get us confused—No, the other Multer girl.
My mother thinks of one stocking hung by the fire at Christmas,
Its mouth gaping open like a hungry baby bird.
One tuition bill, my mother thinks,
One empty nest.

Unconsciously my mother places a hand on her belly,
The inside like a night sky without stars.
To console herself, she thinks how Jesus was an only child,
How the Holy Virgin brought his blind, wrinkled face
To her still tender nipple,
Holy infant. Holy, holy.

She thinks of how it all must be poured into one vessel, now, one cup,
This milk—some bitter, some sweet—
One child full to bursting.

Alexis White

Cookies

They are to die for.
Mourners almost forget
their grief
as they nibble the richness, a taste as ineffable
as the afterlife.

Chocolate chips
half-buried in the earth-colored crust
overwhelm the flavor of death, coat the tongue
with soothing sentiment—

cookies fresh from the life-giving oven
cookies with heaven's aroma
cookies warm
as the eulogies were, light and crisp
as the banter
about loss and togetherness
and the paths of the children and the next
election.

The paths are strewn with crumbs
from the cookies and the children
have followed them home;

and she who had baked them
circulates, glistening,
doling out
sacred wafers like shards of her heart.

Her tears,
too, mix sweetness and sorrow,
the recipe for endurance, the secret ingredients
of a marriage.

His favorites, she sighs, you must try one.

Sherman Pearl

Text Message

When last I saw my mother's face
her peaceful features were strangely graced
by flowers ranged round the casket head,
nicely posed, but oddly read.
The ribbon, somehow upside-down,
said not mere "Mom," but rather "Wow!"
This buoyed me as I rose to speak,
lent me poise in hour of need.
It seemed she'd reached across the void
with a last, kind word for her eldest boy.

David Essex

Exit Julian, Pursued by a Bear

He's scared that bears will eat him once I leave,
so every night I build a Plato's cave
of sofa cushions, then hide his teddy there—
convenient stand-in for Idea of Bear—

for Julian to hunt to his heart's content.
Though we pretend the game is innocent,
we know the beast that hungers for my boy
bears scant resemblance to his cuddly toy.

*Some days you eat the bear, the Russians say,
some days the bear eats you. At end of play
he'll enter darkness, knowing I can't share it.
Already he has learned to grin and bear it.*

Andrew Sofer

Lament of the Silkworm

We should have known
something was amiss

those calloused fingers
offering succulent leaves.

We never had to move
except to chew

or make room to grow.

Better to crawl
hungry
for hours
along naked limbs

to risk claws and teeth

than to be fattened
for the loom

and never have
a chance
at wings.

Lisa Meunier

The Altar

I see destruction / for ship and crew.
—*The Odyssey* (Robert Fitzgerald translation)

Odysseus's final task was to walk
into the bronze wheat, an oar nested
next to his shoulder mound as people came
from their houses like schools of curious
minnows. Walk until a farmer who never
knew the surprise of salt asked
if he was carrying a winnowing fan.

There, he was to stop, plant the oar
and erect an altar to the hoary god
who had dogged him, clawing
his men one by one from his ship
to helix, unwept, in the current.

The oar stuck from the altar
like the arm of a drowning man
as he walked lighter, back home
to his newly forged soldier-son
and his wife's weaving arms while
the altar grew dreams of the ocean
that splashed over the lintels
sprinkling the sons who woke
crunching the salt foam that tipped
the crests of their desire to follow
the astringent path the stranger left
in the air and make the air stranger there.

They journeyed through forests felled for ships
toward the flickering maws of smelting ovens,
the bright spin of shields, the netted
haul of blades.

Such willing fodder
following the promise of adventure, the promise
that their churning needs would be sated, husks
blown away on the sea, as they stand, golden
at the prow shearing through the blue to glory.

Elizabeth Hoover

Language Arts

1. *Gesture*

What option but
the cupped hands
of language to carry thoughts
even though fingers
don't lock close enough
to hold all the meaning
that inevitably
dribbles away

but that time when
you scrambled over
a steep bank carrying water
in your tight-pressed palms
so I could sip from
the glacial waterfall
I could not climb to,
not a drop spilled.

2. *Prototype*

For Helen Keller
the gush of water on her hand.
For my child the neighbor's cat
that padded into the room.
For me an uncle's pipe,
my mother's chenille robe,
all pipes, all robes. The world
expanding thing by thing,
word by word, rounds
to generality with time
and use but always at the core
sparks of the first step,
swim, death, sex
fire the brain.

3. *Vestige*

we use the words sunrise and sunset
as if we still believed the world were flat

and suns and moons rolled over us and demons
pounced on sailors who dropped off the edge

but no other names seem fitting for the first we see
of light above our horizon or the last

so far back before science does language reach
vestigial forms persist in our nostalgia

for lost meaning our bodies still make
gills and tails against regression

4. *Gap*

There is always a gap as
French philosopher-linguists
insist between the sign and the
signified intent into which
meaning can fall by accident or

Design. There is always the design
that negative space forms around
subjects in a painting to shape them
so the mind can distinguish what
is important from mere

Background. It is always important
to notice what is not presented for
attention: blank space pushing against
words, dark strokes edging the white bowl
of cherries, breaths defining sobs.

Anne Johnson Mullin

Shiri's Piano

You hold the chords like my grandfather held spring wheat in his gnarled hand
a big hand and strong, yet it caressed the silky kernels so gently that they
whispered to him all their dreams of tallness and sunshine and growth

and you break the chords and scatter the kernels over the dark earth
like he did and they grow and grow until they reach our mouths and we
can taste their hard nuttiness between our teeth warm and nourishing

and they grow in your field until they reach our noses and we smell again the fires
that licked the dry sticks and leaves, turned old to new, covered fields in smoke
hid the mystery of yet another spring, the hunger of our childhood

and they grow until they tickle our ears and make us laugh with pure happiness
and hear again my grandfather's song as he walked through muddy fields
feeding his tired muscles rhythms, singing his hungry body home

and they grow until you harvest them and bring them back to us—as music.

Gunilla Theander Kester

Winter Milk

Now it is morning,
dawn begins to hem the day, the meadow
and brindled grass take the light.
There is something so beautiful about the window,
the loose silhouette behind the rinse of glass,
the liquid shadow of feline so angular and illustrated
its clarity could break the heart.

The moment she sees him,
panther-like in the dusky daybreak,
the dun-colored cow lets down her milk.
I know precisely
how this bovine's body is composed,
withers and hoof, the flesh of udder,
her skin so alive against mine.
But he is a mystery, an indescribable movement
of muscle and grace.

For the cat I have gathered winter milk,
foamy and sparkle-splashed;
heavy cream so lovely in the pail.
He watches me in backlit darkness,
body crouched, ears flat, tailed curled and tense,
the hunt abandoned with my soft footfall at the door.
His purr and sputtering breath, the smooth push
of paw at my soft parts is a fellowship of elements,
anchor and rhythm, shank bone and fur.
He rises in his lion-body like a tide,
laps my white offering
from the hollows of upturned palm.
I offer my fingers to his remarkable territory
of spine and tail
as bright reaches of sunrise gather us in.
I trim the lantern;
the cat threads himself around me like an epiphany.
How fragile we are in the glorious light.

Jamie Morewood Anderson

POETRY 2008 CONTRIBUTORS

Jamie Morewood Anderson lives on a mountain farm in New Mexico. She says, "I live in the high mountains and live a quiet rural life, surrounded by lots of pets, plants and books. It thrills me when my writing reflects this, as in the poem 'Winter Milk.'"

Nathalie Anderson is director of the Program in Creative Writing at Swarthmore College. Her poetry books are *Following Fred Astaire* (Word Works, 1998) and *Crawlers* (Ashland Poetry Press, 2005).

Amy Dengler, winner of the Robert Penn Warren Award, is author of *Between Leap and Landing* (Folly Cove Books, 1999).

PS Cottier is an Australian poet and author of *The Glass Violin*.

Rebecca Foust won the 2008 Robert Phillips Poetry Prize. Her winning book, *Mom's Canoe*, will be published by Texas Review Press in 2009. She appears in *JAMA*, *Nimrod*, *Margie*, and *Poetry East*.

Allison Joseph is the editor of *Crab Orchard Review* at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Gunilla Kester's new chapbook is *Eyes* (Finishing Line Press, 2008). She teaches at the Amherst School of Music.

Karen Kovacik is author of *Beyond the Velvet Curtain* (Kent State, 1998) and *Metropolis Burning* (Cleveland State, 2005).

Ron De Maris appears in *Poetry*, *The New Republic*, *The American Poetry Review*, *Sewanee Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *Paris Review*.

Sherman Pearl is a co-editor of *California Quarterly* and author of *The Poem in Time of War* (Conflu:X Press, 2004).

Wanda Praisner is winner of *Maryland Poetry Review*'s Egan Award and author of *A Fine and Bitter Snow* (Palanquin Press, 2003).

Andrew Sofer won *Southwest Review*'s Morton Marr Prize. He appears in *Poetry International*, *North American Review*, and *The Lyric*.

Diana Woodcock teaches at the Virginia Commonwealth U. School of the Arts in Qatar. She appears in *Nimrod*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Istanbul Literature Review*, and *Hawaii Pacific Review*.

Elizabeth Klise von Zerneck appears in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *The Pinch*, and *Spoon River Poetry Review*.

About Forgetting

I'll forget that the dogwood bloomed overnight,
the mild white flowers and that scent,
thin and even, there for two weeks. I'll forget
the dark-haired woman I love, the smile, the deep blue eyes
sparkling last night in candle light.
I'll forget the names of my children and their odysseys
changing day to day and each daily crisis recounted, forget
that I once held them in the crook of my arm and rocked them
through sickness, nightmares and little girl sorrows.
I'll forget that I liked my job: that a reporter stood
in my office door, bringing news, that she swayed slightly
as she recited each fact. I'll forget her and the glass of tea
sweating by the window sill as deadlines arrived in the late afternoon
on a day when it was seventy-eight degrees and partly cloudy,
forget the silence that followed the deadlines like the wake
behind a swarm of bees. I'll forget what the stories
said, the list of things that had to be done
and the none of them that got done. Forget the drive
out of the city, the commuter train's reflection coasting
beside it down the river, the carefree moon
that strolled past the cafés along the riverbank,
tossing its old hat softly into the sky.

David Tucker

Canoeing the Buffalo River

For a long time we did nothing but coast
down that fine old happy river, past farms
that failed years ago, fences toppling
under honeysuckle. We meandered
past the nursing home and the patients
lined up in rockers, waving to us, bumped
from one bank to the other, ducking
the green overhang, the whole afternoon to waste.
The canoe juddered through the shoals
at Bethel Bluff, spun backwards, almost tipping over,
our yells echoed off the sheer slate walls.
Scraggy cedars growing out of the rock
looked down, black in the sun glare.
The water was still and blue near Flatwoods,
where turtles slept in trees, blinking droopy eyes.
Let's never get in a hurry again, we said,
like drunks taking the pledge, but for this day
we meant it. Then a mile of silence and horseflies,
scent of cornbread from an unseen house,
voices up ahead and dock lamps
shining though the trees, still far away.

David Tucker

Story Problem Near Vancouver Island

After enough years even the clearcuts
are beautiful, at least in the hazy distance.
Consider this: If a man walks

seven times around the top deck
while the ship travels southwest at
fourteen knots, and six times around

make a mile, and the ocean
is placid as the Buddha's soul,
and the islands slip past like

long-haired girls on the evening beach,
how long must he walk before
the true admonition dances

through the noisy silence?
One island may hide another island.
One mountain may hide another mountain.

How long the world has swayed,
how lightly it rolls and swings
and bears us up, all mixed

and shifting, separate and one.
There is only one ocean,
and it hides itself almost perfectly.

In the south a vast cloud moved
above the long ridge, a ship driving
through waves of cliff and rock,

bearing east with its cargo
of faint hopes and raw soapstone
and ivory only the faithful

may touch without breaking.

Jeff Gundy

Conversation with the Sea

I would do it if I could:
be the siren, the silkie, strip
language from my tongue.

I would wear the skin
of water, the prisms of sun
rushing across sand,

all that makes me reel.
I would emerge naked, the cape
of woman widowed by the sea

castaway. I am finished
with the blunt demands,
the dollars washing up

as a sign. I am finished
with my good fortune
turning into bad. Look at it:

the heart-stopping quality
of light, the pale green turn
of the wave, no trace

of life or death, not a shell.
No, the sea is not finished
with me: at my feet

the ocean clear, then
the lone starfish. Pick it up,
feel the barely perceptible

suction as it finds purchase,
the sea lucid, all knowing,
content with the final word.

Melissa Peters

Ode to a Drained Pond

What shallows you hid within your depths!
Revealed, your secrets prove as uninteresting as my own
Fertile, I suppose, but mundane as mud
The clouds that once paused before your glass
Now pass by unsatisfied, to drop their rain
Over some distant desert waste perhaps, while here
Your drying heart contracts day by day
And the fish, shadowed notions of your past
Flap and circle within their evaporating hopes

Upon your former shore, my small green boat
Hides within the reeds, shamed by its futility
Once it floated, unfettered as a windblown leaf
Back and forth across the long afternoons
Into and out of treeshade, held up by you
By your vanished water, by the soul of you

Dry, what remains?
The dampness of the ground, deep smell of fecundity
Certain plants that tell the history of water
And your form, the vacancy you left between the trees

The truth is, land never forgets its water time
While you, you come and go, you give and take

But you do not remember

Pepper Trail

Chattanooga Freight

Five a.m. silence trying to bag
last night's damp and dark,
cloud deck pressing down.

Chattanooga freight train moans
up the valley, rattles the sleep
in Harriman.

*The midnight train is whining low.
I'm so lonesome I could cry,
so goes the song, but not me.*

I like silence, the grip of dark,
the cloak of dew-damp before
the day begins.

We start and end with dreams,
some forgotten, some fulfilled,
some failed, but listen:

Over there, a cardinal calls,
the first whistle, like a brush swipe
crimsons the dark.

It's beginning again, a new day
cranking up, ready to roll
its freight down the line.

Frank Jamison

Trees in Flame

After surgery, Autumn

A burning needle stitches me
along the incision,

bisects my breast with its quick piercing,
a fire insistent as the sight

of these trees. Against
November rain they assert

with fury their will, their right,
to dazzle

with this improbable light, even as
time and wind take without asking.

Maria Terrone

Seeds of the Giant Sequoia

come cone-born encased
in diamond-hard coats;
something secreted
encrypts them
against climate and time
to wait in the cold ground
generations of winters
for that lightning-crack
thunderbolt trunk-split of fire
to fissure them to life.

Dull glitter of years
layering down.
But when the firestorm
comes, the ground melts
and boils like stew;
each seed swells
from germ to koan,
seeks meaning from rain,
memory from pain, what
it feels like to feel anything.

Rebecca Foust

Bristlecone

I long to age into innocence,
into that time in which I'm seen

by store detectives as too old
for theft, by police as past

the urge for excess, by husbands
as I gaze at their pretty wives

as a man grown daft and impotent.
I await this time as an ancient bristlecone

awaits fire, the trigger of renewal,
that moment when everything still within

will spill out like seeds on the unsoiled
page of what remains of my life,

an inarticulate story bursting
of its own heat to be told.

Malcolm Alexander

Toll

The days shorten, not a season for flowers
or invention. He feels a shudder in his blood
as when he once heard the speeches
of young patriots, but it is only the wind
confiding in the bare branches. At his feet
lies a fortune in fallen leaves.

Returning home, he sets a pot to boil
and puts away the bread and sardines.
The floorboards creak in the entryway
but when he turns he finds nothing:
has changed, and he longs for the past
violence of his footsteps on the bridge,
kamikazes crackling in the gunfire.

Forgotten, the water boils over, given to the air
like his thoughts are often to the sea. Soon
he will gather with old shipmates, their annual
reunion once a celebration of survival, now
just a reminder of it: fewer return each year,
the war's toll a tenth that of time.

No family, his affairs in order, so what remains
to be done? On his pension, little. Take up painting?
Adopt a dog? He pours a cup of tea
and sits in his reading chair as the room
darkens, alone and adrift on that magnificent tide.

Malcolm Alexander

Alchemy of the Maple

You who would learn
this fiery grace,

this brilliant thirst,
must first be mud

filtered through coils
to feed the rising stream,

dumbwaiter to the stars.
You must not fear

its pull, the slow
ascent, the urge

to be diverted
or dispersed.

Taper through limbs
to reach the door:

the slender vein
fanning into leaf.

There steeped
in greening humors lie

until the tap
runs dry and you

ignite as tinder
for the creeping fire

of carotene.
Now comes the test:

to jump from radiance
down to rot,

and suffer the falling fruit
of dogs, and wait

beneath the great-limbed
shadow to be fodder

for its snaking feet,
to be again exalted

and transformed, sunfoil
refined from basest sod,

death and dung
made gold.

Joshua Coben

Earthworm

Think how the earthworm panics on the gravel drive,
twisting and turning, burning for the cold underside
of a stone, a dark planet, a moist blanket of soil.
How it shrinks and lengthens every centimetre
of its blind thin skin. A reddish-pink scribble
pointing its nose for the slightest fissure in flint,
an interstice, a bolt-hole, a lost poem of home.

How quickly a day can change. Like the badger
or the vole, one moment you're rummaging alone
in the vast pocket of the dark, dilating and bloating
through loam. The pleasures here are well known
and there's no richer pudding, plumped to bursting
with small finds; an ear, a wing, the satin eye of
a butterfly, moonseeds under a leaf, fretwork
of a millipede, and once on a tuft of mud,
the scarlet husk of a ladybird.

Peggie Gallagher

Fly

Doped on summer, stung
by the chill coming on
put away the little black book
of yourself, no one's returning
your calls.

Inkling, Flying Chandelier,
Iota of Death dressed in leather
pall-bearing the maggot's dream,
Little Twitch, Punk of Air
scribble your body's note,
your asterisk self,
toss your cap and gown,
graduate!

Julia McCarthy

The Professional

The memory of when this business was chosen for me, the precise moment, seems covered over now like one of those gypsy moth webs that hang, flower-like, from the trees. Now the trees, in the wind, so many Sybils, are still dealing out their leaves without any explanations. I think the late light still clung to the far hills like a note held too long by some amateur saxophonist. But in reality, everything was already over. My father turned to me from where he sat watching the evening news, and for one last moment I imagined he remembered who I was, and recognized for a moment what I would become, this legacy I would inherit. I should add that even now, years later, no one has found a cure for our disease. And it was at that moment that I understood the distant look, a look at what is beyond what we can ever see, and what so many others only understand as an utter blankness of mind.

It is, in fact, distance. I'm not sure I can describe the manner of travel, but it is a kind of exhilarating freedom, for the soul, tied no longer to the self by memory, travels to the most remote and forgotten places, to the most neglected and displaced of persons, and takes on the task of dying for each of them. This, in fact, is the great benefit of our disease, for we forget each death as quickly as we accomplish it, and so it is painless, allowing those others in turn a kind of freedom to think of the future. They think, in terms it is hard to describe, how everything will continue after them, how the fields will be mown, the apples picked, new roads added, new children, ideas, desires. In short, they begin to live again.

And so it is I died on one of the warm air grates on 6th Avenue. I died in the muddy river after drinking too much slivovitz. I died on a battle field and took refuge in a mass grave. I died alone. I died with friends. I died naked. I died in silk. I died from love with her name on my lips. I died from lack of love, cursing her. I died from the knife, the noose, the pistol. I died slowly. I died unexpectedly. As a result of intrigue. As a consequence of actions. Justly. Unjustly. I died in the arms of a lover who thought I was falling asleep before she could tell me her heart.

It was this last death that prompted me to learn how to travel not only over space but over time. Now I am dying in her place, years from now, at a small village in the mountains east of here, the way my father

died, forgetting everyone. I die while the woman downstairs brings up my supper. I die while the distant musician scratches his pitiful melody. I die as the roses I once pressed die, skin blackening, wilting, hidden in a drawer. I hear the last note of light echoing in the hills. I am dying for her, but my own death I can never know, nor have I ever glimpsed it among my distant travels.

Richard Jackson

Cocorete Nanee

*Cocorete Nanee dead.
She chirran come bawlin an cryin.
Dey lay she out overnite
in de ghangree she was wearin,
an pull she orhni arong she face.
She lookin like Mary Magdaleen
in she home clothes,
in some expensive, expensive
Christmas card from Europe.
She restin peaceful peaceful.
She chirran an granchirran
bawlin all over de place.
Each new set ah relatives arrivin
set dem off bawlin some more.
De day ah de funeral, dey bade she
an wrap she up in wite cotton,
an drape it arong she face.
She lookin even more peaceful,
as if God claim she aredy.
More an more relatives arrivin.
De yard full ah people,
comin an payin dey respek to Nanee,
layed out in the tabut
redy for she funeral.
Tings warmin up,
but it eh time yet for the meeahsahib.
Rite in front ah everybody,
as if nobody eh lookin,
Nanee wake up an friten everbody.
Later, wen tings quiet dong
an she ketch sheself,
she tell dem how de angels tell she*

*"Chyle, it eh you we sen for,
dey make ah mistake."
Den dey give she food
in ah golden calabash,
an wen she finish eatin
dey sen she back.*

Zorida Mohammed

Manners for Gentlemen

A gentleman should never question a lady's poems.
—Ray Hudson

A gentleman always pours wine for a lady
so that the fire under her skin
will not set the alcohol ablaze.

A gentleman always precedes a lady into a crowd
to shield the innocent
from the power of her gaze.

A gentleman always seizes his hatbrim when a lady passes
so that the whirlwind that follows her
will not carry it off into the street.

A gentleman always opens a door for a lady
so that she may have her sword arm free
to vanquish the villains lurking behind.
(This is also why he carries her packages.)

A gentleman always walks on the streetside of a lady
so that she may, with a white-gloved finger,
tap into place any loose bricks
in the foundations of civilization.

A gentlemen always follows a lady into a carriage
so that he will not be in the way
if she must stun the driver, seize the reins,
and gallop resolutely toward the invading hordes.

Mary F. C. Pratt

Working with the Developmentally Disabled

Eating hot dogs on the curb
near Bieners Wieners,
Jimmy's making arctic seal noises
and trying to steal
Norman's potato chips,
Greg farts loudly
and I can't stop Ara
from saying: Ahhh, hot pussy
every time a pretty girl walks by.
There's ketchup everywhere
and I keep hoping that none of them
wet their pants before we get home.
I've held a lot of crappy jobs
but this afternoon
watching the office girls
in their nylons and pumps
walk back to their air-conditioned cubicles,
their flashing multi-line phone systems,
and bitchy e-mails from supervisors
with questionable IQs,
I know this time
I've got it good.

Heather Abner

Barney Rubble Saves Our Lives

I am seven and *The Flintstones* are my obsession,
a molded, plastic bank in the shape of diminutive
Barney Rubble, his jovial smile, flaxen hair,
dildo nose, carried in my arms like a graven image.

High on Brasstown Bald, twilight arrives
unexpectedly, my father urging my mother
and me back into the puke-green Ford LTD
for the trip back down the mountain,
the observatory parking lot empty.
For the first time I understand dread
as my father turns over the engine
and smoke curls from under the hood.

We all sit there, momentary brain drain,
flash-forwarding on darkness, cold,
spending the night in the car, Big Foot.
My father springs to action, pulls
dipsticks, tugs wires, nose sharp for leaks.

He diagnoses busted radiator hose,
and, as if by magic, a thin trail of fluid
appears and flows downhill, away from us,
fleeing approaching night.
My father remembers a gas station,
says we'll make it if we can fill up the radiator,
but my mother's frantic search is fruitless:
no cups, no thermos, no cooler to carry water
from the primitive fountain.

That's when I offer up Barney,
remove the flesh-colored cap from his feet,
place my finger over the change slot in his head,
make him prehistoric vessel.

Even after I lose interest, Barney remains,
not tossed into dark attic or tagged for yard sale,
but tucked into a corner of the trunk, and since
Hanna-Barbera never gave him a proper job,
we keep him employed, our tiny lifesaver.

Collin Kelley

On My 13th Birthday
My Mother Convinces My Father
To Sit Down with Me and Discuss
The Facts of Life

Son, he said, in the half shadow
of my bedroom, Bob Cousy
taped to the wall and dribbling toward us,

the early-evening moon smiling
crookedly through the window,
I want to talk with you about

*"life," you know—
the birds & bees thing?
You got any questions about that?*

Prickles of sweat broke out
above his lip, and he made a steeple
with his stubby fingers. I smoothed

a palm over the hard, raised nubs
of my new Spalding basketball.
Not really, I said. *Well then*, he added,

Let's go shoot some hoops.

Jeff Worley

How to Write a Sad Poem

First, hang the moon.
Position that empty socket
at zenith. Make it a December
evening, long gray spirals of dusk
skirring in.

Give us the bare limbs
of a sycamore—that's a good touch
in the chill wind—though how much
better to leave one leaf twisting.

It hangs, we see now,
directly above two lovers whose breaths
rise with what must be icy words.
These two, in their ponderous coats
and gloves, are beautiful
even at this distance, but they don't touch,
because this is the sad poem.

They part,
and take their last moments
away with them forever.

*(Last moments, forever—
choice ingredients in the sad poem recipe.)*
The lovers have promised the occasional
email, we suspect, but we've all inhabited
the sad poem enough to know
that sweet intention will fall
like this sycamore's last leaf.
When the sad poem gets weary
with the weight of its sadness,
it tries to conjure some Latin music
from a car radio, looks skyward
for a fat cardinal that will swoop
down and hop hopefully in the ice-
crusted grass.

What the sad poem gets,
instead, is one laden cloud after another
trudging in like a funeral procession.
Then a phone rings somewhere...

None of us move
toward the ringing: We know
the news it brings.

Jeff Worley

Before She Was Famous

He loved the brown-eyed girl who sang next door
the year he turned sixteen, the girl whose shape
in hand-me-down Levis promised far more
than mini-skirts revealed, the one whose nape
beneath cropped hair incited him to touch
like all forbidden things, and whose deep laugh
was shameless as a farmhand's but held such
innocence it cut his knees in half.

He trembled in her sight and didn't dare
ask her to the movies or the prom.
But now this Talk Show has her on the air
saying in the small town she came from
she wasn't popular enough to date.
He plays her songs till two a.m., sleeps late.

Anna Evans

Elegy in an Elephant Graveyard

My children test the ooze at the Ice Age Museum
to see how hard it is to extricate
an arm (hard!) or a leg (harder!).

Outside, tar pits bubble and burp,
evidence that million-year-old ferns
still simmer in caldrons deep underground.

Imagine the poor Columbia mammoth,
ten thousand pounds of organic grass-fed meat,
sinking helplessly in a seductive waterhole.

Pit 91 at Rancho La Brea held the skeletons
of a hundred and eighty-one individuals, adults & calves,
live tissue, not the rock-for-carbon fossils in other sediments.

Ten thousand years ago the hunter-gatherers of ancient
Mesopotamia domesticated wheat, the horse, and the ox.
In North America, the Pleistocene mega-fauna died out.

The only sizeable predator to survive was man. My children,
latter-day epigones of human adaptability,
examine a wall glowing with hundreds of wolf skulls,

anonymous in their representative glory.
In the next hall, a motorized saber-tooth drives its oversized
incisors into the fleshy scalp of a giant sloth.

This individual portrait of death frightens
my daughter, who hobbles like a baby mastodon
to the safety of her mother's long legs.

Other families roam from one diorama to the next,
small herds grazing on tufts of fact. A crowd gathers
in front of a large mural—nearly naked surfers

toss atlatls and spears tipped with chert
at a mammoth foundering in a sea of golden grass,
its tusks more fanciful than any Alpine horn,

shofars trumpeting a silent fanfare of farewell.
Having eaten everything that was easily killed,
those early humans learned to do without

the great stupid beasts that once filled the prairies
and forests. Every day, they say, another species is lost.
Tonight my children will dream of beauties we've destroyed

to keep them alive. After lunch they spin down the park's
grassy slopes like asteroids in the starry fridge of space.
SUV's hunt for parking like wolves circling a flock of sheep.

Lee Rossi

Meat

Meat, a curious intimacy.
An intimacy they never planned to offer.
Breath and brain on hoof and claw and trotter,
They sacrifice
Privacy of skin scale fur and feather
For our consuming connection.
Oh unkindest cut—
Slice round and rump
Hack shank and rib
Flop dripping fillets on my plate.
I love you all
From bold sirloin and beefy chuck
And lordly porterhouse
To the tiniest cutlet.
Even pale tortured veal
Wan chicken breast with skin like dead Uncle Henry.
Such tenderness!
My fork is poised
Meat eats meat.
Dust to dust.
Dog eat dog.
I'm hungry
This is our body, our blood
This hour
Let us devour
While time eats away....

Eleanore Lee

My Expendable Blood

The head technician asks
if a trainee can draw my blood
today, the young woman standing
behind him like a shy child.

"Sure," I shrug, not nearly
as confident as I want her
to think I am. And though
her hands are less nimble
than they should be,
she slips the needle in
without my writhing agony,
manages not to send
my expendable blood spurting
like a whale's blow hole,

and most important, at the end
she withdraws the syringe, much
to my relief, beginning to think
I'd be spending the rest my life
with that spike in a burning vein
while she worried the clamps closed.

Afterwards, her breath rushes out,
"Thank God," as if afraid she'd kill me.

"You were great," I lie, "a natural,"
to earn her smile, bright
as a City Hall Christmas display,
when, with her hand tight
in her father's, she might have gasped
at the lights coming on, all at once.

Robert Cooperman

The Chef

Preparing each poem like a meal,
in stanza one I offer hummus,
raw carrot strips, with wine
but no mixed drinks. Some find
this approach too—Peter Rabbit.

If the readers haven't fled, I serve
them garlic soup with homemade
whole-wheat bread. There's butter
to spread, soft, at hand. The main
dish tonight is pasta fazool since

the garden tomatoes are ripe,
and the basil needs cutting back.
I offer grated Romano to sprinkle
on top. By now the eaters know what
to expect, no ghazal or anything too

complex, though the leafy salad has
surprise—walnuts, dried cranberries,
endive. Diners *aah* at the chocolate
raspberry tart, but inside a cut cabbage
is where the universe hides.

Some guests fork up every bite
as though it were their last. Others
merely poke, stir each pile of food
on the plain white plates until it
looks *used*. A few refuse the whole

meal, leave my verse seeking pizza,
a burger and fries, something pure
as the Eucharist, or French, perhaps
curry from the islands, screamingly hot,
or pancakes of angst with a side of blood

sausage. The choices are sumptuous,
dizzying, wide. No matter—can you stay?
I'll whip omelet eggs to the beat of a line.
You can chop cilantro, make mango salsa.
We'll pick miraculous beans from the vine.

Margaret A. Robinson

Jello Days

When I asked her how her day was going, she replied
“like a bowl of jello,” and I thought about
the school lunch programs of my youth in which
jello was classed as a fruit or a vegetable.
“Will you have the strawberry, or the lime, dear,
with or without whipped cream?” “Yes, whipped cream,
ma’am, hold the jello.” But the lunchroom matron
does not crack a smile as she dollops out the quavering
green mass, which sits there as sad as a plastic Madonna.
Where does jello grow? What soil of the soul,
what dank corner of the human psyche exudes
this congealed cube of ennui, this gelatinous, nutritionless
unhappiness? Which only pretends to be a real dessert,
as we, in turn, pretend to like it. Sure it’s virtuous and virtually
calorie-free. But what about life’s existential hungers?
What about God, for example, who created
every animal and vegetable and mineral, but never jello?
Or maybe jello is what was there before creation,
the original substanceless substance which got banged out
in the Big Bang. Stop laughing! I’m dead serious.
I’m thinking of something Paul Valéry said: “God made the world
from nothing, and sometimes the nothing shows through.”
The man was clearly having one of those jello days.
As my friend is today. And I was too, until I started writing
this elegy to jello, which shimmers and shakes now
lime green in my imagination. And that is where I plan to keep it—
sitting pretty where I don’t have to eat it.

Richard Schiffman

Balls

Maybe they’ll show up on a bright Sunday like this,
when the spring, which had gone on a chilly sabbatical, saunters back,
the sun a big fat grinning yolk, the breeze a romping puppy,
and everybody and their uncle is out in the park fussing with balls.
What will the little green men think as they watch the local bipeds
toss them and kick them, roll them and spin them, high and low,
fast and slow, whack them with mallets and strike them with bats,
smack them with rackets and snatch them in nets, dunk them through hoops
and punch them at holes, push them with sticks and bounce them off bricks?
Or just plain lob them endlessly underhand, overhand, back and forth,
the bipeds running and jumping and diving to catch them midair,
and the quadrupeds too chasing the balls yelping with doggy rapture,
even the pinnipeds spinning the big red ones upon their natty whiskers,
as the bipeds flip them silver fishes. Perhaps this ball thing is their religion,
their way of giving thanks for the blue-green ball of earth,
and for the fireball sun. And for their own lives rolled
and tossed and spun through time and space and mind.
Then snagged in the end in a crackerjack play
in the glove of heaven’s catcher.

Richard Schiffman

A comma

is a sickle cutting this and that,
now and then, into pieces meant
to fit our breath, the crook that
shepherds far too many adjectives
into the folds they try to modify,
keeps one clause from slopping
over, muddying the next and,
left to their own devices, they
strew themselves about like
new-cut hairs, making us itch,
making us wish one of them,
at least, would, for pity's sake,
curl itself into a round
full stop.

Anne Ward Jamieson

Crossword Puzzles

It's the black squares I like,
the ones that separate
the closing consonants
of old Indian rope tricks
from the opening vowels
of Anglo-Saxon slaves;
the ones that punctuate
where grammar fails.

There is a luxury
about a space reserved,
rich with Sunday's coffee,
heavy with printer's ink.

Unnumbered, unnamed,
these blocks of simplicity
offer themselves up
as solid steppingstones
buoying my imagination
through the maddening
quicksand of defined
right and wrong.

Anne Ward Jamieson

Vocation

In my office at the University,
I practice making paper cranes,
first with white squares cut
from the backs of photocopied stories,
then with the expensive paper, the stuff
speckled with geometric flowers,
wallpaper patterns, cellular
diamond-grids. The sheets
are skinlike, recall each fold
imposed on them. I shape them
over and over, hundreds of them,
string them on red and gold thread
and hang them from the perforated ceiling,
line the ugly metal bookshelves with the tiny,
blind, multicolored creatures. I am
obsessed. My students seem to
take me seriously, insist on calling me
Professor, although I inform them
otherwise, tell them that I don't care
if they write in the first or second
or third person, don't care
about their grammar. All I really
want to do is sit here in my
windowless cell and take every
flat, square thing in the world and
turn it into a bird.

Brieghan Gardner

Note Found Near His Cage

*Alex, a 31-year-old African Grey parrot, knew more
than 100 words and could count and recognize colors
and shapes. Alex died, apparently of natural causes.*

—New York Times, September 11, 2007

She was kind, my friend and protector.

I loved her.

Willingly, to please her, I played the child,
played the games of colors, numbers,
simple words,
but kept something of myself apart.

She never knew the nights I spent
among her books,
tales brought back from Africa by travellers
and explorers; by Burton, Livingstone,
Mary Kingsley, the books of flight,
physics and poetry of flying;
Saint Exupéry, Murchie, his *Song of the Sky*.

I learned there was a sky wider
than our window frame,
drank these thoughts and visions
when the lessons were too long.
Flight, navigation, movement of the air
and that place, that country, Africa,
occupied, no, possessed my thoughts.

I long more and more for wideness,
wildness, the spread of wings,
cannot, another minute, bear this room.
I will my heart to slow and stop.
I dream myself away.

Marjorie Mir

CONTRIBUTORS

Heather Abner teaches at Oakland Community College in Michigan. She appears in *The MacGuffin*, *Nerve Cowboy*, and *Rattle*.

Magomed Ahmedov was born in 1955 in Mahachkala, Dagestan. He graduated from the Moscow Institute for Literature (Emini Gorkogo) in 1979. The author of more than fifteen books, he is head of the Writers' Union of Dagestan.

Malcolm Alexander lives in Tucson, AZ, and appears in *Southern Review*, *New England Review*, *Confrontation*, *North American Review*, and *Colorado Review*. malcolmalexander11@gmail.com

Paul Batista is an army veteran, trial lawyer, and novelist (*Death's Witness*, 2007, *The Borzoi Killings*, forthcoming 2009). A frequent guest on Court TV, CNN and MSNBC, he is the author of *Civil RICO*, the leading treatise on federal racketeering law.

Mark Belair has performed as a percussionist on Broadway, with top symphony orchestras and jazz greats like Bill Evans. He appears in *The Distillery*, *Wisconsin Review*, and *Michigan Quarterly Review*.

Karina Borowicz appears in *Agni*, *Small Spiral Notebook*, *Spoon River Review*, and *Contrary*.

Neil Carpathios teaches at Shawnee State U. His poetry books are *Playground of the Flesh* (Main Street Rag, 2006) and *At the Axis of Imponderables*, winner of the Quercus Review Press Award, 2007.

Tom Chandler's latest poetry book is *Toy Firing Squad*. His poems appear on NPR and in *Poetry*, *Boulevard*, and *Ontario Review*.

Joshua Coben teaches in a public elementary school in Boston. He appears in *College English*, *Pleiades*, *Poem*, *Free Lunch*, and the college text *Arguing through Literature* (McGraw-Hill, 2005).

Robert Cooperman is author of eight poetry collections, including *A Tiny Shrimp Upon the Sea* (March Street Press) and *The Long Black Veil* (Higginum Hill Books).

Anita Dugat-Greene teaches at Georgia Perimeter College. She appears in *New Texas*, *Windhover*, and *Eclectica* (online).

Anna Evans is editor of *The Barefoot Muse*. She appears in *The Harvard Review*, *The Evansville Review*, and *Rattle*.

Rupert Fike, winner of the *Snake Nation Review* competition, also appears in *Rosebud*, *The Georgetown Review*, and *Borderlands*. His nonfiction book is *Voices from The Farm*. rhfike@mindspring.com

Richard Foss appears in *Cimmaron Review* and *Willow Review*. He recently received his Ph.D. in creative writing from Western Michigan University.

Rebecca Foust won the 2008 Robert Phillips Poetry Prize. Her winning book, *Mom's Canoe*, will be published by Texas Review Press in 2009. She appears in *JAMA*, *Nimrod*, *Margie*, and *Poetry East*.

Peggie Gallagher is a poet and short-story writer in Sligo, Ireland. She appears in *Poetry Ireland*, *Poetry Daily*, *Envoi*, and *Force 10*.

Brieghan Gardner writes, teaches (and folds paper cranes) in New Hampshire. His poetry appears in *Poetry East*, *Eclipse*, and *Water-Stone Review*.

Jeff Gundy's fifth book of poems is *Spoken among the Trees* (U. of Akron Press, 2007). He appears in *Georgia Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Colorado Review*, and *River Styxx*.

Krikor Der Hohannesian wrote "Love Spell" 65 years after the event that inspired it. He appears in *Evansville Review*, *Permafrost*, *The New Renaissance*, and *South Carolina Review*.

Richard Jackson's nine books include *Half Lives*, *Unauthorized Autobiography*, and *Heartwall*. Editor of the journal *mala revija* and two books of Slovenian poetry, *The Fire Under the Moon* and *Double Vision*, he was awarded the Slovenian Order of Freedom Medal for literary and humanitarian work in the Balkans.

Anne Ward Jamieson has appeared in *North American Review*, *The Evansville Review*, *Rattle*, and *5AM*.

Frank Jamison's poetry collection is *Marginal Notes* (2001). He appears in *Appalachian Heritage*, *Nimrod*, *CQ*, *Poem*, and *Spillway*.

Collin Kelley's books include *After the Poison* (Finishing Line Press), *Slow To Burn* (MetroMania Press), and the spoken word album *HalfLife Crisis*. He is co-editor of the *Java Monkey Speaks* poetry anthology series from Poetry Atlanta Press.

Jesse Lee Kercheval's poetry books include *Dog Angel* (U. of Pittsburgh Press) and *The Alice Stories* (U. of Nebraska Press, 2007), which won the Prairie Schooner Book Prize. She directs the University of

Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing.

Danusha Laméris appears in *The Crab Orchard Review*, *The Alaska Quarterly Review*, and *Lyric*.

Eleanore Lee is a legislative analyst for the University of California. A former stringer for *Time*, she appears in *CQ*, *The Rambler*, and *Oak River Review*.

Gloria Lewin grew up in Los Angeles and Honolulu. She teaches English in an inner-city high school in Los Angeles, a job she loves.

Julia McCarthy is a Canadian poet and potter living in Nova Scotia. She is author of *Stormthrower* (Wolsak and Wynn, Toronto, 2002), and appears in *Fiddlehead* and *Contemporary Verse 2*.

Jesse Millner's forthcoming poetry book is *The Neighborhood of My Past Sorrow* (Kitsune Books, 2009). He teaches at Florida Gulf Coast University and lives in Estero, Florida.

Marjorie Mir is a retired librarian living in Bronxville, NY. She is editor of *Poet's Cove* at MonheganCommons.com, and a previous winner of *Atlanta Review's* International Poetry Competition.

Zorida Mohammed immigrated to the U.S. from Trinidad at the age of 18 and is now a social worker in New Jersey. She appears in *The Caribbean Writer*, *Compass Rose*, *The Distillery*, *Poem*, and *Folio*.

Jed Myers is a Seattle poet and singer-songwriter who appears in *Fugue*, *POEM*, *Golden Handcuffs Review*, and *StringTown*.

Melissa Peters lives in New York City. She appears in *Denver Quarterly*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *The Spoon River Poetry Review*.

Mary F. C. Pratt has been a geology lab tech, a teacher, a clergywoman, and an apple picker. She performs with *Quatrain*, a poetry quartet.

Andy Roberts works as a wastewater treatment plant operator in Columbus, Ohio. Recent publications include *Barnwood* and *Fulcrum*.

Margaret A. Robinson's book is *Sparks* (Pudding House, 2004). She appears in *Prairie Schooner*, *Margie*, and *Cider Press Review*.

Lee Rossi is campaigning to install a Tomb of the Unknown Poet in Westminster Abbey, dedicated to "all those who have labored in Poetry's vineyards without eating any of her grapes." He has graciously volunteered to be the first occupant.

Richard Schiffman is a freelance journalist and commentator for NPR's *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*. He appears in *Sow's Ear Review*, *The Comstock Review*, and *Motherverse*.

Dorothy Stone's new chapbook is *Discovery Age* (Autumn Light Press, 2007). She appears in *The Southern Poetry Review*, *Light*, *The Formalist*, *The Writing Group Book*, and *The Boston Globe*.

Maria Terrone's poetry books are *The Bodies We Were Loaned* (Word Works, 2002) and *A Secret Room in Fall* (Ashland Poetry Press, 2006), winner of the McGovern Prize. www.mariaterrone.com

Pepper Trail is a biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Oregon. He appears in *Open Spaces*, *Kyoto Journal*, and *THEMA*.

David Tucker's book *Late for Work* won the 2005 Bakeless Prize. Winner of a Witter Bynner Fellowship from the Library of Congress, he is Deputy Managing Editor of the *New Jersey Star-Ledger*.

Jeff Worley's books include *Happy Hour at the Two Keys Tavern* (Mid-List Press), *Leave Time* (Finishing Line Press), *A Simple Human Motion* (Larkspur Press), and *The Only Time There Is*, which won the Mid-List Press First Book Poetry Prize in 1995. He is also a winner of *Atlanta Review's* International Poetry Competition.

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