

# Teach. Write.

A Writing Teachers'  
Literary Journal  
Spring~Summer 2023



Edited by Katie Winkler

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A Writing Teachers' Literary Journal

SPRING~SUMMER 2023

Katie Winkler, Editor

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# Jennifer Davis Michael

## Listening Exercise

I have sent my class outside  
to listen to the world.  
Alone in the room,  
I listen to the silence  
shaped by their absence:  
books left open on the table,  
backpacks slumped on the floor.  
It has started to rain, and I wonder  
how soon they'll be back.  
I watch the clock.  
Meanwhile, the room holds its breath:  
the painted landscape on the wall,  
the white board smudged with half-erased wisdom,  
window screens blurred with rain.

Like raindrops, slowly, they trickle in,  
their faces changed, their voices charged,  
telling of what they heard.  
I am only an audience to their listening,  
as the room breathes in,  
receiving, containing all.

## Prospects

Wearing their Sunday best,  
they shuffle off the bus  
for a preview, an experience  
--or so it's marketed.  
They'll tour the dorms,  
sample the dining hall,  
take note of internships and placement rates.

Beside the road I took  
to college thirty years ago,  
a hand-lettered sign  
reads, *Sister Fatima:*  
*Spiritual Advisor.*  
I've never stopped, but imagine  
inside a darkened tent  
a woman headscarved  
out of central casting,  
bent over a crystal ball.  
Or perhaps she reads tarot,  
dealing thickened, thumbworn cards  
across an antique table.

Today, young faces peer  
through dusty windows.  
Maybe they'll touch initials  
deep-grooved into desks,  
or greet their own ghosts  
in dusty stairwells.  
The interview: a Ouija board  
balanced on trembling knees.



## Valediction

The college chapel overflows  
with parents, broke but proud.  
The organ plays “For all the saints”:  
no irony apparent.  
The faculty, regaled and sweating, pause  
our chatter for some gravitas  
as seniors straggle into line,  
our faded gowns before their gloss.

For them a rite of passage,  
a milestone on the line;  
for us a yearly ritual,  
the circle’s resting point.  
We vest, march, sing, sit, stand,  
and clap them out of town,  
clutching their Latin scrolls,  
their cars and U-Hauls bulging.

Now comes the emptiness,  
both welcome and unsettling:  
a vacant tent, an echoing choir,  
some scattered chairs and tables on the quad.  
The line and circle intersect:  
they leave; we start again.  
And yet, our steps show signs of wear,  
our loss perennial as May.

# Arvilla Fee

## The Bell Curve

There he sits, slumped  
in his chair, chin resting  
on his upturned palm.  
Bored?

There he sits, bottom of  
the bell curve, and not  
the good bottom. But  
the six-zeros-in-the-book  
bottom.

There he sits, sometimes.  
Hungry? Angry? Both?  
Our hallway talks yield  
nothing. Where is your  
assignment?

There he stands, shrugging.  
Eyes down; he's depressed.  
Yet he won't lift a finger to  
touch the rocks that loom  
above.

There he sits, surrounded  
by teachers and a dad who  
speaks broken English.  
What do you want out of  
life?

That's my question, and  
his answer surprises me.  
College, he says, I want  
to go to college. He looks  
defiant.

Then fight, I say. You must fight. And he does. He grabs an edge on the back side of that bell curve, plants his feet.

I throw a rope down from the top of the cliff. Got that paper? I call out. He does. Panting, he reaches the top, Solid C.

Know how to rappel? I ask. He grins, and off he goes, right down the side of that Bell to a B. I tell him to plant a flag.

I get a summer e-mail. He says, Thanks for not giving up on me. I say, You were worth saving. I could not let you go.

There he sits, six years later, in a cap and gown. I'm a college graduate, he writes to me. Neuroscience degree. I weep.

# Amanda Gardner

## Teaching Haiku in Jail

"There is freedom within structure," I announced to the group of 17 orange-clad women arrayed before me in a pod in the Albuquerque jail. I was about to introduce haiku to a new writing workshop, but this was only my second week as a volunteer. I had no idea how ironic that statement was, nor did I have any idea how familiar these women already were to the idea of freedom within bounds.

I was still getting used to the myriad rules of the huge facility: closed-toe shoes, no long earrings, "regulation" (clear-tubed) pens only. I was becoming accustomed to conducting a workshop in a room which was really a fishbowl. The wall of thick, glass windows offered no privacy from the chaotic noise and activity of the rest of the pod, a communal area where up to 100 women lived together for vastly varying periods of time. My prior experience with writing workshops was at a homeless shelter in Hoboken, New Jersey where we met in a quiet, empty church sanctuary every Tuesday evening.

Haiku seemed appropriate to the jail because of its compact format, well-suited to the brief hour I was allotted in the fishbowl with a group of women who I may or may not ever see again.

I launched into my semi-prepared instruction.

"Does anyone know what a syllable is?" I asked.

Blank stares greeted me and I tried to simplify the probably-not-appropriate-for-this-context explanations I had found online: "a unit of pronunciation uttered without interruption" and "an element of speech that acts as a unit of rhythm." Fortunately, a woman named Polly, stepped up to the plate.

"I know what they are!" she exclaimed. "It's when you clap your hands." She demonstrated by striking her hands together in time to each "unit of pronunciation."

The entire room nodded.

"Can you write the word?" asked a woman named Diane.

I wrote "HAIKU" in big black letters on the white board.

"I've seen that word!" said another participant, seeming satisfied.

Now that we had syllables more or less under control, I introduced the 5-7-5 format and explained that haiku originated in Japan, focuses on a direct observation and a moment that instills a feeling. Traditional poems focused on nature, I told them, but modern haiku has ventured out both in

subject matter and, sometimes, even syllable count. I gave two examples of "urban haiku" by Westerner Michael R. Collings:

*Silence - a strangled  
telephone has forgotten  
that it should ring*

and

*Freeway overpass -  
Blossoms in graffiti on  
fog-wrapped June mornings*

"Why don't we write one together?" I suggested. "Throw out some words, any words, maybe they could have to do with jail."

I quickly scribbled the words on the board as they flew out:

*Orange  
Waiting*

When the board was covered with words, I coaxed the women to start putting them together, counting syllables as they went and discarding any phrases they thought didn't work. I wrote the final piece (with its somewhat loose adherence to the syllable rule) on the board:

*As I sit and wait  
waiting for the door to open  
I will keep my patience*

Now I sensed enthusiasm. The women had already bowed their heads over paper and regulation pens and write, finishing what I assumed were haiku with surprising speed.

An "older" (meaning probably in her 40s) woman named Beverly wrote:

*I want to leave here  
And see the beautiful sights  
pack my bag tonight*

Tracy wrote:

*How I miss the world  
so much to do so little time  
soon I will be there*

The longing to be free was a true record of the moment for each of these women but, I would learn over the years, being "on the outs" was not all it was cracked up to be. Many of the women cycled quickly back in to the jail and to the workshop. Often they were relieved, finding the confinement and structure of jail, no matter how harsh and punitive, preferable to the chaos of the streets, abusive relationships, the relentless hold drugs had on most of them.

One long-time workshop participant, Betty Sue, who had been institutionalized one way or another since she was 11, grew more and more excited as her latest release date approached. But she was back in jail 15 hours after gaining her freedom.

"Can you tell I'm happy?" she asked me when I expressed surprise at seeing her.

It wasn't hard to imagine why Betty Sue might prefer incarceration to so-called freedom. As she tellingly wrote in one poem entitled "From Broadway to Tramway":

*It's been a long walk but a short life  
For the ladies of the night  
If money be needed it's first easy to take a walk  
It's nothing nice  
And can turn your warm beautiful heart into ice . . .*

Samantha, an anomaly for the jail being white and from an upper-middle-class background, returned to the jail many times over my seven years there. One night as she described the "PV" or parole violation that had landed her back in custody yet again, she cried, asking me, "What if I have to do the rest of my 14-month sentence?"

Then she apparently thought of a worse scenario.

"What if I do the sentence and get out with no parole? Where will I live? What will I do? I've never been out NOT on parole before."

A Navajo woman named Lucinda was also back that night. She and Samantha had done time together 10 years ago. Lucinda told me that she could only imagine staying out if she went to a totally different environment, one that provided "control" like drug tests.

Hearing this, Samantha's face lit up. "A fortress!," she said. "A big place where you can all live and work!"

It occurred to me that these women were already living in that big place with measures of control, but sadly no freedom from sober thoughts, as Samantha wrote:

*Hot summer sun, freedom, content  
Icy air, freezing, tormented, confined behind walls*

*Heat rushes up my body, filling my throat  
Too much guilt and regrets for my mind to bear*

*Anger, self-hatred, disquiet  
Fifth round of broken promises to my beautiful son*

*My insides seem to boil, too hot, within my shell  
So so hot, but my heart still beats cold*

About five years into my own regimented, weekly visits to the jail, I started a second workshop on the women's psychiatric pod and, after a few weeks, introduced haiku again.

Hazel, a 40-ish-old woman whose individuality manifested in non-regulation white head kerchief, approached our table hesitantly. She took a seat next to me and I gave her a piece of paper and a clear ballpoint pen.

"Are you going to write?" I asked her.

A small smile appeared on her lips.

"What's the topic?" she asked.

"We're doing haiku. Do you know what that is?"

Hazel shook her head so I took a little time to explain it to her. She didn't take her eyes off me the whole time.

"Why don't we write one together?" I suggested.

She didn't object so I take that as permission to proceed.

"What do you want to write about?" I asked.

She shook her head, looking down at the paper.

"Where do you most like to be?" I asked.

After a moment's hesitation, she offered, "on my bed."

"Okay. What does your bed feel like?"

"Hard and uncomfortable."

I wrote the words down.

"How much time do you spend there?"

"Most of all my time."

I wrote that down as well.

Then she volunteered, "It's my comfort zone."

We had a haiku.

*Hard, uncomfortable  
I spend most of all my time  
in my comfort zone.*

Hazel smiled as I read it back to her.





# Laurinda Lind

## Overview

Out my window by where  
I work to the last minute  
coming up with stuff for

students to do before I  
speed downstairs and share  
with them something I am

not sure I should, snow has  
made intersecting parking-  
lot slots into an abstract

painting with grids of  
white laid in between wide  
lines of bare earth where

life still asserts itself.  
Nothing moves in the mosaic  
but still, foottracks left their

evidence that it is worth  
coming in through the cold  
where each tree planted

years ago as a tiny seed  
took what it was given, then  
gave its voice to the world.

## To the Person Who Sits Here Next

Whoever worked at this library table  
before me left a long black hair  
so instead of writing I try  
reading it, dark river of thoughts

that are not my own but that run  
across the afternoon. This  
is not where I belong, though

I wade whatever words will  
open to me. I have long hairs  
of my own I could drop down  
as graffiti that go, Hello,

here's where I was in the world  
today, I traveled light and arrived  
alone, and for a while I was wary

of unfamiliar waters. And  
here's the chair where I sat  
when I changed my mind.

## So Now You Are a Poet

on top of everything else while you are up  
to your armpits in composition papers at  
the community college where students are  
shocked when you say there is a difference  
between saw and seen, I and me, that we  
can't all be you and they. You made two

hundred dollars this year writing poems  
which means fifty-five cents you could  
spend every day, or pay a sixth of your  
mortgage for the month. A press in

Raleigh loves your poems and sends  
a release to your local paper which it  
refuses to print, and you win a contest that  
won't be reported on local public radio—

do you teach at the correct college, no  
you don't, did you get enough degrees,  
no you didn't, and by the way that was  
a passive construction four lines ago,

which is a bridge too far for students  
to hear when they just need to pass your  
class so they can get certification for  
something better than sitting and  
listening to you tell them how much  
writing will make them love their lives.

## My Life, In Failures

I used to spend every morning in an empty classroom, sitting beneath a poster of a rock climber hanging on the edge of a cliff. Beneath the rock climber's dangling feet, across the bottom of the poster were three simple words: "Struggle Isn't Failure." This poster always grabbed my attention, and even though it was meant to encourage the students, it always reminded me, the teacher, that I need to keep going, too.

This phrase is a great sentiment and a great lesson. There are many moments in life when you simply have to struggle. Difficult times will come, and you have to put your head down and push forward. However, from my experiences, I believe this statement needs to be expanded by explaining that not only does "struggle" happen, but failure happens too.

Yes, failure happens.

Sometimes you end up on the wrong side of struggle. As a human being, you are going to fail. You will fail yourself; you will fail others; others will fail you. This is part of life, but it's not the end. Life keeps going, and you will keep going, too. Every failure is different, and while I know that you can learn a lesson from every failure, it is important to remember that there are different types of failures.

Every time you fail, it affects you and the people around you; how you cope with your failures will ultimately shape who you are.

### Immediate Failures

Some failures are what I would call immediate failures. These are situations in which you know right away that you have failed. I have seen others engaged in immediate failures in videos where someone is riding a bike and flips over the handlebars, or where someone plugs in Christmas lights and nothing happens.

One of my immediate failures took place when I was running an Outdoor Education program for a camp. I was in a car on my way to a local high school to run a team building program for a group of "at risk" students. As the driver made a sudden stop, the coffee mug I was holding tipped over and spilled directly into my lap! Yes, hot coffee poured in a giant puddle right in the center of my khaki cargo shorts. It was painful and embarrassing, but that wasn't the worst part. The worst part was that I was about to lead a group of angry teenagers through team building activities for four hours.

We were almost to the school, and I had to make a decision – there was no way I could pretend this hadn't happened. My initial thought was that I should tell the kids that I was wearing a new fashion trend, but I quickly realized that that wouldn't work. So, when I arrived – I decided to own it.

"Good morning," I started. "I have to admit, I am having a rough morning. Not only am I out of coffee already, I also just spilled it all over my pants."

To my surprise, the kids just laughed and appreciated my honesty, and the day turned out to be really great.

Immediate failures demand an immediate response, and how you respond will determine how the immediate future will go. The point is that you can't simply sit in your failure and do nothing. Life is going to keep on going. Try to make the best of your failures when they happen to you.

### Failures When You've Tried Your Best

Sometimes your best actually isn't good enough, and you end up failing. When I was in high school, I tried out for the basketball team. I practiced and practiced and worked really hard. My dad and my brother were both really good at basketball, so I naturally wanted to be good at basketball, too. I literally poured my blood, sweat, and tears into the basketball team tryout, but at the end of the week, my name was on the cut list as one of four students who didn't make the team.

I had failed my family, and I had failed myself. This situation led me to make some realizations. I realized that I didn't really like playing basketball; I was only doing it because my dad and my brother had done it. So, I decided to do something completely original for my family and try out for the tennis team. I had always watched the tennis team on the tennis courts, and they always looked like they were having fun. In my freshman year of high school, I had never picked up a racket, and by my sophomore year I was on Varsity. Later on in life, I even became a tennis coach, and had the opportunity to be on the staff of a team that was in the top five in the state!

The thing is – when it came to basketball, I had tried my best. I had worked really hard. I had put in the time, effort, and focus, and I really wanted to succeed. And I still failed. Not everything you do is going to work. There will be times where you will try your best, put in all your effort, and still fail. Sometimes it takes a while to figure out how to cope with that kind of failure. And that's ok. Every situation is different. Every person will cope differently and be impacted differently – just make sure you don't bury your failure. At some point you will look at it and realize that you have learned something from it.

### Failures of Personal Character

When I was in college, my grandma called me on an autumn Saturday afternoon. Truthfully, she had called me a few times during the previous weeks, but I was always busy and didn't answer her calls. I actually was busy, too. I was part of a leadership team preparing to leave for a conference, and I also had a ton of school work to do. As I silenced the call, I promised myself that once I got back to school from the conference, I would sit down and write her a letter. I knew that she would like getting a letter in the mail, and I hoped that *that* effort would make up for the times I hadn't called her back.

A couple of days later, I sat down at my desk and got out an envelope and piece of paper. "Dear Grandma," I wrote on the top of the sheet. My phone rang again. This time it was my dad; this time I answered.

Through his broken voice, he told me that my grandma had died that morning. I looked at the words I had written on the page and knew that she would never read them, and I knew that I would never get to talk to her again.

As I carried her casket up the hill to her grave with my brother and cousins, I promised myself that I would make a better effort to talk to the people who are important to me.

I did a better job for a while, but the problem is that I am still busy. I still don't answer the phone calls. I still don't call my family members back when they leave me voicemails, and I still forget to answer text messages.

Since then, I have lost more family members and people who mean a lot to me. Every time, I am panged with disappointment and regret.

### The Choice to Grow

So, what have I learned? From these examples, I have learned that sometimes bad things happen that are out of our control. I have learned that hard work doesn't always pay off. And I have learned that I can be selfish, prideful, and inconsiderate.

Essentially, I am a human, and this is life.

I am still trying to learn lessons from my failures. For now, I think the main lesson that I have learned is that you can't focus on the bad. As I think about my life now, I know that I have so many blessings--more than I even realize.

While your failures impact you and those around you, they don't define you.

I will choose to believe that when bad things happen that are out of my control, I can do my best to make it better.

I will choose to believe that hard work does pay off. It just doesn't always pay off in the ways you think it will.

And I will not be defined by selfishness, pride, and inconsideration; my life isn't finished yet. I still have a lot of growing to do, and I will grow to be stronger and better than I am today.

I know I will keep on failing for the rest of my life, and that's ok. Failure is a part of life. Failure is necessary to be human. Accept it, embrace it, and live through it.

Finally, when you see someone else failing, take a moment to consider your own failures and be an encouragement.

Remember, struggle isn't failure, and failure isn't the end.



# Michael Milburn

## Kendrick Lamar

They don't just  
know the lyrics  
but uncurl into the music,  
sneakers flashing,  
expressions ecstatic  
in cutthroat combat  
to stomp hardest,  
rap fastest,  
the song crashing  
into English class,  
a roomful of worshippers  
writhing in the aisles,  
talking in tongues,  
and the words are yours.





## Recess Duty

The deck  
where I'm assigned to see  
that no one goes over  
onto the footpath below  
affords a prison guard's vantage  
of lower schoolers  
playing touch football,  
a patio where donuts are served,  
boys emerging with handfuls  
or mouthfuls.

\*

Along the rail,  
silver plaques  
honor donors  
to this building  
dedicated to my student,  
a quick teaser  
with a cracking voice  
who barely outlived puberty.

\*

Harry Shi strides by,  
his gait, mien, isolation,  
and point A to point B  
back to A fixation  
advertising autism,

though he's great  
with teacher questions,  
precise answers  
in robotic voice  
belying his witty  
self-deprecation.

\*

Two girls sit on a bench  
with books in their laps,  
legs crossed at the ankle,  
fifth graders who hurry out  
every day, even midwinter,  
to dig into their pages  
like a laborer's lunch,  
shed skins of their older selves  
who chat past, unnoticing.



# Ginny Boudreau

## The Joy of Nailing It

“Why do you get up so early in the morning to write? Wouldn’t you rather be sleeping?” It’s been almost ten years and I still picture Callie, a petite fourth grader, studying me with unnerving intensity. Her delicate brow furrowed, she was genuinely curious, and earnest as well. I remember taking a deep breath before answering this enthusiastic member of the creative writing group I ran during school lunch hour. A conscientious student who struggled mightily with many aspects of the curriculum, she had an instinctive gift for using beautiful, metaphoric language that almost took my breath away. Truthfully, she was the reason I’d started the club in the first place. I wanted to get my explanation right.

I must admit, during those years when I was teaching full time with young children at home, I too, often wondered why I made early morning creative time an absolute priority. I’d struggled to convey the motivation and felt mostly unsuccessful until the day I went searching for one thing but discovered another. This disconcerting experience happens to us all and it can be a disappointment or a wonderful, if unexpected, gift. For me, it was an epiphany that helped clarify for that young poet exactly why I felt so passionate about the writing process and its singular impact on my life.

It all started when I became interested in learning ways to help my learning-disabled students cope with academic stress. I attended a workshop on strategies for combating anxiety. The facilitator discussed the positive psychology concept of the flow state. “Flow” describes a mental zone where one is fully immersed in a feeling of energized concentration, full involvement, and satisfaction with the process of the activity. The implications for managing tension are significant for all populations: negative thought is far less likely to intrude if your mind is preoccupied with something you find enjoyable. The good news is that it’s entirely subjective and applies to any pleasurable endeavour demanding hyper-focus.

Each participant was asked to identify something capable of providing this sense of single-mindedness and deep relaxation. The range of responses was impressive and pretty well limitless. Not surprisingly, writing was the interest that immediately came to my mind. I shared this and when pushed, described it as both healthy and life-enhancing, an exercise that provides a sense of purpose and inner peace. Knowing there was a word to embrace the holistic experience gave credence to a process I’d previously defined only in mechanical terms. Until then, I’d not encountered an expression celebrating the

“other side,” that heady merging of mind body and soul that magically occurs in the writer when all facets are present and accounted for.

Discovering a name for this type of profound engagement was powerful for me. The session caused me to ponder the role of writing in my life, and that, in itself was strangely satisfying. I concluded this form of expression creates a force that celebrates the authentic person I am. It makes my heart sing and my brain thank me. I’d venture the practice serves as the one constant joy that both feeds and makes me hungry for more. It challenges and puzzles, it encourages digging deeper like nothing else does, and it’s this constant striving for clarity that is most addictive of all.

The trial of locating the perfect word to communicate a thought or idea that does not necessarily want to be tamed is somewhat like having an unfinished jigsaw puzzle set up on the table in the corner; you can’t wait to return to complete the elusive image, frustrating and downright painful though that exercise may be at times. You know the goal is attainable; all you need to do is align the disparate pieces to conjure something from nothing. It’s sort of like making magic, and as I explained to that group of children so long ago, it’s definitely why I write. That has not changed.

During the discussion that day, I encouraged students to come up with comparisons of an author’s final product (whether it was at the lowly sentence level or encompassed completion of a whole novel) to an animate object. One of the more memorable similes offered by that class of 8 to 10 year olds was: “The book is like an iceberg.” So true! Though, from the outside it appears to be serene and floating, there’s a massive, intricate foundation beneath the surface that totally belies the simplicity we observe on the water, or conversely, the page. It speaks to the hidden labyrinths within each of us, the infinite sense of wonder and possibility waiting to be shaped into something real.

The magnitude of learning we possess this continuous potential for creating deep personal growth is significant; that it can be done through the medium that speaks to our truest selves and accomplished on our own terms is nothing less than astonishing. Knowledge of this type is reassuring when we live in a world that’s constantly shifting beneath us. It’s been a comfort to my students who each “flow” in their individual and inimitable way, and it’s been a comfort to me, knowing I put into words something I’d fought to articulate for a long time.

I just ran into Callie a couple weeks ago. She’s busy working as a grocery store clerk and earning money for college tuition. Her eyes sparked when I asked if she still enjoyed writing. With a wink and a beam, she didn’t miss a beat. “I’m afloat and I love it!” I know exactly what she means. I’d also be remiss if I didn’t admit to the small frisson of pride that came with the realization I’d nailed it when answering her innocent question back in 2012.

# David M. Harris

## Writing for Me

“Writing for me is a way to write my thoughts on paper.”  
The student states a pure, unarguable truth.  
But what are those thoughts? What of their shaper?

I stand before the class and talk and cut a caper,  
Preaching writing to these flowers of our youth.  
Writing for me is a way to write my thoughts on paper.

The centers of their essays shift like vapor.  
I hunt through garbled phrases like a sleuth.  
What are those thoughts? What of their shaper?

They lumber through the language like a tapir  
Fleeing the awful predator’s tooth.  
“Writing for me is a way to write my thoughts on paper.”

From tangled sentences, the rare escaper,  
Its meaning strange, untamed, uncouth.  
What are these thoughts? What of their shaper?

In wild confusion, the language and its raper  
The words are wrong, but in them hides new truth.  
“Writing for me is a way to write my thoughts on paper.”  
But what are those thoughts? What of their shaper?

# Marjorie Dybec

## Perception: Conception

*"There is no certitude but in what the mind conceives." --Georges Braque*

It's mid-morning. Your stomach growls. By instinct, you elbow your way through the noisy, crowded hallways--out of the math wing, through the gauntlet of classrooms for Russian, French, Italian and Latin, holding your breath as you pass the cloud of cigarette-smoke billowing in from the open doors of the underclassman courtyard. Just a few shoves more and you turn left. Once you pass two open office doors, each containing a guidance counselor and their packs of noisy teenaged groupies, you can, at last, catch your breath in a long empty hallway. Your footfall echoes against the metal lockers. At the far distant end, distorted by perspective, are the bright blue doors of the large art studio. Clutching an armload of heavy books, you push open the mucky, double doors and enter a classroom you want to love, but don't.

You scuff across the yellowed, narrow-planked floors, staring downward, searching for patterns in the decades of splattered paint splatches. Sunbeams flood through large windows, skirting around the student drawings masking-taped to the glass. Angular shadows spill onto the floor. A tight crowd of wooden easels, messy and monstrous, stand packed against a side-wall. They groan uncooperatively as you and your fellow classmates drag them out, creating a loose circle around a pathetic still life arranged on a torn piece of fabric.

Back in the math lab, where you had been contentedly solving difficult problems just a few minutes earlier, your brainy friends are writing out proofs. Math is beautifully binary: either the proof works or it doesn't. A math teacher doesn't lean over and whisper, "that could be better." In the realm of the art studio, nothing is certain. The kid who only uses one dark pencil, whether the assignment is oil, watercolor, pastel or line drawing, is endlessly praised for his work. In your quest for correctness on your canvas, you strive for realism. But as you look at the drawings on the window, the most memorable, the ones that make you feel something, are warped, incomplete—not realistic. The riddle is real here.

You and *your* friends like precision. The kids who spend a lot of time in this studio fall into two categories: a few innately talented students, and the rest who are seeking an easy A. The former just need materials and time to become artists. You watch them with admiration and fascination. They are the first to be at their easels and the last to leave. They rarely speak to Miss

Bergstrom, the aging Swede who is the sole art teacher for your high school bursting with 10,000 students. After using your limited electives in Freshman and Sophomore year for typing, creative writing, and French literature, you finally have space in your advanced placement schedule for Drawing & Painting I. You missed Art and yearned to visually express yourself again. But from the start, this classroom has confounded you. Sadly, you are not part of the “club” who hang out here whenever they have a free period. Yet, these talented kids, interest you. If you could create a good painting, you are sure they would notice you.

The non-academic kids looking for easy As are completely unknown to you. You have never run into them in any other classroom. One girl has a name you hear on the morning loudspeaker when the Vice Principal lists off the kids who have to stay for detention. Until this art class, you had never seen her face. The girls are disruptive and spend a lot of time taking the hallpass to the girls room, where they smoke and gossip, a hall and a half away. The boys look manly and several have the starts of mustaches. They wear Levis and open flannel shirts, over colored tee shirts. They aren’t interested in painting or drawing. They aren’t interested in studying any subject. They want to be out in their cars or having a beer with friends. Here in this prison of a high school, these kids use the art studio as their low-impact hide-out.

Miss Bergstrom lives a couple of towns away, in a condo. She is the only person you know who lives in a condo. She wears her dyed blond hair in a severe blunt bob, an unusual style for the late 1970s. She is slim and tall and approaching 60. She dresses like a student. She has a favorite pair of tall leather over-knee boots which she pairs with a variety of mini-skirts and snug tank tops or sweaters, depending on the season. Despite her occasional shrill attempts at order, she wants to be everybody’s best friend. She and her fragrance are too cloying. You learn to associate creativity with the strong scents of this art studio: a mix of gesso, turpentine, student armpits, the fresh flowers, unbaked clay, and Ms Bergstrom’s floral perfume. Always after, when these notes tickle your nose, the sublime smell of creativity will feel monumental. Often, you will crave it.

Unlike any of the Easy-A students, you grab a dirty, cotton apron off a wall hook and throw it over your head. You take your place on a stool in front of your easel and arrange your paints and thinner beside you. Your palette is balanced on your left thumb. You are poised to begin.

You hear a strange, plaintive moan to your right, away from the painting circle. You turn your head and see a boy, really a young man, sitting in a hardback chair. This room doesn’t have many chairs, which makes the one he is in, notable. You notice Miss Bergstrom’s desk chair is missing. You suppose he is sitting in *her* chair. His eyes are mostly closed but he is not sleeping. You resume painting.



You've been working on this still life for what feels like months, although it's probably only been the span of two or three classes. Each time you return, your easel isn't exactly in the same spot, the sunlight has changed, your paint consistency is different, and the items in the still life: a watering can, a couple of lilies in a glass soda bottle, a lemon, and a small brass bell, are slightly amiss. The lilies wither and occasionally are replaced. Frequently, fellow students will move the items about so they don't need to include the bell in their view, or simply because they think it's fun to mess with the class. You look at the tableau of objects, and sigh. The shadow you created last class no longer exists. The water in the glass soda bottle is now green. You wonder if the lemon has shriveled. The talented artists are busy at work. You take your cues from them.

Miss Bergstrom is more absent than usual today. Since her chair is missing, she isn't sitting at her desk chatting privately with one or two of her favorites. Nor is she wandering around the room smooshing paint on canvases with her usual casual flamboyance. Instead, she is seated on a stool, facing the young man in the chair. She is humming and this makes him hum too, although his is more of a buzz than a hum. He rocks left and right, and sometimes with enough force to tip the chair onto two legs. She looks towards us and sees several of us have stopped painting and are watching her. "Carry on," she says while rising and placing a steadying hand on the back of the young man's chair. This does the trick.

She strolls over to your circle where most are actively painting and a half-dozen are staring through the windows at the parking lot, fiddling with keys or a paintbrush. Miss Bergstrom notices the green water—which you have just finished painting. She snatches up the bottle, carries it to the slop sink, dumps and rinses the bottle and replaces the two lilies into crystal-clear water. You wonder if this was an act of cruelty—a sabotage intended just for you. Several students groan about the fresh water and she makes a meaningless apology. The commotion causes the young man to stand up and attempt to speak.

His words are not discernible, but his inflection indicates a question. Miss Bergstrom tells us the young man's name is Nathan, a student who graduated the previous year who stopped by to visit. He's having "a bad day" and she invited him to stay for as long as he needed to "clear his head." You expect Miss Bergstrom to command him to settle down but instead she returns to him and takes his hands and coaxes him back down into the chair. Whispers float among the painters. You find it difficult to focus on the still life.

It is collectively determined that he is not high on pot or alcohol. But none of you, even the girl with a penchant for detention, have experience with drugs harder than those. Stew, the brawniest kid in the class stands up with his

hand raised to ask a question. “Miss Bergstrom, what’s going on with Nathan, there ? What’s he on ?”

Nathan is now waving his hands and making disturbing sputtering sounds.

Miss Berstrom returns to your painting circle and sitting conspiratorially with the students on a stool, and says softly, “he’s tripping.” She explains that Nathan had been delivered to her earlier by a friend who didn’t know what to do with him. She had tripped herself as a young woman and knew what he needed. So far, he was having a good trip and she intends to keep it that way. She doesn’t want him to get in trouble with his parents, the school, the *police*.

You only vaguely know what she is talking about. It only vaguely makes sense. You try and process the words; fill in the rest with some sort of logic. You stare at the still life and the forms come into shape. You work on the lemon and add the tiny speckles of brown and grey that make it look four-days old.

Miss Bergstrom turns on a radio and plays some soft music near Nathan. He’s a little sweaty but is soothed by the music.

You think about the chaos in this classroom. Its awkward discomfort. It’s always there. Nothing ever adds up.

You work the lilies, capturing their breezy petals and rich colors. You choose to leave the brackish water. As the minute hand on the big round clock slowly lurches forward, Nathan mumbles, sighs, moans, sways, and knocks his head against his palms.

You *could* find another adult. The guidance counselors are not far off. You *could* ask Nathan what he wants—what he needs. You *could* speak up boldly and confront Miss Bergstrom, for you are fairly sure, hers is not the correct answer. But you do none of it. You focus. You look deep into the watering can and the ragged linen and the brass bell. You notice the fly on the lemon and paint him, too.

In the absence of absolutes, you do the best you can.



# Annette Gagliardi

## What's Left But The Verbs?

People are in a hurry, they want to leave out so many important words.  
Paradigms of syntax without meaning,  
language denuded, denied the right  
to be fully-fledged;  
a contemplation of syllables—  
parables that lack nouns, adjectives,  
prepositions. Articles dance and mime  
the written word into actuality.

What is the plural of the prime (*time*)-property  
of language? Its nudity takes refuge  
in the contemplation of syllables.  
(*If you undress language, you've only got ABC's*)  
We spill them out;  
when we speak in written word,  
using the complete repertoire that gyrates  
and pirouettes in the blank lines  
waiting,

then sweep the left-overs up  
and out into the universe,  
to be imbibed by unsuspecting  
audiences who glance sideways  
as they try to comprehend sentences.  
language is a social construct - conjugated?  
we talk while (by) leaving out so many  
categories of words: no more articles, no prepositions!  
Nouns used as

verbs—so begone verbs.

Can it be true that only English nouns can be  
verbed—becoming actions?     *But some are more resistant  
than others.*

Adjectives and adverbs describe  
   occurrences without forming  
the main part of a predicate—only  
a clause lacking movement.



# Sunayna Pal

## Big Learning from Small

I used to volunteer at an NGO when I was 18 years old. Though the organization was called "Touching Lives," everyone called it the shelter. The aim was to help kids whose families had left homes in rural south India and were trying to survive in Mumbai, India. They were low-income families and stayed near rail lines and attended free government schools. Kids were about to go to the 8th grade and didn't know to make a sentence in English. How would they pass their board exams? This was one problem we tried to solve. I taught mathematics to eighth-grade kids. They were regular and listened to every word I said.

For me, it had been about 5 weeks of volunteering every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. All my previous nervousness about volunteering had vanished. I had witnessed the thirst to learn and excel, evident in the students and it made me feel great.

I taught mathematics to eighth-grade kids. They were regular and listened to every word I said. I had started calling them "my kids" in front of my mom with a sense of pride and a flavor of achievement.

I had become comfortable with the teaching and correcting as I could be until the Universe decided to shake me up a little. On Monday evening, after the session, the head of the institution, Mita asked me, "Would it be possible to come tomorrow?"

"Sure, I can. Wassup though?"

"There are a few kids in the fourth grade who need help with some math problems. Their current teacher isn't regular, and they are suffering."

"Oh! Sure, say no more. I'll come. Same time?"

"Yes! Thanks."

I reached the shelter as usual and wasn't sure where to go as I found new teachers among many unfamiliar faces. I removed my shoes and tried to find Mita. She was outside her office, talking to a young girl but discontinued as she saw me approach.

"Hello, I'm here." I smiled, stating the obvious.

She smiled too and said, "Thank you for coming, I have some bad news though."

"Oh!"

"Since the teacher is irregular, the kids are a little irregular too."

"Only one kid showed up today—Sara", she said pointing to the girl standing next to her. Sara's eyes met mine, and then she looked at the floor and I looked at Mita who smiled nervously.

"Great, where do I sit."

With a sigh of relief, Mita told Sara to take me to her corner, and she did.

After settling down, she looked at me and said, "Can you explain this problem of Profit and Loss?" Pointing her thin index finger to the question, her forehead slightly tensed and eyes questioning my abilities.

"You mean I should explain the solution, not the problem," I replied, half-joking, half-serious.

She looked at me with a calm, approving smile, and she inched closer to me as if she trusted me more and I had passed her little but wise test.

"Why don't you explain it to me till the part you know?"

She seemed excited and readily started. Where she stopped, I started. She was attentive throughout and seemed to grasp everything.

I gave her similar problems like that. She solved them and smiled a little wider every time her solution was correct or maybe I imagined this. She turned the page to profit percentage and asked me, "Shall I explain this solution of the profit percentage till the part I know."

"Yes!" came out of me, louder than was necessary.

She ended up explaining the entire problem and was amazed at herself.

"Good!" I squealed, and she gave a slight chuckle.

Her once questioning and worried eyes now seemed still, as she told me that there were no more doubts. She gave me a soothing smile that felt like a tight hug that could glue all the broken pieces inside me.

We had about a few minutes to go and I looked at her more carefully now. She was in clean and tidy clothes with neatly tied plaits, unlike other kids, and had an unmistakable calmness about her. She was well-mannered, intelligent and if I hadn't known better, I would have assumed she came from a middle-class family.

As I saw her work on the math problem, I felt worried about her future. Will her parents let her study further? I hope they don't get her married to some clerk somewhere. I hope she doesn't fall in love with some useless chap in her area who are only good with words but never with work. If she graduates, where will she go after her graduation? Which company will give her a job?

The finishing bell broke my train of thought, and Mita announced a kid's birthday. We were all to sing happy birthday. She had arranged for some chocolates and the kid, bubbling with joy, did his best to control his excitement and stand in one place as we sang. Each kid got two delightful treats.

Most volunteers denied the chocolate, fearing that it wouldn't be sufficient for the kids. I wouldn't be one of them. Though I wasn't the youngest among the volunteers, I wasn't ashamed about eating chocolates. I was looking forward to the sweet melting treats after a full day's work and had already decided to eat one here, and the second one after my dinner.

Eying the kid's bag of chocolates, I prayed for the chocolates to last till he reached me. Why did Sara have to choose this corner in the end?

Sara had packed her bags and was looking at me intently. Her eyes still calm but had one question. I answered her with the truth and a giggle, "I really love chocolates." She gave me an even bigger and understanding smile. She hung her bag on her delicate shoulders, waiting for the treat, so she too could go back home.

The kid finally reached us, and my heart fluttered. He came near and gave Sara his last chocolate.

He looked at me and gave me a toothy smile instead of a chocolate. I wished him a happy birthday and smiled back, and the look on my face should have won me an Oscar because I didn't let the birthday boy or anyone else see my disappointment.

I looked down, took my phone, and started packing my folder. Sara looked at my brave face and I think she saw right through me. I looked up as I was about to get up and found her looking at my fake smile.

I lied, "It's OK. I should probably stay away from chocolates."

What this 10-year-old could do shakes me even now. She got up and handed me her only chocolate and her same soothing smile. With this, she turned and left the room. She didn't even wait for thanks or any formality of me denying it.

Too stunned to tell her anything, I watched her go. Giving away the chocolate was as easy and compassionate as a rich businessman giving a coin to the beggar on the street. I thought chocolates were a luxury to these kids, and they treasured it as precious gems. I could never imagine sharing my chocolate with anyone. Sara was kind enough to share her chocolate with me and wanted nothing in return. Not even mandatory thanks. In about 20 seconds I felt touched by a love that only angels can possess.

In a heartbeat, she taught me to share and showed me that kindness in the heart can make even the gray skies dance exuberantly with a rainbow. The world thrives on kindness. She taught me to be the first one to be kind. We can all be good with people good to us. That's easy. What matters is to be kind and loving to all. May he be your loved one, or may he be some roadside stranger. Even if you know that this relationship or brief meeting will not last, one can be kind, it doesn't hurt. Though we crib and whine about life, kindness is hidden behind this veil and in the most unexpected and random moments, unleashes itself like fireworks against a starless night.



Kindness didn't mean donating some money to anonymous people. It meant giving whatever the other person needed.

I hadn't been able to digest the chocolate and kept thinking about my deed. Was I a good person or did I read quotes on kindness, tell everyone to be kind, and think I was kind too? It is like we tell our kids not to waste water, list down the ways to save water but behind closed doors, take a shower rather than using a bucket.

Sara didn't visit the shelter on Wednesdays, but while walking to the gate, my eyes still searched for her amidst the students who had assembled. I obviously couldn't find her. When my regular kids encircled me, my mind looked at the corner where Sara and I had had our brief encounter.

After class, Mita didn't think I needed to come on Thursday as the other teacher had confirmed. This went on for a few weeks until one Monday, Mita asked me if I could come to teach on Tuesday. I agreed instantly. I just wanted to meet Sara again and be in her presence. I had to tell her thanks.

Sleep came in short bursts on Monday night as I was excited to see Sara. I reached the shelter earlier than required and found Mita in her office. She requested me to sit where Sara had shown me, and she would send the kids there if they didn't find me.

Kids walked in slowly and took their respective corners, waiting for their teachers to come as I waited for Sara. I wanted to ask them if Sara had taught them something too when I saw a girl walk in. I thought it was Sara but... a few minutes later, two boys came to me and asked me, "Will you be teaching maths?"

I nodded, and they plopped themselves around me, opened their bags, and removed their textbook. Is Sara coming? I asked with as much control as I could.

"She hasn't come in a few days."

After class, I asked Mita about Sara, and she told me she was unsure of Sara herself. It was normal for kids to come and go as they pleased or as their parents allowed.

I haven't seen Sara after that day but this memory is with me always. Other kids have come and gone, and have taught me other valuable lessons, but Sara's essence is still with me.

I think about that day often. Would I have been able to meet her eyes? I will never get the answers. I know that out of all the people I have known, I will recognize her for sure. I wonder what she felt and where she is now. I pray and hope that she must be in some good job by now.

I try to be kind and share a lot more than I did. My family thinks I had joined as a teacher to teach and help the society. Little do they know that kids half my age taught me about kindness and sharing and accepting and loving and living.

# Michael Clark

## 2020: A Teacher's Journey

It's currently ninth period. I'm in the copy room making copies for my cooperating teacher. I'm exhausted and reflecting on all that I've learned in the two months that I have been student teaching. I have exactly one week left until I finish this placement and move on to my second placement in a high school. My mind is bouncing around with thoughts about my lessons for the next week, what I'm going to do over the weekend, and what part of my dreaded edTPA I have to work on next.

There's an announcement over the loudspeaker. It has to do with all of the talk that's been circulating around the building. "Due to the rise in Covid-19 cases, the county has decided to shut down all schools to reduce the spread of this virus. We hope to open back up in two weeks with a proper plan to ensure the safety of our students and staff. Thank you for your understanding and have a great weekend," the school principal announced.

This ninth period announcement meant that my time in this district had officially come to a close. I wouldn't get a chance to say goodbye to 90% of my first batch of students. The first bonds I had formed in my teaching career. The first group that taught me how sentimental of an educator I am. Even the students in the 9th Period Study Hall wouldn't get a true goodbye; everyone was too busy discussing the announcement and if memory serves, the students were more excited than worried.

New York State requires us to have an exact number of hours logged in order to get our teaching certification. They drilled this so hard into us that my professors stressed the importance of attendance and said to avoid planning or taking vacations, and certainly no personal days. Now, I was going to miss two weeks. I was freaking out.

Well, that wasn't the end of my problems. A few days later the Governor mandated schools to close for another two weeks, which eventually extended to the rest of the school year. As we entered the lockdown, my certification and graduation were at risk. Thankfully, alternatives were made to allow us to get hours despite the unexpected circumstances.

Fast-forward to the Fall of 2020.

I have been accepted into my graduate program and schools have opened back up. I was told by many people that Covid-19 would extinguish the teaching field - many older teachers had to adapt to virtual learning and struggled greatly. Surely, some would be retiring early, right?

I missed working in a classroom despite it being the hardest thing I had ever done. I felt robbed; I had never even gotten a second placement. I was missing so much hands-on experience. So, I decided to apply for a few teaching jobs. I eventually got my first position as a Leave Replacement. This was back by my hometown, so it was decided that I would move back in with my Mom instead of renewing my apartment's lease.

Had I really thought student teaching was that hard? I mean, I had to adjust to a schedule where I was teaching seven different classes (three different preps) while working (because student teaching is unpaid) and study consistently for certification exams. I had never been that stressed before - until I got this job. Now, I was doing the work of a full-time teacher while also being matriculated in a rigorous graduate program for the first time. If teaching without a professional teacher there to help out wasn't difficult enough, I was also teaching during the chaos of Covid-19.

My career started with hybrid teaching which was coded by colors. One group was "Purple Team" and the other was "Gold Team." My first time teaching in a high school setting was filled with challenges since I now had two alternating sets of students, one of which was masked in the classroom with me while the other was attending class virtually online. Any teacher who taught during this rare era will surely have plenty of "fun" stories to share. By "fun" I actually mean nightmares, but there were plenty of fun and memorable times as well.

Working with this model, I had to keep attendance for students online and in the classroom. Students would frequently sleep late or fall asleep during class and forget to switch from one class to another. In my first week I had a student damn near curse me out for accidentally marking them absent. I had to teach 5 lessons to 5 different classes a week operating under the assumption that all of the students at home could hear me properly, understand me, and of course, were paying proper attention. Can you imagine a world where a 9th grade or 12th grade student wouldn't pay attention to a class while in the comforts of their own homes? As someone who struggled with ADD and did poorly in school myself, I frequently told the students how proud I was of them. I would have been there with the worst of my students, skipping class, fooling around, or playing video games the entire time. I was never for once ignorant of the fact of how hard it was for them. Even low expectations were a lot to ask of high school students, to join up to 8 classes in a day, do remote work, avoid disrupting the class when most of their time with their peers was in the classroom, and so on.

I had several students that were fully remote. I had nothing but the picture on their name to know them by and a profile picture if they chose to upload one (it was usually anime characters and rarely pictures of them, anyway).

This went on for three months. I suppose I did a good enough job, because the English Coordinator at my school offered me another leave replacement that would start in a few months and go into the end of the school year. I sometimes had mental breakdowns from stressful deadlines, rigorous work, and piles of papers to grade. Occasionally, I was so exhausted that I had to pull-over on my drive home and take a nap in my car. I still had an amazing time working with my first *real* batch of students. I honestly wish I had the space to speak to all of the amazing kids that I had the pleasure of working with.

When I returned to this school, I was stoked to be working with the same exact grades. I had now taught four classes of 9th Grade Regents; four classes of Freshman Seminar; five classes of seniors in 12th Grade Regents and AP Lit. I forged incredible bonds with so many of the students in both of these grades. I felt extremely passionate about the 200+ kids I had the pleasure of teaching in my first year of teaching.

I happily chaperoned Senior Prom and attended their graduation. In this part of the year, things were really looking up. The mask mandate had been revoked and approximately 95% of the students were back in the building. It was a rejuvenating experience to see the once ghostly hallways filled with loads of students. We even had some students without masks now. (I will not look back fondly on the secondary duty assigned to teachers: The Mask Police. If I don't think about it, it's almost like this never even happened at all.)

During the first leave replacement, I was mostly isolated and working as a lone-wolf. I rarely spoke to my colleagues. When I returned, I began to get to know my colleagues even better and grew to consider most of them great people and a few of them as good friends.

All of these events culminated in one of the largest disappointments of my life. By the end of the year, a teacher in the English department had retired and a new position had opened. I happily interviewed for it, thinking I had a strong advantage. I had an incredible relationship with many of my students; I had kept my novice mistakes few and far in between and worked well with my colleagues. Finally, I thought if anything, the fact that I did all of this during the Covid-19 pandemic would prove my flexibility and commitment.

Sadly, I didn't even make it past the first screening interview. I was devastated. Only much later would I mature enough to realize that they weren't exactly wrong to pass me up in my inexperience; but, it still hurt. I thought that I had proved myself enough and could be a worthy investment. I spent the entire summer applying for teaching jobs. I was now obsessed with getting back into a classroom and getting a job where I didn't have to give it up at the end of the year. One where my name might be on the door and I could see students grow from immature 9th graders to successful and mature seniors graduating and moving on.

I returned to the district as a substitute teacher, but only because all of the 9th graders I had worked with and the friends I had made. I honestly missed my past students a lot. I'm not sure if I will ever have a more positive experience in a school's hallways filled with talkative students, or faces that would light up when I would speak to them.

It wasn't long until I had a successful interview for a teaching position at a new school. It wasn't 100% what I had wanted. It was a part-time English Position in a county that I knew relatively little about. I was unsure, calculating if I could survive on the pay and deciding it would be valuable experience and it could lead to something else.

I'm sorry to say that the situation turned out much like my prior school - only this time even worse. I had my first teacher salary, even became a part of the union, so now I was able to acquire extracurricular positions and chaperone more events. I came into a position that three other teachers had already left. I was dealing with a somewhat rough male-dominated crowd in my three classes. I think mostly, the students were just beginning to socialize and make-up for lost time. I promised the students I wouldn't leave and I didn't. Like before, I forged amazing bonds and made amazing progress with students that needed help and support. At the end of the school year, the part-time position was upgraded to a full-time position. I showed up to every event I could, helped out whenever I was needed, substituted for as many classes as they would let me, and in the end they still opted to forego me during the interview process.

It felt like *Deja vu* of the worst kind. When I was informed by the principal that I didn't get the position, I'll never forget breaking down in his office. I don't know if I will ever feel as embarrassed as I did that day ever again in my life, but I couldn't help it. I wanted it so bad. I'd have to say goodbye to so many students and colleagues once again. I had to forfeit my position as a club advisor and class advisor. At least this time, parents actually fought for me to stay. They wrote letters to the superintendent and complained to the principal. I was so very touched in a way I can hardly explain. They pushed for me to get an award, which was "Best Teacher" given out by a local politician. Sadly, it still wasn't enough.

I am still so grateful for all of these experiences and all that they have taught me. I learned many lessons, such as the general mix of thanklessness of the teaching career. But at the same time, I had received a ton of genuine gratitude from students, parents, and colleagues. Sometimes that has to be enough. I truly wish to convey that I put up with all of it for a singular reason: I love what I do and I refuse to give up on it.

I have kept nearly everything students have given me: cards, letters, emails, drawings. It means the world to me and always serves as a reminder to stay strong and keep pushing forward. I will treasure the time we did virtual

Shakespeare Slams and a “talent show” video as a culminating experience for Freshman Seminar. I can never be grateful for COVID-19 and the lives it stole or the lasting impact it has had on all of the generations who lived and worked through it, but I can be grateful for all of the highs and lows I had, and finally, all of the students and colleagues I met along the way who helped me grow to be a better teacher. If you’re reading this: Thank you, forever.



# Robinne Weiss

## Introduction to Poetry

When I say you'll write poetry,  
You want to write prose,  
But it's not as bad as you think,  
For poetry is simply prose  
With metre and rhythm to link  
The thoughts with the sounds  
When they're spoken aloud,  
Because this is where writing began—  
With stories recited 'round campfires at night  
Using rhythm and rhyme so we can  
Remember our history, whakapapa too,  
Remember what's wrong and what's right,  
Give thanks to our gods,  
Record all our deeds,  
And remember the info that might  
Come in handy someday when we look to the past  
And wonder just where we went wrong.

And that music?  
You know, that you play on your phone  
And dance to on Saturday night?  
It's nothing but poetry set to a tune.  
So, while you all grumble and fight,  
Saying poems are musty, for old troglodytes,  
I know poetry's more, when we stop to look close  
Than a sappy old card for your mum.  
It's our history, our music,  
Ancestry and more.  
Doesn't have to be silly or dumb.

## Bryant Smith

### Privilege - A Poetry Manifesto

My motivation for becoming a poet is somewhat selfish. I'm privileged in many ways, and one of those ways is that I work in close proximity to a number of skilled and accomplished poets in my job as a Spanish professor at a small public university in South Louisiana. Two doors down from me is the office of an oft-published poet who not only holds an MFA from a prestigious school, but also teaches the subject several times a week to undergrads. This colleague, along with one of our university librarians and a couple of English professors, who also have impressive backgrounds in the poetic arts, were meeting bi-weekly at a restaurant near campus to have drinks and share poetry. I was enticed by the idea of drinks and some collegial conversation. "Sure," I said, "but I'm not writing anything." Fortunately, they allowed me to attend anyway.

I approached the poetry happy hours skeptically, like a language teacher and linguist, as a non-poet. I was able to say what I liked or didn't like about a poem based largely on the words used and how it made me feel. Was a specific turn of phrase clever? Did a certain combination of words inspire an image in my mind? Did something seem hokey or cliched? My colleagues urged me to attempt my own poetry, but I was hesitant. Where would I begin? I knew so little about the art. Did poems have to rhyme? I started by asking my colleagues, some of whom didn't attend the meetups but had some poetic backgrounds as a part of their English graduate training. So, what *is* a poem? "Spontaneous overflow of powerful emotion," replied my friend. "Wow! That's so good," I responded. "I stole it from Wordsworth," she admitted. Still impressive, if you ask me. I started to think of poetry as meaningful language - as something that evokes feeling. I imagine it as if you boiled down a book as if it were a pot of water filled with meat, bones, and vegetables. After some time, all that would remain would be the essence of language - all the original ingredients concentrated to their most potent form. I was intrigued.

My next selfish act came when I was registering for spring courses at the university where I am taking online graduate English classes. Though I already have a BA and MA in Spanish and a PhD in Linguistics, I want to increase my knowledge of English studies, particularly writing and rhetoric, and I thought I'd capitalize on my reduced tuition as a faculty member and enroll in a graduate program. I've pushed myself to take classes that are out of my comfort zone. With my linguistics background, courses related to that disci-



pline are too much of a low-hanging fruit; I want new experiences and knowledge. Admittedly, when I saw “Creative Writing Workshop - Poetry,” I was initially intrigued because it seemed like less work than, let’s say, Composition Theory or a literature class that would undoubtedly include a final term paper. “What the hell,” I thought, “and I can get feedback from my group.”

At the time of writing this manifesto, I’m still a very young poet. I have roughly ten poems under my belt, some better than others. I’ve received and given feedback, and I’ve tried to use the commentary of my peers, both physical and virtual, to improve my work. Though I’m still very much in the process of learning how to write poetry, here’s what I can say about the topic now:

1. Write about your life and what you know - however mundane it may be. No one knows your life better than you. Use your expertise to show readers about yourself and your experiences and to make them feel something you’ve experienced. It can be fun to write from the point of view of someone or something different from yourself, but I think the best poetry comes from personal experience.
2. Be in the moment. I find my best poems are ones where I went with the first idea that came to me and I wrote without looking back. Now, many of my poems have benefited from feedback and revision, but I try not to edit too much while working. I try to let the poetic spirit move me in the moment and revise later. Don’t think an idea to death; run with it. If it’s bad, throw it out later, but see the idea through. You can defeat yourself before you start if you try to have your last line in place before you have your first.
3. Work with constraints. This approach doesn’t work for everyone, but it does for me. The majority of the poetry assignments for my course involved a task, such as writing a litany, a pantoum, or an aubade. If I had been asked to write a poem about anything, I probably would have struggled with the endless possibilities. By having to fulfill a challenge, I was able to push myself, focus my efforts, and produce a poem that fulfilled the requirement.

I hope that I'll continue to write poetry when the course concludes. If nothing else, I'll continue to read it, have a better understanding of it, and a greater appreciation for it. I encourage all poets, those new to it like me or those who have dabbled in it for some time, to embrace your own privilege and use it to create poetry. This might be a wealth of knowledge or experiences due to personal challenges, triumphs, or tragedies. This might be access to a talented group of individuals who are willing to give feedback and criticism on your work. Your privilege might be as simple as having two eyes to see the world around you and pen and paper to record what you observe and how it makes you feel. Use what you have to make others feel. That, to me, is the goal of poetry.



# Noreen Wilson

## Writing

Inviting  
Another's heart  
Into  
Another world  
Mackintosh laser-printed expressions  
Sharpie markers whisk across a page  
Endlessly creating  
Perpetually planning  
Words of art  
Freeing us  
Changing us  
Pulling us  
Into an author's creation

# Ana Reisens

## Etiquette for the Composition of Poetry

### 1. Don't stroke

kittens, puppies, pets (unless dead)  
or kiss  
smooth, loving lips (with tender bliss)  
softly/slowly/gently/hurriedly/adverbly;

### 2. Don't *get* it:

get literal, get over, get abstract –  
as a matter of fact, just stay away from  
get/this/that/these/fixed phrases/  
fixing/things/hearts/mistakes/  
and taming lions in circuses of cliché;

### 3. The passive voice

shall not be abused,  
nor any words such as  
*hence, shall, or nor* be used;

### 4. Don't describe

his *sky-blue* pupils,  
OVERCAPITALIZE,  
Underline,  
isolate  
exclaim!!!

### 5. Don't lose your scruples

in blind pursuit  
of over-rhyming lines,  
or curse into  
the God-damned  
shit-streaked  
darkness of night;

6. Don't cheat, start  
with the *beep* of an alarm,  
wander mazes of tenses that will change  
where you switched speakers  
and had finished  
as if it all were all a dream;

7. And don't ever  
ever  
follow the rules.



# Fiona M. Jones

## 11 Drabbles on Writing

### Amazing Authors

At the end of the year Carol had to nominate two members of her class for the school's agonizingly alliterated Amazing Author Awards.

She chose Stephanie Rose's action story, "Super Shot," and Kenny James's imaginative poem, "The Flower Elves." Both names appeared in the school newsletter, along with their literary efforts.

Now Carol was well accustomed to parents accosting her to point out typos, wrong dates and punctuation errors on the newsletter. Several now did so. But this time she stood her ground. Yes, a little girl had written a gun story, and yes, a boy had written a poem.

### Ambition

It was Getting-To-Know-You time in Miss Carrigan's class: names... hobbies... pets... ambitions...

"I'm going to be a famous footballer," said six students.

"A reality TV star," said eight more.

"I'm gonna be a writer and get rich," said ten others.

"Well!" said Miss Carrigan brightly. "With so many budding authors in our English class, I'm sure I'll see high motivation. Won't I?"

Shoulders shrugged.

Faces twitched disagreement.

"Don't you think that if—"

"It don't matter," one student explained. "You don't need English, you just like write whatever stuff and then put it through the grammar app."

### Yon Silv'ry Moon

(First Published by The Drabble, 2021.)

"Look," said the judge. "You can't just assault someone for writing 'thee' and 'thou'."

"But he did it WRONG," the defendant insisted. "And he said azure and stuff. I HAD to push him away."

"A poem can't harm—"

"Just read it, please, your honour."

The judge gulped.

His eyes rolled in different directions.

He struggled to breathe.

"Case dismissed," he said hoarsely. "Let the defendant go. Clearly this was reasonable self-defense." He dropped the paper and wiped his hands.

"Thee," said the poem, crumpled but unabashed, "art the yon silv'ry moon, Whom scaleth the azure stare-case of nights room."

### How to Write Nature Poems

Hannah wrote stuff about nature. Not poetry exactly. Just stuff.

She'd walk through rain and ask what the rain was doing. She would climb hills and wonder why the heather chose that place to live. She'd smell the chemical distress of wind-ripped leaves or sense the joy of insects riding air.

"Well, you can always improve," said her family, encouragingly. "Look, a nice workshop: 'How to Write Nature Poems.'"

It began easily enough... *Look out of a window. Focus on a flower or a tree. Describe the object, analyse your feelings.*

Hannah tried the window thing, but she felt nothing.

### The Easy Option

"All this grammar stuff," Jill complained. "Pretty near puts you off of being a writer. I think I'll settle with doing poetry. You don't need grammar for poetry."

Her friends nodded wisely. "That's true. You don't even have to make it rhyme these days."

"Oh, I can make it rhyme," Jill assured them. "I've bought The Poetical Rhyming Dictionary and it's really helpful! Look!"

She waved her latest composition.

"I feel so much," it claimed, "emotions and such. They fill my heart, they inspire my Art."

Her friends nodded again. "So talented," they agreed. "You'll be famous in no time."

### Self-Helper

"So," said the interviewer, "you're the author of these self-help books? How many have you written?"

"Oh, literally millions," said Angus.

"And what advice do you give?"

"Well, the usual stuff, be inspired, give 110%, world's your oyster."

"Can you give examples of how this has helped your readers?"

"Yeah, well, proof's in the pudding, case in point, works for me, I'm making a packet."

"Thank you so much for sharing your successes with us today," said the interviewer. "It's nice to know that if ever you meet any life challenges yourself, you'll have your own books to help you."

### Maddelynn's Poems

"If you really loved me," Maddelynn said tearfully, "you'd read my poems."

"Awww..." Dennis put an arm round her. "Course I love you. I'm just not into poetry."

"But that's not TRUE," Maddelynn cried, pushing him away. "You've got three whole BOOKS of poems published!"

"Oops. Can't keep a secret from you, can I? How'd you find out?"

"It doesn't matter. Just read my poems and tell me honestly what you think."

Dennis turned pale. He had already seen some of her work, and he knew he wasn't a good enough liar. Whatever he did now, this relationship was over.

### Critique

Silence fell as Kendall finished his reading.

"Well?" he said. "Thoughts?"

The newest member of the group put up a tentative hand.

"Amy?"

"I wondered," Amy began... "I mean it felt like the guy was always having ideas and doing things, and the women just agreed."

"You're saying they should have disagreed?"

"No," said Amy. "I just... And they all seemed to be tall and blonde and—"

Kendall looked her up and down. "I should have made more... short, flat-chested brunettes?"

"No—"

"Maybe you shouldn't let your, er, personal insecurities get in the way of your literary judgment?"

### A Much Better Writer



"I didn't really like it," Marni admitted. "You have to read so careful if you want to know who's good and who's a baddy."

"Well, but that's the fun of a mystery novel," Emma argued—"reading carefully, figuring it out."

"The Cardall Mysteries are a lot nicer," said Marni. "He lets you know. Like if a girl's got blonde hair and blue eyes, you know she's going to get a happy ending. Or if someone's got a squint eye or a missing finger, you know he's secretly a baddy. That sort of thing. Ron Cardall is a much better writer!"

### Hunny Bunny Makes some Money

"I'm an author," said Mavis. "The Hunny Bunny series. Haven't you heard of them? Bestsellers. I've got some copies right here in my bag. 'Lessons for Life, centered on the moral dilemmas of an adorable pink rabbit.' Let me sign them for you. That'll be £79."

"Thanks—but we—"

"Not at all," said Mavis firmly. "Just what your children need, caring parents, you'll know the value, quality reading material. A cheque will be fine. Thank you."

"No wonder she's a bestseller," Jane whispered as they opened their purchase.

"What? Are they good?"

"No... ugh, they're awful. But her sales technique!"

### A Patient Man

Connor was a patient man. His wife wrote novels. He read and praised each one of them, and she never once saw him yawn.

Connor even agreed to copy-edit her writings and help with her punctuation. During nearly four decades of marriage he deleted an estimated 8000 exclamation points and added 7000 full stops, 5000 apostrophes, 9000 commas and 12 semicolons.

All this work was not without reward. When Connor finally departed this life, his widow honored him with a marble monument in the shape of a book. The inscription read, "Rest in peace from your wife of 39 years."

## Kids Write

My daughter's three children attend an elementary school that, in collaboration with a local, independent bookstore, brings in published authors to read to the children, answer their questions, and sell books to their parents. I'd love to be a fly on the wall.

I'm not sure what the kindergarteners are writing, but I know the second graders are expected to write fictional stories and nonfiction pieces. I'm intrigued about how their desire to write takes root and what their processes look like.

The weekend before Thanksgiving, my daughter showed up with her kindergartener, Mikey, and her twin second graders, Ben and Bella. I've published several nonfiction pieces focused on Ben. The latest was about Ben's perception of the pervasiveness of scammer artists and his plans to learn hacking to shut them down.

When I mentioned publishing such stories, Bella exclaimed, "You mean, you're a published author?" I had to confess, yes, I am.

"I didn't know that," said Bella.

Mikey and Bella positioned themselves at opposite ends of the kitchen table. Spontaneously, both began writing words, phrases, and even entire sentences on three by five sheets of paper and drawing copious illustrations.

"What are you up to?" I asked.

"We're writing books," Mikey answered.

I noticed that Mikey drew something very dark. "What's that?" I asked.

"A person who's never been loved," he answered.

"That's very interesting," I said. "How do you know that a person's never been loved?"

"You talk with them," Mikey answered. "You ask them questions. You listen to their answers. Then you know."

He proceeded to write, after a fashion, the story of Cornelia. "Cornelia has never been loved. She wants a boyfriend. She meets the sad guy. Then she decides to climb a wall. The sad guy follows her. And soon, the sad guy becomes Cornelia's boyfriend. The end."

"Why do you write books?" I asked.

"Writing books is fun," Mikey answered. "I want to talk to people and write books."

Meanwhile, Bella was writing a book about the lifecycle of sea turtles, complete with illustrations. One shows how sea turtles bury their eggs in the sand. Another, how baby sea turtles begin developing shells even before the eggs hatch. Her words surround the illustrations.

"Why do the turtles need to start developing shells even before the eggs hatch?" I asked.

"I wrote that here," says Bella. "To protect them from predators."

At that point, Bella reached across the table, grabbed the stapler, and stapled together the pages she was working on.

"Done," she said. "I finished writing another book."

Mikey had already finished writing his book about Cornelia and the sad guy. He was starting to write another book about how to talk to people.

It was time to check up on Ben in the living room. Ben had been assembling anything he could find that needed assembly. Done with that, he began recording the narrative for a video on the meaning of "belonging" and how important it is for every person to feel that they "belong."

"Don't you have any notes?" I asked Ben.

"I don't need any notes," Ben said. "I know what I want to say. Anyway, I like dictating. It's quicker and I don't have to explain my handwriting."

A week later, on Thanksgiving, Mikey made cornbread. He said it was for the homeless. After we ate it, an upset Mikey said, "The cornbread was for the homeless people. We ate their cornbread." My daughter promised he would get other chances to feed the homeless.

A week later, my daughter took her kids to a parade. Bella marched with the Girl Scouts; Ben and Mikey with the Boy Scouts. Afterwards, as they waited for a bus, Mikey saw a homeless man who had a cardboard sign, "Homeless Vet Please Donate and Help." Mikey walked up to the homeless man and held up his fist. They fist bumped. Mikey showed the homeless man a dance. They danced together. Emily took pictures of the two and recorded a video of their dance. Mikey reached into his pocket, pulled out a fistful of money, and gave it to the homeless man, who said he would use it to buy something at Five Guys, adding, "I'll put this sign away now. I only ask for what I need." The homeless man then turned to my daughter and said, "That boy is going to do something."

Eventually, my daughter realized the bus stop where they were waiting was still inactive because of the parade so they moved to another bus stop by Five Guys. First, they went into the restaurant. When they came out, the homeless man was lingering outside, no longer holding up his sign. Mikey walked up and began feeding him French fries, then gave the homeless man half of his remaining fries. When their bus arrived, Mikey and the homeless man exchanged goodbyes.

On the bus, Mikey said to my daughter, "I'm still writing my story. The homeless guy is part of it. I need to add him to my book."

My daughter told him, "The homeless guy can be a new story and a new book."

"That's what I mean," Mikey said, "a new book."

Two months later, I said to Bella, "I liked the story you wrote about sea turtles, starting from when they're still inside the eggs."

"Did I really write that?" Bella asked.

"Yes, it was really good," I said. "You wrote a book about it. And your pictures helped me understand the life of sea turtles and how they grow shells even while they're still inside the eggs to protect them from predators."

"I did that?" Bella asked, like a true writer, in total disbelief that they had any role in producing what they wrote.

"Yes, it was great," I said. "I was wondering what you're writing now."

"I'm writing a realistic fictional story," Bella said.

"What's it about?" I asked.

Bella smiled and said, "A smiley face eats all the angry faces."

"Are you really writing about that?" I asked.

"We'll have to wait and see," Bella said.

A week or so later, we took the gang to the National Museum of the American Indian, as promised repeatedly throughout the pandemic, when we weren't willing to venture out. Ever since preschool, Bella has been excited about American Indians and wanted to learn more about them. At the museum, Ben, Bella, and Mikey all got to create their own Lakota paper quilt around a central star. Bella showed a keen deliberateness in her color selections. The three built an igloo together, though Ben was clearly in charge. Bella rowed a canoe. Mikey went inside a house to grind corn. When we reached the cafeteria, everyone had the chance to eat like different Indian tribes.

"Did the Indians really eat French fries" Bella asked.

"They do now," I said.

All that was a warmup because a week later we drove to Jamestown, where the English settlers encountered the Powhattan Indians. Among other things, Ben, Bella, and Mikey walked through and inspected the recreations of Powhattan homes. Bella lingered, touched things, picked them up, pantomimed using them. Mikey preferred aiming the cannon at me from The Discovery, a re-creation of one of the three ships the settlers travelled in.

Ben and I were most excited about the bottle shop, where we all got to see items being made by glass blowers, then the finished bottles and other glass pieces for sale in the shop. I bought him a cobalt blue imitation of an old Navy pickle bottle.

A week after we got home and they had time to filter what they learned at the Museum of the American Indian and in Jamestown, I asked Ben and Bella what they were writing.

"I wrote my realistic fiction story. Now, I have to write nonfiction," said Ben.

"What did you write about?" I asked.

"I don't remember," said Ben.

Bella said, "I finished five pages of my realistic fiction story. Now it's in my folder. The teacher will send it home at the end of the school year with all my other writing. You can see it then"

"Are you working on a nonfiction piece too?" I asked.

"I suppose you could say that," Bella said. "I have to write something about the how the Indians lived. I have a choice of writing about the Lakota, the Pueblos, or the Powhattan."

"We learned a lot about the Lakota at the museum," I said.

"Yes, and I thought I was going to write about the Lakota until we went to Jamestown and I walked in the houses where the Powhattan lived. I changed my mind," Bella said.

"Sounds like a great idea," I said. "You have personal experience and knowledge of Powhattan. How far are you with your writing?"

"I haven't started yet."

"Do you have a plan?" I asked.

"I'm waiting for the teacher to tell us what to do."

"Have you done your research?"

"Going to Jamestown was my research. I don't think I need any more. First, I need to write down what I already know."

"Sounds good," I said. "Will you do an outline?"

Bella said, "The teacher hasn't told us about outlines yet. What I want to know is, are you going to write a story about going to Jamestown too?"

"I don't know," I said. "You think I should?"

"I'd like to read yours first," said Bella, "before I write mine."

# Sophia N. Ashley

## Someday, I identify as a Prairie

Glory be to the improper plot: this acre of hand tilled hibiscus  
& the dying raven that slants midway, in collapsed grace.  
I am thankful for everything that lays chaotic. jagged landmass.  
raked mess of depression, inversely proportional to climate change—  
the way I discolor in summer. measuring tape laid to waste because,  
this is a farm dispute where everyone wants to outcount the other.  
when Ma questions me on how I'd love to manage my existence,  
I tell her *I wish to identify as a desert, barren with opportunity.*  
ridges laid haphazardly—I find my loin tumbleweeding from its root.  
the shower head, gone haywire. all of my dirty-washings, heaping in  
the ugly fold of a mountain. It's barely summer & I have bled past two moons,  
dressed my blood, midair—hacking at the tough ground that spoils into green.  
hoping, my grief looks gorgeous in the face of harm. & say it doesn't, it still  
would  
remain mine to keep. sorrow knew me in the early hours of my birth. here,  
look how I  
wear the stench. even rain leaves petrichor as aftertaste, in the mouth of the  
world.  
in the chewed minute, I observe night waste in plastic silence. branches  
shedding from  
their trunk. cloth, roasting in the unforgiving heat of summer. all creature here  
adores  
pain. It is one way to worship how we make something of it. even the blank  
page  
adores anguish. still, I choose joy. choose to wrap my head in the moment,  
scream a  
purple song, mow the lawn at the balcony. I joked around the blisters in my  
palm.  
thank the edges for being jagged & improper, thank the blade's music for  
making a  
mohawk of the grasses & the past that is a bunch of weed—ready for a  
haircut.  
I hope to make sense of my future someday. as of now, I identify as a prairie.

# Zary Fekete

## Little Drummers

I attended Hungarian school from grade one through six when my parents were missionaries. The times in school when I felt the most like a foreigner were on Hungarian national holidays. These were vacation days, but there was always a school celebration held beforehand. Our class filed into the communal gymnasium with the other grades and sat on ankle-high wooden benches where we were told to sit still with no rocking.

The school principal led us in singing through a variety of Soviet-era national songs, inherited from Russia, and designed to encourage Communist solidarity. We sang together in unison, but in one important way I stood out from the crowd. All the students wore an official uniform for the Little Drummer Society. I only wore a white shirt with blue jeans.

Every Hungarian student was automatically enrolled, from the age of six, into the Little Drummer Society. This was a student's first step on the road to Communist party membership. The Little Drummers would be followed by the Path Breakers, the league for the older students which began in the seventh grade. The Path Breakers eventually graduated into full-fledged Communist party membership once school gave way to a career.

The Little Drummer uniform was a white shirt with a blue kerchief. There was a whistle attached to an embroidered rope hanging from an elegant shoulder epaulet and was stored in the pocket of the white shirt. There was also a belt with a buckle featuring a noble-looking drum beneath a red communist star with the Hungarian word "Előre!" (Forward!) written below.

I desperately wanted a Little Drummer uniform. However, when my parents realized what it stood for they forbade it from me. One day, in an attempt to reason with my father, I explained that if I was going to someday be able to share the Gospel with these students I would need to fit in to their ranks. By now I understood how much my father's mind operated around spreading the teachings of Christ.

My spirits rose when he didn't immediately say no. He spoke with my teacher one day after school and came home with a pamphlet that explained the purpose of the Little Drummer Society. Later that afternoon he sat me down by the kitchen table.

He said, "The Little Drummers follow six steps. Should you wear this uniform you must agree to these six steps."

“What are they?” I said.

He read through the first five. “The Little Drummer is a faithful child of his country. The Little Drummer loves and respects his parents, teachers. The Little Drummer diligently studies and helps his partners. The Little Drummer always says the truth. The Little Drummer is clean, ordered, and punctual.”

My father paused. I leaned forward, disbelieving that there could be any problem in agreeing to these points.

“I can do all those things,” I said.

My father looked me. Then he said, “The sixth point is: The Little Drummer lives in such a way as to be worthy to wear the red kerchief of the Communist.”

I understood. Even though I didn’t know what Communism was, I knew I could never be a Little Drummer.

Today, a father myself, I can see it both ways.





# Lauren Cohen Fisher

## Never “I’m Sorry,” Just “Nice Details”

This is not a story about writing. *Per se*. Writing itself is rarely the scariest part. Having studied creative nonfiction for all four of my undergraduate years, I’ve found the thought of people reading what I write far scarier, especially people from the small, liberal arts college I attend. The double-edged sword of attending an 1800-person campus in the middle of Maine is that most people know most people. At least, most people have *heard of* most people. This secluded community creates a certain pressure to appear *chill*, also known as *fine*, also known as *whatever*, also known as *let’s just get drunk*. We’re supposed to have “shit that we’re dealing with,” so that people think we’re “real,” but actually dealing with our respective shit would make us seem too emotional. Complexity is aspirational, yet uncool in your early twenties.

In creative writing, though, *chill* doesn’t make a good story. Consequently, personal essayists often end up more vulnerable in front of their classmates than they do in front of their friends. The academic and the personal become inextricable. I learn that the sister of the senior at the end of the table died in a car crash before I learn where she lives on campus. She doesn’t tell me about her grief because I’m her friend, she tells me because without properly capturing the grief, the story falls flat. Remember, this is not a story about writing. It is a story about writers, specifically a particular group of creative nonfiction writers on my college campus in rural Maine.

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When I was in elementary school, I told people my dad hated me. It wasn’t true. But it was easier to say that he hated me than that I hated him. When I was in high school, I told people that I hated my dad, but I didn’t want to talk about it. It was partially true. I wasn’t sure that I hated my dad, but I was sure that I didn’t want to talk about it. When I got to college, no one really talked about dads, so I didn’t tell people anything. I still didn’t want to talk about it, but I thought maybe I’d write about it.

“Complicate,” my nonfiction professor wrote in the margins, “Get away from the bad dad narrative.”

“It is complicated,” I told him, “He’s mean. He’s supposed to be nice. That’s complicated.”

“It’s good that it’s complicated—well, not good, but—look, our job as writers is to *complicate*, not to point out that things *are complicated*. You don’t need to tell me what’s up with your dad, but if you’re going to write this

piece, you're going to need to figure it out for yourself. He can't just be Bad Dad. No one wants to read that."

He was right. I'd started writing the story about my father months earlier. I wasn't afraid to write it; I was afraid to turn it in, to have people read it, to have people know that behind all of my *chill*, also known as *fine*, also known as *whatever* I was trying to work through years of hurt from living in a household with a father I both wanted to love was deeply terrified of. I was afraid that people would feel bad for me, or worse, that they wouldn't. Talking about my dad made me feel uncomfortable, weak, vulnerable. That's good for writing, but not good for writers afraid of exposing themselves to their classmates.

Two months later, I finally turned the *Bad Dad* story into an *I-make-you-bad-even-though-you-might-not-really-be* story. On the day my piece was up for workshop, I spun the charm on my necklace like a turbine and tapped my foot against the carpeted floor. My lower back was sweating, my teeth were grinding, and my eyes were locked on the classroom table's chipping shellac.

"I really like that part on page 5 where the temperature lamp shakes with the walls," said Adam.

"Me, too," said Emma, "but I almost felt like the part where your dad hits your brother is too sentimental. I mean, we get it. You don't need all of that description."

"I would want more description on that scene at the dinner table, though," Josh added, "like if you use that tone you have on page 11."

The teeth grinding slowed. The tapping ceased. The necklace rested. I took a pen out of my backpack and started writing down their suggestions.

My classmates' writing got better as essays about sports reviews and hiking adventures gave way to the things they were *really* thinking about – the challenges they hid from others and sometimes from themselves. The eating disorders, the dysfunctional families, the desire to feel less alone. I'm not sure if that was because we were learning how to find the stories in our lives or because we trusted each other enough to reveal the stories we found. Ironically, the trust part came from the distance of work shopping, not the closeness of getting to know each other. It came from knowing that the marginal comments would never say, "I'm sorry," just "nice details."

As we continued reading each other's pieces, I became increasingly uncertain of whether the experiences functioned as tools to understand the story, or if it was the other way around. I know it should be the former, but the latter is what ultimately kept me involved in my college's creative writing department. Separating the narrator from the writer in a workshop makes the

editing process impersonal. However, that separation led many of us to write about personal subjects. The more I got to know about myself and about my classmates, the more invested I became in writing and in the class.

"Wanna play?" Adam stood over a folding table outside the senior apartments, rearranging 10 red solo cups in two lines along the table. Flip cup, a classic college drinking game. It was a sunny Maine day during the last week of classes.

"Yeah, teams?" Mary responded as she finished off the last of a beer in a red solo cup.

My creative nonfiction class decided to end the semester the way many college friendships started: unload a few warmed thirty-racks from the trunk of a sun-dusted, snow-residue-stained car and drink until the *how's your day's* become *I fucking love you, man's*. The plan began as a joke about "transcending the classroom," a play on our professor's constant comment that we had to "transcend" the piece in order to produce better writing. But the joke turned into an e-mail thread. And the e-mail thread turned into a plan. And the plan turned into a Saturday afternoon at Jenny's apartment.

"Let's do people with Daddy Issues on one team. That's you, Lauren."

"Word. Let's also grab Josh, Andrew, and Marcy."

"Yo, and me..." chimed in Emma. We debated whether our last team slot should go to Emma because her dad was going to die soon or to Calvin because his dad used to bring him to bars when he was a teenager.

"And who the fuck are we?" slurred Jessica, from the other end of the table.

"The other-issues people."

\*\*\*

"Hi, Dad. I'm actually about to get lunch, so I only have about two minutes to talk," I lied as I lay out on the grass on the first day of summer break.

"I'm sorry."

"It's fine. I just... what do you need? I'm pretty late to this thing I have to go to."

"No, I mean *I'm sorry*."

I picked at spears of grass and crumbed them between my fingers until the dew inside them spurted under my fingernails.

"I've been seeing this therapist, which, you know, I don't really like to admit, but, well, I think, maybe, I might have played a role in why we don't, why there's this, whatever it is, between us."

My father never admitted fault.

"You still there?" He asked.

"Yeah." I exhaled so hard that my stomach started to fold under my rib cage.

"I'm at the café. Sorry, I have to go." I hung up. I stared at my phone. I dialed a different number.

"What's up?"

"I think my dad just apologized. Like, for everything."

"You good?"

"Yeah. Maybe. I just felt like I should call someone. Is that weird?"

"You wanna talk about it?" Andrew asked.

There's an intimacy to reading someone else's personal essay, an intimacy equally countered by the distance of responding to their writing and not their experiences. Where one might think to write, "that must be so hard for you," creative nonfiction writers fill the margins with editorial suggestions: "Tonal shift," I scribbled next to a lyrical description of a sister's funeral, "too sentimental. Cut or tighten." It sounds disaffected, apathetic. My classmates give me a portal into their worlds, but I am not a listener. I am a reader. This places me in an in-between place—a good place to be in creative nonfiction, I'm told—where I can ask the writer to build a more vulnerable *persona* without asking them to become a more vulnerable *person*. But, at the end of the day, because it's nonfiction, the *persona* *is* the person. And so, in this disaffected, academic classroom, we writers learned not only the craft of nonfiction, but also how to let go of *chill*, *also known as fine*, *also known as whatever*, so that we could be seen as the people we actually are.



## Janice Zerfas

### A Reading List on the Anniversary of Passing Her Death-Date

If I had known I would live this long, longer than my mother's death date,  
I wouldn't have read *Anna Karenina*;  
So impressionable, I feared train stations, especially where the trestle  
turned,  
rotated so losing one's balance if afraid of water too easily done.  
How did I know I would meet a Holocaust survivor waiting at the tracks near  
the lake  
where she then showed me the tracks on her right arm,  
still tatted in blue shiver against an inner arm color of Burt's bee's wax.  
I would never have wanted to read Anne's experience hidden in the attic,  
but secretly, I am glad since she liked to star watch as I do, hoping the lunar  
light as if a torn wing  
would come down on her, still born light.  
I will admit I read Anne's thoughts she thought no would ever see many  
times as I had a secret  
place to read also, at the top of the stairs where the hallway light was always  
on, and no one  
would complain after listening to the hail cannons all day disrupt the storm  
that would destroy  
the blueberries if the hail dropped, and the storm already obscuring the  
moon's flash flood of light,  
and frankly, if I hadn't read about Anne's wish to be a Hollywood star  
like Greta Garbo or Deanna Durbin with their smoky makeup and candlelight  
hair,  
and not Anna Karina who gave up, well, frankly I never would have seen the  
Luna moth moon-bathing  
for awhile on the screen. Not ululating, resting. If I had known I would turn  
this decade this July,  
I would have read a *Midsummer Night's*, to imagine more fireflies brimming  
over  
my single candle with a zero at the end, I would have dressed more  
extravagantly  
like the survivor I met at the train tracks who said in her previous life she was  
a furrier, and made  
furs out of mink fast as rats.

God knows listening to my father talk about snow falling  
on his bedclothes or milk pails overturned in blizzards or wearing a girl's  
winter coat to St. Mary's  
in Byron Center, locally known for potatoes heavy as cinderblocks, well, I  
wouldn't have touched wrathful grapes either. Though I always keep a pa-  
perback, spring Baptista, true and false indigo & bleeding hearts from a  
secret garden in my oversized Goodwill-obtained Vera Bradley purse,  
better than an apron pocket, I admit I didn't read it, especially noxious  
while my mother, who shared rom/coms with me, was dying; her skin I told  
the nurse  
felt cold as if swimming in a pool. But she  
must have been warm within, right, the nurse  
agreed, perhaps to be polite. And I'll never again  
pick up the books my dying mother and I read together,  
especially Jack London's wolves  
when there were coyotes  
in the strawberry patch knocking field mice in the air,  
licking berries as if food pellets,  
not knowing, not ever knowing  
the meaning of Ash Wednesday,  
day she died  
while I didn't know  
what to read  
or think  
about  
anything.

## With A Leg to Stand On

“We need to take off the leg.” The physicians all agreed that this was the simplest approach to the infection in my father’s foot. He was a man approaching ninety with diabetes and dementia.

We were all horrified by this assessment. What did they really know about my father? What would be the repercussions of amputating his leg on him and my mother, his primary caregiver? And then as further evidence of their disinterest in who my father was beyond an old man with an infected foot, they added, “It’s not like he needs it.” We were speechless – where was the compassion?

Turning to my mother, sister and me, the doctors advised us not to discuss his condition with him anymore, as if my father had no agency over what was happening to him. They overlooked the moments when my father was fully lucid and aware of what was going on around him, moments that evaporated when he sank back into the fog of dementia.

Is that how hospitals treat patients with memory loss? Ignoring that there is a person with an opinion in their care. Finding it simpler to write off those cogent moments to avoid resistance from the patient. Were doctors so overworked that whatever sympathy or empathy they had at one time, disappeared?

This was not our first go-around. Months or a year prior, Dad had been hospitalized with the same condition. At that time, amputation was the only recommendation, which we adamantly rejected. Dad recovered enough to return home with his leg intact.

The doctors reminded us of this as they pointed to dad’s leg.

“It’s been going on too long,” they said. “The foot is not going to heal. The leg needs to come off.”

Perhaps they were tired of seeing him and us at the hospital. Weary of trying to convince my mother. She’d fought them off before, in a similar hospital room, at the far end of a hallway, far from the attendants’ desk. This time, though, we were close to the hubbub of the nurse’s station, with little privacy.

So, we whispered, as the three of us huddled in the hall, away from dad’s earshot, also careful not to let staff hear us deliberate or challenge their advice and bedside manner in not the most polite terms.

“What do you think?” Mom asked the two of us. My sister and I, careful not to overstep her authority, wanted her to know that we’d support



whatever she believed best. The conversation circled around -- what would dad want, what should we do, not wanting to take off his leg but wondering if it was the right medical action-- until I could take it no more.

"I cannot say to amputate. It's just not a decision I can make. Those words won't come out of my mouth," I said. But, I continued, "If the two of you believe it's the right thing to do, I will never question you." I stepped away for them to hash it out. Nothing about this was simple.

Simpler – that was the standard of medical care for a man who had walked miles in his day. A lover of travel, particularly abroad, he preferred to explore new destinations by foot. For over a decade he controlled his diabetes with daily five-to-ten-mile walks. Joining us on vacation in Charleston, South Carolina, he'd be gone for hours during a long beachside hike to a faraway water tower.

With a desire to see the world, inspired by his despised tenure abroad in the army, he and my mother began travelling when I was a child. Eurail passes took them from country to country, city to city, as they stayed in little pension hotels far from the branded American hotels used by their peers. France became a favorite, whether Paris or Cannes, or other small towns. Later, they would stay for a month at a time, in a rented apartment that allowed them to live as locals. My father's early morning walks brought fresh and warm baguettes for breakfast, as he always struggled with the language. To the end, Dad's pronunciation of "merci" remained "mercy" – as he never mastered even the most basic French. And it never stopped him.

My father had stood on the sidelines watching my sister and me play sports, cheering us on in school, careers, and life. He encouraged me to become an attorney, or anything else I wanted to be. And, of course, to excel in school. An artist by education and career, he dragged his mostly unappreciative daughters to art museums, sharing his love and knowledge.

This active, involved grandfather inspired travel in one grandson by taking him to Paris and Cannes, strolling both the Champs Elysée and the Croisette. Chauffeuring another to and from 5 am hockey coaching. Years of treating grandsons to carousels, the Thanksgiving Day parade, and ice cream.

Now the fate of his leg was weighed against the scales of simplicity versus complexity, and the doctors had their thumb on the scale of simplicity—why make their lives more difficult when caring for an old man?

Losing dad to dementia was far from simple. It was a long slow decline, with the early period only obvious in hindsight. Perhaps we should have suspected when he became irrationally focused on a problem. And maybe he gave us a hint when he chose to give up driving, expressing that he no longer felt comfortable behind the wheel. Truthfully though, the condition only became clear after traumatic falls, recoveries, and rehab; his disorientation confounded

us when it continued as his body healed. Dad said he was waiting for the train and bus, as he sat in a wheelchair at a rehab facility. In his mind, he thought I was in the early days of my law career. Or that I was still sixteen.

As if disappearing to dementia over and over was not a sufficient loss of dignity, he should lose a limb as well. To hospital staff, my father was just a body being kept alive. Not one doctor inquired what he would have wanted.

Nor did anyone consider the impact of amputation on my mother as his primary caregiver. During what I call the “stage of rage” as he was aware that his memory and abilities were slipping away, she bore the brunt of his anger, making excuses and hiding as much as possible for as long as she could.

Nothing could prepare us for the disaster of Thanksgiving 2016. The turkey took forever to roast in my oven. My father -- recovering from a hip break and surgery -- became unhinged from a combination of low blood sugar and hunger. He had a full-on meltdown, yelling at me for ruining the holiday. I cowered in the kitchen trying to escape my father's rage, all the while crying, “I tried to make it nice.” In his agitated state, my defense fell on deaf ears. Dad was no longer the man we knew. And it was the last time he came to my home.

Over the years of dad's ailments, the medical system expected my tiny eighty-something year old mother to be doctor, nurse, assistant, administrator, and more. It was staggering. Mom adroitly arranged appointments and ambulettes, filling prescriptions, hiring home health workers, coordinating visits, dealing with insurance, and so on. Frankly, she was effectively running a healthcare company for a client of one. My sister and I were merely consultants.

Mom also stepped in as an unregistered RN, responsible for injecting meds, changing IVs, applying topical treatments, changing bandages to his foot and leg. And now, she should care for a stump? Whether she was uncomfortable and squeamish was never considered by the medical staff.

Unfortunately, she couldn't even turn the care over to her daughters, or at least not to me.

Shivering at the very idea of limb loss, even today the image of Dad with only one leg makes me shake.

And what did the medical professionals think would happen when Dad was lucid and aware that his leg was missing? We knew he would not be silent. My father was going to yell for my mother and ask. And then ask again and again. After all, he had dementia and wouldn't remember what he had just been told. Imagine, hour after hour and day after day, Dad yelling “Myra, where's my leg?” and “Who took my leg?”

Clearly, that never entered any staffer's mind. Sitting in a hallway serving as a consult room devoid of privacy, with whitecoat authority, they pressed for simplicity. When I played out the scenario for the attending physician's as-

sistant, her widening eyes and her gasp revealed shock as I argued that there could be consequences at home; that my mother would be confronted with ramifications. No one contradicted my assessment, yet they provided no advice. They were hellbent on the simple solution – take off his leg and be done with it.

Dad passed away peacefully two years ago. None of us second guessed our final decision to treat the whole man and consider the effect on his family. Periodically, Mom unexpectedly says, “I’m so glad we kept his leg.” So am I. In my memory he will always be walking on two legs. And I think Dad would have been grateful that as we dealt with his health issues, we also cared for Mom, his wife, who stood by his side throughout his ordeal.



# Chris Mikesell

## butterfly, a poem

what is a butterfly?  
the thing itself,  
and all that it symbolizes,  
and its appearance in context:  
spring to summer to fall.

dissected into its parts and pieces,  
fragmentations—the once beautiful  
becomes nullified and obscene,  
the pastime of bullies and fools.

a Sylphina Angel on a pin  
is good, at least, to study  
structure, coloration, and form.  
but it loses all of the grace  
and much of the beauty  
of a Swallowtail on the wing

where the structure is translated to movement  
—scissoring, spinning, soaring—  
and the color shifts in the light  
and the shape adjusts  
to circumstance:  
the wind, a branch, your hand.

a butterfly is a poem.

## Moments of Beauty

*for my students*

The poem was about death.

*The tyger, they said, is a monster.*

*How, they asked, is that beautiful?*

First, the tyger *is* beautiful in its form:  
the symmetries of stripes  
and fiery balance of form with function.  
This monster is perfection  
at thinning the herd.

And, while death is anathema,  
the nemesis of the lyric form,  
the presence of the lamb  
is the promise of paradise,  
a hope that can only be filled by...

The poem was about death.

*In the end, they said, nothing changes.*

*How is killing beautiful if nothing improves?*

Hang on, don't diminish the frabjous joy  
of the old man, the young hunter.  
Things *have* changed in the forest,  
if only a little bit:  
death's danger for a moment reduced.

It certainly hasn't been eliminated, though.  
Birds'll still double-jub; snatches will bander and frume.  
The boy likely killed the least lethal first,  
so if you can't snicker-snack,  
it's business as usual to avoid...

The poem was about death.

*How in the world, they asked, is—*

Let me stop you there. It isn't.  
*It isn't.* There's nothing beautiful  
about war, about being gassed,  
your internal organs liquefying.  
War is hell, and death here is no tyger.

Still, the poem is true, and truth is?  
*Beauty, they said.*  
And the truth is: dying for your homeland  
is neither sweet nor beautiful.  
It's only a horrid, ugly...

This poem has been about death.

This has been a moment of beauty.



# Abby Perkins

## Seasons

A small calendar with scribbled notes hung on the wall above Annie's living room table. After drawing an X across yesterday's notes, she put on her wedding ring, grabbed her keys and headed out the door.

She let herself inside her mother's residence, opening the large, dark mahogany door quietly. The home smelled of cleaning product and vanilla driftwood candles. The floorboards creaked with each step. Once she reached the back room behind the staircase, she peeked in the door which already stood cracked open. Her mom was sitting on the bed reading her favorite Nicholas Sparks' book.

"Mom, It's Annie." "Oh Darling! Come here. Its been so long," Her mom attempted to stand.

"You don't have to get up Mom!" Annie rushed to the side of the bed entering the embrace of open arms. "Whacha reading?"

"I found it on the shelf. Nicholas Sparks. I do love him."

"I know, Mom." Annie remembered the nights her mom would spend hours reading sad romance novels at her bedside.

The bedside table was scattered with half-empty cups of water and pill bottles. Annie walked around to the other side of the bed, cracking open the blinds to share the rays of sun from the fall morning.

"Oh honey! We should go have lunch soon, before its too cold and rainy outside. I want to sit in the park, you loved it there when you were little." She was right.

"That's a good idea, Mom," she let her mom continue smiling with the idea it gave her.

"I don't see you much anymore. I know you're busy with that new boy of yours, oh and that grand job downtown. But a mother needs some time with her only daughter.

"I know, Mom. I'll make sure to come visit more. Listen, I can come back later, I have to run to work to grab some papers before the office closes for the weekend."

"Of course! It was nice to see you sweetie, I hope to meet that boy soon, don't be scared to bring him by."

"Love you, mom," Annie kissed her mother's cheek, "Get some rest, okay?"

Annie drove back home, watching the leaves fall from the sky, occasionally finishing their descent on her windshield. When she arrived home, she unlocked her front door, and hung her keys on the key rack sitting next to the calendar.

Her husband was home early from work, “Hey Annie, how was your mom today?”

“She knew it was me but said I need to visit more,” she rubbed her eyes, “She said she wants to meet you.”

She picked up the pen above the calendar, scribbling the words, “symptoms moderate, recognized me, but lacked sense of time.”





rob lane wilder

#936: a glowing, knowing compassionate soul

d.b.'s fervent fire  
inspired me to question  
misconceptions i had buried  
somewhere deep inside

crafty to the nth degree  
emanating such élan,  
a singularly knowing songster  
influential like no other

i was lucky to receive  
instruction from this guy  
constantly inventive  
musician, actor, story teller

clever, hip, thoughtful  
his inner engine, it would buoy...  
lifting to the highest height  
those who peered into this light.

unique and formidable,  
placing faith in all  
d.b. was so wired...  
*a glowing, knowing  
compassionate soul!*

## #514: Great Gigs Were In Store

Vying to succeed  
exercising vocal chops  
at commercial read

Charismatic Dyer-Bennet<sup>1</sup>  
issued years before  
an untrammelled energy  
enabling C. to soar

D.B.'s clever trainings in bel canto  
clearly helped him much  
casting agents volunteered  
*soon we'll be in touch*

Three simple winning words D.B. would repeat  
effectively a formula  
that no one could beat  
'Elevation of Style'

Tightening his cleat Culver through a door  
wiggling round in Nowheresville  
not one minute more  
understanding recognizing

*Great gigs were in store*

<sup>1</sup>In memorium Richard Dyer Bennet, formerly of Great Barrington, MA.

# Samuel Samba

## A Bilinguist blaspheme in Broken Accent

As with each raw moment of sign languaging,  
meaning comes in restitution of jaw & careful jargon  
of warm hands— fondling a narrative in the air.  
sound, blooming from my fingertip.

I converse in high gifted parlance,  
& regurgitate my thoughts in way too many phrases: verbatim.

on shuttling between kiosk to own my smaller needs,  
I throw a capsule of word in between clenched lips,  
& my tongue sifts the broken plural into a native slang.

the larynx owns a church of dialects.  
& on lifting my voice, I'm bare-teethed:  
polyglot inscribed on the scruff of my chaplet.

at Confession, Hebrew churns from all corners of my mouth  
like grammar to kill for— rich-soft on my gum: a godly accent.

say, a deity refunds prayer in its broken state;  
do we call it *'English'*?

countlessly, I'm of the notion: a poem tiles the hour to a sacrilege.  
& that which I call brother— a seminarian in his seminudity, tells us:  
sound travels the vast chorus of language.

even the wind could turn into a well-dressed noise.

consider the rare niceties of life that measures how silence stretches.  
how hymn weaves the summary of breath.

yet, where do our breath go?  
where between language & Lord does my blasphemy touches?

## Elegy for a Biracial Culprit

A cop's hand on the shutter, raining blows in rehearsed grace.  
paws, thirsting for the slim purpose of a loin:  
anything to knead into crisis. Pa dresses a nursery bed  
the way each foreign accent dresses his gum:  
a husbandman, rearing broken dialects to see  
his lineage through the violence of migration.  
the bone-soft lingo, branding him unprintable names:  
letterless mouth, biracial culprit. homonyms, tumbleweeding  
from his throat. hands keep afflicting the doorpost,  
threatening to break in. Pa, unbraiding the loose soil that peel open  
a fresh tomb to house more than his body.  
palm, polishing a stone fruit before reaching for  
my scalp—lotioned with blood. a sharp cry knifing the atmosphere,  
unhinging the door nails. the earth-shattering sound of glass,  
with louver blown wide with trembling. the vowel in your name,  
pronounced in hushed tone. I nurture this moment your feet  
trellis the walkway, while hands dragged you on.  
me, knelt before a wealth of sand, deboning language.

# Mord McGhee

## Fetch

June drew back the curtain, and seeing motionless fins broke her heart. Windmill power had been the biggest reason they'd gone there in the first place and now, along with those dead and folded blades, ruined too was all hope. She leaned down and set a hand upon Fetch's little head.

"Why won't you work?"

Fetch remained unmoving.

She looked at the static blades, and said, "It's hooked up. Why?"

When the windmill was spinning, Fetch was alive. Why the little robot dog existed, Marty's creation, like a sensor of sorts. June silently reviewed what she had done so far to get Fetch back online. The connectors were properly locked. There was a breeze, not a big one but enough to spin the blades, surely.

To the sky she said, "Sorry, Marty. Just don't know what to do without you. Send me a sign or something."

Fetch squeaked, and his ear moved.

The robotic critter suddenly came alive, and the windmill began to rotate slowly.

"Well, I'll be," June said, patting Fetch.

Little plastic eyes blinked.

She walked a circle around the windmill and laughed softly, whispering, "Thank you, babe."

June bent and picked up the mutt's red ball. She tossed it across the dusty ground and Fetch retrieved it, tail humming back and forth. If nothing else, she had power again. Not much else good happened after the accident.

For a brief second the accident replayed in her head, and she repressed a scream.

Fetch barked, weakly.

"Oh no," she said, looking at the windmill's blades. "Don't stop!"

Then Fetch slumped to the dirt, lifeless again. Emitting one last squeak before going dark. June kicked the base of the windmill, cursing it. She opened the pop-up shelter's flap, gathered the little robot, and slipped inside before it got too cold on the surface of Noir Celadus' second moon.

In the morning she opened her eyes, shivering. She could smell Marty on the sheets. Memories of laughter and life filled her mind. The lights flick-

ered, and Fetch's tail shifted ever-so-slightly. "Today we're getting you online," she said, rolling off the mattress.

It had been two days since they'd crashed. The worst possible thing to happen. It was supposed to be their grand adventure, but now Marty wasn't coming along. June wiped her cheek and stepped outside. The breeze was faint but had gotten the blades to turn a little. She reached up and gave it a spin. At once she heard Fetch bark inside the pop-up shelter.

"Why?" she said, watching helplessly as the blades slowed.

June had to get it working or the emergency beacon would not reach help, and she and the robot dog, "and Marty," she sobbed, would be stuck there to whatever end the universe had in store.

June opened the windmill's side panel and unplugged and reseated all connections. The black one made a spark, and she said, "Hey!" as she studied it for a moment. "What happened there?" she asked herself. "Why sparks?"

It didn't make sense. Without wind there was no electricity. Without electricity the batteries had nothing to store. With dead batteries, there could be no sparks. But there were. "Fetch?" she called on a hunch. He did not come. So, she went inside and took the manual charging case out of the kit and plugged it onto the battery leads, then began to wind the little arm.

The battery's light turned green.

She laughed happily, but as soon as she stopped cranking, it went dark again.

She sighed and slid to the ground with her back against the windmill.

"Marty, Marty, Marty," she said.

Suddenly she had an idea.

June detached the signal emitter, which she'd plugged in in the hopes of getting the beacon active, and she checked the end of its adapter. There was a small gray circuit board, and a small black spot where a pico-fuse had blown. She got up and went inside. Fetch was still lifeless. She opened his back panel and felt around until she found the release clip, then she carefully withdrew a tiny component.

"Perfect match," she said, comparing the two. "Sorry, buddy," she told Fetch. Returning to the windmill's side panel, she snapped the circuit into place. At once there was a soft humming sound she hadn't heard before. With a smile on her face, she grabbed the unmoving blade and gave it a whirl, and she cheered as it began to spin and the pop-up's power came online. The batteries, the lights, the heater, everything... except Fetch.

It wasn't ten minutes later when the emergency beacon lit up, and she accepted the incoming signal. "Good day," came the sound of a human voice, and there had not ever been a better sounding thing in all her life. She cradled the little robot dog and packed him into the kit, and said to it, "Except for

Marty's voice, buddy." Just then Fetch barked, and his tail wagged for just a second.

It wasn't possible, and June held the robot tight and began to cry.



# Kathleen Dillon

## To My New Friend, Stinging Nettle\*

You brought my attention back.  
So set on finding you – I was blinded by the hunt.  
Searched and searched until I tracked you down,  
forgot all my principles, and yanked you up,  
without my gloves and without acknowledgment.  
Your sting stayed with me for two days,  
a reminder that my Windingo mind  
will be painful to root out.

The next time I saw you, I admired your evolution  
and thanked you for showing yourself to me again,  
despite my earlier transgressions.  
I said a blessing and passed you by,  
trusting I would see you again if you willed it.  
And when you revealed yourself to me once more,  
I carefully harvested your leaves,  
slowly (and with gloves).

I soaked your leaves for 20 minutes in warm water,  
unable to rush the process,  
for fear your prickly fibers would sting my mouth.  
You teach us awareness and patience, my friend.  
A tea made from your leaves is healing –  
reducing inflammation  
and reminding me of the healing that could be brought to this Earth  
if only we learned to see beyond the stings.

I think about your history and am amazed.  
Roman soldiers rubbed your prickly leaves all over their bodies,  
endeavoring to stay awake in their campaigns to conquer my  
ancestors,  
the same ancestors who eventually found their way to you here,  
repeating the cycle of harm inflicted on them,  
and yet, you remained, you survived,  
your sting reminding me that you cannot be ignored,  
and that you will not be forgotten.



You make me recall the pain wrought by Windingo thinking –  
the lands that were stolen,  
the lives that were taken –  
and the way this mindset of the conqueror  
still bleeds into my daily life  
but also all that the Earth can offer  
when I open my eyes,  
slow down,  
and see you as a friend,  
not an object to be ripped from the Earth.

You have your own armor,  
evolved from the need for protection  
from the Windingos of the world,  
but also your own gifts to offer,  
when approached with care.  
Thank you for showing me  
my Windingo mind in action.  
You focused my attention  
on the impact of a life lived  
through a colonizer's eyes.

\*Author's Note: This piece was written following a trip I took to go foraging one spring in Lincoln, Nebraska's Wilderness Park, having been inspired by Robin Wall Kimmerer's idea of the "Honorable Harvest" in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*. When we slow down, we make more ethical choices; when we slow down, we can root out the colonizer mindset. This is the lesson of this poem.

# Ben Nardolilli

## The Cup of Trembling

It was the first time in years Frankie had to ask Jimmy for a ride. He had asked his brother for plenty of things before, including money, but transportation was new. Jimmy asked Frankie what happened to his car. Frankie told him the car was fine. His license was not. Jimmy asked Frankie where he needed to go. Frankie told him he was performing and this was not a gig he could miss. If Jimmy took him, Frankie promised to give him part of the money the club was paying him. This was he could repay Jimmy for part of the money he asked for to cover the previous month's rent. Jimmy agreed, with a sigh he reserved for after the call was done.

When he pulled up in front of Frankie's building, Frankie was not there. Jimmy called him and pressed the buzzer for his apartment. There was no response. Someone let him inside and he found his brother's room. He banged to the door until Frankie opened to it. Frankie was not yet dressed and his eyes had a glazed over look to them. He apologized and said he overslept. Jimmy asked if he had been using. Frankie stared at him until Jimmy apologized. He left to get dressed and grab his trumpet case. When he was ready, the two of them got in the car. Along the way to the club Frankie told Jimmy he did not appreciate his question. He wanted his brother to be a brother to him. Not a preacher, lawyer, or doctor.

Jimmy said that was fine, but as Frankie's banker he had an interest in his wellbeing.

"Well, if you want to think about me that way, it is in your interest if I am using."

"What?"

"If I am using."

"Why would you say that?"

"It helps people like me. You wouldn't understand."

"People like you think they need it to be artists or whatever, is that it?"

"Yeah."

"All that..." Jimmy thought about a word to use. He fought a strong urge to say *shit*. "Mythology."

He looked out the window and gripped the trumpet case. "Yeah. Sure."

Jimmy parked in a lot next to the club. Frankie got out and Jimmy followed him in. Frankie was surprised.

"You want to come?"

"I'm just supposed to sit in the car and wait?"

"You can go back. I'll take a cab after I get paid."

"Nah, I'll take you home. Anyway, I haven't seen you perform in a while."

"Years."

In the club, Frankie went backstage with his trumpet to get ready. Jimmy looked around to see where to go. He took a seat near the aisle. He figured it was better to sit there in case there was an emergency. A waitress came up to him and told him there was a two drink minimum.

"Fine, I'll do a double. A scotch."

"Anything else?"

"Milk."

"Really?"

"Yes." She left and brought him a glass. Jimmy sipped on it and looked up at the stage. It was lit up with an indigo glow. A piano and a bass were already set up along with seats for the other players. He thought about what Frankie might play. Jimmy assumed some improvisation would be involved, maybe all of it would be done on the fly. Jazz was not his style. He gravitated towards styles that produced things that were recognizable. Frankie liked to call his playlists "clip symphonies," believing Jimmy knew nothing about music. Jimmy felt he was wrong. He knew enough to be familiar with the kinds of things musicians told themselves they had to do for their art. He also knew Frankie was more familiar with them than he was. As teenagers, Frankie covered his side bedroom walls with posters of famous musicians, each one holding a trumpet.

The other players from the quartet came out, but one was missing. Frankie. Each one of them took a seat and tried to pretend they did not notice the absent trumpet player. After a couple minutes of waiting, they started to look around the room and then at each other. Jimmy was worried about his brother. Was he carrying something else in that case, his other instrument? Jimmy debated going backstage to see him. Maybe he needed real help, a medical intervention. The pianist got up and walked behind a curtain. A little bit of shouting came through the fabric. He returned to his piano and Frankie stumbled out behind him. Jimmy shook his head, long and slow, hoping Frankie could see him on his side of the dark. Frankie sat down with his trumpet and the pianist started to play. After a couple of notes Frankie began to blow.

The first notes came out too loud and disorganized. His lips slipped and his fingers could not move in time with the other players. Jimmy could sense there was a problem and yet a small hope too. Maybe this would be it. One terrible performance and Frankie would wake up. If he used because he suffered and he suffered because of his art, then the spell might be broken if

the art suffered too. The whole degrading machinery of his life would be exposed.

Frankie stopped. Jimmy hoped it might be for good. The others continued to play their parts but they repeated them, as if waiting for Frankie to make a real entrance. Frankie wiped his brow, stood up, and faced the glare of the lights. He started to play again, and this time the music poured out of the trumpet like it was a brass diva. The audience applauded and cheered. Jimmy drank his milk and scotch instead. It would be a triumph. Another success in Frankie's repertoire. Jimmy finished his cocktail and got another on while tapping along on the glass. This was going to be the best performance he ever saw, and he hated it.



# Laura Merleau

## Fruit Basket

We almost killed each other.  
Smiling as we always were.  
Attracting negative charges  
on ground or in water.  
No point in identifying  
the common enemy. No  
point in being told we're  
crazy. We already knew  
that. Recovery was  
possible, even with no  
signs of life? Was it  
life we wanted? We  
looked at each other.  
We looked at the fruit  
basket. Nothing abnormal  
anywhere, but we were  
wrong. We had missed  
something. We were spooked.  
We scared ourselves silly. We  
were going to the underworld for  
the way we couldn't  
stop, couldn't stop killing  
each other – almost. We  
were not breathing, we had  
no pulse. We could not  
give each other CPR. We  
couldn't fall asleep on  
the table now. We'd  
have to stay awake,  
unarmed and having  
a cup of poisoned  
coffee or two.

## Mark's Nemesis – A Grocery Store

By walking past the veg section of a grocery store, Mark thought about how long it's been since he bought vegetables. Perhaps, too long. In that nick of time, those terrifying thoughts were overshadowed by the liquor section. He threw a six-pack into the shopping cart and a bottle of scotch. There was nothing in that cart yet but for those exact items, even though he'd been there for at least thirty minutes. Mark enjoyed wandering around at grocery stores. It made him feel like a responsible adult, even though his cart usually had more liquor in it than every 'responsible' man's of his age strolls around these places. He was almost forty, and still didn't have the pleasure of being proud and scared of shopping for baby diapers and formula.

*I can't checkout this! I need something more. The cashier lady knows me. I don't want her to think I'm an alcoholic,* thought Mark by looking at his own cart.

Back to the veg section. He grabbed a couple of carrots, reluctantly, and tossed it into the cart.

*What am I going to do with a few carrots? What can I pull off from this? Toss a salad? A soup? I don't cook or eat any of that. Well, I can eat it raw though. Yeah, let's go with that,* wondered Mark by the veg aisle.

When he was about to pay and take off, he ceased his steps towards the cashier lady, and another thought came to his mind, *booze and carrots?! This is weird. A carrot is a too phallic of a vegetable to checkout alongside with alcohol. Nah, I can't take this, otherwise people will look at me and think 'what kind of kinky night is this guy planning to have?'* Yeah, I must keep shopping...

And so he did. He returned to the aisles of that small grocery store. He browsed around, aimlessly.

*Fifteen bucks worth of caviar?! Who in their right mind would buy fake caviar? As far as I'm concerned, that's rock bottom! What are they trying to prove by buying this sort of stuff? If you can't buy real caviar, buy canned sardines or tuna fish. Don't embarrass yourself!* Mark questioned himself once again.

*However, I'm buying cheap scotch instead of a Macallan or something like that. Am I a hypocrite?* This counterquestion haunted him, however, he kept going, *why am I always getting back at myself? Forget*

*about the fake caviar and who buys it. Just buy the damn liquor, and don't think about who buys what and why!*

That, above, was his cue. Two cans of tuna hit the bottom of his cart. Mark looked around, and stepped into another section, the candy aisle.

*It's both interesting and funny how people move from sweet things to sour stuff as they grow up. From sweet sodas to sour beers. From chocolate spread to... let's see... strong, salty, and smelly fake caviar. Do we get dumb as we get older? Because, who in their right mind would drink something that burn one's throat? Well, might be the kick of it, of course, but where's the main pleasure? The naïve one? That instant pleasure of feeling something sweet going through our bodies. Where's our thoughtless and harmless short-term goal for fast kicks, like the kids have? Did our stupid 'wisdom' take over our common sense as we grew up?*

Mark, with his booze, tuna, and carrots in his cart, was now looking at loaves of bread and cheese. *Ew, no, I'm sick of bread and cheese. I've been ordering pizza for the last three months like a divorced and bitter man, and I haven't got married yet. That says a lot about me, I think. Maybe I won't age like blue cheese. I won't become better as I get older. I think blue cheese mocks the human nature in so many ways. You buy, for good money, a piece of food which is already decomposing, and then realize it won't get you any younger, let alone richer. Moving on...*

Mark had enough of walking around with his psychotic insights in there, so he looked at the shopping cart he was holding and saw that his first and only goal was done. His cart was not compromising anymore, therefore, he was good to go. However, and there's always a 'however' with Mark, it didn't feel right. He wasn't feeling good, hence, he let the cart unattended, grabbed a new one and walked, determinedly, towards an aisle to fill this one with candies. Every piece of candy he could lay his hands on. From lollipops to candy bars. Jellybeans, sodas, absolutely everything that has the ability to sweeten one's mouth and heart. He paid for everything, thanked the lady with a nod and a naïve smile, and took off.

Carol J. Luther

## Shakespeare's Birthday: A Jeu d'Esprit

Notes and Inquiries: Shakespeare's Natal Day

*Editors' note: The pages of this journal have seen much discussion on the subject of the actual date of Shakespeare's birthday. As scholars, we are concerned with the accuracy of factual information, and we have asked Professor Portia Dryasdust to respond to recent queries. Her analysis follows.*

The Anniversary of Shakespeare's Birth: A Note  
By Portia Dryasdust, MA Oxon., PhD Cant., DVM, MBE

Rumor and gossip are not the appropriate sources for scholarly endeavors unless one is studying rumor and gossip. My disquisition, therefore, will rely only on the most impeccable sources, which I myself have examined with a magnifying glass.

Shakespeare, one can say for certain, was baptized on April 26, 1564, according to the parish register of Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon (Fraser 2-3; Honan 10).<sup>1</sup> Many scholars believe that the birth occurred three days before the baptism and thus set April 23 as that date.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, April 23 has sentimental associations because it is also the date of Shakespeare's death. (See the analysis in Honan 15-16). In his account of the events surrounding Shakespeare's birth, Park Honan, using the latest available scholarly resources establishes that, as is frequent in Shakespearean matters, the actual birthday might be one day, or indeed it might be another (16).<sup>3</sup> In short, while celebrating Shakespeare's birth on April 26 is not heretical, it might be more precise to label the festivities as a celebration of Shakespeare's baptism in order to be strictly accurate, which accuracy is what one strives for as a scholar.

What I do know, without a shadow of a doubt, is that any day is a good day to honor Shakespeare.

*Editors' note: Professor Dryasdust has assembled the evidence admirably. We asked if she would be willing to provide further references for the remaining skeptics. Her reply, we regret to say, was, for a scholarly person, most unscholarly. In short, she refused.*



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Unless, of course, one subscribes to the theory that Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, Queen Elizabeth, or some other pretender wrote the plays, in which case the author of the plays we know as “Shakespeare” was *not* christened on April 26, 1564. This is, however, a fantastical quibble that is not germane to the present examination.

Fraser discusses the St. Mark’s Day, St. George’s Day, Holy Day issue for those interested in holy day arcana (3).

<sup>2</sup> For a fascinating discussion on the proposition that Shakespeare was not christened on April 26, see Écrite Graff’s “Peccadilloes in Parish Registers: An Analysis of Elizabethan Sacred Handwriting” in *Publications of the Elizabethan Literature Association (PELA)*, vol. 237, no. 3, fall 2020, pp. 486-597.

Part of the discussion naturally centers on what one might consider “three days” before the christening. For example, if Shakespeare were born at 11:30 p.m. on April 23, technically speaking, April 26 would be three days later. If he were born at 12:05 a.m. on April 24, he might also have been christened on April 26, which would, technically speaking be only two days later. Speculation on the time of day that Shakespeare was born thrusts one into a labyrinth of guesswork from which there is no Ariadne’s thread to rescue one. However, for some thought provoking work done in this area, consult P.M. Chronometri’s “The Minutes and Hours of a Tudor Day: Quotidian Timekeeping without Timex” in *Tudor Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2012, pp. 89-99.

<sup>3</sup> A further fly in the Shakespearean birthday ointment is the pesky question of the use of the Julian calendar in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. England did not adopt the Gregorian calendar (as corrected by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582) until 1752. Thus, was April 26 really April 26? Was April 23 really April 23? One must emphatically swat at such questions in order not to be driven from the topic at hand by the insects of petty scholarship.

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# Jill Jepson

## My Word

The first story I ever wrote grew out of a mistake. The word *wrote* isn't quite accurate. I was three, and the art of putting words on the page was still beyond me, so I told my story aloud and my ever-patient and doting mother took dictation.

The story was inspired by a picture I had drawn: Three girls with triangles for dresses and stick arms and legs, each with a different hair color and type. When I finished the picture and sat back to admire my work, I realized I'd made a grievous error. I'd forgotten the girls' heads. On top of each triangle dress sat a bundle of hair, curly and yellow, wavy and black, straight and orangey-red. No eyes, noses or mouths lay between the hair and the dresses, not even round circles for the contours of the faces. It was a humiliating oversight.

I almost tore the picture up. Then I picked up a black crayon bent on scribbling over my monstrous blunder. But I paused, considered my options, and decided, instead, to make up a story. I told a tale of three headless girls. I don't remember what happened in my story, how the girls lost their heads, or whether they ever retrieved them. I do remember laughing at its silliness, and I recall the satisfaction I felt at having explained my picture. I learned two important lessons that day. First, though stories can't fix mistakes, they sure as hell can make you feel better about them. And second, everything that happens in life is material.

In that way, I learned to deal with the chaos of my childhood by writing. By second grade, I was laboriously printing my stories in pencil. But in third grade, I discovered that my mother had a Royal brand portable typewriter from the 1930s stored in the attic, and it became my writing tool of choice. I didn't just two-finger my stories onto the page. I used that machine so much, I became a very rapid typist ten-fingered typist. It made people smile to see an eight-year-old typing away, her brow furrowed, a pencil tucked behind her ear, as she pounded out her latest manuscript.

Words were my medium. I didn't do perfectly in all my classes, but I soon discovered that I could always get an A on an essay. I won local essay contests, and at ten earned first place in a short-story competition for children. My story, "Leslie and Marian go Dog Sitting," was published in the *Oakland Tribune* in 1961. The award I waited for with great excitement turned out to be a cheap pencil box I could have gotten at the drug store for a couple bucks, my first experience with the crappy remuneration every writer knows about, but never mind. I was ten years old, and a published author.

Then, in ninth grade, something happened that nearly upended my budding writing career. I was accused of plagiarism.

My social studies class had been given an assignment to write about a profession we were interested in. I picked translator. The two things I loved most in the world were studying French and writing, and the thought of combining the two sounded like paradise.

*A translator is like a musician, I wrote. A composer puts the music on the page in the form of written notes. The musician translates it into music that the audience can enjoy.* It wasn't a perfect metaphor, but it wasn't bad for a kid.

I was proud of my essay, and handed it in confident that I would earn my usual A. But when my teacher, Tim Johnson, handed the essay back the following week, it had a gigantic red D- at the top. Scrawled next to the grade were the words, *This isn't your own work.*

Mr. Johnson's classes were notoriously disorganized, even nonsensical. One day, he would have us come up with lists of synonyms and antonyms. The next, he would lecture us on the mining industry in Peru, reading directly from the *Encyclopedia Americana*. One day, he would give us tips on improving our study skills and the next have us draw maps of our school with the rooms labeled. For one assignment, we were given lists of words we had to define off the tops of our heads, and then graded based on incomprehensible standards. When most of us defined *wheat* as *a grain*, he marked us wrong for not answering *a cereal grain*.

We all knew he had no real plan. He was just winging it, coming up with ideas a few minutes before walking into the classroom. We smelled the alcohol on his breath.

Social studies was the last class of the day, so I had time afterwards to speak to Mr. Johnson about my essay. I approached him confidently, positive I could straighten out the misunderstanding. I was wrong.

"You can't have written this," he insisted in a cloud of alcohol-laden fumes. "You show me one thing you've ever written that's this good. You can't think of one, can you? Can you?"

I had never written anything for Mr. Johnson, except a definition of wheat, but I wasn't going to back down.

"It was my work," I insisted. "I wrote every word."

"No it wasn't," he said. He sat down at his desk with an air of finality, as if the conversation were closed.

"I'm not a cheat," I said. "I've never plagiarized anything in my life."

He bent over his grade book and ignored me.

"I give you my word that this is my work."

Silence.

I had given my word, and even that was not enough.

Realizing nothing I said was ever going to convince Mr. Johnson that I had written my precious essay, I ran from the room in tears, down the steps, out of the school, sobbing the three blocks to my home.

My mother was standing at the stove stirring white sauce when I rushed in, tears sheeting down my face, my crumpled paper clutched in my hand. I slumped to the floor, overwhelmed with what felt like utter catastrophe, demoralized by the humiliation of having been called a cheat and a liar.

My mother listened as I told her about my D-, the red letters on my paper declaring me a plagiarizer, Mr. Johnson's refusal to believe me. Her green eyes flashed, and her lips knitted into a taut line.

"Get in the car," she ordered me. "We're going to get your father."

My father was a gentle, kindhearted man with an iron core. He worked harder than anyone I've ever known, physical work that left him aching and trembling with exhaustion, and yet in the summers, he would carve out a half hour in the afternoon to take my sisters and me swimming, before going back to work late into the night.

He was devoted to his family, fiercely protective of his girls and, still stung by his father's refusal to support his dreams, determined to support ours. *Someday you're going to be famous*, he would tell me when I showed him something I'd written. He believed it.

If Dad had a fault, it was that he never, ever forgot a slight. Despite his jovial sense of humor and gentle disposition, he collected grievances like some people collect bowling trophies. He was still angry at the man who ran the hardware store for making fun of him in second grade. He bristled at the time a guy stole his comb during World War II. Mom always claimed I'd inherited both my brains and my snideness from her father, but I knew exactly where I'd gotten my habit of clinging to resentment.

The day of my fight with Mr. Johnson, Dad was working in our apricot orchard just outside of town. My mother drove in a fury to find him. At the orchard, she slowed, and we crept along peering down each row of trees one by one until we saw Dad in the distance, working by the irrigation ditch with a shovel in his hand. Mom parked the car on the side of the road. I stayed in my seat, sniffing and wiping away tears, as she marched between the long row of apricot trees, my paper in her hand. I saw my father turn to her in surprise. I saw him leaning on the handle of his shovel while Mom talked, gesturing to my paper then to the car where I sat, waving her hand in the air elaborately. Then I saw my father throw that shovel to the ground, snatch my paper from my mother's hand, and storm toward the car.

By the time Dad arrived at the high school, he'd showered, changed, and calmed down. He said later that he talked to Mr. Johnson courteously. He told him he'd never challenge a teacher over a grade, that giving grades was

the teacher's job, and he respected that. But he'd never, ever allow someone to call his daughter a cheat.

If it had been today, I'd have expected a face-to-face apology, but I was happy enough with the single word "sorry" scrawled across the top of the page when Dad brought my paper back. Mr. Johnson had changed the grade, not to an A, but to an A-. I smirked when I saw it. I knew that grade it had little to do with the essay that was so good Mr. Johnson couldn't believe I'd written it. Even at fourteen, I realized that minus sign next to the A was just Tim Johnson's way of hanging on to one tiny scrap of power.

The matter of my supposed plagiarism had been settled to my and to Dad's satisfaction, but that doesn't mean it was forgotten. Forty-five years after Dad raced to my school to confront my teacher, I won a writing award at the university where I was teaching. My father went to the reception, beaming extravagantly as the president of the university handed me a certificate and a nice check. I read the award-winning story. Everyone applauded.

When I sat back down next to him, my check and certificate in hand, the sweet sound of applause dying down, Dad leaned over and said in my ear, "I wish Tim Johnson could see this." Nearly half a century later, he was still ticked off.

What Dad didn't realize was that Mr. Johnson had done me an accidental favor that day. He showed me how good I writer I was. I was so good, he didn't believe my work was actually mine. He thought I copied it from a book, written by an actual author. The day Tim Johnson called me a cheat marked the point I decided I would write for the rest of my life.



## Contributors

**Sophia N. Ashley** is a writer of poetry. They have had their works previously published, or forthcoming, in *Native Skin*, *Wondrous Real Magazine*, *The Capilano Review*, *Grimscribe*, *Art Access Australia*, and elsewhere. They are the author of the unpublished work “Dumb Mandate.”

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**Michael Clark** is a 28-year-old high school English teacher and novelist who has taught Writer’s Workshop and various other English classes. He dreams of getting the chance to come up with his own creative course ideas, but in the meantime, he sneaks creative writing lessons into the curriculum whenever he can.

**Kathleen Dillon** teaches first-year writing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The motto for her course is “know what you believe and why.” She engages her students in reflecting on the places and communities that have shaped their beliefs and how to act on those beliefs in the world.

**Majorie Dybec** expanded her portfolio of personal essays, poems and works of fiction at Sarah Lawrence College’s Writing Institute. She is a member of the Charlotte Writer’s Club and participates in Charlotte Lit events. She strives to always be improving through online craft lessons. Currently, she is attempting a first novel.

**Arvilla Fee** teaches English for Clark State. She has been published in numerous presses, including *Poetry Quarterly*, *50 Haikus*, *Contemporary Haibun Online*, *Drifting Sands Haibun* & others. For Arvilla, poetry is about making personal connections and about being in the trenches with ordinary people who will say, “She gets me.”

**Zary Fekete** has worked as a teacher in Hungary, Moldova, Romania, China, and Cambodia. He currently lives and works as a writer in Minnesota. Some places he has been published are Goats Milk Mag, JMWW Journal, Bethlehem Writers Roundtable, and Zoetic Press. He enjoys reading, podcasts, and long, slow films. Twitter: @ZaryFekete

**Lauren Cohen Fisher** graduated from Colby College in 2013, when she wrote “Nice Details.” She has since returned to Colby as a Jewish Studies faculty member. The lessons she learned from her creative writing advisor during her time as a student continues to drive her teaching today – that the classroom is not just a place to explore content but also how to understand ourselves and the world in which we live.

**Annette Gagliardi** taught Family Education for thirty years in the Minneapolis public school system. She also taught poetry in elementary schools and was a 'writer in residence' for several years. Gagliardi's poem *What's Left But the Verbs* won third place in the 2022 Nebraska Poetry Contest. Visit her website at: <https://annette-gagliardi.com/>

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**David M. Harris**, in a midlife career change, left book publishing and became a freelance composition teacher at various colleges in the New York and, later, Nashville areas. One of his end-of-semester assignments was an essay on what the student learned from the course. One of those essays inspired his poem, "Writing for Me."

**Jill Jepson** is the author of two books, and 65 stories and essays. She taught composition and creative writing at the university level for 27 years and is professor emerita at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

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**Laurinda Lind** taught composition classes at a New York junior college for eight years. She has also worked as a journalist and a communications superintendent. Other poems are at *Atlanta Review*, *Keats-Shelley Review*, *New American Writing*, and *Paterson Literary Review*. She is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee.

**Carol J. Luther** taught freshman composition for almost forty years at the college level, first at Hiwassee College in Madisonville, TN, and then at Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville, TN. She also taught developmental writing, sophomore literature, and introduction to film studies. Now retired, she writes for pleasure and has published several short stories.

**Mord McGhee's** work can be read in four published novels and anywhere literary fiction is found. He is currently a board member of Roway.org and an associate editor for Ariel Publishing and Parsec SFF. Mord is also an associate executive producer for upcoming feature film 'The Man in the White Van' starring Sean Astin and Ali Larter. [Mordmcghee.com](http://Mordmcghee.com) for more. On a personal note, Mord collects fossils and writes out of Lowcountry South Carolina.



**Laura Merleau** lives in Texas where she teaches high school English. She taught AP Language and Composition at a high school in China for five years, during which time she visited Tibet and made it to Mount Everest Base Camp. Laura does yoga and writes and illustrates children's books in her free time.

**Jennifer Davis Michael** is a professor of English at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, and around 40% of her teaching load each year is first-year composition. She has published two chapbooks, both from Finishing Line Press. These and other works can be found at her website:

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**Chris Mikesell**, growing up in San Jose, took AP English Literature in high school. He now teaches AP English Language in Dallas, Texas. His poetry has appeared or is pending in *GRIFFEL*, *The Quarter(ly) Review*, and *diet milk magazine*.

**Michael Milburn** has taught high school English in New Haven, CT for twenty-eight years. Prior to that he taught composition and creative writing at colleges, community colleges, and graduate schools in the Boston, Syracuse, and New Haven areas. As a former English major and writing graduate student, he has benefited from writing teachers at every level of his education. The best of these still look over his shoulder (or seem to be doing so) as he writes.

**Ben Nardolilli** is currently an MFA candidate at Long Island University. His work has appeared in *Fez Red*, *One Ghana One Voice*, *Caper Literary Journal*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Elimae*, *fwriction*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, and *THEMA*. His chapbook *Common Symptoms of an Enduring Chill Explained*, has been published by Folded Word Press. He blogs at [mirrorsponge.blogspot.com](http://mirrorsponge.blogspot.com) and is looking to publish a novel.

**Duarte N. Nobrega** was born in Madeira, Portugal in 1996. He's a holder of a BA in Languages and Business studies from University of Madeira. He's a screenwriter (in English), a novelist (in Portuguese) and a poet (in English). Duarte's fiction has been published in *Twenty-Two Twenty-Eight Literary Magazine*. Other work of his is anticipated to be published in *Birmingham Arts Journal* this year.

**Sunayna Pal**, born and raised in Mumbai, now happily resides in Maryland with her family. She used to teach at Art and Math Touching Lives Welfare Trust. Her story, "Big Learning from Small," is from that time. She is also devoted to the practice of Heartfulness meditation. Find more on her at [sunaynapal.com](http://sunaynapal.com).

**Abby Perkins** is a feminist author who enjoys the impact that writing can have. When she is not writing, she enjoys finding other ways to positively impact her community through volunteer work and outreach. She is currently a graduate student working towards her MFA in Creative Nonfiction. She believes writing can create a more understanding and empathetic world.

**Ana Reisens** is a poet, writer, and teacher. You can find her poetry in *The Bombay Literary Magazine*, *The Belmont Story Review*, and in the Fresher Press anthology *Winding Roads*, among other places. She

teaches university English in Spain and is currently working on her first novel.

**Jim Ross** taught composition while substitute teaching through four years of grad school. After becoming a school-focused researcher, he continued teaching composition to fellow researchers who hadn't learned in school. Teaching composition became an integral part of parenting. His piece "Kids Write" describes how his grandchildren "write books" while aspiring to become published authors.

**Samuel Samba** is an indigenous writer of poetry and other works of art. He has been previously published in *Exist Otherwise*, *Australian Poetry Journal* and elsewhere. He received an honorable mention in the recent 2022 Christopher Hewitt Award in Poetry.

**Bryant Smith** is a reluctant writing teacher, in English, at least. For almost 20 years, he has taught Spanish at the college level in South Louisiana. However, he earned his MA in English where poetry was a part of the required curriculum. The attached manifesto/memoir is a direct result of a poetry course that he took in order to obtain the required credentials to teach first-year (English) writing in addition to his Spanish courses.

**Robinne Weiss** teaches extension writing to 11-13-year-olds who always groan when she starts a poetry unit. But when she launches seamlessly into a performance of her poem about poetry, the students go wild.

**rob lane wilder** advances language in a unique way. Using a freewheeling, neo beat vernacular, wilder also taps into ee cummings, Neruda, and Emily Dickinson. Tipping hat to Jackson Pollock, Edward Hopper, Georgia O'Keefe, Lester Bangs, David Whyte and Eckert Tolle, wilder is by turns tongue-in-cheek, exuberant, and often unpredictable. Wilder's publishing credits include *The Featherdale Review*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *Second Guess*, among others.

**Noreen Wilson** has a master's degree in writing, taught fifth graders for almost forty years, is newly retired, and is now hoping to share her poetry with others. When teaching writing, Mrs. Wilson was most inspired by her students' voices, containing originality, humanity, humor, and compassion.

**Janice Zerfas** has taught writing at a southwest Michigan community college for thirty-two years as well as at a minimum-security prison and a senior citizen center. Janice has found that the invisible pain writing students felt was a form of unshared suffering but also one understood communally. She hopes her poems express that journey. Janice's poems have been published in the *South Dakota Review*, the *MacGuffin*, *Caesura*, and more.

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