



ON THE ROAD

VOL. 2

THE POET
SUMMER 2020

THE
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Summer 2020
ON THE ROAD

Volume 2

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CONTENTS

8. Mary McCormack - USA
11. Yi Jung Chen - TAIWAN
13. Eugene Stevenson - USA
21. Judy DeCroce - USA
23. Karen Douglass - USA
27. William Khalipwina Mpina - MALAWI
30. LindaAnn LoSchiavo - USA
32. Wynn Wheldon - ENGLAND
34. Megha Sood - USA
37. Alex Carroll - ENGLAND
41. Cheryl Caesar - USA
44. Kathleen Bleakley - AUSTRALIA
46. Jim Landwehr - USA
49. Strider Marcus Jones - ENGLAND
53. Theresa C. Gaynord - USA
57. Sara Kerr - ENGLAND
63. Kimberly Falsafi - USA
65. David A Banks - ENGLAND
68. Jacinta Diaz - USA
72. Leanne Bradbury - FRANCE / UK
74. Jayne Marek - USA
78. Barbra Dean - SPAIN / ENGLAND
80. Gila Mon - USA
83. Dany Gagnon - CANADA
85. Stella Peg Carruthers - NEW ZEALAND
88. Janet McCann - USA
91. Máire Malone - ENGLAND
94. Judith Sanders - USA
101. Bill Cushing - USA
105. Marianne Mersereau - USA
108. Maliha Hassan - PAKISTAN
111. Saharsh Satheesh - USA
113. Bernadette Perez - USA
116. Sean J Mahoney - USA
120. Aaron Sandberg - USA
123. Veda Varma - BAHRAIN
125. Sandra Storey - USA
128. Bill Cox - SCOTLAND
130. Mariana Mcdonald - USA
132. Hussein Habasch - KURDISTAN / GERMANY
136. Diana Raab - USA
139. Ankita Patel - INDIA

141. Charles Leggett - USA
147. Sarah Jane Justice - AUSTRALIA
149. Jack D. Harvey - USA
155. Adrienne Stevenson - CANADA
159. Barbara Hawthorn - NEW ZEALAND
162. Jessica Niles DeHoff - MALAYSIA
164. Mary Anne Zammit - MALTA
166. William Rudolph - USA
168. Emmanuel Chitsanzo Mtema - MALAWI
170. Tamam Kahn - USA
174. Angela B. Haag - USA
178. Alicja Maria Kuberska - POLAND
182. Mtende Wezi Nthara - MALAWI
185. Fred Kracke - USA
187. Mantz Yorke - ENGLAND
190. Donna Zephryne - USA
192. Brian Langley - AUSTRALIA
196. Mary Messick - USA
199. Marc Darnell - USA
201. John Laue - USA
203. Isioma Jemimah Okonicha - NIGERIA
205. Bruce Pemberton - USA
208. Brigette Furlonger - CANADA
211. Lucy Tyrrell - USA

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Mary McCormack

USA

Mary enjoys wandering forest paths, dreaming up stories. She currently lives near Chicago. Her book is titled: *Away From Shore*, and her work has appeared - or is forthcoming - in *Gingerbread House*, *Storm Cellar*, *After the Pause*, *Plum Tree Tavern*, and *Neologism*, among others.

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HITCH-HIKING

In Ireland, I lived by a beach,
ran up and down hills
with two border collies,
tried a pint of hard cider,
and wrote letters to send back home.
I wore welly boots
and hitched rides.
Sometimes the people who stopped
were women,
but mostly they were men.
One said the wellies I wore
were attractive; they showed
I'd be a hard-working wife.
He asked if I wanted to meet
for a drink that night. He wanted
to drop me off at my front door.
I told him the only way
to my house
was on foot. I had him stop
in front of green fields,
and then I got out,
slipped under a fence,
passed horses and farmhouses,
and left him to wonder
who the heck
was that beautiful,
fearless girl.

Previously published in *Away From Shore*, 2007.

A DAY IN PARIS

1.

I talk to all the strangers I meet, including the young man from Barcelona, who got pulled aside for questioning. He carries a sack of rice on top of his suitcase. He's visiting friends who work in factories that produce T-shirts for tourists, Paris, *je t'aime!* scrawled across the chests. He helps me navigate the subway system, shocked – worried – that I'm travelling alone. His sisters, he says, would never dream of doing anything so reckless.

2.

I buy tangerines and a baguette, wander the city, see the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame, but pause longest by a painter at his easel. The day is clouded, but he catches each scrap of light. A puddle on cobblestones, panes of stained glass, pigeons with their iridescent stripes. Things I could add: a gleaming bench, the river Seine, a homeless man's *merci* when I sit, peel a tangerine, and offer it to him, citrus spray coating my fingers.

3.

At the top of the stairs to the Sacré-Cœur Basilica stands a man with green eyes. He extends an arm when I reach him, breathless, and offers to show me around the church. I think maybe this is what French people do, maybe he's lonely, maybe this is a dare, or maybe he's trying to catch me off guard and lead me into an alley. It turns out, he's just *très charmant*. After the tour, he bows, and we part ways.

4.

At the end of Rue Gabrielle in Montmartre, before returning to my hostel, I close my eyes, breathe in the scent of roasted chestnuts. The wind slips cold hands under my scarf. A Tchaikovsky waltz floats by. The Nutcracker? Swan Lake? *Joie de vivre* courses like a song through my veins. Alone under the night sky, I'm undaunted. I think of how people worry about me, even strangers, and how worry twists itself around girls everywhere. I think of the dreams they have, the ones their brothers will never know.

Yi Jung Chen

TAIWAN

Yi Jung Chen writes poems in English, Chinese and Taiwanese. Besides teaching students of learning difficulties in the elementary school of Taiwan, he was also a teacher-researcher for seven years in the Graduate Institute of Education of Chung Cheng University. In his spare time, Yi Jung Chen also works with other teachers for the completion of illustrated picture books in Chinese, English and Japanese language.

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ON THE WINDING ROAD

Sakura petals scattered on the path,
as we whistled on the tandem bike.
Your smile, so sweet and tender,
Dragonflies greeted us with their soft dabs.

Red paper lanterns hang up yonder,
Magpie sat still on the tree branch
announcing the wedding news of a couple.
In the lush valley, again I found myself
sobbing, shedding tears of forlorn solitude.

Never had I suspected,
our love could not stand tall to
relentless ordeal of time and space.
Two lonely souls combined,
a perfect match meant to be.

The meandering road unfolds
the painful moment again.
Stopping by the lake,
we used to gather Daffodils.
Down on my knees,
I turned away with a rueful laugh.
How silly I was to believe in
a vacant promise from a weak mind,
easily break down, showing no signals overhead.

Eugene Stevenson

USA

Eugene writes to make some semblance of order out of disorder, to make sense of the unthinkable, to make still photographs out of daily rushes. His poems have appeared in *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, *DASH Literary Journal*, *Dime Show Review*, *Gravel Literary Magazine*, *The Hudson Review*, *Icarus*, and *Swamp Ape Review*. He is the son of immigrants, the father of expatriates; he believes the world is round and goes around. Stevenson has lived in Italy and Turkey, and currently lives in Raleigh, North Carolina.
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LONELIEST ROAD IN AMERICA

The loneliest road in America could be Route 50 across central Nevada, a road chosen from the atlas two nights before, or could be the road one chooses to drive solo, as an expert in leaving, skills honed over years, over other roads, the unsubtle ways of good-bye, so long. In the car, everything? All one needs.

There are checkpoints to remind & guide: a scratch on a rock, rocks, here & there so I do not tread the same day twice. The charts may need new markings after long sessions in the treehouse. In the days before departure, a repeated note to self: Do not expect, do not expect at all, let alone too much.

1. Home

His father was a wandering soul. So he was not, exchanged his trolley chits & railroad passes for a three-lot plat where a brickyard once stood, in a village upriver from an orange-blue forest of open hearths & chemical plants directly in the path of prevailing winds that pushed translucent clouds of chlorine & sodium ahead of coming storms. He planted his feet in that plat, in that village, planted the ash, the maples, the elms, the lilacs, the honeysuckle, the poplars to define his territory, with the bonus of shade for the house, the yard, the garage.

There he grew, as much as his early life would enable & allow, to witness his village melded into the city, watch the ash tree in front chainsawed to make way for a paved road with granite curbs, oversee the removal of the umbrellas, hubs, & tubes of diseased backyard elms, show little regard as in the space of an hour, saws ate the row of poplars along the back lot line, their ambition having outreached their strength. He watched

all that grew there in the yard & in the house,
watched it vanish, sooner than he knew
it would, much sooner than he expected.

Somewhere along the way, in his singular way,
he resolved to stay where he was until
his children were gone, his friends were gone,
his wife's mind was gone, his identity was gone.
Stay he did, until the night they carried him out
the front door of the house on a gurney, as if
practicing for the night, two weeks later, when
they carried him out of the rehab hospital
in a body bag & I walked him to the back door.

Before dawn, a too-bright light switched on,
I look at my father in the mirror, study his
specular reflection, squint until I decide the
better original light is this side of the silver glass,
behind the window glass, where he is wearing
clothes worn smooth under a grey wool jacket,
holes in the elastic cuffs, the jacket that gave
him his double-edged nickname. Now, in harsh
LED, he has a gift to give: the link between
going half crazy now & then, & when, after the
drama is over & pieces stop flying & settle down,
the dust also settles on all that has occurred.

2. East Ely

There are more Everests to die on than
we can count. Around Wheeler Peak,
13 thousand 63 feet, through Connors Pass,
77 hundred 22 feet, into this thin air
our last breath whispers as we ask,
if we can, *How did we get here?*
In East Ely, a whistle blows, a steam whistle.
The steam whistle blows again, unmistakably
a *Here I am*, an echo from the day
we lowered him into the ground.
Even when one flies for a living, for fun,
for fear, for need, even so there are stops.
I look for sense in the sound, for signals in
a coded message, for a face framed in
darkness with eyebrows like black nimbus,
eyes like sun through a magnifying glass,
lips like hell's rim speaking in brimstone.

Cigarette smoke out in the hallway drifts down from the casino, all-machines & dark as a barn. The Old Prospector has seen better days, like the big-haired women of a certain age, the big-hatted men of wizened appearance, not entirely owing to age & sun. This may not be a destination you choose, but becomes a good enough place where you decide to stay, counting your stacks of dwindling chips, not counting how much remains. In the beep *beep beep, boop boop* of the money suckers, & the tinkling of ice not yet melted by booze, a hollow comfort for awhile, in that part of the day you throw away.

Early morning, Hotel Nevada coffee shop, the waitress walks the counter, efficient, omnipresent. *Another cup of coffee? Wanna a top-up?* She is catholic in preaching her canon of abuse, *Ned's a regular, he doesn't getta please & thank you, doesn't get much else neither.* Breakfast theatre before sunrise. Two coffees to go, the cups are small & it's a stretch past hills of copper-mine tailings to Eureka, a stretch where the feeling begins: how far away all that is known, how far away all that is recalled or remembered. Yet here it is, all of it, populating the seat beside me, populating satellite radio, populations copulating in lyric & melody, as we climb the east side, leaving the crowd behind, behind Robinson Summit, 75 hundred 88 feet, in a long slide to the valley floor, where they gather once again in the back seat, where they hitchhike along the shoulders in both directions, where they recombine, make faces & change faces, where they talk to me or ignore me depending on what they want. I am merely their chauffeur, heading down the road west, west to what is there.

4. Eureka

All morning, all afternoon, all evening, all day, everyday, Welcome to *Willie's Roadhouse*,

the home of Classic Country. We will never have enough Willie Nelson, raw talent, naiveté early, too-much-life late. This morning he offers, *Nothing I Can Do About It Now.* Flashbulbs blind, absent the pop, pop, pop. Pull the car off gently on the west side of the pass to take this photo: the road clings to the mountainside in long arcs as it descends to the right, north, then twists again & again, finally to the left, west, across how many miles. until it rises to the right, north again, squeezes into a gap in snow-headed peaks. Repeat in forty minutes, repeat the sight, repeat, repeat.

I found it, The Owl Club cafe in Eureka, after walking the elevated sidewalks on both sides of the main drag, elevated for buckboards, stage coaches, horses, Model-Ts. I am high, having walked through an old postcard, hand-painted to boast & to preen, not as off-putting as the idea might seem, past the general store with pizza among its offerings, the court house, 1879 painted in black on its white crown, the post office in a low shed. Once, there was money & aspiration enough to fill the red-brick opera house.

Gambling machines in the bar blare & glare their one-measure melodies & cold, sharp lights. Chicken-fried steak & hash browns, coffee as good as it gets. Compliments to the chef, except she is cheerless, looks puzzled before she says, We get it from foodservice. A pause to note we can be miserable or happy, maybe both anywhere on the map or on the globe. Hitch the jeans, walk in the sun & get out of town.

Over & through the mountains, miles & miles of emptiness, better in a car with a good engine & tires, wondrous at a Conestoga with a pair of tired oxen & steel-rimmed wheels. Up & over Hickison Summit 65 hundred 46 feet, down to the valley floor, up & over Austin Summit 74 hundred 84 feet, cold headwind & country music for company. Stomach full of breakfast, eyes full of open road make for a good day, a celebration:

hall pass in the pocket, signed by Willie himself.

5. Cold Springs

Off Whiskey Hill, where the dead drink dust,
a pause to think of what might have been, but for
cotton flannel, virginity, a nightstand light &
a determined hand, meetings arranged in
subtraction of zip codes. This afternoon, the sun
is striated muscle, taut in the western sky.
To meet death on a blind curve, pass it by in
black & white, to see the kingdom of the missing
& the dead rise with each new ridge is to
make the u-turn a bigger part of the ride.
What a place to think, open space a luxury,
if you can spare the time from feeding stock,
scavenging wood for a fire, patching adobe walls.

Sage, scrub brush, tumbleweed wander by.
The stream that has etched a pass through
this topography is full with early April snow melt
heading east downhill to the Colorado.
The road mirrors the bank for miles, descends,
levels out, a safer place to mount the head
on a swivel, to see a carved & painted
wood sign, Pony Express Trail 1860-1861,
knowledge that deflates a boyhood myth.

At the ruins of the station, visions of bedding
down next to the animals for body heat,
falling asleep to wolves howling in the dark.
Here, a human history: Pony Bob rode
three hundred eighty miles roundtrip in
thirty-six hours after the local residents killed
a station manager, death by arrows if he was
lucky, retribution for the paleface incursion,
strong horses the prize worth killing for.

6. Carson City

The view out the windshield becomes jaded,
civilization is at hand to the right & left as
the highway broadens to four lanes, grows
traffic lights, fast food joints & strip malls
along its edges, & feeds duels with Buckeyes
tired from driving. Leave the road, divert north,

up through Silver City for a look at Virginia City,
quick read of bars & tourists, brief vision of
Hoss & the boys & their Canadian father,
back when characters had real conversations.
Drive by a large & unlikely Catholic church
looking more prosperous than the town
around it. Down to the pass, west again.

The route winds vaguely downhill, past signs
outside the city limits advertising local bordellos,
towards & through the state capital,
antiseptic like most state capitals.
Pedestrians more noteworthy: men in suits &
ties with briefcases, women in heels with
purses, & knots of tourists looking lost,
looking for lunch. Civilization makes one tired.

7. Tahoe

Diamonds sprawl on a blue silk runner, draw
the eyes, beyond tired in their sockets, to see
through a ragged, elongated green curtain.
Diamonds, more diamonds. More diamonds
than people, more diamonds than cars, more
more diamonds than towns & stops on
the maps of the atlas. On the south shore of
the alpine lake where Nevada & California meet,
the driver, the wagon master, the traveller,
the wanderer, this generation's iteration of
the family genome untethered, looks though
the window of his room, looks north up the lake
& feels the water, the blood, the record of
the years, quiet down, the urge quelled, the itch
quelled, at least for the moment, a day or two.

There stretches from this place to the next,
a lonely road, asphalt with a single line, double
lines or no lines, muddy with rain, dusty with sun,
winding past ridge & mountain, past gulch &
valley, past sand & rock, past cliff face &
shattered stone, a path worn like a runner laid
across geography by these feet & the feet of
those who walked & rode before, those who
thought & spoke hopeful words a million times
before. Yet even in the residue of tumult, glacial
retreat, clash of tectonic plates, there are quiet

spaces of flowers watered by memories melting
like so many lemon drops on the tongue.

Save this history for another story, fit it in
between the dialogue, the faces, the names,
carry the record of the truths harvested from
this fragile soil. The highways into dreams are
darkened. Memory selects scenes illuminated
by dashboard light, high-wattage moonlight,
cloud-reflected city light, shaded sunlight,
all light & especially the light captured behind
the retina, filed or misfiled on the laptop, &
deep inside the repository of our history. No
Kerouac & Cassady on the road this time. This
is the flight again, multiplied, magnified, the
homestead far behind, but perennially in front
of the head. This solo drive over the loneliest
road in America has become less going-to than
leaving. No fooling the heart's odometer.

Judy DeCroce

USA

Judy is an American poet/flash fiction writer, educator, and avid reader who began writing flash fiction and poetry in 2006 - many of which have been published by *Plato's Cave* online, *Front Porch Review*, *Amethyst Review*, *Tigershark Publishing*, *The BeZine* and many others. Her works have been featured in US, UK and India. Judy is also an acclaimed professional storyteller and teacher of that genre working with students ranging in age as young as kindergarten, as well as instructing adults in the art of storytelling and is a requested instructor in Writers and Books summer program Summerwrite and ADEPT - an enrichment program sponsored by BOCES 2 of Rochester, New York. Judy lives and works in upstate New York with her husband, poet/artist Antoni Ooto, and continues to teach Flash Fiction and Storytelling.

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Karen Douglass

USA

Karen Douglass, MA, MFA - a displaced New Englander now living in Colorado, she has been a grad student, college instructor, parent (still is), poet, novelist, horse trainer, race-track judge, and psychiatric nurse. She has published five books of poetry, three novels, and a memoir.

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CHECKED BAGGAGE

Anything I claim
about packing
means me,
stuffed metaphor.
I always pack
three white shirts.
Things are my habit,
hands-free travel
my final destination.

Terminal illness
is a TSA dis-ease
rarely fatal.
I cannot take
leave of my senses,
I believe
the boarding gate
is a ramp,
the taxiway
has no cabs, and
no one runs
on the runway.

I am my own
flight crew
belting me in,
upright and secure.
I know where
to find the nearest exit.

DREAM VACATION

The hour before sleep feels like
I'm already in New Orleans
wearing a new black and white
orchestrated outfit. I can see myself
strolling the Vieux Carré paying
hard cash for hot beignets,
knowing they will never fill me.
I am a tourist everywhere, wondering
if I would fit in in Fargo, live well in LA.
I see myself aloof and alone
at Café du Monde watching
other well-dressed strangers pass.

Footsore in New Orleans
finally I see, not myself, but
this old city where a man prays
to a light pole, his hands
folded, squinting in the sun.
A barista gives him free coffee,
says, "He's harmless."
A street drummer rings
his cymbal with a screwdriver.
A woman alone on the sidewalk
yells, "Get rid of the bitch!"

The Big Easy is a bitch.
She shows me two kids
and their mother tap dancing
on the sidewalk for spare change,
can lids for taps on their sneakers.
Waiting to cross Decatur a Marine vet
in a motorized wheel chair says
he was once struck by a hit-and-run.
He was just dazed but his chair
suffered a broken arm. He rolls away,
Laissez les bons temps rouler
Outside Starbucks a man passes out
on the sidewalk and for an hour
people walk around him,
their only kindness not
to step on his out-flung arm.
Called for twice -

no help comes. A stranger stops,
steals his cigarettes and half pint.
A blind cop drives away. I stand guard
until the man wakes up, tell him
he's been robbed. "You didn't stop him?"
Get into it over smokes and vodka? No.
I am just a tourist here.

In the old Custom House two guards
scan and wand every paying guest
to the Insectorium, protecting termites
and tarantulas from terrorists. I know
my hotel maid will be paid
to clean up after I leave and my tip
won't buy her much but she's not
saving up for Disney World.

LOVE ON A GREEK ISLAND

A greenish-brown gecko,
small and loud-"Chuck! Chuck!"-
shares my room on exotic Skiathos,
where even the nights are steamy.

Bug net tucked tight
I keep a worried eye on folds
where a lizard might sneak in
to share my bed. Reptilian love
is not the passion I want
on the edge of the fabled Aegean.
Instead of Apollo, I get a gecko
and call him Fred. I ask you,
what Greek god was ever Fred?

But I love him for fending off
the biting insects that invade our room.
Fred hovers, true to my needs
as no man ever was. May feral cats
never crunch his dainty bones.

William Khalipwina Mpina

MALAWI

William is a Malawian poet, fiction writer, essayist, editor, economist and teacher. His writing reflects on the mundane and everyday experiences. Many of his works appear in online international literary magazines such as *Brave World*, *Kalahari Review*, *Literary Shanghai*, *Writers Space Africa*, *African writer*, *Nthanda review*, *Scribble*, *Atunis Poetry*, *Poetica* and *Expound Magazine*; and in over ten local anthologies. A co-editor of *Walking the Battlefield* a 2020 Malawian anthology on corona virus, Mpina contributed verses in an international collection *LOCKDOWN 2020*. His books include *Princess from the Moon* (2020), *Shattered Dreams* (2019), *Blood Suckers* (2019), *Shadows of Death and other poems* (2016), *Namayeni* (2009) and *Njiru* (2003).

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THE ROAD VIA THAMBANI

Remember our visit
To Liberty Hotel
The silent blaze of light
The oppressive calmness
The fog on the road
Suddenly breaking the wind
Of joy and the mid-night
Road block singeing our nerves
Flashes of pain and rain
The fabulous fortuner
Driving us intently forward
To escape the torture
Remember how we
Ducked and fled
The stones they fired
Tyres whispering
Breathing sparks of fire
Till we took the road
Via Thambani,
Dusty and rocky
No road signs
No shouting for help
Only the pouring heat
Snapping the nerves
And the dangerous cruise
The last cock's crow
Singing in hurrying clouds
Blanketing the night sky
Speaking to pregnant air
Blew trauma, judicious fear
Bulwarks of freedom
Of travel, looking back
The journey appalled
By untold misery lingers:
Al-Shabab or Boko Haram?
No, those were bees
To bite innocent lives
But God lives,
Reads evil minds
Shreds false dreams
Listens to nature's outbursts
Crowned in fiery tongues

And turns the tables upside down
He cannot allow reliable limbs
To be paralysed and peace
To be troubled forever
Delayed, we took a long road
Via Thambani
Through Mozambique
Meet the main road
At Tsangano
Ripples from our eyes
Falling like hailstorm
Till when the beautiful face of
Liberty Hotel, our destination
Brightened in the rising sun.

LindaAnn LoSchiavo

USA

LindaAnn is a dramatist, writer, and poet. Her poetry collections *Conflicted Excitement* (Red Wolf Editions, 2018), *Concupiscent Consumption* (Red Ferret Press, 2020), and Elgin Award nominee *A Route Obscure and Lonely* (Wapshott Press, 2020) along with her collaborative book on prejudice (Macmillan in the USA, Aracne Editions in Italy) are her latest titles. A member of The Dramatists Guild and SFPA, she was recently Poetry Superhighway's "Poet of the Week."

Twitter: @Mae_Westside

MATTINATA

That dark cathedral we've passed - a second time,
I'm sure - is proof we're lost, this dog-eared map
Another mystery on my damp hands,
And yesterday's last accident red, tight
Across my mind, the Autostrada lined
With better cars than our Fiesta loan
From Hertz-Italiana, drivers making
Mouthfuls of grand imperfect music there,
In our direction, hating tourists dim
As rusted roofs, our lack turned up - exposed.

If weariness won't finish us, rust must.

Halfway to wishing I were home, dead - or both! -
There's Tintorétto's sky. The ceilings
Of the Autostrada come from paintings viewed
In muted colours as compared to this
Display: dim business of a dawn lit now
Like Lazarus just risen, frictionless.

Wynn Wheldon

ENGLAND

Wynn's collections of poetry are *Tiny Disturbances* (Acumen Pamphlet, 2012), *Private Places* (Indigo Dreams, 2016) and *Know One* (ArtKapsule, 2018). He has written biographies of Huw Wheldon (*Kicking the Bar*, Unbound 2016) and Daniel Mendoza (*The Fighting Jew*, Amberley 2019). He reviews occasionally for the *Spectator* and *Commentary* magazine (USA). He was born and lives in London.
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ON THE BOUTONNE

Laughter, mint and dragonflies
as we canoed the Boutonne.
Twelve clicks from Antezant to St Jean,
a trip memory amplifies into the Arcadian,
as we recall what gratifies
and not the cloud that dims the sun.

Megha Sood

USA

Megha is an Indian American living in Jersey City, New Jersey. She is an Assistant Poetry Editor for the UK based Arts and Literary Journal *MookyChick*, and a contributing editor at *Free Verse Revolution*, *Heretics*, *Lovers and Madmen*, *Sudden Denouement*, *Whisper and the Roar*, *GoDogGoCafe*, and poetry editor at *Ariel Chart*. She had had published over 450 works in journals including *Better than Starbucks*, *FIVE:2: ONE*, *KOAN*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Foliage Oak*, *Visitant Lit*, *Quail Bell*, *Dime show review*, etc. and has works featured in 35 upcoming anthologies in the US, UK, Australia and Canada. She is two-time State-level winner of the NJ Poetry Contest (2018/2019), National level poetry finalist in Poetry Matters Prize 2019, and shortlisted in the Pangolin Poetry Prize 2019. Works selected numerous times by Jersey City Writers group and Department of Cultural Affairs for the Arts House Festival.

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VAGABOND

A weary traveller
a vagabond,
a man with a
heart of a gypsy
and etched
with a bohemian soul

I wandered
nooks and corners of the world
flaunting my fears and anxiety
to someone, anyone
who would just sit next to me
and spend those flickering golden
moments of time
to melt and cover
my tattered soul in the body
so sublime

This unending quest
my parched self
has been wandering for eons
searching for that break
the humdrum of the moment
tipping off the sidewalk
and the tenacity of life
holding my hands
tightly with a sweaty palm

As I cross the roads
as my soul laments
drops are falling
and getting lost in that
little box of tin

A twinkle in my bleared eyes
an occasional gaze from the passerby
has hooked me to life forever
I fight that cold stirring breeze
testing the tenacity of my puny life

The dissonance of the walking footsteps
keep my marred soul alive;

my epitaph is etched
on the corner of that lonely road
which lost its identity
at the crossroads of life.

Alex Carroll

ENGLAND

A member of a local choir, *Singing Our Socks Off* and a teacher of 17 years, for Alex poems and stories have always been an intrinsic part of daily life. Writing poetry only arrived for her three months ago though, when exploring feelings of self and surroundings. Inspiration is captured from experiences, songs, family, nature, and writing has become most fluid in the early hours of the morning. The flow of rhyme and beat links to membership of Katumba Drumming band which has unlocked a new level of creativity.

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THAI LAND OF TREASURES

The bustling streets of Bangkok,
a blur of motion, neon strips cross the eyes,
Life grinds to a halt, a stand off
where human and mechanical meet,
Feet prove faster, closer to the melee,
the temptations of the pleasure seeker,
hands reach out from doorways
luring the spectator to become the observed.

The oil sizzles in the street market wok,
bubbling and popping sounds fill the air,
Hands move deftly, almost separately
from their human form, the repetitive motions,
mesmerising to the onlooker, a flesh like robot,
an assault on the nostrils, the flavour of nowhere else,
every step a fragrant memory of life in this thronging street

Lush and tranquil canals give way to the
hustle and bustle of the floating markets,
Locals direct their punts, jostling for position to
sell their wares to excited tourists searching for
the weird and wonderful,
The sound of chattering banter between
vendors, interrupted by an explosion of sound,
A busker suddenly springs into action, his
fingers moving fervently across the strings on his sueng.

The breathtaking beauty of the golden Buddha
bejewelled in wealthy leaf, sits sparkling in the
rays of the sun, a new day of worship has dawned
inside, crystals adorn the very surface of
the eyes, billions of reflections in a dazzling
display, spinning like a mirror ball in your own
silent disco, lost in a maze of glass, praying for a
miracle, following the light,

Competition is fierce in the rickshaw race, all is
not what it seems on the surface,
Riders deceiving, their strength is within, the
silent klaxon has sounded,
dodging, weaving, changing pace, breathe in,
hold on, a corner..LEAN!

A fight for the lead, this is not our race,
landmarks pass by in a blur, a tour recorded in
quick snaps, that was Chang Mai.

NIAGARA FALLS

Nature in a hurry, pouring
its heart out over the
 Edge,
Running wild and free
with no hesitation,
The pounding water
beating down
on weathered rocks,
Deafening

The eternal steady flow
cascading on nature's course,
Torrents gushing,
unstoppable energy,
immense power
that can't be turned off,
it has no choice, its path is carved
by those that came long before

Encompassed in these water walls
feeling small
in the swirling whirlpool,
patterns of white scum,
rise from the black shadows,
rain goes unnoticed,
rainbow calling through the mist
fine spray falling,

We can share it all,
between two lands,
beneath a ceiling of blue,
Down the waterfall,
wherever it may take us,
forever flowing to the sea,
Into a unity,
An ocean filled with peace.

Cheryl Caesar

USA

Cheryl lived in Paris, Tuscany and Sligo for 25 years; she earned her doctorate in comparative literature at the Sorbonne and taught literature and phonetics. She now teaches writing at Michigan State University. She gives poetry readings locally and serves on the board of the Lansing Poetry Club. Last year she published over a hundred poems in the U.S., Germany, India, Bangladesh, Yemen and Zimbabwe, and won third prize in the Singapore Poetry Contest for her poem on global warming. She also won a scholarship to the Social Justice workshop at the Fine Arts Work Centre in Provincetown, Mass., awarded by Indolent Books. Her work is currently appearing in anthologies of Reo Town readers from Lansing and of the East Lansing Art Festival. She has been swimming with wild dolphins, and it is one of the high points of her life. Her chapbook *Flatman: Poems of Protest in the Trump Era* is now available.

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SHELTERING PLACES

A box. A bed.
A house. A home.
It's the shelter that waits
when you're living alone.

A coat. A bag.
A phone. A Mac.
It's your coffeeshop space
with the wall at your back.

It's a carrel that's lined
with graffiti you know.
It's the stall where you hide
when there's nowhere to go.

It's the wind in your hair.
It's the sun in your face.
It's a nest in the bush.
It's a sheltering place.

A skin. A cell.
A tent. A tarp.
It's a chamber to hold
every beat of your heart.

A here. A there.
A me, a you.
At the end of the day,
we are all passing through.

First published in *What Rough Beast*, June 2020.

SUMMER EVENING

Watermelon rind forgotten
in the grass for the ants.

Streetlights come on
and shadows move behind shaded windows.

Music from a car window
far away and going somewhere.

Spring is promise, but summer's fullness
holds the seeds of its own dissolution.

Like dandelions that have turned
to ghosts and will soon fly away.

Like the drop hanging from the spigot, swelling
and waiting to shatter.

First published in *The Elixir Magazine*, June 2019.

Kathleen Bleakley

AUSTRALIA

Kathleen has four published poetry and prose collections: *Azure* (2017), *Lightseekers*, photography by 'pling (2015), *jumping out of cars*, with Andrea Gawthorne, images by `pling, (2004), and *Passionfruit & Other Pieces*, with prints by Hannah Parker (1995). Kathleen's poetry has been widely published in literary journals including internationally. Kathleen has a Bachelor of Creative Arts (Double Major Creative Writing & English Literature, with Distinction) from the University of Wollongong, Australia. Kathleen lives with her celestial, twin star – in life and art – `pling, between the escarpment and the sea, in Wollongong.

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WINDMILL

Travelling with David

the last time i went to Melbourne there wasn't a cloud in the sky or forecast. when we got to Melbourne it rained but this is the story of how we drove there. it was summer, your love Louise rolled down her window, face to the breeze... i sat in the back, driftin' between dream of what would be, the long grasses & talking to you. it was hot – not lush, we stopped at Holbrook you got out of the car the sky was crimson. i have a photo of you David in your cowboy hat collared shirt buttoned right up even in summer. what's with the mex thing? someone asked. somekinda phoenix.

we went to dine at a diner Louise said the tea here is safer than the coffee i ordered an English breakfast the woman at the counter scoured the breakfast menu she couldn't find it. we sat down to our overcooked vegetables & fibrous meat, i missed that part being a vegetarian i was still hungry and had apple pie it was the thing to have in Holbrook it was home-made and out of the oven not bain-marie you & Louise declined some people have to watch their weight you laughed like a hyena. after the apple pie, ice-cream and English breakfast tea i fell asleep in the back of the falcon. i slept most of the way to Melbourne when i woke Charles Bukowski was droning the same poem it must've been as long as the road from Gundagai – you & i didn't always agree on poetics.

you showed me round St Kilda i have picture of you by the water, wearing a red t-shirt a testimony that you didn't only wear suits, it's the last photo i took of you. your blue falcon is no more. next time i go to Melbourne you won't be there. David, i think of your phoenix. your ashes scattered in the wind. you by the windmill.

Previously published in jumping out of cars by Kathleen Bleakley & Andrea Gawthorne, photography by 'pling, Ginninderra Press, 2004.

Jim Landwehr

USA

Jim has published five poetry collections, *Thoughts From A Line At The DMV*, *Written Life*, *Reciting From Memory*, *On A Road* and *Genetically Speaking*. He also has two books, *The Portland House: A 70's Memoir* and *Dirty Shirt: A Boundary Waters Memoir*. He has non-fiction stories published in *StoryNews*, *Main Street Rag* and others. His poetry has been featured in *Torrid Literature Journal*, *Blue Heron Review*, *Off the Coast Poetry Journal*, and many others. Jim is a past poet laureate for the Village of Wales.

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BY WHATEVER MEANS NECESSARY

It is a longing in me which seeks
that feeling of moving through space
on wheels or wings or waves
over the strong backs of hills
and exclamatory mountains
shouting at the clouds
or atop oceans rolling to shores
our travels require little effort
we simultaneously sit still
yet speed forward blindly
in pursuit of better surroundings
a place anywhere but here
or at least different and new
this need for a change in scenery
takes me places where landscape
dictates memories treasured in tomorrow
of those spaces that hold unknowns
and make today's places
feel cold to the touch.

STATE LINE

It was a migration of one
a lonely, solo caravan
of the unholy trinity
me, myself and I.

A Minnesota job loss
pushed me eastward
toward the pull of
a Wisconsin job opportunity.

So I loaded my trailer
with fear, uncertainty and doubt
padded with excitement and anticipation
pulled by my compact, fueled by prayer.

It was a migration of self
a reinvention of me
a change of latitude
for a fresh start on tomorrow's dream.

Now I am assimilated
blending in with the natives
speaking their language
wearing the mask of my new tribe.

Strider Marcus Jones

ENGLAND

Strider is a poet, law graduate and ex civil servant from Salford, England with proud Celtic roots in Ireland and Wales. A member of The Poetry Society, his five published books of poetry reveal a maverick, moving between forests, mountains, cities and coasts playing his saxophone and clarinet in warm solitude. His poetry has been published in the USA, Canada, England, Ireland, Wales, France, Spain, India and Switzerland in numerous publications including *mgv2 Publishing Anthology*; *And Agamemnon Dead*; *Deep Water Literary Journal*; *The Huffington Post USA*; *The Stray Branch Literary Magazine*; *Crack The Spine Literary Magazine*; *A New Ulster/Anu*; *Outburst Poetry Magazine*; *The Galway Review*; *The Honest Ulsterman Magazine*; *The Lonely Crowd Magazine*; *Section8Magazine*; *Danse Macabre Literary Magazine*; *The Lampeter Review*; *Ygdrasil, A Journal of the Poetic Arts*; *Don't Be Afraid: Anthology To Seamus Heaney*; *Dead Snakes Poetry Magazine*; *Panoplyzine Poetry Magazine*; *Syzygy Poetry Journal Issue 1* and *Ammagazine/Angry Manifesto Issue*.

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VISIGOTH ROVER

i went on the bus to Cordoba,
and tried to find the Moor's
left over
in their excavated floors
and mosaic courtyards,
with hanging flowers brightly chamelion
against whitewashed walls
carrying calls
behind gated iron bars-
but they were gone
leaving mosque arches
and carved stories
to God's doors.

in those ancient streets
where everybody meets;
i saw the old successful men
with their younger women again,
sat in chrome slat chairs,
drinking coffee to cover
their vain love affairs-
and every breast,
was like the crest
of a soft ridge
as i peeped over
the castle wall and Roman bridge
like a Visigoth rover.

soft hand tapping on shoulder,
heavy hair
and beauty older,
the gypsy lady gave her clover
to borrowed breath,
embroidering it for death,
adding more to less
like the colours fading in her dress.
time and tune are too planned
to understand
her Trevi fountain of prediction,
or the dirty Bernini hand
shaping its description.

BOOTS OF HARLEY

this universe has no centre
and you're not there.
this sun is only sunny on the hood -
its light can't bend more benter
to be fair
as time stops running rings in wood.

the floorboards creak
and pictures speak
when I stand in empty corners making room,
for ghosts that want to have my seat
when they come in from the street
after riding like Valhalla under sun and moon.

summer shoes,
with beards of barley
in their soley grooves -
still think they're boots of Harley
on electro glide down highway avenues -
with a woman's arms around my waist
singing Bob Marley
and promising me her taste.

foot down. legs braced -
rocking back the headboard on the bed and base
in the hanging of her breasts
where my head would rest,
her lips a vanished beauty of the past -
explode
unload
to this contrast -

that turns its empty pages in my head
unlit, as I lie in bed,
running out of Kerouac road -
i feel the beat
and go to sleep
with some more story told.

WORDING WITH A WISE OLD SHAMEN

i danced around the monolith
on the dark side of the moon -
and waited for the face to speak on Mars:
there was no one in on earth to share it with
in the gloom-
they were going round in circles in their cars.
hiking out in Arizona.
sleeping underneath the stars;
got wording with a wise old shaman in a bar -
and he said: 'we have lost who we are.'
who we are, and where we come from.
what to do, and where to go -
unite the crystal skulls of wisdom
for knowledge that we used to know.
back inside my human body,
all things here are still the same -
time to smoke and drink some coffee,
then a walk in the rain -
before I glide the astral plaine.

Theresa C. Gaynord

USA

Theresa likes to write about matters of self-inflection and personal experiences. She likes to write about matters of an out-of-body, out-of-mind state, as well as subjects of an idyllic, pagan nature and the occult. Theresa writes horror, as well as concrete gritty and realistic dramas. She is said to be a witch and a poet, (within the horror writing community), and has been published in a number of magazines, e-zines, anthologies and books throughout the years. She is a former elementary school teacher, a psychic medium, reader and advisor.

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HIDDEN WATERS

On the road there are stairs, twisted like a rope.
Cottonwood kicks up yellow dust interrupting
the breath that scrapes the surface of air with icy
trails, wheezing in circles, barely high enough
for anyone to take notice.

There's an old Chevrolet with dangling exhaust
pipe, rattling out fumes as it lurches forward with
reluctance, playing it safe between the narrow
arches of towering mountain ranges that hover
over blue-green light,

displaying the mischief of the canyon. I reach out
with hesitation, afraid to let the westerly light breeze
touch my face before it shifts to the south. Black
Stetson and sunglasses guard against the sting as the
violent thrashing of windblown

sands offer solitude before nightfall. There's darkness
that remains in the memory of it all, momentary
infatuation that cynically interrupts with weakness;
but I'll take the shadows of fragrant sage over the
patches of hypocritical sunlight shaking

a wagging judgemental finger at the mesa of my spirit.
To me, the precipice isn't so steep. Fluidity
and commodity rest buried beneath the edges of sacred
Earth. In the grand vision I want to walk through
twisting paths, absorbed by endless

space where there are no signs of printed words, just
hidden waters that remain undisturbed inside old ruins
grafted to the mount by mythical beasts, ancient
superstitions and God's forgiveness. I want to excavate
the land with my eyes, resting my hands in the cool waters,

long gone and best forgotten.

BENIDORM

I see the image of the sea
mirrored in the wrinkles
of her face, streaked with
deposits of pinks and aquas.

The tourists don't know
each villager has a story,
and each story pervades
the tranquil landscape.

In the province of Alicante,
magic rituals slide silently
along flowing waters, where
torchlight processions travel
through grotto rooms.

Every church, mosque,
synagogue and temple
stares at one another,
with immense grandeur,

in a provincial little place
that serves goat's milk in
Mallorcan wine, where one
breath is peacefully lost
between the next.

FIRST SNOW OVER BUDAPEST

The train's engine crept north-east
to a stop in Budapest where
the tedium of snow settled
on the platform not far from
the exit door.

The land rolled out like a
white carpet void of patterns
or carved feet in the visible
distance; nestled within the rain
was the sound of grim silence.

The icy sleet and hail blurs stir
my blood and I lick the mist as the fog
swirls around me, heel to toe,
heel to toe, cross over and back
again, breathe.

Behind me a sea of slush is dancing
shyly as the sun makes its daily
comeback over the little village
homes. The sheets of air are warm,
and I slip away.

Sara Kerr

ENGLAND

Sara is a UK citizen, spending 2020 travelling in Spain, although travel plans are a little abridged due to Covid 19 restrictions! As a practitioner Psychologist, Sara has always been a keen observer of the beauty of the human spirit, but has only recently discovered the joy of writing about it and the wild metaphors always hiding at our feet. Spending such a prolonged period within a different country and culture has been the source of much inspiration. She has had some of her work published in *Lockdown 2020 - Poetry and prose from around the world on living in isolation and surviving the coronavirus*
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GALLERY OF LIGHT

I travelled oceans
for moments
such as this.

Just to look
through windows between worlds,
hanging on stark white walls.

Reality is now encrusted
with precious stones
and golden braid.

I have met a man
who paints in rubies.

Who repairs chasms
between the seen and the unseen
without a word spoken.

For a moment when I leave
this new city is of gold,

this unfamiliar street I walk
is as pure as transparent glass.

My centre of ordinary has shifted.

LOST TRAVELLER

I see her
on the first day I arrive
at La Puerta de la Luna.

I have known her hiraeth too,
a soul born
under a different moon.

And this gateway
shall not lead to it.

Her moon was full,
silken promises
and prayers
as soft as thistle down.

And yet she is here
in a land
where dreams
fall like rocks.

She wonders if
the silver beacon
of home
still searches for her
night after night.

But it has been such
a very long journey,

and still she is lost

in this
mist of unknowing.

She chooses clothes
of deepest scarlet

and
burnt orange

anything to catch the light.

For she fears
she is becoming
harder to find.

And perhaps

even the tireless seeking
of the most eternal of knights

can become waylaid

on the labyrinthine paths
of these moonless streets.

THE RESIDENCE

I found it today
hidden in a tiny alleyway,
next to the last
preserved synagogue in Andalusia.

They seemed to make
curious companions,
although perhaps
some shared goals
now I think about it.

In this street
filled with the echoes
of ancient incantations,
stands the door
of the Residence of Alchemy.

A magical doorway
if ever I saw one.
It seems to be carved
with the light of this place.

A deep amber hymn
that inhabits the walls,
casting an ochre spice glow
upon every footstep that visits.

The panels are intricately woven,
lines painted so close
they wrap around each other,
symbols dotted with patient tears.

What in ancient times
was sought here?
What other prayers of transformation
fell upon this doorstep
rather than the one next door?

My fingers long to trace the shapes
of these letters I don't understand,
for might not dull lead
yet turn to gold?

Is this an alchemy
that would look into my soul,
or one that looks out from it?

I am glad the door is closed today.
No stolen glimpse
for the casual tourist,
of the philosopher's stone
waiting to refine me to perfection.

Some things
are best left a mystery.

Kimberly Falsafi

USA

Kimberly is from McDonough, Georgia. She once spent her days travelling the United States. Living in 20 places in ten years. Now, she stays at home and writes during naptime, and travels through her memories.

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HOLY SAVANNAH

Savannah never looked so beautiful as it did empty
Sheltered inside, shuttered in place
Shivering but not from the cold
But for this haunting space
Where did you go Savannah?
It's good to see you again
Your trees seem taller than they did way back when
Your river street can breathe
Without the weight of well meaning travellers
And in the cemeteries the dead rest (for a change)
If the sickness takes me
I pray it takes me from Savannah
Heaven's appetizer
My last thoughts
Of Spanish moss
My last sight
A clear Savannah moonlight

David A Banks

ENGLAND

Based in the UK, David escaped from the confines of academic writing and now roams the fresh pastures of poetry and theatre, where he encounters far less bull. He regularly earwigs on conversations in a number of café haunts under the guise of 'research'. When not reading or writing, he has been known to make wooden dolls' houses, manufacture interesting pieces of firewood on a lathe, or spend many hours in the garden planning what he might do next time the weather conditions are absolutely perfect. He lives by the wise words of a respected friend who advised that most work activities should be given 'a good coat of looking-at' before commencing.

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FIVE HUNDRED MILES NORTH... THEN TURN LEFT

I had sought advice before I made this road trip.

"You'll hate it" some of my colleagues muttered,

"Mile after mile of... nothing."

"You'll love it" others enthused,

"The scenery changes every mile."

"It's an easy ride" my next door neighbour counselled,

"Just go north from Port Augusta for five hundred miles ...

Then turn left."

"Welcome to Port Augusta: Crossroads of Australia" the sign proclaimed.

Four frustrating hours had passed since I had left home

And threaded through teeming Adelaide traffic on the first leg of my journey to Uluru.

Two hundred and seventy miles from home - and only just at the starting gate.

Was this a sensible venture to see a lump of rock in the middle of nowhere?

A possible answer was worryingly revealed the following day,

Driving north along the Stuart Highway, a dead straight road

That seemed to end in the sky and was edged with patches of low-lying scrub

And a few bleached trees in an endless red landscape.

But as the sun arced across the sky the foliage slowly transformed from dull greys

To avocado, verdigris, lime green, olive, mint, silvers and purples,

Pink salt lakes, fringed with white, like paint on a red ochre palette.

Startled flocks of budgerigars, bright green and yellow,

Swirled from the road like leaves in an autumn wind,

Wheeling in their thousands in the clear blue sky.

That evening in Coober Pedy the sun plummeted below the horizon,

Its final glancing rays briefly igniting the red dirt of the main street.

As I lay in bed and contemplated the journey that lay ahead,

I mentally replayed scenes from the first two hundred miles.

The town of Woomera with its Missile Park and Heritage Centre,

The desert landscape, an emu and her chicks racing for non-existent cover,

Families of wedge-tailed eagles feasting on road-killed 'roo,

The road-side sign that marked Glendambo with its population of thirty people,
Twenty-two and a half thousand sheep,
And two million flies.

I agreed with my colleagues. There is nothing to see - and everything to see.
Tomorrow I would drive the remaining three hundred miles north
Then turn left.

Jacinta Diaz

USA

Jacinta has published poems in *The New Madrid*, *The New Mexico Humanities Review*, *San Pedro Review* and *Sycamore Review*. A dancer, Jacinta has adopted the Pacific Northwest.
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THERE WAS NO RAIN

We drove through scrubland and desert grass.

We drove through valleys of sand past
white rocks and trees. We drove fast
in pale light under mountains and vast
sandstone cliffs, their shadows like masts
of ghost ships. We swerved. We didn't crash
into the cool shade of canyons. We talked of nasty
loves and grated romance, so much hot gas
in our voices. There was no rain. Our asses
were cramped-up, knotted like our lives, raspy
young lives, felt like old lives that flashed
across the horizon, and if we could have grasped
them, held them like roses, made a dramatic cast
of our voices - a one-act play, we could have seen beyond the
glass
windshield. We drove into silence. We clasped
the wheel tighter when the wind howled like blasts
through red rocks. The universe was not as
narrow as we wanted, not as thin as
the shadow of a cactus tine or as fast
as light. The sky was the colour of blood. We drove past
discarded tires, lean-to shacks, abandoned cars, masses
of sand, light that had preyed on sassy-
assed men who thought they could outlast the heat. We passed
the burned bellies, the charred limbs and backsides
of ghosts. We drove nameless among the earth's deep cracks,
saw ourselves crouched like desert wolves in shaded tracks.
With our eyes white as limestone, we trotted off through shafts
of light, our fur mangy, the sky muttering thunder blasts.
We curled among the flowering yuccas, wagged our scratchy
tails, waited for accidents to happen on the road.

THE ROAD TO L.A.

The road winds through the colours of rust. A lopsided U
veers like a body that is all curves, so mellow,
expressed shadow along the desert, beyond a white lily,
zigzags around an arroyo, the original sand. A
bruised star will heal its own wounds here tonight. Mystic
drivers downshift and drift across the centre line,
forward with the jazzy rasp of a snake rubbing
its scales together, forward like the whispers of a swami
joining her smaller self with her habits. A forward spark
layers the twilight. Now a headlight beam.
Now lightning like a twinned lotus, a tango-
perfect dance step of light. Night rises like ash. A rescue
relief effort reaches for a home beyond the broken bridges.

ROAD TRIP

That summer before I turned 16
we took the customary car trip
to Montana, listened to Harry Potter
three times on CD, my father farting
behind the wheel, my sister farting
beside me, talking non-stop
to the stuffed dog she bought
with her allowance, my mother pointing
to Lewis and Clark signposts
and the confluence of rivers as if she'd led
the expedition herself,
and me, braces off, a year before
my license, shifting imaginary gears,
no parents or sisters, no stuffed dog
wearing Harry Potter collars,
just the road, my road, my own
corps of discovery,
the moon burning into the hillside,
the air silent as a star.

Leanne Bradbury

FRANCE / UK

Leanne is a British-born writer living and working in south west France. With a degree in Journalism and Linguistics and a Masters in Scriptwriting for Television and Radio, she has spent her career working in regional and national media; content production and marketing. Her writing has been described as “lively and easy to read” by the BBC, and often tackles taboo or difficult subjects. This aims to give a voice to those who have experienced situations that others are oblivious to, ignore, or simply do not understand. Her use of dark humour encourages reflection, understanding and, importantly, debate. While living in France she has had one of her theatre scripts performed, and a poem chosen and published for an anthology. She is currently adapting her script, which highlights the comical side of English/French language issues, for the Radio 4 market.

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A QUESTIONABLE JOURNEY

"Are we nearly there yet? Are we nearly there?"

"The road goes on as far as I can see.

"What time will we get there? Is it much, much further?"

"Mummy, won't you talk to me?"

"Are we nearly there yet? Are we nearly there?"

"Another day is turning into night.

"I don't like the dark and I don't like the cold,

"Mummy, will we be alright?"

"Are we nearly there yet? Are we nearly there?"

"I'm hungry and I'm trying not to cry.

"What time will we get there? Is it much, much further?"

"Mummy you won't tell me? Why?"

"My child I wish that I could say, how far we have to go.

"But this is a big journey and the truth is, I don't know.

"I wish I could explain to you and tell you it's okay.

"But all that I can say to you, is let's get through today."

Jayne Marek

USA

Jayne's newest poetry collection is in *Triple no. 10* (with Bethany Reid and George J. Farrah, Ravenna Press, 2020). Prior books include *Company of Women: New and Selected Poems* (with Lylanne Musselman and Mary Sexson, Chatter House, 2013), *Imposition of Form on the Natural World* (Finishing Line, 2013), *Why Horses?* (Red Mare, 2017), *In and Out of Rough Water* (Aldrich, 2017), and *The Tree Surgeon Dreams of Bowling* (Finishing Line, 2018). She also authored the scholarly study *Women Editing Modernism: "Little" Magazines and Literary History* (1995). Her writings and art photos appear in *Spillway, One, Eclectica, Grub Street, Calyx, Cortland Review, Folio, Bellevue Literary Review, Forage, Cold Mountain, About Place Journal, Stonecoast Review, Slipstream, River and South, Women's Studies Quarterly, Sin Fronteras, Notre Dame Review, Gulf Stream, Watershed Review, Camas*, and elsewhere. International publications include *The Lake, Amsterdam Quarterly, The Curlew, Dodging the Rain, QWERTY, Bangor Literary Journal, Tiger Moth Review, Chroma*, and *Writers' Café*. She won the Bill Holm Witness poetry award, has been nominated for Best of the Net and Pushcart Prizes, and was a finalist in eight poetry and photography competitions. She received two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities for literary scholarship and creative residencies at Playa, Hypatia-in-the-Woods, and the Whiteley Center. Her one-act play *Katherine and Virginia*, which characterizes the friendship between authors Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf, has been performed in New York City and Indiana.

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AFTER VERDUN

i.

In France
we listen to approaching weather
that tore its rags climbing the far cliffs
and mutters, stalking across farmlands,
lashing the henhouses with bean tendrils.

Earth knows what's coming.
Its hollow eyes shut
under the ranks of identical trees
patient in olive cloaks.

Across our automobile windows
oncoming clouds
crowd the road to the restaurant.

ii.

A stork stalks our lawn table,
shifting its canvas wings.
Each step forces a sign.

Uphill, the vineyards begin to boil.
We bumble against each others' limbs
as waiters snap up glassware
and run. Wind slams the door.

There's a sliding glimpse of the stork
yanking the hat-shapes of napkins
so they hop, flinging pellets of rain.

Laughter hard in our guts.

The bird opens its gray wings,
appeals to the wind
and is gone
in pines.

Thunder pushes red wine
back in our throats.

Previously published in *Company of Women: New and Selected Poems*, by Jayne Marek, Lylanne Musselman, and Mary Sexson (Chatter House Press, 2013).

DRIVING THE VOID

At the end of an old song, the car's player
flips to the beginning, going back
into music, a voice, whatever suits you.
Sounds untying the solitude
make company for the time you're alone.

Out amid the farmlands, highways
keep to themselves,
crossroads pass like stanzas.
At the crest of a hill the sky's so white
you're at the top of the world.

These days, the walnut groves are gone.
Beneath the flat brow of a landfill
spreads a tree farm,
quiet as any remembered woods.
The young trees try, swaying in their rows.

To follow the codes of moving,
you drive toward the person you might become
if this weather holds.
A swag of carpet lies like a dead deer along the verge.
Your wishes become the wind that skims the trees.

Previously published in *Imposition of Form on the Natural World*, (Finishing Line Press, 2013).

WOULD THE GOOD PEOPLE PLEASE STOP DYING?

For CD Wright, 1949-2016.

Driving the two-lane road pre-dawn. Thirty-seven miles per hour. Scraps of frost, the flickering center line. Through mist, an apparition, a lamp, a living room's green walls. Silhouette of a man seated. Still as an oak, he faces the window. Look out, look in. For one second, the seated man and the driver are light and light. Across the road, leafless shadows, a dark saltwater expanse. Stars lap at their own feet. Blacktop like a night ocean tide pulls the car away, its dashboard glowing. Spaceship dials. From one world to another. It happens. If it is not loneliness, then what. Then this.

Previously published in *The Tree Surgeon Dreams of Bowling*, (Finishing Line Press, 2018).

Barbra Dean

SPAIN / ENGLAND

Barbra's first jobs were in public relations and advertising. Then she joined *SHE* magazine as Assistant Fashion Editor arranging photography and fashion shows. She also freelanced for many magazines and newspapers. Later on she worked for a well-known agony aunt, and was responsible for answering her mail. She has also been a film extra appearing in many soaps for television, a lot of the time spent in the pub background pretending to drink! As a mature student in her fifties she successfully completed a degree in Humanities, and her subjects were English, Psychology and Computing. She also did Drama, which she loved, and appeared in a few productions. She has written a children's book *The Multicoloured Hat*, which has been translated into Spanish called *El Sombrero Multicolor*, and is suitable for adults too who are learning either language.

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OUT FOR THE DAY

We love to be out on the road in an open car
Wind blowing in my hair just like a movie star
Scenery drifting by, fields with cows and sheep
Trying to avoid the hills especially if they are steep
With lovely trees surrounding us and blue sky up above
Some floating fluffy clouds, we can never get enough
On and on a country lane then stopping suddenly
A tractor coming opposite driving steadily
Quickly park up on the side, or back up on the lane
If its huge machinery it can sometimes be a pain
But the rewards make up for it when we see what lies ahead
A pretty little village is where the lane has led
We stop off for a cuppa then continue on our way
Going nowhere special just out for the day

Gila Mon

USA

Gina has been writing poetry since high school, since she found an anthology of poetry titled *A Geography of Poets* in his dad's bookshelf. He stole that book. Currently, he teaches 8th grade English in Payson, a semi-rural town in Arizona, USA. His work has been published in several journals over the years, including *The Comstock Review*, *BlazeVOX*, and *Southwestern American Literature*.

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FEATURED GEM

On a slow noon Saturday, the pioneers remain
buried. A dented, turquoise Windstar
crawls up the half-circle

pinecone and gravel driveway. The Witnesses
are recruiting, but first we'll talk

hunting, the upward and onward
of trekking Mogollon trails, of blinds
and shallow hiding, masking our scents.

Ruefully, we'll speak of the fire-ravaged
bark-beetle old pine forest, which brings us back
to why he's here: to dispel

my notions of Hell, to speak
of lions and lambs sitting
at evening tea, reminiscing

about the old days of chase. In this
new earth the rock lizards will cradle
quail eggs, nod gently and whisper

the over and under of reclaiming the bounty
of lost tails in a one-off light.

ROSWELL: THE LAST TRANSMISSION

The official objects exhibited: hubcaps, tin foil, the hand-torn weather balloon. Not what you saw when the questions vibrated above you -

 "May I dive into the gutter of your sphere?"

 "Do you see this cloud of colour falling into you?"

The coyotes chased your truck when you saw the loop swirl of city lights bearing down at the speed of extinction.

The radio hissed its last fits as the frequency opened the radio to the spray of shh shh
Geronimo, pack of deceit, burn the religion

The desert air severed its tether to its other children, something hurled from Olympus, a parable digging its heels in the gracious thumb of your corroding home.

That is how you saw it,
those emaciated jelly-fluid bags flickering life,
seeking refuge along the quiet western front.

Seeking a respite, they might have been seeking the Florida promised in the brochures floating in the vacuum of a comet's tail, the debris of the exploded attempts at giant leaps for mankind shh shh

Geronimo, pack of deceit, burn the religion

The gold plated record championing Earth may have reached Thomas Edison of Universe Nine for all you know shh shh
Geronimo, pack of deceit, burn the religion

For morbid reasons, you gathered the metal scraps, the charts, the waste. For reasons unknown, you loaded the family, drove back across the New Mexico ranch to the crater dust echoing give me your tired, your poor, your huddled mash shh shh
Geronimo, pack of deceit, burn the religion

You heard it, the last transmission moments before impact:
Geronimo, pack of deceit, burn the religion

Then, the last words of a static throat: *Carry me.*

Dany Gagnon

CANADA

Born in Quebec, having had a classical education in French that included Latin, and spending her formative years in London, England, Dany Gagnon's vocabulary is entwined by these three languages, an affinity to the poetry of Middle English times, contrasting with her exploration to comprehend the human factor through the lens of new scientific discoveries. She is looking forward to resume her appearances in the many venues of open mic happening in Montreal.
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JET LAG

I am in a state of continual jet lag
as each of my cell is pursuing the trajectory
of the exploding universe

Stella Peg Carruthers

NEW ZEALAND

Stella is an emerging writer from Aotearoa, New Zealand. Born and bred in the capital city of Wellington or Poneke, she still lives there and is employed as a library assistant at an academic library, as well as working in community work and running her own freelance writing business. She is currently working on her debut novel, a cross-genre family saga about the power of literature to change lives. Stella has found publishing success both internationally and within New Zealand. Her poems have been published in online and print publications and she has been long listed for a number of short story competitions. Her first personal essay is due for publication in an anthology to be released in 2021. She writes reviews regularly for the New Zealand Poetry Society, and maintains a blog. As well as writing, she facilitates a writer's group in her home city, and has in the past co-presented writing based self-development workshops for women. A keen vegetarian cook, Stella also loves walking, yoga, dance and knitting. Additionally, she runs sustainable living workshops at her local community education centre to support lifelong learning principles.

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IMAGINED ADVENTURES

To have adventure on your mind
Is to nurture a spirit of wonder.
It is to read all Chinese characters as lucky ones.
It is to risk Delhi belly in search of The Delicious.
It is to put your phone away and get lost in Tokyo.
It is to find your Angels in the Galleries of Europe.
It is to find silk dresses in The Vintage Markets of Paris
That you wear with hiking boots and bright baseball caps.
It is to lie on a white arm of beach in Oceania
Next to dancing palms and chopped-to-blue waters.
It is being the kind of traveller who wants
To high five the monuments in England.
It is being the kind of traveller who is so full of horror
At The Death Camps she cannot cry,
Instead she sweats out her grief in Swedish dance clubs,
Her body flashing into fragmented pieces
With the beating-heart-pulse of the strobe lights.
The club is a temporary lover
Who holds her sadness for her so she can spin and spin
Until it is the world that moves around her.

TRANSIENT

Patchworked by palm fronds,
The backyards by the railway line are fenced
with corrugated iron.
The colours bleeding, onto the bare red earth.
Hibiscus flowers shout aloud from the sheltered corners of this
Sub-tropical city.
Eleven hours up the island and it is another heavy world.
One made of glass and steel sky scrapers.
Where the air itself has weight.
With words.
With water.
Asian eateries line the steep side of Queen Street.
And donut shops have taken over further down.
American fast food chains glow golden.
As dusk falls I walk past with my grocery store dinner
Creamy harvati cheese,
Salty rice crackers, and strawberries, lush
And bursting to blush in their triangular box.
Back at the hostel I sip pulpy orange juice and stare
At the still life on the wall.
A glass jug reflecting the sunshine
Orbs of fruit.
All of it lying on a crumpled red cloth.
An offering to God?
Perhaps.
Or just a gift to the traveller passing through.

Janet McCann

USA

Janet is a crone poet who taught creative writing at Texas A&M from 1969 until 2015. Journals publishing her work include *Kansas Quarterly*, *Parnassus*, *Nimrod*, *Sou'wester*, *Christian Century*, *Christianity And Literature*, *New York Quarterly*, *Tendril*, *Poetry Australia*, among many others. She has won five chapbook contests, sponsored by Pudding Publications, Chimera Connections, Franciscan University Press, Plan B Press, and Sacramento Poetry Center. Her most recent book-length collection: *The Crone At The Casino*, Lamar UP, 2015.

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AT THE BUTTERFLY GARDEN

Tropical air and bulging exotic blooms
from a travel agency poster paradise,
bromeliads, palms, flowers like blue stars.
You look for macaws but there are none,
just the butterflies, fluttering
tiny Chinese lanterns in the sunlight.

Monarchs, luna moths, translucent blue ones
that change appearance and disappear
into the leaves when they land. A child
waves her arms, the pure sound of her laughter
blends in with light-drenched spray
of the background bubbling fountains. Oh,

I pay if I tell you anything.
If not then, later. She keeps her wings shut,
brown on the outside because
colour jeopardizes. I focus my camera on
thick fleshy petals enclosing
a roughened dark brown centre,

nearly invisible, the poised brown wings.

THE TRIP

She asks, "Are we almost there?"
As though we had not just left,
as though the sleeping towns we pass
are milestones, lines on a ruler,
destinations precise as departures.
As the neon eyes blink at her Bill's
Place, Sam's Lunch, Beer, as the
other cars slide down the darkness
in silence, she believes that
we are all going someplace!
How can we tell her, half asleep
under the stars and flashing lights,
that we three are on a mobius trip,
that somehow we slipped through
there at the centre where all
the curves of the cloverleaf meet
and we're gliding along the
undersides of highways, always
leaving behind the places where
we never arrived?

Máire Malone

ENGLAND

Máire was born and reared in Dublin where she worked as a medical secretary. She moved to the UK, studied Arts and Psychology and followed a career in Counselling & Psychotherapy. Several of her poems have been selected and published by Ver Poets and other anthologies. She has had short story prize wins in *Scribble* magazine. A story was shortlisted in Words and Women Competition, 2018. She was selected for a place on the Novel Studio Course in 2017 where she completed a draft of her debut novel, *The Dream Circle*. Her novel has been selected as a Finalist in Eyelands International Book Awards 2019 and *The Irish Echo*, New York, published an essay about it earlier this year. She lives in Hertfordshire with her husband.
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TWIN TRAILS OF TEARS

Pipe tomahawks swinging from their wagons
They set out
Barefoot or in moccasins
Dignity in weathered faces
Hair black and strong
Plaited or hanging loosely
Wearing buckskin dresses or leggings
Plaid blankets wrapped around shoulders

Choctaw must follow *the Trail of Tears*
Says the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek
Clutching a ten-dollar bill and a rifle each
They steer towards their future
But the rains come and the blizzard stings and
The Arkansas River and people freeze up
Or die of pneumonia

Sixteen years on in Louisburgh Mayo, Ireland, 1847.
The starving beg help from an Officer
Apply to the Board of Guardians – they meet at Delphi Lodge tomorrow
So they sleep under the stars until dawn when
Ragged and barefoot they walk fifteen miles to that place
But the Board are *at lunch* and are *not to be disturbed*
At last the meeting is held
But they are offered no help
Many die on the return journey
It's not the potato but a pearl of great price that's dug up in their field
When the surviving Choctaw hear of their plight
And collect seven hundred and ten dollars for the deserving Irish

THE GOING NOWHERE ROAD...

There is a road that leads to nowhere
Nobody knows where it goes
But the west of Ireland people
Call it the Famine Road

I dreamt of a green-eyed woman
Burnished hair, green shawl
She glared at me accusingly
Her palm outstretched

At first I thought she meant money
So I handed her my purse
She thrust it in the air
And spat an ancient curse

What good are your coins to us
On this going nowhere road
Too late for your charity money
What I want from you is a poem

Write about my eyes
The same shape and colour as yours
Write of my fleshless bones
And my bloodless heart

Tell them you saw my ghost
Among thousands of swarming souls
Wandering into the mist
On the Going Nowhere Road

Judith Sanders

USA

Judeth has a B.A. in literature from Yale, an M.A. in writing from Boston University, and a Ph.D. in English from Tufts. She has taught literature and writing at Boston University, MIT, Tufts, Bowdoin, and Shady Side Academy and Winchester Thurston School in Pittsburgh, and in France on a Fulbright Fellowship. She has also worked as a freelance editor, writer, and writing coach. She has published articles in *The American Scholar*, *the Journal of Popular Film and Television*, *Modern Jewish Studies*, *Independent Teacher*, and *Film Quarterly*; on the website *Full Grown People*; and in such anthologies as *Mama*, Ph.D. from Rutgers University Press and *From Wollstonecraft to Stoker: Essays on Gothic and Victorian Sensation Fiction* from McFarland. Her poems have appeared in *Calyx*, *Light*, *Poetica*, *Poemeleon*, the children's magazine *Ladybug*, and anthologies; on the website *Vox Populi*; and in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Her poem *Homage* won the 2012 Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest sponsored by Kent State University. Her poem *Shoppin' Spree* won the 2012 Wergle Flomp Humor Poetry Contest. Her poetry manuscripts were semifinalists for The Word Works' Washington Prize in 2012 and 2015. The granddaughter of Eastern European immigrants, she grew up in New Jersey, then lived in Boston, France, and Maine, and now lives in Pittsburgh with her family.
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THE CARIBBEAN ON A SHOESTRING

I.

We step off the plane into the Third World.
The air's as warm as a kiss.
We wince and blink, startled midwinter
from our frigid burrows
into this silken sunlight.
In the terminal, we pass the native dancers
in permapress native dress
rotating to canned dance tunes.
We pass the free paper cups of rum,
the posters that promise paradise.
We shoulder our packs and split off
from the tourists with matching luggage
being herded into hotel vans.
We line up for the jitney into town
among spattered workers,
indecipherably still.
The jitney chugs beneath arcing palms
their fronds murmuring
over rosaries of coconuts.
The radio dreams of White Christmas
while I misname the tropical flowers,
boas of luscious magenta.
Town's a jumble, shacks and high-rises,
overgrown rubble, a goat,
shutters clattering, laundry flapping,
Market ladies squatting, men idling, ganja wafting,
top-heavy trucks teetering,
peels in the gutter
And down muddy byways,
glimpses of the glittering sea,
an azure so dazzling
That I must live here forever

II.

What do you really really want to do
in the years before we grow old?
I just want to strum my guitar all day, he says
I just want to write poems all day, she says
I just want to walk the beach and lie gazing at the sky
and hold your precious hand and kiss you
and tend a garden and sing in the shower

and not wear too many clothes
and bear sturdy babies who ripen in the sun
and worship every dawn with a choir of birds
So should we cash out our mutual fund
and go somewhere cheap
and rent a casita on a hillside
and live on tortillas and sweets from the market
and do the least possible in every holy day,
long minutes full of insect hum and sunlight,
ao at last we can hear time breathe?
Or would we get bored?

III.

Shaving at night in cold water,
wringing socks still clammy by morning,
ignoring cigarette burns in the sheets,
counting the midnight noises:
Gunned motors, insomniac roosters, straggling revellers,
the creaking useless fan, snores through the walls,
the world's loudest fly
The sky is never as blue as in the posters
The hotel never as charming as in the guidebook
The perfect beach is too windy, too buggy, too blazing hot
The local cuisine tastes of hunger
and local colour is a euphemism
And fretfulness itches till daybreak
just like back home

IV.

In El King Seafood
elbows stick to the plastic tablecloth
despite the labouring fans
White bread smeared with margarine,
clump of cabbage, thick pink dressing
Can you translate the specials?
Should we try the curried goat?
Big families at big tables
Rice and beans again
Fried plantains, too
Women of all ages in tight bright dresses,
hennaed hair, hoop earrings
Men freshly barbered, exuding competing colognes
We're in our unwashed travelling clothes
Salty chicken breast with garlic,
chewy pork chop with onion
Young couples flaunt frilly babies like trophies

Bottle of water
Bottle of beer
Local, not bad
Can you understand what they're saying?
Do you want flan again?
The waiter sets down the check without looking at us,
the rich gringos, sunburned, bug-bitten, tongue-tied,
furtively reading the backs of the coins

V.

Nighttime stroll through the town square
past the adobe church strung with coloured lights,
past the broken street lamps,
past the dry fountain
past the children on bicycles, out late without parents
past a weaving drunk
past the shops with hand-made signs:
El Exquisito Bakery - dusty cracker boxes
El Grande Fish Market - a leaky refrigerator
El Nacional Party - painted with peeling promises
El Tipico Bar - an open shed
where scattered men hoot over dominoes
and a woman with dyed red hair
shakes a tambourine at the dark

VI.

Hitch out to Blue Lagoon
Guidebook gives it three stars
Past shuttered barbeque shacks,
the gated resorts, guarded like prisons
Down that dirt path to a quiet pool, lush greenery
What a beautiful place to be alone...
From behind trees,
teenage boys materialize,
sidle up, joshing each other
The boldest offers to show us around
He's shirtless in frayed cutoffs,
with a glossy sculpted torso,
like beefcake or a god
The others snort and elbow
"No thanks"- but he shows us anyway
Here Brooke Shields washed her face for its beauty
The waters are a fountain of youth
Would you like to buy this lovely conch shell? I dive for it myself,
down fifteen feet, and polish it for many days with sand
The hurricane blew off my mother's tin roof

She has thirteen children, she lost her job at the hotel
I am opening this coconut for you - Coconut jelly very refreshing
And Miss, do not scratch - the bites can get infected
And Sir, your kitchen door is open (if you know what I mean)
The trail fades into brush and sand.

He surveys his companions, lolling on the rocks,
He surveys the luminous waters of tropical paradise,
the lush palms, the empty golden beach
Miss, can you get me a job on a cruise ship?
I would like, he says, to get away from here
We fish out precious money.

Our guide vanishes.

Thumbing back, we spot him at a snack shack,
lording it with chips and a spliff.
Well, what did we want him to do with it, buy IBM?

VII.

Overnight bus-ride to the next attraction
Squashed by a snoring fat man
who spills over half my seat
Sunrise stop at open-air café with clogged toilet
Don't dare order the food for the flies
Locals stare; they think this backwater's the world
Travelling is making it hard for yourself
to eat, sleep, and pee
Bus toils up the mountain,
rounds the hairpins with no guard rails
Look, look down there,
jutting through the thick pelt of jungle trees,
like a broken bone -
It's the chipped tip of a pyramid
We behind the bus windows
fade into the sun's reflected glare,
while the ghosts of the lowlands
hoist blocks of stone

VIII.

On the white sand beach
packed with pasty tourists
lounges a Rasta man
in mirror shades and dreadlocks
that hang like licorice twists
to his rippled shoulders,
his slim loins sheathed
by the skimpiest
of white silk trunks

He's encircled by
giggling redheads
sunburned secretaries
from overcast England
who've stripped away
their sensible tweeds
down to bikinis
teensier than underwear,
sloshing jolly beers
in the mad midday sun
All night long in Holiday House
the Jamaican berates
his sobbing Swedish wife
Over the particle-board partition
seeps their reggae, ganja,
fury. Down the dark
hallways their toddler roams
barefoot in a sagging diaper
his pale brown skin crusted
with pink calamine
He pauses to whine
at their locked door
Up at the club
portly white men
swallow iced drinks
brought by the sweating black waiter
silent in a strangulating bowtie.
I caught him red-handed
dragging off a sack of my allspice
They'll steal anything
that's not bolted down
Along the raggedy back beach
the one the tourists don't go to
the unfinished villas
- vandalized by vines
studded with staring lizards -
belonged to drug lords
who've been caught.
Some boys lounge, kicking sand
and broken glass
with bare feet
Yah, says one, I have a garden
up in the hills
But there is only one vegetable
that I grow
Snorkelling out to the reef

I recognize them:
A danger I didn't know I knew
Hanging in the blue, blue stillness
silver barracudas
sinister as a spray of bullets
thuggish underjaws
spiked with teeth
I splash to shore
and the lifeguard
who barely turns down
his reggae radio
to assure me,
They're only babies
They only bite
whatever shines

IX.

In one of those tin-roofed shacks on that steep hill
There, in that one painted long ago pink and lavender,
where a runny-nosed child lolls barefoot in the dirt yard
among the pecking chickens,
one hand's in her mouth, the other dangles a stick
Inside, a woman at the window,
rubbing a dishrag over a cracked plate,
glances up at a glinting jet, its plume vanishing,
and wonders briefly about life in New York or LA
As I inside that jet
pause in forgetting about her down there
And how I, lounging by a dappled waterfall, trailing my toes,
watched her splayed bare feet tread the rocky path
as she balanced the sack on her head,
the baby in the sling, the yawning toddler on her hip
Up here in the blue, skimming toward somewhere I call home for
now,
I think as I flip through a flight magazine,
how I could have been she,
weighted in place
every day of my life

Bill Cushing

USA

Born in Virginia, Bill Cushing grew up in New York but has also lived in Pennsylvania, Missouri, Florida, Maryland, Texas, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. He moved to California in 1996. As an undergraduate at the University of Central Florida, he was often referred to as the 'blue collar' poet based on his stint in the Navy and years at shipyards and other blue collar jobs. He earned an MFA in writing from Goddard College in Vermont. Bill recently retired after teaching English at East Los Angeles and Mt. San Antonio colleges. He resides in Glendale with his wife and their son. Bill has had reviews, articles and poems published in *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Birders World*, *Brownstone Review*, *the Florida Times Union*, *genius & madness*, *Mayo Review*, *Metaphor*, *Sabal Palm Review Spectrum*, and the *San Juan Star*. His poems have been in several anthologies, including both volumes of the award-winning *Stories of Music*. Recently he began a collaboration with a musician on a creative project called *Notes and Letters*. In 2017, Bill was named one of the Top Ten Poets in L.A., an honour followed up by being identified as Ten L. A. Poets to Watch in 2018. His full-length book of poetry, *A Former Life*, was recently released by Finishing Line Press while *Music Speaks*, his award-winning chapbook has recently been reconfigured and released to the public.
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CUSQUEÑOS

Up where the mountains curl like sleeping dragons,
Peaks, piercing far above the clouds, in another world
two miles above sea level sits the centre
of the Incan empire, Cusco, a *pupute*:
bellybutton of the planet.

Like a crouching panther this place,
all diagonal slopes, everything hard stone:
boulders, smooth squares of grey granite
the size of a room; cobblestones, loose ovals
of softer pastels; and of course, interrupting
the landscape, the weighted masonry of churches
with arches lifting statues promising
spirituality but instead delivering conquest.

In the morning, from the town square, comes
the hammering: a stonemason crouches
amid rocks, boulders, and stones. His song rings out
with each ping of the steel striking the rock
he works on. Not far, a finisher chips
discretely on the rough work, trimming rock
into shapes that could easily have come from a lathe.

Then there are the people, the *cusqueños*:
trudging along the sloping roads and paths,
they carry belongings or wares in the *lliclla* -
colorful blankets sprouting babies, flowers, hay,
or more stones, the wraps that wrap around
stooping shoulders and seem to push the carriers
into their own incline, making their shuffling way
up these narrow and steep streets
while we tourists steep coca tea in our rooms,
attempting to adjust to the heights.
At midnight we bolt awake, our bodies
gulping air to catch breath; feeling a tingling
in fingers, we drown in thin air.

The *cusqueños*, like the stones surrounding them,
are squat, browned, with hearts enlarged
and noses slightly widened: equipment for the altitude.
The old ones peer through occidental eyes
cracked and peeling from age and knowledge,
knowledge ancient and pure. The look says,
"*Nokanchis ocmanta causanchis.*"
"We will endure."

FROM CALIFORNIA TO CHICAGO

The rolling surf and mists of
clouds reflect
the sunlight
off the side of our flight
and into the Grand Canyon:
three rock formations snake
through the gigantic gullet,
their peaks like the spine
of an iguana.

The inverted capillaries,
veins, and arteries of
river beds cut through
the landscape,
indentations that seem as if
God had scraped spoons
of ice cream
out of the earth.

The topography transforms
into faces in the terrain,
and we look down on contortions
of grimaces.

Landing, we slide beneath
the bellies of arriving
and departing jets.
"The moving walkway is now
ending; please look down."
Above, candy colored
coat hangers of neon
burn and cool the area while
rising up into the concourse
of O'Hare, a plastic and chrome
Grand Central Station
for the new millennium,
opening floodgates
for the art of denial,
washing away
all silt of tradition.

Previously published in *Metaphor*, 2015.

CHÂTEAU FORTE LA RIVIÈRE CHER

Paying the Loire tribute,
Cher rises in the northwest,
then flows across a plateau
to join the Yevre at Vierzon.

Eighteenth century masons
built the château from, and on,
pilings of a sixteenth -
century mill, creating

a castle more squat than wide.
Torch-lit halls linked galleries,
ballrooms, the castle fastened
riverbanks with black-and-white tiles,

witness to minuets, waltzes. Then,
pawns crossed this checkerboard that
was then scuffed by the jackboots
of soldiers of the thousand-year Reich

lasting only twelve - a fraction
of a Fuehrer's promises.
Taking flight from Gothic weight,
the structure offered flight

to its builder's descendants.
They had no way of knowing,
these workmen who joined shores with
stone, the path they left. Placing

this architectural bridge
on arched columns, they spanned
generations both backward
and forward. They did not see

events that were to be
yet still supplied an avenue
to freedom for their great-
grandchildren's grandchildren.

Previously published in *Barbaric Yawp*, 1999.

Marianne Mersereau

USA

Marianne lives and writes in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. She is the author of the chapbook *Timbrel* (Finishing Line Press, 2013). Her writing has appeared in *The Hollins Critic*, *Bella Grace*, *Entropy*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *Deep South Magazine*, *Seattle's Poetry on Buses*, and elsewhere, and is anthologized in Public Poetry Houston's anthology *Enough*. She was awarded a Second Place Prize in Artists Embassy International's Dancing Poetry Contest in 2018.

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WINTER SOLSTICE '88

My first time in Europe -
cold sunny Venice,
hot Cappuccino.

The charm of the Grand Canal gondola
dims like the sky as the sun sets
and we take an earlier train to Florence.

We plan to spend Christmas in Rome,
and we arrive in Florence to learn
of Pan Am Flight 103 falling over Scotland,

of students boarding the plane at Heathrow
headed home for Christmas
after study abroad, their first time in Europe-

students around our age.
They enjoyed Venice, Florence and Rome.
These students were us,

carried souvenirs, memories
and hope for the future,
wore t-shirts that read, I love London.

We think of them as young Italian men
flirt with us in Florence and
Pope John Paul blesses us in the Vatican.

We think of them as we board the plane to New York,
fly over Lockerbie, and arrive home on New Year's Eve.
We think of them and what might have been.

CROSS COUNTRY ROAD TRIP WITH MY DAUGHTER

I'm Mama and you're Louise, the driver, I tell her
We leave Auburn Alabama in a 1999 QX4
She wears a pink wig, blasts Switchfoot's Dare You to Move
And we head toward New Orleans
Our first stop en route to Seattle
She's leaving college, returning home
We've got no qualms about crossing the desert in July
In search of America like Steinbeck in the sixties
We drink La Croixs, pretend they are Buds, crush the cans, laugh,
and sling empties into the back seat like badass chicks.
We search for an America that no longer exists,
A country Steinbeck could not find
And we don't remember.

Maliha Hassan

PAKISTAN

Maliha is an educationist from Pakistan. She has done Masters in English Literature and Linguistics; and Masters in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), and has about 30 years teaching and administrative experience to her credit. Her poems have been published in various anthologies, and is the author of e-book, *Thought Provoking Poems, Reflections of a Thoughtful Mind*. She exposes the harsh realities of society in a subtle manner. There is a touch of religious and didactic verses which appeals to young and old alike.

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THE EXPANSE OF ROAD

The *ROAD* connects people far and near,
That they can overcome their homesick fear.
Travelling thus broadens the mind,
Enjoying life, having new sights to find.
Moving from one culture to another,
Different languages, different colour.
Spending holiday in atmosphere serene,
Marvelling all the new shades of green.
For some travelling is extreme fun,
While for others it is cumbersome.
The one who travels near and far,
Explores nature `s hidden power.
There are some who are forced to travel,
Seeking exile at the highest level.
And he journeys to pursue his career,
To accomplish his goal to be a warrior.
Travelling they say is a means to success,
Hopefully have to destiny, an access.
He is tragically turned out of land,
Just for declining a helping hand.
Are bound to travel to save their lives,
As were chased with guns and knives.
Coerced to travel, he never so willed,
As was mercilessly about to be killed.
Also he is on road who is a vagabond,
To have a home and family he longed.
Away from home you did abscond,
The wishes, desires you kept so fond.
The dacoit running away from the land,
Plundering and dodging the lawful hand.
Then the ONE on road for a noble cause,
Never stopped preaching, nor took a pause.
To spread the rightful message of God,
Therefore, be dear in the eyes of Lord.
The best journey was the one he took,
Thousand years back if we may look.
The journey to save from the cruel, his life,
Which came as a repercussion of his strife.
For the betterment of all mankind,
So they in the world do not lag behind.
Along with companion took refuge in cave,
From treacherous hands of morally slave.

In order to obey the command of God,
Left his home to find a welcoming lot.
The enemy chasing lest he may escape,
The wisest person, in true sense a sage.
To deliver the message, being truthful,
To guide humanity to a life blissful.
Creating history for generations to come,
Truly he proved to be the righteous one.

Saharsh Satheesh

USA

Saharsh is an Indian American poet living in the glorious state of Tennessee, USA. He enjoys crafting poetry, especially that inspired by nature. Some of his poetry can also be found in *Headline Poetry & Press*, *Undivided Magazine*, *Infection House* and others. When he is not writing, he loves to read and play chess.
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THE NEVERENDING ROAD

He used to drive by himself,
turning corners and driving fast
hoping that the next turn was it.
It wasn't and it never will.

He stopped living for the bends,
stopped hoping that the next
corner would make him happy.
Happiness isn't the destination,
it's the journey.

Bernadette Perez

USA

Bernadette is from Belen, New Mexico. In 1990, she received the Silver Poet Award from World of Poetry. Her work has appeared in *The Wishing Well; Musings* (2010), *Small Canyons Anthology* (2013) and in *Poems 4 Peace* (2014). Contributions to *La Familia: La Casa de Colores* and *Fix and Free Anthologies*. Winner of the Wagner Society of Santa Fe Audience Favourite Write Your Own Prize Song. Included in the mega-unity poem by Juan Felipe. Included in *The Americans Museum Inscription* by Shinpei Takeda. Published in over 100 publications between 2015 and 2019.
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FOURTEEN HOURS

Energetic roaming
Live conversation
Exhilarating experiences

We fill our tank with gas
Grab gas station goodies
A quick stop at a friends house
Our journey begins

Small town wonders
Send me back in time
A realistic sense of tranquillity
Peace of mind
A simpler time

Onward past fields
White petals of fluff line the pastures
Pure white cotton flowers blowing in the wind
Square bails of hay consecutively in rows
For miles there seems an almost endless line
A divide between the sacred and the secular

Green grass on both sides of the highway
Verdant grassy rampant
We pull over for lunch
Time changes when we cross the state
9 more hours to go

Snack time and a fill up
Drivers rotate
I try to sleep
It's no use
The sun shines through my window
Brightly before a storm

Hail comes pounding down
Full force angrily
We pull over

Mountain views capture my attention
Colors of red, yellow and streaks of gold
Reflections bounce off the valley below

Minutes later we are back on the road
Smooth music chilling on the radio
Pop snores as he takes a snooze
I blinked and the sunset disappeared

It's nearly dark
We are closer to our destination
I'm a front seat passenger
I am not good company

My mind travels along the side roads
Daydreaming scenarios^[00]
Detached from the clouds
Barren land remind me of sacrifices
Days of yore

Who were the women who walked this land
Who were the men archived in yesteryears
Who are the forgotten

Bumps in the road bring me back to now
Now where dust covers the land
Scattered over miles
Where and when will I return

We are almost there
By this time I am overwhelmed
Exposed to observation
The journey to my destination
Is empirical
I come in contact with myself
My thoughts
My surroundings^[00]
My adventure has reasoning
I can now rest my mind
Visit nearby destination
Disembark with purpose

Sean J Mahoney

USA

I have had work published at *Poets Reading the News*, *The Good Men Project*, *Nine Mile Literary Magazine*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Antithesis Journal*, and *Wordgathering* among others. I live in Santa Ana, California with Dianne, her mother, three dogs, and four renters. There is a large garden and two trees with big, bitter oranges that look more lemon-like. I help run the Disability Literature Consortium booth at the annual AWP bookfair... lit by crips. Except this year cuz well... Covid.

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NEARLY WEeping OUTSIDE

Lining each path, each road stop and roadway we traverse here, wake-robins exhibit folds thick with lashes of redemption. Course flint beneath supports our beatific mission. The quarries green, gray, and black as durable as the city's Big Shoulders weathering in stories behind us. And now, as he rests eyes bloodshot with laughter, I will tell you of the urge for execution brewing betwixt us on a freeway east of Cleveland. Our mass now critical, it is clear that one of us must be retired. Rather than paint him past prime I elucidate instead upon his errant missives as evidence that his aim is far from true, and as sad as sweet Cuban rum mixed in gigantic decanters of coffee picked up in mega-Targets across the Midwest. His emperor pride harmed by the rapidity of scenery – Los Angeles to Greenfield, MA in just days – and regional tongues speaking to him with little gained in the way of exchange.

He fears the glow from my eyes testifies before helminth encountered like intestinal gospel. Expunges our nominal guilt for spreading parasitic words. Like an August heat bears yellowed leavings of lewd summer trysts, we tried to unburden souls in Primm, the base of Big Rock Candy Mountain, and in suburban Denver where we spared a child close to rolling far away from cliffs of the 'pretty house'. We dressed in white suits and combed our hair. Bathed. Carried bibles adorned with purple rosary page holders. This cross-country art-house mission on 4 wheels under an ancient Acura shell our passion play. We play against each other for the lead. It was never meant to be visceral: intent before lightning rattled our wheels.

"Let's talk instead about our crusade and wrongful crucifixions," I say and I am visibly unnerved upon this perch; positioned by my blood for a letting. Would I soon be tied off the southern Erie shores for dispensing my grade of faith, for following through with the performance directive? For my sweet honey pitch? Will he turn on me any moment now? Paint me with primary circles and a large red dot scribed driven mad. We had lost each other by Lincoln. After the stop and the ticket. After the search and seizure of our better natures; parable of a mad police dog and DV camera that did not rise out our open sunroof and capture a scene of me being profiled, led forsakenly astray, and my brother interceding, dropping to his knees, polishing the stick for my release. And me swallowing air instead. This is not

a pot stirring. This is quest. This is calling.

And now the knot up under my left trapezius - obliquely poised adjacent the evil rasp seething from my right lung - bellows and foams a betrayal. Urban his drawl. Arrow entry from above, below and behind. Fine hardly audible tearing at the site of the exit wounds. Clean incisions. No bone fragments. Derision in and empathy, running a deficit, out. Sensitivity not ready to leave the body catacombs quite yet, not yet ready to swaddle me with halos, with art, with pure love joy. I believe you were not rehearsed for the drag of the journey. I believe you sabotaged the radio with a partially resurrected iPod mini. I believe there will be a drug or a store ahead where lotions and balms wait to kiss my aches. Distilled agave. Perhaps a miraculous heating pad too. Where miles of blood filming the roadway, figuratively, are forgiven loaded youth and sprayed off of the asphalt.

Co-mingling beneath the Sixth City geology kneel converters to my honeyed pitch and humble yaw. You offered hugs and kisses to the forsaken in rest stop restrooms. I could forgive you. I could. Though I do find it suspicious that these arrows, loosed from regions where we pursued our preachy AM radio amusements and pissed in soy fields, these arrows seem to find the same point of entry as though fed in, as if someone could persuade an arrow. Someone close enough? And as the point of entry for so much girded malice and malaise the brown of my hair has run, trickled down to my feet, and into the rich Ohio Valley soil where it takes root and grows into the Ash that provides the next quiver. Each nock of the new set milled as an apse relevant to this body

and blood of whatever. This disharmony between us. A body full of hand holds and recesses. And stabbing pains. This body continues pushing sound away from it; the rattles of jest and repent, the sound of your pulsing neck, as if a reduction in nonsensical road games could bequeath a peace many would find comfort in being spared. Spared the ire and scorn scored in bulk.

I blame you for me seething out the window like a rabid dog begging the gun. I am to be the tethered target practised in dissent, hope and faith. Look to your own open source and find me in one form or another protecting our mother's gold from thrill seekers. I am war and shipped aside my infernal twin (who has indeed flipped his wig) from one coast to another easement, and the discomforts lining me grow and spread inducing smirks from my taller brother and other. lepers. I the one who lit up in seedy hotel rooms; I the one mixing Red

Bull and rum cocktails for our dirty quick epiphanies.

Yet each fletch of the newly milled set flexes us toward Horseheads, NY, which will prove a crushing mistake, a crucial navigation error. Leaving me more vulnerable than an apple. Closer now to what will prove to be my final resting place, my Apian Way complete with gaslight and discount gasoline. This lack of sleep reduces me to near tears, and you, dear brother, tiring of residual laughter. Your snout still wet with snot and red from roadkill of skunk and comedic conspiracy theories.

And so, if this is the act of dying for art, for transgression and soul, for whiskey, water, and a couple of blanched skulls more, then so be it.

Let us no longer divide and conquer. Wake! Come for me. Seek and find your zealot brother. Love me again and I, no longer a nuisance if, as your final act of penance, you retrieve me from the sewers, leaving
all seeds of me there for eventual grinding.

Aaron Sandberg

USA

Aaron is an American teaching just outside of Chicago. His recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *English Journal*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Writers Resist*, *Yes Poetry*, *Unbroken*, *One Sentence Poems*, *Vita Brevis Press*, *Literary Yard*, and elsewhere.

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OMEN

I am still unsure
whether the song
I heard while driving
which made me blinker -
brought me to the

shoulder in a
silent stare -
was the kind of omen
one welcomes
or fears.

But still I hear it
after all cars rushed past
with me still stuck in mine
waiting to see
if I should shelter

or, like any true sign
good or ill,
make me ready to rally -
to merge back into
the portentous parade.

PRESSURE

One night Jane came back with the car
and said the tire was low
and that someone had honked at her on the highway
and that he made her roll down the window -
 made her -
so that he could tell her just that
while they sped on,
never slowing down,
no street lights flashing red to tell either to stop.

She said the whole thing shook her -
the kindest of gestures
 unnerved her,
broke her for the rest of the drive
 and her life.

Her heartbeat never recovered.

Even now she's just a buzzing pile of people stuff
turning slowly into a boiling rain.

Veda Varma

BAHRAIN

Veda is 14 years-old and lives in Bahrain. She considers herself a poetry, guitar and drama enthusiast. Like every other teenager binge-watching in these exceptional conditions, she took some time away from screens to write about dynamic lives before quarantine; bewildering adventures, exquisite sights and the long, peaceful road trips. She has written a few poems in the past, contributed to *LOCKDOWN 2020 - Poetry and prose from around the world on living in isolation and surviving the coronavirus*, and has given short stories a whirl for school assignments.

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ZEST

Mesmerising mountains, crystal clear lakes,
The sceneries of my car, while I munch on chips.
Take a gander at these surroundings,
One glance, and your heart won't stop pounding.

Bollywood, Italian, Spanish, English,
Jams played in my car, while I grasp these landscapes to cherish.
Siri guiding us to our destination,
One wrong turn? Oh god, the frustration!

Each person in the vehicle with a key role,
The back-seaters, pass out fruit rolls,
The passenger seat, your music should be goals,
Ultimately, the driver, you take care of the tolls!

Milan, Austria, Berlin, Tuscany,
No journey is dull alongside the right company,
A store of sights that had me euphoric,
Whether verdant fields or townships so historic.

Tirelessly walked on for miles,
However, the result ending in smiles,
I could barely contain my glee,
As lay before me,
A spectacle of a view.
Lush green grass, a sky so blue.

I make my way back to the car,
Eager to behold another view so bizarre.
Germany, Greece, Norway,
Beware, as I'm coming your way.

A zest in me to see the world,
I cannot sit in a corner all curled.
US, Africa, Australia, Europe,
I have the enthusiasm,
You won't hear me saying, "Nope!"

Sandra Storey

USA

Sandra's poetry collection *Every State Has Its Own Light* (Word Poetry, 2014) was a finalist for the May Swenson Poetry Award. Her poetry has appeared in *New Millennium Writings*, *THEMA*, and the *New York Quarterly*, among other journals. She is a member of Jamaica Pond Poets and is co-director of Chapter and Verse Literary Reading Series. She leads poetry workshops in the community. Sandee has given quite a few featured readings in eastern Massachusetts, most recently at the Old Manse - which both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne once called home - in Concord, sponsored by the New England Poetry Club. She has also been a featured reader at bookstores in San Francisco and Austin, Texas. A resident of the Boston neighbourhood of Jamaica Plain, she was founder, editor, and publisher of two bilingual English/Spanish neighbourhood newspapers for 20 years. Sandee has been on the road a lot during her life. She grew up in Ohio, Kansas, Missouri, Alabama, then Ohio again for high school. She went to college in Indiana. Upon graduation, she joined the Peace Corps and proceeded to teach English for three years in Thailand. She travelled to India, Singapore, Laos, and Nepal and spent a year in Indonesia. There she met the Swiss man whom she married. For the next 14 years she was a dual Switzerland/USA national. Sandee loves going on the road sometimes in the US now, especially in the Northwest and Southwest, sometimes to Peace Corps group reunions.

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WHERE THE COLUMBIA MEETS THE PACIFIC

Crossing the bar requires two pilots
for every hulking cargo ship.
Hidden sands have come
from as far away as Idaho.
Thirty-foot waves churn
a wall at the mouth.
Spray so dense, pilots take care
to hold their breath when boarding.

Sailors tempted
to compare their journey
to Tennyson's
stop short, don life jackets.
Worst outcome
has always been to drown.

SLEEPING IN AIRPLANES

Hands clasped in their laps
over shiny buckles,
the travellers' arms form circles
row after row.

Strapped upright in place
not sprawled out in bed,
they remember in sleep
they're already flying.

CEREMONY

On the way to the train
he took his eyes off the road
to ask if she trusted him.
When he turned back
to the windshield
she took her time
mullied over
what she had to lose,
what all he could do
that might hurt her.

Then, *Yes*.

When she asked him
the same question,
he turned to her fast
with a gasp and a loud
Oh in front of his yes!
He looked surprised
that she wondered,
then smiled, both watching
where they were going.

Bill Cox

SCOTLAND

Bill started writing in 2014 and has so far made the princely sum of 100 USD from his work. He hopes to be able to make a living as an author before the heat death of the universe. He currently lives in Aberdeen, Scotland with his partner Hilary and their daughter Catherine, who constantly remind him that he's not as funny as he thinks he is.

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THE ROAD, THE TRAIL

Under the Eagle standard of Rome, I marched arrow-straight across
conquered lands.

In the grasslands of the Masai Mara, I guide all Nature's children to
the watering hole.

In the Levant I am tyre tracks in the sand, blown away in the
suffocating heat of the Simoom.

In the high plateaus of the Hindu Kush, I wind precipitously upwards,
as gunfire and curses echo through the valleys below.

The Milky Way rises into a clear night sky, lighting my way as I
traverse the empty savannas of the Eurasian Steppe.

I course through the Land of Fire, at the end of which I watch ships
depart for the Land of Ice.

In Nevada's desert heat I swing past Groom Lake, listening to the
whispers and delights of unearthly minds.

In Iceland I'm interrupted by lava flow; in Scotland by a river
bursting its banks.

In cities now forgotten you will find me. In the dreams of the
architects of the future I roam.

I am the rubble of history beneath your feet. I am tomorrow's
promise of adventure.

I have known all your travels, through the throaty roar of the
combustion engine, the friction of the vulcanised wheel, the repetitive
strike of foot and hoof.

I am the road,

I am the trail,

I am the way,

I am the journey.

Escape with me and I will guide you

To the freedom of new horizons.

Mariana Mcdonald

USA

Mariana is a poet, writer, scientist, and activist. Her poetry has appeared in numerous publications, including *Crab Orchard Review*, *Lunch Ticket*, *The New Verse News*, *Les Femmes Folles*, *Southern Women's Review*, *We Are Antifa*, *Poetry in Flight/Poesía en Vuelo*, *The World Is Charged: Poetic Engagements with Gerard Manley Hopkins*, *Stone Sea and Sky. An Anthology of Georgia Poems*, *Fables of the Eco-future*, and *Anthology of Southern Poets: Georgia*. She co-authored with Margaret Randall the recently-released *Dominga Rescues the Flag/Dominga rescata la bandera*, the story of black Puerto Rican heroine Dominga de la Cruz. She lives in Atlanta.
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TRAVEL

Yes it was me who said
Living with men
Is sort of cross-cultural,
Kind of like travelling;
Always something different and new.

If you've been to the Himalayas you know
It's glorious, peaceful, a constant excitement.
But when the dark consumes
those glazed white peaks
You are alone.

Me,
I think I'm going
Home.

Hussein Habasch

KURDISTAN / GERMANY

Hussein Habasch is a poet from Afrin, Kurdistan. He currently lives in Bonn, Germany. His poems have been translated into English, German, Spanish, French, Chinese, Turkish, Persian, Albanian, Uzbek, Russian, Italian, Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Macedonian, Serbian, Polish and Romanian, and has had his poetry published in a large number of international anthologies. His books include: *Drowning in Roses*, *Fugitives across Evros River*, *Higher than Desire and more Delicious than the Gazelle's Flank*, *Delusions to Salim Barakat*, *A Flying Angel*, *No pasarán* (in Spanish), *Copaci Cu Chef* (in Romanian), *Dos Árboles and Tiempos de Guerra* (in Spanish), *Fever of Quince* (in Kurdish), *Peace for Afrin, peace for Kurdistan* (in English and Spanish), *The Red Snow* (in Chinese), *Dead arguing in the corridors* (in Arabic) and *Drunken trees* (in Kurdish). He participated in many international festivals of poetry including: Colombia, Nicaragua, France, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Germany, Romania, Lithuania, Morocco, Ecuador, El Salvador, Kosovo, Macedonia, Costa Rica, Slovenia, China, Taiwan and New York City.
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A TRAVELLER

Translated by: Azad Akkash

Edited: Ali Salim

I

As his puzzled legs like, he travels. He crosses long distances and dangerous bridges with no doubt that he will make it even over his dead body. From springs he drinks, in deep rivers he swims.

He suckles fresh milk from the breasts of she-wolves: "Thank you, fierce mothers," he says.

Under a plane tree he rests, and with a provocative desire he contemplates the cracks in the valleys.

After a scared rabbit he runs and calms her with a carrot that emerges from his heart like an arrow.

He wallows in grass and mimics the birds in the sky.

He jests with the squirrels, tossing them hazelnut, here and there he joins their jumps.

He waters a flower and in return receives a whiff of perfume as he whispers to her: "He who has flowers, has no need for God."

When he feels hungry, he knocks on doors like a passerby asking for bread to share with his siblings, the birds.

He falls in love with the first woman meets, as if she's been his woman for a millennia, he leaves a kiss on her forehead.

He does not care when his heart is worn out of love or vice, and he says to him: Thank you, my big heart!

Near a sparkling spring water he lies down into a sleep all of nightmares. He opens his eyes to the sudden appearance of a lioness nearby.

In cold manner he says to her: Claws morning, lioness! He asks indifferently: Do you pray on dreadful poets?

The lioness turns her face and runs away from him!

He tightens his packsack and off he goes toward oddity.

With no burden of a home, a homeland, a woman or a child.

Wherever he halts at, and fills the place with the water of temptation, he calls it homeland. Wherever he takes the earth as a bed and gets drunk on the damp grass, he calls it home. Each woman he comes across in his travel, he calls her his own. A sparrow, a butterfly or a star let his child be.

Here he is standing on a highland, getting all of his act together and kicking the butt of sorrow,

As high as his own death he shouts: Oh life, I will devour you, where to run?

II

He left no sea without slating his body with, nor a mountain without giving it a pat on the head.

No forest unless he obtained out of its arcane, no land unless he planted it with his madness.

No language unless he learned its most impudent vocabulary, most hurtful and evil!

He passes through each and every border, "Thank you, my strong legs", he says.

He finds himself everywhere, "thank you, my wanderer soul that roams the world."

In the huts of the poor he lived; he became one of them. Into the palace of the rich he entered, he could not stand it.

He knew hotels, bars and sidewalks the same way he knew his parents, siblings and friends.

To homelessness the same way to his torn socks.

He drank, got drunk, smoked. With indiscretion, with delirium, he filled the world.

He loved trees more than human beings, birds more than planes, autumn more than the other seasons.

He loved the night, he grasped his hand and told him: "You blind man, how much you enlighten the hearts of poets"

He knew chilliness and wrapped himself in. He tested the strong accent of the snow, he cared not!

He did not take storms in earnest, his face kept butting against the forehead of the wind.

As he dies, in the grave where he lies there will be no ease, from one grave to another, one graveyard to another.

He comes across the ancient dead men; hears the bones rattling, across the fresh dead; to hear them decay.

across those who were sentenced to death, to bliss and those who are swinging on the Straight Path.

The one eternal traveller he is, man daren't to ask: why not to rest?

God shall judge him, yet "What has the insanely sad one done to be judged" the traveller shall ask.

"Why did you create me after the image of the mad not after the pure image of yours?"

He molested frustration, but it penetrated him with a bullet that was not stray!

He hit the roads until they worn out, the soles of his feet cracked, one by one, the toes phalanges fell apart, "It's all right, travelling is prettier."

In his entire life, he had no money, scraps were enough for him!

One the edge of an abyss, his life was. On the sharp edge of existence, his heart was.

With stubbornness he kept telling the life: "Be generous with me, O

life! With more greediness be generous with me for I love you with all of my passion and enormous generosity.

III

As a guest at the garden of the blinds

He came so close, staring at their eyes, beaming with blindness!

All of sudden he remembers J. L. Borges, *"If I could live again my life... I'll try to make more mistakes."*

He remembered the blind man of Ma`arat al-Nu`man, healing pain with forgiveness, forgiving no one.

He remembered José Saramago, leading his blinds all over the city, killing and wreaking havoc...

He remembered the lover by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, piercing his eyes to be as blind as his beloved.

He remembered the old blind man of his village, reciting from the book of God and gathering the angles around,

and how he himself was gathering all the devils around old blind man.

Now, he opens his heart, totally blind... From the abyssal depths of his blindness he beamed with ecstasy!

IV

Rain is tapping against the pane of his heart

He sticks his head out and says: You rain, hit it here on my head,

Exactly on the carefully polished skull

I want the rotten mind and his resident farce to be driven away!

Under the strong your strong stings, I want the salt of wisdom and the pus of certitude to dissolve.

I want the rock of quietude to crumble, the throne of the taboos to collapse.

I want to keep the madness glittering, beaming, enchanting, bizarre and out of norm.

I want the beings to breathe sharply in amazement and repeat: "How majestic is this enormous mad traveller"

Diana Raab

USA

Diana Raab, PhD, is an award-winning memoirist, poet, blogger, speaker, and author of 10 books and over 1000 articles and poems. She's also editor of two anthologies, *Writers on the Edge: 22 Writers Speak About Addiction and Dependency*, and *Writers and Their Notebooks*. Raab's two memoirs are *Regina's Closet: Finding My Grandmother's Secret Journal*, and *Healing With Words: A Writer's Cancer Journey*. She blogs for *Psychology Today*, *Thrive Global*, *Sixty and Me* and *Wisdom Daily* and is a frequent guest blogger for various other sites. Her two latest books are, *Writing for Bliss: A Seven-Step Plan for Telling Your Story and Transforming Your Life*, and *Writing for Bliss: A Companion Journal*.

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BEING A MONK ON BIG SUR FOR A MONTH

One can lose oneself seated
on this Big Sur cliff -
a turning inside out of sorts,
beside a rustic log cabin
created by long-gone friends
who believed creativity birthed in isolation.

A surrounding path begs for meditative mindful steps
beneath bowing branches,
as visitors nudge night crawlers left behind
by Steinbeck boys, and museums.

I used to take my thoughts there,
catch glimpses of magic
on moss-covered benches,
beside buried journals
hidden in pine needled paths.

In the distance, an ocean washes woes away
and hugs hungry hearts,
while braided memories
are written with her crystals
in glistening waters
weaving disconnected stories.

This cabin has no phone
no TV nor human utterances -
one only hears a purring forest
to embrace lonely souls like me.

There's a universe of possibilities here,
a real-life force - Pacific powered inspiration -
as these cabin walls capture
creative bursts and bleed
onto the pages of our minds,
in a place where Nin and Miller

made deep penetrating love.

Hearts come alive here
and loneliness evaporates
like whiskey in open canteens,

on this edge of Big Sur, and it's cannon-like waves.

So yes, we can lose ourselves
on this Big Sur cliff
once turned inside out,

we can also find ourselves
and our long-gone friends.

Ankita Patel

INDIA

Ankika resides in Mumbai, India, and is a US citizen. It's been a time of revival of passion for her; as a scientist her actions are left-brain dominated, so she has taken this opportunity to metamorphize, and activate and enhance her right-brain by indulging in some writing. It has been a therapeutic journey so far, and making her life a rather balanced chemical equation.

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SUMMER STORY

A sensational summer at Stanford
A coquettish courtship with the white wax begonias
A frabjous fling with the whiff of morning coffee and bagels
A salacious soak at the White Memorial fountain
A scrumptious snack at the Tresidder Union
A hillside hike up the Stanford dish
A smooth sail at Lake Lagunita
A gratifying guitar session under the oak grove
A gruelling game of volleyball at the oval
A mesmerizing musical mashing at the Memorial Church
A rhapsodic romance rollerblading the roads
A breezy bike ride across the quad
A bazooka barbeque with my squad
A bountiful time at the brilliant bookstore
A flirtatious fling with the crisp evening air
An auroral affair with the star studded skies
Midsummer Night's dream

Charles Leggett

USA

Charles, a native of San Francisco, is a professional actor based in Seattle. His poetry has been published in the US, the UK (*Magma Poetry, Firewords, The London Reader, Creative Writing Ink, As Above So Below*), Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Recent and forthcoming publications include *Automatic Pilot, Volley Road Review, Heirlock Magazine, Ocotillo Review* and *Sublevel*. Other writing projects/experience include a play *The River's Invitation*, featured at Seattle's Theatre Off Jackson as part of its inaugural Solo Performance Festival, 'SPF 1: No Protection!' in March 2007. Charles also spent three years as lyricist/frontman for the Seattle blues band Uncle Ed's Molasses Jam, and has written, co-arranged and performed blues tunes for the Sandbox Radio Orchestra and 14/48: The World's Quickest Theatre Festival.
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ON A RUNDLE MALL BENCH

Adelaide, South Australia, March 2002.

God-awful techno disco sonic garbage
from the Jetty Surf Shop to my right

but from behind me to my left I hear,
forlorn and wordless, gently squealed, a chant

- indigenous? - of long, gnarled vowels drawn
from deep within the singer's bottomless

throat. People streaming past, on cell phones, pushing
prams; in grade school uniforms; some smoking
cigarettes, some drinking sodas, holding
hands or carrying purses, bags or backpacks.
The incantation dwindles and dies out

but soon resumes, unaltered - and transforms
the scene into a promenade of ghosts

the more affecting for their nonchalance,
crepuscular in tones if not in light.

What I cannot explain is how I never
found—was it time, as busy as I was

with notebook, pen, Cohiba, all the ghosts
or was it more the nerve?—to turn and see

just who that prehistoric vocalise
was coming from. I couldn't even tell you

if it was man or woman, let alone
what had been worn, or what if anything

was sought, or in what posture. An omission
I often question, and don't quite regret.

Previously published in *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, Issue #12, Oct. 2014.

LAYOVER: EMPRESS HOTEL

Outside Kuala Lumpur

This building rises nakedly up
from rows of yellow three-story flats

like an elegant wart from the crown
of a dentist's hovering knuckle.

Lurching half-hour's drive from the airport;
lobby and halls suffused in prayer

chants piped in through a subtle P.A.
system. "Help in Time of Need" leads off

the Gideons' list of "Suggested
Readings" from the worn bible they've "Placed"

- next, as it happens, to The Teachings
of Buddha - in what I'll call the drawer

of need. Now, techno dance beats debouch
from a stoop below, across the street,

next door to Naeshan Trading, where men
in t-shirts are hunched at card tables

under a naked bulb's margarine light.
An equivocal phrase, "drawer of need":

need drawn as baths are drawn - immersion;
or sketched, in lines of a face - mundane,

sweet, straining to become familiar
in a nakedness dressed to the nines.

Previously published in *Scarlet Leaf Review*, Scarlet Tree Press, Toronto, 1st Issue, January 2016.

HOLIDAY TRAVEL, Y2K

Also newly unforgettable:
Hearing from the pilot that we'd "*try landing once*": this after having circled

over banks of Portland fog for forty
minutes forty minutes after hearing
we would circle Portland fog for forty

minutes but most likely would be landing
in Spokane, eight nervous souls our Captain's
captive audience that Christmas morning.

Previously published in *Claudius Speaks*, Issue 4 - "Flight," September 2017.

PUERTO VALLARTA TIME-SHARE BLUES: APACHE

Well this place has the glasses for the whiskey,
But paltry choice of whiskeys to go in them.
I've smiled and settled for a neat Jim Beam,
Prepared to prosecute another study

In aloneness, under canopy,
Amidst a blonde clutching a shrieking cream-
frosted Chihuahua, an alarmingly serene
Alan Rickman look-alike and empty

Tables. Ah, the shaggy tolerance
I'm shown. And heard the waitress arbitrate -
Her patience meted out with subtle flair,

Confronted with a lifetime's nonchalance -
A spectacularly fussy chicken plate...
Would you let a bald man cut your hair?

Previously published in *Graze Magazine*, Chicago, IL, Volume 4, October 2013.

FORTUNE COOKIE

Each Sunday evening, in suburban New York,
we eat at the corner Chinese:
its fish tank hypnotic, the smiling

welcome from the Chinese woman
pressing menus to her chest,
who leads us to the booth with the vinyl seats.

They stick to my legs as I slide
across to my designated spot. Dad promises
me a fortune cookie on the way out;

from the bowl by the door.
We eat spareribs, lick our fingers
and laugh, try to pick rice kernels

and slippery noodles with splintered
chopsticks. We praise the food,
but wonder why we often leave hungry

for food and fortune. After extracting
mine from the smashed cookie, I put
the crumbled paper in my pocket,

and find it weeks later, hoping somehow
the words change
and the little paper whispers

truths about my own future,
which never told me dad would die
before my daughters' wedding.

Sarah Jane Justice

AUSTRALIA

Sarah is an Australian writer, living in Adelaide, whose work has been commended across a wide variety of fields. Her poetry and prose have been published on four continents, including in releases from *Caustic Frolic*, *The Blue Nib*, and *Pure Slush*. As a spoken word artist, she has won a tidy number of awards, and competed as a National Finalist at the Australian Poetry Slam. Her other achievements include writing and performing an original one-woman cabaret show, creating four studio releases of original music, and curating the mixed-media exhibition *Cracks in our Shadows*.

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FORGERIES

beacon light binds its captives
a siren with silent songs
the bellbird call of your origins

from behind,
you see what once was home
old walls that feel like forgeries
cold in counterfeit colours

new light leaves a hazy coating
on bricks that never changed

FLY

footprints fly away from concrete
unleashed in scattered dust

the score of streets is restless sound
a straining crash of broken glass
a cry that bleeds merlot
drips muffled through the rustling
of ripped brown paper skin

these streets are built from bottles
with wounds that can never be cleaned

Jack D. Harvey

USA

Jack's poetry has appeared in *Scrivener*, *The Comstock Review*, *Bay Area Poets' Coalition*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Piedmont Poetry Journal* and elsewhere. He has been a Pushcart nominee, and over the years has been published in a few anthologies. Jack has been writing poetry since he was 16, and divides his time between his home near Albany, New York and his plantation in South Carolina. He is retired from doing whatever he was doing before he retired. His book, *Mark the Dwarf* is available on Kindle.
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CAPE HORN

Read the nebulous twilight
before you try to take wing
against the night,
black as a crack
or bright with the moon;
read the silvery leaves
of the willows
before you venture midstream
in a canoe silent as the grass.

All the loose beginnings,
the ventures undertaken, understood
turn on dangerous flights;
benevolence of angels
or devils,
freshening the poorest enterprise.
The die, once cast,
turns joyous, nervous,
in the air,
no longer a cube
in fateful repose
but a revolving shape,
ending its journey
and beginning anew.

Let go! Hold fast!
Under white cliffs
by a far-off sea
ships are drawn up,
the argosy assembled.

It's time to leave now,
time to strike out
new ways,
leave
before bell rings,
or letters come,
before cock crows,
or the law is changed;
cross the hall, the threshold,
shut the door behind you;
leave the old land.

There before you
grim and shining,
the sea's unblinking eye,
the voyage south;
again and again
against the cold,
against the antipodes
that restless bitter water,
rising and falling,
that shouting restless voice,
warring against the night,
borne away on the wind.

Beyond Patagonia,
beyond the unsinging lines
of enormous deliberate seas,
a dream, your dream,
in the coming dark
bright as a bird;
again and again
rising
at world's end
the loom of the cape;
again and again,
restless, monotonous,
the same fateful danger,
the same fateful repose.

ON THE MARCH

It's a long high fly,
going, going,
the slow army,
elephants and all,
from the Alps descending,
going deep towards the belly button,
the breadbasket of Rome.

Along the Trebia flats,
the shores of the Trasimene,
Roman soldiers fell in droves,
legion by legion,
covering the ground
like the glittering leaves of autumn
or driven to drowning in the lake;
the silent uncaring water
swallowed them whole.

Fabius Cunctator, old and wily,
waiting in the wings,
patient for the reckoning;
but not his turn,
not his time;

Hannibal marches on.

LICHTGANG

On the road;
in a space between
the lamps of night,
dark trees
surround the moonlight
in the meadows;

blanched ships at sea,
boulders sail
through the hours
under the quiet constellations.

In his nightshirt,
posing by the casement,
the poet complains that
nature's brought on like
groceries brought in;

plants his disdain
like a lance of affliction,
like Anfortas' useless lance.
Banished, the petals of his poems
take their place in a
nursery of devices
dreary as broken toys.
No matter to anyone.

On the paradox road
we travel;
on delirious flights
from all yesterdays,
the screaming estuaries
of bad things,
to the clear quiet
boredom of now,
to the ghostly
hills and dales
of tomorrow.

Travel we must;
the sun levels off,
going down,

going away;

slicing
the blank face of day
evening gives way
to the operation of night,
in the moon's rising
harsh lines
overcast the kingdom of blood,
ever gorging,
ever diminishing;

through the dark and
the coming morn
like a crippled lion,
the marches of the road
retreat before.

Adrienne Stevenson

CANADA

Adrienne is a Canadian living in Ottawa, Ontario. A retired forensic scientist, she writes poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction. Her poetry has been published in *Bywords*, *Quills*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Blood & Bourbon*, *The Wire's Dream*, *The Literary Nest*, *Ottawa Poets Pathway Lampman Challenge* chapbook, *Time and Again Poetry Anthology* chapbook, and *20/20 Vision* by Canadian Authors Association-National Capital Branch. Her stories have won prizes in contests held by Capital Crime Writers, Canadian Authors Association and the Ottawa Public Library, and some have been published in *Byline*. Several non-fiction articles have appeared in *Byline* and *Anglo-Celtic Roots*.

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BIG ISLAND

the view from the lanai
changes daily
just as cliché would dictate
but it escapes the mundane
in its varied aspect
wildlife

breaching whales
spinning dolphins
grazing turtles

weather

fine, clear horizon
mist shrouding eerie palms
raging storm sea-spawned

the only constant is the wind
that drives the change

island of black, volcanic sand
violent sunsets
virulent blooming greenery
air like silk
water of benediction
change is your beauty

STATIONMASTER

tracks positioned carefully
curves banked, trestles firm
the iron horse puffs around the bend
steam issues from every orifice
gears mesh, turn with precision
well-lubricated by the engineer
all runs smoothly, disciplined,
over level crossings
routes developed in series
with stations interspersed along the lines
here a lumber depot, there a grain elevator
forests, tunnels, deep ravines, noisy rivers
procession of cars hold their cargo
red cabooses follow

stationmaster quenches the miniature fire
his landscape rests, spread out
on the recreation-room table
- mother calls him to dinner

EXPEDITION

He checks – is she still sleeping? good, she is
as morning beckons with its pristine snow
the light of early morning thin and pale
his skis are ready, waxed the night before
in hopes that such a morning might appear

he leaves a loving note beside her head
saying the coffee's made – he'll be back soon
quietly turns the key to lock her safe
the car is huddled in its white duvet
feather-like drifts fall swiftly to the brush

he's on his way – nothing can stop him now
no traffic on this pearly weekend morn
just a few others heading to the hills
up the white roads as far as they can go
abandoning civilization while they can

finally here, in the stillness of the park
where hawks once rose on thermals at the cliff
and beavers built their mounds out in the swamps
a land abandoned to winter's frosty breath
just a few birds to show the land still lives

he's not the first – all the main trails are groomed
but there's a private path, not far along
he lifts a snow-clad branch that marks the way
it drops behind him, few can find it now
he breaks new trail – a hundred metres in

a clearing opens – ringed by snow-clad spruce
and birches dripping filigrees of ice
he rests a moment, leaning on his poles
drinking in the fresh, idyllic peace
and silence, frost and beauty everywhere.

Barbara Hawthorn

NEW ZEALAND

Barbara lives in Auckland, New Zealand. She is a retired teacher (Mathematics) with a lifelong addiction to writing. Currently a member of International Writers' Workshop, Northcote, New Zealand, Barbara is a musician, playing mandola in The Auckland Mandolinata Orchestra.

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ONE WAY PATH

On tramping tracks, while toiling up
Short of breath and pounding heart,
Thinking "This is torture. It just never ends.
 Why did I start?"
Then one meets another party coming down
Hears their laughter floating light
Above their booted feet
Long before they come in sight
 Around the bend.
"Hullo there," they call, "Keep going friends.
This is the steepest bit,
like climbing an endless stair
But keep on going. You're nearly there.
Take the right fork," they advise.
"The left is just a cul-de-sac...
And oh the view – you'll love the view
It's well worth it", says the party coming down.
This path I travel is well worn
Others have passed this way.
Their footsteps in the sand I see.
But heel to toe, they always go
 The same way as me.
And when I reach the crossroads,
A forking in the track,
I get no clues beforehand -
 No-one is coming back.

PASSPORT TO PARADISE

This was the notorious coast road
Only way in to Paradise
 No avoiding it,
How many hairpin bends?
I always meant to count,
 But nausea would grip me
 White-faced, sweating in the back seat
 Staring fixedly ahead
Never at the banks of ferns brushing by
Never at the tilting dashboard.
Windows wide open for air – and choking dust
Distractions handed back from Mum,
 Dry salted cracker – stick of gum
Determined cheerful sing-alongs
 None of it helped.
Won't be stopping anywhere, Dad would warn,
There's no shoulder. And he would swing the wheel
Car juddering over the ruts.
 Paper-bag if I lost it.
Every year this was the price of summer
Six weeks of heaven at the secluded cottage
Crashing surf beach just over the ridge
Barefoot dreaming. It will be worth it.
 So hang on, teeth gritted.
Oh the pleasure of being there
Lurching giddy from the car to sprawl
Face down in the sweet long grass,
 Let summer begin.

 The cottage
Is still in the family
Turn off the highway
A wide sealed road awaits
Deep cuttings, wide slow curves
 Nearly there, I tell the back seaters.
But they don't even raise their eyes
In the mirror I can see them texting...
They haven't really earned Paradise.

Jessica Niles DeHoff

MALAYSIA

Jessica is a visual artist and writer who has lived in Asia since 2007. Drawing on her earlier career in architecture and urban planning, her work dramatizes interactions between individuals and their social, cultural, and spatial environments. Her current project is a chapbook of poems and paintings. Jessica holds degrees from Harvard University and Yale School of Architecture, and she has taught design at universities in Japan, China, and the USA. In July 2019, Jessica was the Open Residency artist at Rimbun Dahan Arts Centre in Malaysia. Her poetry has been published by *Independent Variable*, *Hive Avenue Literary Magazine*, and *166 Palms*.

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PARIS

A weekend task in
Paris is not glamorous.
But, leaning on that
laundromat's old wall,
smoking, I felt how good to
be alone, and free.

The cathedral where
we kissed is gone now,
and you are a boy's father.

Still, it happened. Candles,
a little rain, your new lips.
We were young. I'm glad.

SAINT LEANDER AT CARY CREEK

At night in the desert, the radio crackles.
The son is in the middle of his crossing.
The sky turns peach over dust and he thinks of
another dusk, near a cabin,
the smell of duckweed
in the creek as the water turned cold.
The smell of mud a secret.
Morning glories glowing, a heap
of incandescent stars thrown over the fence.

Fat spiders in the For Rent garage.
Fat spiders, daddy-long-legs
in the cardboard playhouse.
The curtains sewn of sheets, yellow and brown,
their cousins still in the cupboard
with the blue robe his mother wore
in the maternity ward (velvet)
and his robe, made of
one old, orange towel.

Mary Anne Zammit

MALTA

Mary Anne is a graduate from the University of Malta in Social Work, in Probation Services, in Diplomatic Studies and in Masters in Probation and has also obtained a Diploma in Freelance and Feature Writing from the London School of Journalism. She is the author of four novels in Maltese and two in English. Some of Mary Anne's literary works and poetry have also been featured in international magazines and anthologies and set to music and performed during the Mdina Cathedral Art Biennale in Malta. Also, her artistic works have been exhibited in various collective exhibitions both locally and abroad.

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SPANISH REFLECTIONS

She dances with passion,
Telling the story of blood and conquest.
Flamenco beats inspires me and reminds me of the Iberian ground/

The spirit of Spain.
For me is a pathway between past and present.
Cathedrals and monuments stand passionately over time.
Solitude of many centuries.

Her mysterious moves like
She looks into my eyes
I know I have been there over years like a cycle

It is where I know you and will see you again.

MEDIEVAL ROOTS

Dawn is moving silently.
Through the day.
I run away and away.
Searching.
For the place, for my identity.
Like Ulysses in his Odyssey

By the edge of the road.
Like a traveller.
I gaze at the sky, and there I see
The castle from ancient days.
Another story.

When I looked at the shining stars and whispered the secrets of
humanity to the wind.
I belong here back to my roots.
I travel back but I know are paths are bound to meet.

William Rudolph

USA

William earned his MFA in Writing from Vermont College where his mentors included Mark Cox, Jody Glading, Leslie Ullman, and Roger Weingarten; he also has studied poetry under Edward Hirsch at Breadloaf, and both Jane Mead and Katie Ford at the University of Iowa. His poetry has appeared - or is forthcoming - in *Barrow Street*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Midwest Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The North American Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Rattle*, *SLANT*, *Steam Ticket*, and many other journals. He coaches student writers at Grinnell College and in GC's Liberal Arts in Prison Program.
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EN PASSANT

Parallel Highway 18, two deer leap
after one another through
deep uncut prairie grass. Eyes
wide with the moment, they dive
toward me through
early April haze. Within
three heartbeats of one another -
a white tail slaps
my left headlight -
we pass. Beyond our pulsing, peripheral
brushing of shoulders,
all that remains -

quickened hearts within
their brown bodies, quickened
hearts within my line
of metal-and-glass-packaged drivers, and
that endgame impact
of another
arbitrary coming together,
another jarring miss, another
given pawn
the future
at our back
has taken.

Emmanuel Chitsanzo Mtema

MALAWI

Emmanuel is a Malawian writer who currently lives in Zomba, old capital city of Malawi. He is also a high school Science teacher. His works have appeared in *The Scarlet Anatomy*, *ACE World Magazine*, *2019 BNAP Anthology*, *Nthanda Review*, *Walking the Battlefield Anthology*, *Lockdown 2020* and *Scribble* magazine.

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ON THE ROAD

I'm in the middle of nowhere
Swaying to and fro
Like dancing branches
Trying to figure out, how I got here
My path narrows down
And the whisper of the earth gives my ears a melody
As rivers of sweat skate down my face
Everything around me pauses

I feel a load on my neck
My hands freeze in the moment
I feel powerless, my legs numb
Am drifting like a river
I fear am falling in a deep hole
Yet am failing to pull back to safety
A thud reminds me am already down

The eye lids pull a dead weight
I fail to lift back up
Like a small cloud that sails the sky to peep
For seasons changing
I see a standing ovation
And the pacing wind bring me voices
Crying, "we told you!"
I hear myself mumble, "Officer, I can't breathe"
His boot embraces my throat
Clogging the pant of air

Tamam Kahn

USA

Tamam is the author two books on the women of early Islam. *Untold, A History of the Wives of Prophet Muhammad*, (Monkfish Books, 2010) was awarded an International Book Award in 2011 and translated into Indonesian. *Fatima's Touch, Poems and Stories of the Prophet's Daughter*, (Ruhaniat Press, 2016). Tamam has travelled to sacred sites in Morocco, Syria, Jordan, Andalusia and India, and spent two decades researching early Islamic history. In 2009 she was invited by the Royal Ministry of Morocco to read her poetry at a world-wide Sufi conference in Marrakesh. She lives in the San Francisco, California area, and continues to travel and teach from her books about the women at the dawn of Islam.

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BEYOND PILGRIMAGE

1

Nine-hundred miles between Basra and Mecca!
Can I make sense of this story they tell me?

Rabia, walking this very long distance
wanting to, trying to, longing for Mecca.

Seems like the rhythm moves just like a camel that
Carries her luggage - no that was a donkey.

Filthy with dirt from each pray-bend-and-stretch step:
seven years prone on her belly she crept to...

"crept to?" O, Attar you stretch out this version.¹
Who could do that? "On her belly" - that's crazy.

Something like thirty-five well stops for camels
Names like: Tha'labiyya, Zurud and 'Afif.

2

I travel quickly on asphalt the same route,
busing the long desert miles highway 80.

Bathrooms and restaurants with meals and cool water.
Seven more hours I'll reach Mecca city.

Wondrous! I see it, I'm here at the Ka'ba.
Soon to be part of a swarm going 'round it.

Thousands of people, they press to get near this
mighty and powerful heart of religion.

3.

Tales - old mythology famously tells that
one who was making the journey reached Mecca.

Ebrahim looked but the Ka'ba was gone, be-
cause the black building went out to meet Rabia.²

Headlines that say it like this leave me wordless:

Rule-breaking Building Moves Out to Give Welcome!

Stunned by this tale - metaphoric tomfoolery
I, if not telling this, veil and fail history.

NOTES

1. Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Women*, 1983. p. 36 (story from Farid al-Din al-'Attar, the Conference of the birds).
2. *ibid.* p. 33, 34 (Story of Ebrahim Adham and the Ka'ba.)

SAHARA CAMEL GHAZAL

We wrap blue fabric round us like the Tuaregs do, then mount
each kneeling saddled beast. We're up. I clutch a passport of silence.

Seated high - so high, I rock from side to side, hold on and then,
release!
My pelvis tilts and opens. Legs stretched wide, my core cavorts in
silence.

My camel wants to lead. He's young and quick. I say his name
And pat his neck until loud snorts erupt to thwart the silence.

East of Zagora lies a view of sand and sky, the desert hills.
Three men in robes lead us on foot—two tall, one short, with silence.

The camel has two spread-out toes, familiar with the heat of sand
and rock. This one is quiet now, with ease transports in silence.

We're crossing heaps of loosened scree, and stone. A quilted sky,
air wall that's brown, high wind; this sudden sandstorm ignores the
silence.

Our camels kneel, each one a wall for us crouched under saddle cloth.
And when the stinging air and storm's complete, we mount. Our
escort - silence.

Previously published in *Salty At Heart* Journal, 2020.

Angela B. Haag

USA

Angela is a visual artist and writer with a degree in Graphic Art, who lives with her husband and cats, surrounded by wildlife, in the rolling hills of Kansas. She draws inspiration from nature, travelling, and the human condition. Her work was recently published in the anthology *LOCKDOWN 2020 - Poetry and prose from around the world on living in isolation and surviving the coronavirus*.

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ROAD TRIPPERS

A long grey ribbon
weaves through
connecting town to city
and me to you

An efficient route
over easy terrain
offering vast stretches
of wood and plain

Some cannot understand
and often suspect
there is nothing to see
on this dull trek

Road trippers know
so much more awaits
when the car leaves behind
the hectic interstates

Real adventure begins
when the wheel turns
for that great unknown
an explorer spirit yearns

Crunch of dirt
on a narrow track
as wildlife grazes
in the hidden outback

Mountain cathedrals
with towering spires
stress melts away
beneath the tires

Meadows of flowers
and rocks rising high
endless waters spreading
beneath dazzling sky

Roaring water
tumbles over the fall

washing from the soul
the dust of it all

Yet
Even the heart
which lives to roam
eventually looks for the road
which leads back home

ON A ROAD TRIP

On a road trip
All cares fade away
Winding through mountains
Cruising by a bay

There is no destination
On a road trip
Forget the compass
Tear up the map

Air smells of freedom
Sights feed the soul
On a road trip
Life is wonderful

Time means nothing
Gives reality the slip
As miles fly by
On a road trip

Alicja Maria Kuberska

POLAND

Alicja Maria is an award winning Polish poet, novelist, journalist and editor. She is a member of the Polish Writers Associations in Warsaw, and IWA Bogdani, Albania. She is also a member of the directors' board of the Soflay Literature Foundation, Our Poetry Archive (India) and Cultural Ambassador for Poland (Inner Child Press, USA). Her poems have been published in numerous anthologies and magazines in Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Belgium, Bulgaria, Albania, Spain, the UK, Italy, the USA, Canada, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Israel, Turkey, India, Uzbekistan, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia, South Africa, Zambia, and Nigeria.
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THE ISLANDS OF HAPPINESS

dreams come true in the Bahamas

let's go there where the wind brushes
the green hair of palm trees
the huge ocean murmurs sleepily
the golden sand remembers footprints
and the sun disappears in blue water
in the evening

before the black butterfly appears
we have time to write a few lines of a poem
and to share our thoughts
like a slice of bread

only there
we can entrust our secrets to the stars

THE WONDERS OF THE WORLD

I have never been to Hawaii.
Not for me, do the palm trees dance in the wind,
The sun's rays do not caress my skin,
The hot magma does not flow from the heart of the Earth.

I have not seen coloured hummingbirds
hanging like living jewels on the flowers.
The exotic and beautiful butterflies,
Similar to the fans of the Japanese geisha,
do not fly around me.

I have not climbed the steps of the ancient pyramids.
I have not seen the treasures of the pharaohs
And the huge Temple of Amun.
I cannot dance the Spanish flamenco
And I am not enveloped in a delicate, Indian sari.

The Amazon does not open the gate to the green paradise
And ruthless tundra does not lead to the white hell.
The ocean does not show its underwater treasury
And dolphins do not play on the backs of the waves.

I have not met a happy eternal love,
But this does not mean that it does not exist.

AUSTRALIA - THE LAND OF DREAMS

On the sandy soil, the wind makes a symbol of eternity.
It leads along the dreamy path marked out by ancestors.
The right direction is indicated by the Uluru monolith.

Churing remained after the past generations of sleep time.
Oval stones are hidden in the holy places of oknanikilla
There, as in rock cocoons, souls sleep until they are born again.

Time carries death and life like a boomerang
Before the next revival - a long and stone sleep awaits.
Ritual songs and dances wake the dead to a new life.

Mtende Wezi Nthara

MALAWI

Mtende currently works at the Catholic University of Malawi as an Associate Lecturer in the English and Communication Studies Department. Some of her work appears in *Nthanda Review*, *Kalahari Review*, *Suicide: A Collection of Poetry and Short Prose*, *Literary Shanghai*, *The Voices project*, *2019 Best New African Poets Anthology* and *Walking the Battlefield: An Anthology of Malawian Poetry on the COVID-19 Pandemic*. She also edits for *Nthanda Review*.
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THE NARROW ROAD

Not beautiful shoes, just shoes
Is all it took to get to the top
One step after the other
In a straight but slanty position
Sometimes windy, and steep
And sloppy, surprisingly
Thinking of it gives goosebumps
Experiencing it lifts the soul
Upon hearing the sounds of nature
Annoyingly good, when out of breath
A sit down comes in handy
To restore the broken spirit
No predator, in the name of nature
Can break the hope in the spirit
Even trees smile back and forth in admiration
Wishing to be your escort
But the best offer is a peep
And a whisper to the next one
Turning back is not an option
For the minutes of glory await
Getting there soothes the body
And the spirit as well
The peak is all smiles
While bidding farewell to the narrow road

THE ROAD TRIP

On a beautiful morning
In a crowded all go
Where life lives and reigns
Off the crowds forwards and forwards
To scatters,
Where evaders keep away,
Not that its up to them
Or the fear the of their lordships
Welcomed by a cool breeze
The metal box in motion
Moves the wheels, forwards the forwards
Winding again and again
Squick, and buzz
To a place, jovial and lively
From dancing bees
To singing birds
The temptation to mimic
Gets the shrubs angry
Moving forwards and backwards
And pushing the air your way
The breeze soothes
Water spit from mouths of mountains
Sing in corroboration
Leaving the need to keep moving
Til the the curve leads to a market place.

Fred Kracke

USA

Fred currently lives in Nebraska USA. He is now a professional mentalist. Previously had a long career in executive protection and running the doors at various bars and clubs. His poetry has previously been published in *The Horror Zine* and *Space Sports and Spider Silk* to name a few.

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OPEN ROAD

The open road so proud.
I'm running from the crowd.
True freedom found.
The road is so profound.
Taking me to the farthest reaches of my roam.
Why would I ever go home?

THE ENDLESS MILE

Mile after mile.
Only now I'm beginning to smile .
Boundaries no more .
To the open road do I implore.
A journey with no end.
On adventure do I depend.

ENDLESS JOURNEY

Across the ocean.
I'm in perpetual motion.
Every destination, a different nation.
Adventures found, my life is unbound.
My kindred spirit.
I could never fear it.

Mantz Yorke

ENGLAND

Mantz is a former science teacher and researcher living in Manchester, England. His poems have appeared in a number of print magazines, anthologies and e-magazines in the UK, Ireland, Israel, Canada, the US, Australia and Hong Kong. His collection *Voyager* is published by Dempsey & Windle.

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INUNDATION

Days on the road north, fender to fender,
the pick-up loaded with all we could cram in.
The authorities, organised this time, insisted
on radio and TV the approaching hurricane
would swamp the city and we should leave.
We hadn't been surprised: we'd seen the tides
creep higher year on year, each highest tide
a reminder of waves breaching the sea-wall
to flood a few suburban streets. Far away,
the radio told us the surge had swept in
like a tsunami, pouring over the sea-wall
and levees to leave the city's bowl a lake,
the streets at its margin blocked with dreck.
We are forced, for now, to live in tents,
waiting for deliverance, water and food.
The plain we've fetched up on is no Ararat
and this flood will not subside. We're stuck here
till they move us on. We know we can't go back.

THE PATH

*Start at the church, the clergyman said,
follow the cobbled street through town,
bear right at the sea: the pavement
becomes a tarmac path up to the head.*

To begin with, a delight: valerian, red campion
and cow parsley share the path's landward side
with grasses nearly as tall. On scrubbier land
behind, patches of bluebells fight for light
with resurgent bracken and bramble.

Seaward, bushes trimmed low by the wind
allow a view across a tumble of black rocks
to a beach you can reach only by sea.

Not quite as the reverend told me, though:
the asphalt leading uphill has begun to crumble,
exposing the rubble on which it was laid.

Further on, an abrupt end where violent waves
have collapsed a huge sea-cave into a jumble
of boulders far below. My legs quiver
uncontrollably as I look down: I recoil, afraid,
not yet prepared to face the infinite void.

Donna Zephrine

USA

Donna was born in Harlem, New York and grew up in Bay Shore, Long island. She graduated from Columbia University School of Social Work in May 2017, and currently works for the New York State Office of Mental Health at Pilgrim Psychiatric Center Outpatient SOCR (State Operated Community Residence). She is a combat veteran who completed two tours in Iraq. She was on active duty army, stationed at Hunter Army Airfield 3rd Infantry Division as a mechanic. Since returning home, Donna enjoys sharing her experiences and storytelling through writing. Donna's stories most recently have been published in the *New York Times*, *War and Battle*, *The Seasons*, *Qutub Minar Review*, *Bards Initiative*, *Radvocate*, *Oberon*, *Long Island Poetry Association* and *The Mighty*.

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PLACE OF MY ANCESTORS

Both of my grandparents originated in Grenada
They migrated to Trinidad for a better life
Recently I was blessed and visited both countries

The Island was like paradise
Rich mountains covered by green trees
Reached toward the bluest sky I had ever seen

Sunny beaches and warm wet sand between my toes
Cool clear ocean water
Little fish swimming around my feet
Walking into the surf
Stepping on small rocks and seashells

It felt good to be in the place of my ancestors
Learning about my roots and my heritage

In my mind I can hear my grandmother's voice
She always entered the room soft spoken as ever
Short and petite, drawing us in with her sweet smile
I remember the tone in her Trinidadian accent
As she sang a Christen lullaby,

*"Read your bible pray every day
And you will grow, grow, grow
Neglect to read your bible, and you will
Shrink, shrink, shrink"*

This was Gram's way of giving her grandchildren a message from God
We loved to gather around her on the couch and listen to her songs
of praise.

I wish I could have had more time with her.

Brian Langley

AUSTRALIA

Brian lives in suburban Perth, the capital of Western Australia with his wife of fifty plus years. His poetry has changed direction somewhat, now being mostly classified as Australian Bush Poetry; rhyming poetry which has near perfect metre and consistency of structure. He writes across many subjects and performs (mostly from memory) regularly at retirement villages, aged care facilities, country festivals, service and social clubs etc., etc., under the name The City Poet - this is due to him being a member of the Western Australian Bush Poets Association, many members of which have a rural background and write on rural subjects - most of his poetry is from the point of view of an Australian city dweller. His poems reflect his lifestyle, age and interests, mainly ageing, being Australian, the environment, travelling, fishing and contemporary living. He also delves occasionally into politics and history. He has self-published several books, as well as some audio CDs, and a couple of e-books of historic Western Australian poetry.

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LAST CHANCE

A nomad grey, I was on my way to warmer northern climes,
To spend the winter in the sun and maybe write some rhymes;
I was up and off quite early, just a bit before the sun,
If I'd waited till the crush time's start, that wouldn't be much fun.
I'd packed the things I thought I'd need, including fruit and veg;
My fuel, I'd fill once I had got to the city's northern edge.
An hour later, heading north, I saw a sign that said
"It's your last chance for city fuel, just five K up ahead."
My gauge was now near empty, was time to fill the tank
With fuel at city prices so it wouldn't break the bank.
I reached the final "last chance" sign and filled my tank with fuel,
Then once again I headed north, but life, it can be cruel -
For two K north of "last chance" fuel, another sign I saw,
A sign that got right up my nose, I even almost swore;
The sign it said, for all to see, in language quite precise,
"In just 5 K, fuel's ten cents down, on any city price."

DRIVING IN THE OUTBACK

The wife and I were driving, the back tracks out from Cue;
We stopped to look at wildflowers, the way that tourists do.
There's not much else that grows out there, it very seldom rains;
A little grass, few trees or shrubs, just endless red dirt plains.
We hadn't seen a car all day, nor one the day before;
There's not too many drive those tracks, a fact you can't ignore.
Well anyway; while we were stopped; the wife, she got the urge
To answer nature's calling card, so right there on the verge
She squats in preparation of, the thing she ad to do;
' Er knickers down around 'er knees - an interesting view.
But then, from out of nowhere, comes a car that's travellin' fast;
She quickly pulls 'er knickers up and waves as they go past.
Then two weeks later, much the same, another lonely track;
Much further north, up near Hall's Creek, where folks are mostly
black.
Again, we'd seen no cars all day, this time I 'ad to go:
Well, you can guess what 'appened next, your thinkin's not that slow.
I'd got meself all organised, me jeans down round me knees;
I'd got me balance; all was set, for that first gentle squeeze;
When tearin' down that red dirt track, a bloody great big truck:
Coincidence, you may well think, or simply just bad luck.
But I believe it is a law, a law that's set in stone:
A law that for survival, stands proudly on its own:
A basic law of nature, and it cannot be dismissed;
It should be taught in all the schools; it should be on the list
Of things you really have to know, essential things of life:
You must ensure you family knows, your children and your wife;
That should you have a breakdown while driving outback tracks,
To get assistance there and then - just simply, drop your daks.

THE HIGHWAY MAN

I was tearing down the highway,
The sun was shining bright;
The road ahead was wide and flat,
No vehicles in sight.
I'd left the city far behind,
A long way yet to go.
The next town through which I must pass,
Three hundred K or so.
The shimmer of the desert air
Made on the road ahead,
Illusions of a silver lake,
As ever on I sped.
This was the fastest I had been,
My foot hard on the floor.
I can't believe the thrill I got.
I'd not done this before.
Two hundred K, the speedo said;
It quivered not at all.
There's no way I could go this fast
Back in the urban sprawl.
Then suddenly, disaster struck:
A bang from somewhere near.
The car was sliding sideways and
I found I couldn't steer.
I tried to get it back on track,
But nothing seemed to work.
Somehow I think I'd left the road,
The car had gone berserk.
The world went spinning round and round;
It all seemed out of whack.
I was afloat in timeless space,
Then everything went black.
Then on the screen a message came;
A message that I dread.
"You've Crashed" it said, "You've no lives left,
Game Over! You are dead."

Mary Messick

USA

Mary is a poet and printmaker. Her poems have appeared in *LIPS*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Plum Creek Review*, and *Silkworm*. Her paintings and prints have been exhibited in Hartford, Boston, Phoenix, and New York City. She is graduate of Oberlin College, Wesleyan University, University of Hartford, and Harvard University. She taught Special Education and English as a Second Language for many years in inner-city public schools and worked as a freelance writer and editor. She lives in Easthampton, Massachusetts where she and her wife enjoy hiking, kayaking, gardening, and cooking. She is a member of the Florence Poets Society and Zea Mays Printmaking Studio.

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MARYLAND, THE EASTERN SHORE, 1949-56

We ride in a new black Chevy sedan
down two-lane highways from the city of Dallas,
through downtown Shreveport, Birmingham, Atlanta,
and up and down the Appalachian Range.
Daddy drives for three long days,
while Mama sits beside him with the map.
My brother, Lee, the dog, and I fill the back.

I stare out the window at changing scenes.
Cypress trees and Spanish moss,
farms and shacks, orchards, willows, rocks.
As we speed past fields, Daddy names the crops:
soybeans, sorghum, corn, peppers, and peas.
I wonder how he can tell when leaves
look the same in the distance at high speeds.

As we drive through forests, I mount my horse
and gallop alongside the car, bending over
the flowing mane, dodging low branches,
jumping rivers, ravines, creeks, and streams.
Nights, we eat, brush teeth, and fall asleep.
Up at dawn, I drag my pillow to the back seat,
and wake up when Daddy stops to eat.

At the Chesapeake Ferry, we wait, drive aboard,
climb the metal stairs, and stand by the rail.
Daddy names every kind of ship that sails.
He chuckles when I point to foam alongside
and proclaim it Tide . He says tide isn't suds,
but the changing depth of water that depends
on the pull of the moon. I'm confused.

At last, we turn up a sandy lane, passing corn,
butterbeans, and tomatoes, to the farmhouse,
a barn, the smokehouse, an old horse, a cow, hogs
and chickens, pens and coops, and the outhouse,
grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins,
the water pump, the kitchen and wood stove,
dining room, parlor, and both kitchen and front stairs.

By day, Cousin Pat and I keep house in the broad,
low branches of a lightning-split tree, avoiding

the hacked up stump where Grand-mom kills chickens.
Grandfather and Daddy work fields, then drive to town,
Lee and Cousin Bill shoot BBs and smoke behind the barn.
Mom and Grandmother shell butter beans,
shuck corn, pick tomatoes, and cooked meals.

Evenings, all of us sit on the wide front porch,
four children in the swing and grown-ups rocking.
Then up the stairs, girls to one bed, boys to the other,
as Grand-mom sprays DDT to ward off mosquitoes.
Our elders drone below: The Orioles, weather, and the dead.
I fall asleep to dream about Grand-mom with an axe
and chickens flying above us without their heads.

Marc Darnell

USA

Marc is an American living in Omaha, Nebraska. He is a custodian and online tutor, and has published poems in *The Lyric*, *Ragazine*, *Verse*, *Blue Unicorn*, *DASH*, and *POETICA REVIEW*, among others. He has never read his poetry out loud, and has only been photographed once in 22 years.

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PEARL

They say the world's my oyster,
but I can't pry it open -
it's more a roller coaster.
Can't even win a toaster,
given up on hope and
finding a prize in the oyster,
but always I was just your
unlucky, mental, misshapen
schlep on a roller coaster
of nerves, emotional blisters,
a tender heart too open,
groping for that oyster.
Now I'm heading east, or
somewhere men have fallen
off the roller coaster.
I'll sit by the roaring coast, or
give up, drown in the sea when -
no, I'll still look for that oyster.
The joy's the roller coaster.

TRANSIENT

I burn my bridges, I eat the past. I am
locomotive laying waste to each
new encounter. Friends are temporary,
enemies too, forgotten as they're plowed
aside, their wind knocked out - I'm too rootless,
a comet tail brief in their emotions.
Taking flight is good protection from
the knife of all that's intimate - the stain
of love unreturned, or those that leave
before I do and steal a bite of me,
so run run I say, take on a blur
and be indefinite to ones who yearn
to drag you till all speed is lost and you
are static as if dead and wish you were.

John Laue

USA

John is a teacher/counsellor, a former editor of *Transfer*, *San Francisco Review*, and *Monterey Poetry Review*, has won awards for his writing beginning with the Ina Coolbrith Poetry Prize at The University of California, Berkeley. With five published poetry books, a sixth; *A Confluence of Voices Revisited* (Futurecycle Press), published 2019, and a book of prose advice for people diagnosed as mentally ill. He presently coordinates the reading series of The Monterey Bay Poetry Consortium.
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TRAVEL

Four Haiku

Hollow rumble of
Heavy suitcases across
Pavement. Time to leave.

**

Travel's ironies.
Rain, rain, rain. The first sunny
Day, the day we leave.

**

Hotel wake up call.
Eight O clock Vancouver time,
Six A M in mine.

**

Car, train, bus, plane in
One June day. Stiff travel test
But afterward – rest!

Isioma Jemimah Okonicha

NIGERIA

Isioma is a Nigerian writer, and poets with several works published in magazines, journals, and anthologies.

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HELLO MR. TRAVELLER

Your name is mentioned everywhere
Each day you struggle for a ticket as you hang your bag
Looking for either local or advanced means of transport.

Your ways we do not understand
A job that keeps you on a path through journeys
You do not have a family
You spend each day booking tickets and staying in lines

All passengers have had contact with you
They speak of your weird nature
You never speak to anyone except travel is mentioned
That's when you suddenly awake

You sleep throughout the way as you snore loudly
We know your mark your identify
You do not accord time for anything else
As you clinch right to the bag that you prefer to hold

You've been voted as the king of travels
Yet you disagree as you deny holding a certain bag too
With marks of deep sleep
As you talk on a full speed

No one has the right to criticize you though
We are only eager to know your destinations
Call it a gossip, but our reasons are genuine
You are always saying a goodbye.

Bruce Pemberton

USA

Bruce is a retired high school teacher, coach, and Gulf War veteran. His most recent work has appeared in *American Life in Poetry*, *Duck Lake Journal*, *Ocotillo Review*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Rune*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Thimble*, *Third Wednesday*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, and the anthologies, *Spokane Writes*, and *In Tahoma's Shadow*. He lives on the Palouse, in rural, eastern Washington state.

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FLIGHT OF THE INFIDELS

We load onto buses at zero dark for the airfield. Crying wives are allowed to see us off. My good-byes were days before to my lab, wishing her well in the kennel, telling them what to do if I didn't make it back, find her a good home, don't forget about her hips and weak stomach. We're on a refueller out of Spokane, bound first for Andalusia, then Kuwait. Ten hours later, we land for a new crew and breakfast. The runway's littered with large cargo jets, all heading east for the war, or west for home. Spaniards staff an Air Force mess hall, we're told to stick and move our meal, then we're loaded up again and gone. We travel across the Mediterranean for Kuwait, as the pilots dead-stick our approach, gliding down to the runway, engines off and no lights. The next morning, we find white spires and bleached sand. Our bodies are all half a day behind us. Day is night, night is day. We wait for our last flight, end up on a C-130, with the pilot yelling back, hold on, as we spiral down to the runway and land hard on what seems the third bounce. Baghdad is dirty blowing sand. Buses are waiting for us. We stack our duffle bags on the floor and against the windows. Three hours east, on the side of an ancient road, we wait for an armed escort. We'd be an easy target. An RPG would ruin everyone's day. The new guard shows up, and an hour later we're at our barracks near dark. Never volunteer for anything, my father once told me, so my first in-country night, I volunteer as NCOIC for a hundred sleeping Kurdish recruits, with a carbine, a pistol and full clips for both. There's six of us pulling shifts all night. I imagine three Toyota trucks, an insurgent

favourite, plowing into the main gate. Two make it through, and head for us. We stand on the barracks porch, empty our magazines into the windshields, as one truck peels off and overturns. The last one rams into us and detonates. However, none of this really happens. We're so far out on the eastern frontier that the insurgents need gas money to get to us. They're pestering locals in Baghdad for spare change, so we're safe for now. My loaded carbine rests across my desk, as Kurdish fireguards send down reports all night. Someone is smoking on the fire escape. Someone's sister's honor is questioned and there's an argument. Awake before dawn, they pray, facing southwest, to Mecca. We get them outside for exercise, then into the mess hall, for boiled eggs, cheese, jam, lentil soup, and naan. The dayshift shows. We pack up our weapons, gear, and head for our barracks. Three days or nights ago, I was ordering burritos at a drive-through in Tacoma. Now, a tinny loudspeaker somewhere blares call-to-prayer, as we finally fall asleep.

Brigette Furlonger

CANADA

Brigette is a multi-disciplinary Métis artist based on Vancouver Island, Canada. Her favourite mediums include writing (poetry and fiction), photography, and jewellery. The symbiotic relationship between the arts is where Brigette finds her inspiration. Being an active participant in community art events is of the utmost importance to developing her skills further. Over the past five years, Brigette has shown her art in numerous shows, published several poems, and is currently working on a novel.

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THE NUMBER ONE

Excited at first
to watch the trip tick
the first 100 klicks.
No choices `cuz there's only one route to pick.
Tires rumble
A steady thrum
from beneath my
numb bum.

Been on the open road
For too long

83 hours of driving time.
That's 7 thousand kilometres just begun.
Living out of a pick up truck
Is supposed to be fun.
Driving from the West Coast
To Newfoundland's St. John's,
Using one single highway:
The number one.

Been on the open road
For far too long

It's been a month now
But it feels like a year.
Still not there yet
But let's be clear.
The farther I go,
The closer I near.
No point in turning back now,
My body has changed gears.

Been on the open road
For ridiculously long.

It's been three months now
And I really don't care
That my bum is flat `cuz
I've experienced wind in my hair.
Windows wide open, I tap a beat
On the roof, as the music blares.

One arm is weathered,
The other is fair.

Been on the open road
For wondrously long

I've witnessed hundreds of sunrises
And breathed fresh mountain air.
I've followed mighty waterways
And seen several bears.
I've traversed the windswept plains
And rode the rollercoaster at the PNE fair.
I've dipped toes in opposite oceans
And watched bald eagles fly in pairs.

Been on the open road
For stunningly long

On my return from this cross country run
I realize that this trip is not done.
I turn north in Cache Creek,
Off the number one.
Now, on the ninety-seven,
With new adventures to come.
Heading north another four thousand clicks
To Tuktoyuktuk and the midnight sun.

Lucy Tyrrell

USA

Lucy lives near Bayfield, Wisconsin, USA, with her eight Alaskan huskies. Her poems are primarily inspired by nature and wild landscapes, outdoor pursuits, family stories, and travel. In 2016, after 16 years in Alaska, she traded a big mountain (Denali) for a big lake (Lake Superior). Her favourite verbs to live by are experience and create. She is Bayfield's Poet Laureate for 2020-2021, and co-edits *Ariel Anthology*. Her poems have appeared in a number of journals and anthologies.

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STOPPING ON THE TAMiami TRAIL

After Mary Oliver

I cannot tell
you what prompts me
to pull over at what
the sign says is
Miccosukee Indian Village - it
is where you might stare over the green sweep of Everglades and, if
you
are lucky, witness a Snail Kite float down to pick a snail from
sawgrass. Or you can plan
a rotor-noisy airboat ride skimming the sparkling-river of grass to
visit a village of thatched-roof huts called chickees and do
touristy things like buy trinkets with
Miccosukee printed on them while your
secret hope is to watch the guide wrestle one
mean scute-skinned alligator, putting his face next to its wild
bobble eyes and open jaw with ragged-row teeth and
you better leash your precious
little dog for its life.

ROCK, RIVER, ICE

above, below, surround,
larger than any road mile -
like a child in this landscape

I walk ten soaring miles
on the Denali Park Road -
among whistling ground squirrels
where golden eagles float above

bear scat not fresh, but
my cautious shouts - to unseen
bears - lost in the immensity

geologic time
plays this game -
Rock, River, Ice

fist of granite,
V of fingers, two silver braids of river,
flat hand, sheet of glacial ice

Rock sequesters
remnants glaciers
cupped among high ridges,
rock scrapes rock, pulverizing

River carries glacial silt,
luminous strands of the East Fork
meander-flow, erode today's valley,
cut sturdiest of rocks into dust

Ice covers, carves, moves,
plucks boulders as glaciers slide,
melts as slurry of silt,
abandons erratics on the plains

while I walk among squirrels, eagles,
the unseen bears,
we intersect the massive scales

of time and place -
geologic textbooks, open for inspection.

RETURNING HOME

This place soothes -
rough weave of wool,
scent of lavender contentment,
geography of castled heart.

That place beckons -
journey of dancing miles,
the road beyond usual,
soaring paths that unspool
beneath azure skies.

Eagerly grasp ticket for there -
for anywhere -
adventure north in soggy
muskox polygons,
landscape south rooted in live oaks,
crinkled blushes of crepe-myrtle,
east for tide-drenched scent
of rocky granite headlands,
slip-away saddle west
where pronghorns bolt-run in sage.

I need a self-addressed
stamped envelope
to help me return home.

END

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