

The Barefoot Review

Summer 2012

Staff

Jason Teeple - Editor-in-Chief

Jason has been fascinated by language all his life. He received a Bachelors in English literature from Rutgers University, then continued his pursuit to understand language in a more formal way. He earned a Master's from University of Pennsylvania, studying linguistics and computer science. He specialized in natural language processing. It's a subfield of artificial intelligence that uses computer programming, linguistics and statistics to model language.

Sadly his career was cut short when he was diagnosed with brain and spine tumors. After two surgeries and three rounds of intensive radiation the tumors have been stable. He is Federally disabled and uses his time to write and help people when he can.

jason@barefootreview.org

www.jasonteeple.org

Mel Glenn - Editor

Mel was born in Zurich, Switzerland, on May 10th, 1943. His family came to the United States when he was three years old, and settled in Brooklyn, New York. He grew up playing stickball in the street (three manhole covers = a home run) and stoopball (a forgotten art, really) outside his house.

Mel graduated NYU in 1964 with an English degree, which in no way prepared him for life in Africa. So he joined the Peace Corps and went to Africa.

Mel lived in Sierra Leone for two years, teaching English and history, before coming back to the States. He went back to school, and got his Masters degree from Yeshiva University, and did some post-graduate work at NYU.

And, having not yet had his fill of school, he became a teacher. First, junior high for a few years, at JHS 240 in Brooklyn. A few years later, he settled in for the long haul: 31 years at the same school from which he graduated, Abraham Lincoln High School, near Coney Island. Mel loved teaching English, helping his students discover why Macbeth is cool, and how come Captain Ahab didn't just quit his silly quest, and open a seafood joint in Boston.

Mel married his wife, Elyse, in 1970, about when he started at Lincoln. They had two

sons, now both in their 20's. Jonathan, followed the trail of verbs and adjectives Dad sprinkled behind him as he walked, and made his way to a career writing television news. Andrew, on the other hand, splashed his way out of the family's literary gene pool, to become a software engineer.

Mel retired from teaching in 2001. He now spends his time writing, and making appearances at schools, libraries, and community groups around the country.

In his free moments, Mel likes sternly admonishing the television set whenever a public figure dares to use incorrect grammar, and cheerily refusing to clean up the papers on his desk no matter how often his wife throws up her hands in despair.

You can read more about Mel: www.melglenn.com

Nicholas Gordon- Editor

Nicholas Gordon is retired as a professor of English after more than thirty years of teaching at New Jersey City University. He holds a B.A. in English from Queens College of the City University of New York and an M.A. and Ph.D. in English and American Literature from Stanford University.

He began writing poetry seriously in the early 1980s, mostly to celebrate family occasions. While on sabbatical during the academic year 1997-1998, he decided to expand the feelings and experiences on which his poetry was based by starting a Web site that would invite visitors to request poems. The inspiration for many of the poems on this site (Poems for Free at www.poemsforfree.com) comes from these requests.

Eventually the site became so popular, and the requests so numerous, that it became impossible even to read them all, and so that feature of the site has been deleted. However, the site continues to draw thousands of visitors, and the poems on the site have been used for many weddings, anniversaries, birthdays, graduations, and funerals, and published widely on the Web and in collections of occasional poetry, newspapers, textbooks, and yearbooks.

Amy King- Editor

Amy King's most recent book is *I Want to Make You Safe* (Litmus Press), forthcoming November 2011. Other books include *I'm the Man Who Loves You* and *Slaves to Do These Things*, both from Blazevox books. She is currently preparing a book of interviews with the poet, Ron Padgett, co-edits *Esque Magazine* with Ana Bozicevic and works

with VIDA: Women in Literary Arts. Amy also teaches English at SUNY Nassau Community College and conducts workshops at such places as the San Francisco State University Poetry Center, Slippery Rock University, and Summer Writing @ Naropa University. Her poems have been nominated for numerous Pushcart Prizes; she was a Lambda Literary finalist and the recipient of a MacArthur Scholarship for Poetry. Amy founded and curated the Brooklyn-based reading series, The Stain of Poetry (2006-2010).

For more, please visit www.amyking.org

Jamie Sue Austin -Grass Roots Public Relations

Jamie Sue Austin is an established freelance writer actively pursuing advanced degrees in literature. Her current focus is on poetry that gives voice to the disabled, experimental poetry, and flash fiction. She is a disabled herself, and is the mother of a disabled child. This gives her an unique perspective on disability in relation to the family. She actively promotes the inclusion of *The Barefoot Review* in various literary publications (online and off) while simultaneously encouraging persons with disabilities to engage in the cathartic and self-exploratory experience of writing poetry.

You can see Jamie Sue's website: www.jamiesueaustin.com

Table of Contents

Zelda Alpern.....	1
Ichneuman.....	1
Ken Arnold.....	4
Conversations with Dr. Bill	
In memory of William Newton, September 25, 2011.....	4
Jamie Sue Austin.....	9
I am paralyzed by the dirty dishes.....	9
take 2 green pills and 1 blue till tame.....	10
Meg Baird.....	11
post-op dream.....	11
Sandra Becker.....	12
Flash in the Night.....	12
Under Cover.....	12
Invasive Species.....	13
Ariel Bugosh Boswell.....	14
Burdens.....	14
After Cancer.....	15
Tomatoes.....	16
Barbara Brooks.....	17
Tobacco Season.....	17
Jada Broussard.....	18
You'll Find Me There.....	18
Arthur Durkee.....	18
Needles.....	18
Switch.....	19
Michael Estabrook.....	22
Help Me Nurse.....	22
Natalie Easton.....	23
The Nurses Go Back to the Wallpaper.....	23
The Nurse Daughter at Work.....	24
Remote Control.....	26
Erin Farias.....	28
Wrapped.....	28
Christopher Farrell.....	28
Born with a Broken Heart.....	28
Arrhythmia.....	30
Michelle Lizet Flores.....	30
Movement.....	30
Nostalgia.....	31
Saying Goodbye.....	31
People keep telling me how alike we look.....	31
My last real conversation with Mami.....	32
Roger Floyd.....	33

Then She Went Away.....	33
Jessica Goody.....	36
Panic Attack in Neo-Natal ICU.....	36
Intensive Care.....	37
P. E. Guess.....	39
Life.....and Death.....Decisions.....	39
Jim Gustafson.....	41
Scrabble Word Eyes.....	41
Brain Storm.....	42
Diana Hallare.....	43
Dinner with FOP.....	43
Jessica Hambleton.....	44
Dermatomyositis with a side of Asperger’s Syndrome.....	44
Constance Hanstedt.....	46
Radiation.....	46
Catherine Harnett.....	47
Steep.....	47
Chad Haskins.....	48
Preyed.....	48
Alan Dennis Harris.....	49
The Rose and I.....	49
Art Heifetz.....	50
After the Operation.....	50
Paul Hostovsky.....	52
Disbelief.....	52
Oath.....	53
Long Battle with Cancer.....	54
Letting Go.....	54
Richard Jacobs.....	55
Sickness and Health.....	55
Karen Jakubowski.....	58
Migraine.....	58
Cassandra’s Last Suffering.....	58
I’m Not Ready to Be an Angel Yet.....	59
Amy Murre Klemm.....	60
Farewell, Arvin.....	60
Tricia Knoll.....	62
Clot Be Gone.....	62
Anna Kurtz.....	63
Lyn Lifshin.....	64
The Yahrtzeit Light.....	64
Taking my Mother to the Bathroom.....	65
Curling on the Bottom of my Mother's Bed.....	66
Debbie C. Lincoln.....	67
Erasing Memory.....	67
Jennifer Londry.....	68
Pickle’s Birthday.....	68

Deborah R. Majors.....	70
When?.....	70
Start Off On the Right Foot *.....	71
Rebecca Masri.....	72
Inside.....	72
J. R. McRae.....	73
Inside.....	73
Breathe.....	74
Jacqueline Michaud.....	75
False Positive.....	75
Progressive.....	75
Lynda Monahan.....	76
Red Boots in the Snow.....	76
Cris Mulvey.....	79
Dark Mother.....	79
After All These Years of Illness.....	80
Questions.....	81
Mark A. Murphy.....	82
Colorado Girl.....	82
Nora Forever.....	82
Nausea.....	83
Pain Eater.....	83
Beverly Offen.....	84
My Husband’s Doctor.....	84
Amanda Gayle Oliver.....	86
The Stroke of Rae Rose.....	86
Frances Shani Parker.....	87
Sweet Treat.....	87
Nancy Phear.....	88
It Was Already Dark.....	88
Lightning Storm.....	90
Douglas Polk.....	91
The Seizure.....	91
Post-Cancer Survivors.....	92
The Disaster.....	93
Aaron Poller.....	94
Paying Attention.....	94
Healing After Surgery.....	95
DC Reid.....	95
I have let the river carry me.....	95
An Ode an Elegy a Cancer.....	97
Christina Rinnert.....	98
Body.....	98
Pain Warning.....	99
Michael Romary.....	100
Diagnosis.....	100
Sy Roth.....	101

Cicatrix.....	101
Marjorie Sadin.....	102
Faces on a Totem Pole.....	102
G.A. Saindon.....	103
Midnight at the Clinic and Beyond.....	103
The Scavengers.....	103
Mary Harwell Saylor.....	104
Lasting Rule.....	104
Taking Mother to Lunch.....	105
Ray Scanlon.....	106
Virus.....	106
G. David Schwartz.....	107
I Never Liked The Magic Shows	107
Christopher Seth.....	107
A Single Action.....	107
Anne Shaughnessy.....	109
You Left the Refrigerator Open.....	109
David Sloan.....	111
Sea Treasure.....	111
Heartsick.....	112
Stunned.....	113
Barbara Ellen Sorensen.....	113
Valley of Fire.....	113
Sky Islands.....	115
Water From Oar.....	116
Megan Stolz.....	117
A Sestina for Erik.....	117
Lesley Strutt.....	118
What I'll Tell My Friend Who Fell and Broke Her Neck.....	118
Danielle Sullivan.....	119
Promise Broken.....	119
To the Grocery Store Cashier.....	120
Today.....	121
Marc Thompson.....	122
that thing you sort of wanted to know about but didn't really want to ask:.....	122
Emily Treakle-Chase.....	123
Hospital.....	123
Scene from a Nursing Home.....	124
Gary Turchin.....	125
I'm Not Going To Tell You Everything Is All Right.....	125
Second Chances.....	128
Kris Underwood.....	129
Going for the MRI.....	129
Dreams, Diagnosis, Recovery.....	130
Bobbie Valentine.....	131
Killing the Axe man.....	131
Marian Veverka.....	132

Lady Bountiful.....	132
Autumn Sacrament.....	133
After the Warning.....	133
Colleen Wells.....	134
Lithium.....	134
We Line Up.....	135
L.D. Williams.....	135
Six Feet Under.....	135
Dreamscapes.....	136
Changming Yuan.....	137
Masking Up.....	137
Vegetarian Will.....	138

Zelda Alpern

Ichneuman

My dad sits in his electric wheelchair. No	it's on a stretcher under amb ulance lights	mint gum from the pouch that hangs from the back of
amigo, one swollen hand on slacked lap, one	or once in a van-sized hearse if a hearse is	his chair. He waits. Mom's indoors, not ready. I
fisted at motorized controls. Wheel buzz wheel	any aut omobile that trans ports dead hu	go outside to smoke. <i>Look at this Zelda will</i>
hum instead of footsteps scoring my stealthy	mans. Pyra cantha smothers the rails he used	<i>ya? I can't figure it out. What? On that stump.</i>
childhood. Gone Canadian crutched clip clop, their	to hold to transition from scoot er to car	The maple by the rails by the peace sign I
sight and sound my earliest e pitome	seat pre-wheel chair. When mom is real ly ready	scratched while the cement set (dating the rails to
of ugly. He's on the walk closer to	to leave he'll buzz himself and his wheelchair or	junior high). <i>What?</i> I ask again. <i>Is it one</i>
the curb than the house which he en ters from the	I'll push the knob by his bloated hand, propel	<i>or two? Huh?</i> I blow smoke away from him squat
side on a ramp that hides ornate iron-worked	him down the lawnside cut-out, up the mini	close to old dead wood, see it. So skinny most

stairs. If he
enters or exits
the front door

van's ramp where
I'll belt him in, where
he'll ask for

sightlines won't
catch it. Long as my
hand's width, terr

ible thin,
tail-stinger-thing-a
ma-jig, a

my father's
funeral. Don's dead
now, too. Mom

took Don.
I met an ento
mologist

loop from it
self inserted in
to bark. It

wasn't up
for the ten hour drive
to my fa

in Philly
at a then-boyfriend's
art open

outlasts us,
outlasts my mom's late
ness, my fa

ther's hometown,
in western Pennsyl
vania. Al

ing who wore
bright green. He was tall
with dark hair

ther and his
wheelchair belted and
buckled in

most thirty
I had no license.
Don told us

and a beard,
resembled Sebast
tian, a child

to the mi
ni-van insect still
piercing the

he was a
minister's son. The
pictures Don

hood neighbor
who met me at dawn
to hunt bugs

the old ma
ple stump. I forgot
to tell you

took were blurred,
disappointing as a
photograph

when we were
seven. I longed for
snails' spiraled

about the
neighbor Don Patch who
came outside

of a ghost
though this insect was
real. The ep

shells, we found
slime gray slugs, stored
them in jars un

to smoke—emph
ysema and all—
who we waved

iglottis
the last muscle to
fail my fa

der the porch
like science projects
and death. The

over to see
this strange small sight.
He brought his

ther. He choked
on hot Chinese food.
Turned out what

entomol
ogist named what my
father and

camera,

he ate was

I had seen:

sent pics to the insect zoo. Don	going straight to his lungs for a	ichneumon fly, well wasp really.
drove us, my mom and me, to the airport for	year. He had chronic MS. Emph ysema	The long loop neither tail nor stinger but o
viposit or that bore three inches through rotten	larvae. Some ichneumans lay eggs in the larvae	
larvae full wood to lay its eggs. Its antennae discern the species lodged inside prior to drilling. Their larvae hatch from eggs with	of other ichneumans, the entomologist says. The salon chair dryer above his dry head yawns no breath. Unusual venue for	the blurred images crisped to catch the looped cell opaque-thin lined origin of my father's nervous system's end. At his death did MS
in the host larvae, eat their way out, disable their hosts' immune systems to prevent attack	an art opening. Wasps not flies, he reminds me. I wish I had the pictures Don took, that	take wing—what is its post-host phase besides this?

Zelda Alpern's poetry and fiction have appeared in *Literary Imagination*, *The Warwick Review*, *Chain and Fiction*. Currently studying to be a clinical social worker, she has also made her living as a teacher, community organizer and grant-writer. Her poem mourns the loss of a loved one. "Ichneuman" takes as its subject her father, Erwin Alexander Alpern, who was diagnosed with chronic multiple sclerosis before she was born. He passed away due to complications of this disease ten years ago this coming April. His most common refrain was, "Don't try, just do it" which became increasingly challenging for him to live up to as his disease progressed, but which nonetheless has ingrained some measure of self-discipline in his daughter.

Ken Arnold

Conversations with Dr. Bill

In memory of William Newton, September 25, 2011

1.

The summer we met we were dying
you of ALS and I of prostate cancer.
We bonded over plans to kill ourselves.
You were a talker after decades listening
to patients on your psychiatric couch.
You loved to pose a question and then rummage
through the endless permutations
toward no answer.

These were koans such as:
how will I be present to my daughters
when I'm dead or we to each other?
Can this conversation last?

Conversation's what you cherished.
You asked to be remembered in a garden
by your friends who'd stroll and talk
about whatever they desired
not only you
(whom all of us desire).

I'll be gone.

The living need each other more than me.

But then you smiled indulgently
I'll be there somehow
perhaps by giving everyone permission
to imagine that I am.

The news that cancer wouldn't kill me yet
changed our conversation.
I saw the knowledge in your eyes
that what had bound us now was loosed
perhaps a sadness at the loss of a companion
in the journey through the liminal world
between this life and that uncertain other.
We speculated on the spaciousness
of disembodied minds
the possibility of liberation
we could not describe but only long for.

How could we
trapped in bodies
know?

We were seekers after death
and yet reluctant to abandon everyone we loved
to satisfy our yearning for the satisfaction
of our restlessness.

You've gone and now you know
and I am jealous of your knowing.

2.

The *I Ching* was your guide.
You inscribed a copy for me
to my friend and fellow seeker
a coin toss to help with the future
Love Bill
and taught me how to use it.

Today I throw the coins for you.

Heaven over Water means Contention:
the ideograph combines
a face with an open mouth
the act of speaking bluntly
and self as one who asks for justice.

Seek the middle ground.
Contention should not last.
True or false will be distinguished.
Thus the Yao text for the initial six
the Greater Yin
which leads to

Heaven over Lake
Fulfillment
A person walking in his shoes
which for the Chinese means
one advancing with firm steps
toward his fulfillment
who walks with an open heart.

3.

We met for lunch one day a week
in your apartment just to talk
until fatigue diminished you.
You recounted stories that gave meaning
to your life and mine.

Arriving in Hawai'i to run a clinic
never having run a clinic
overwhelmed at first you stood at the western edge
of the island and ahead was only empty water
like the future given to you
empty water.

Later when you met a young psychiatrist
who'd worked for you back then she said
you taught me so much.
How you wondered when you knew so little?
What you knew was what I needed.

Surrounded by your friends and daughters
even former lovers
you refused to give up conversation
and contention
arguing the points
even when your voice was dying
and your lungs were gasping for relief.
You threw parties randomly.

We gathered one night to watch slides of China
taken when you were thirty.
Such a handsome man a woman said.
You smiled
still handsome in your breathing apparatus.

Days before you died
I saw you in the lobby of our building
coming back from Happy Hour
at Joe Bar down on Twenty-Third
your shoulders slumped
your head too heavy to be raised
the tube delivering oxygen to your face
a reminder of how little it would take
to take you
and you were gone.

4.

Supreme Good Fortune
reads the Gua:
Review the past
Summarize the journey
Everything is fulfilled.

I'm still alive and still have cancer.
You are cured of ALS
which never had a chance against you.

I recall a rare clear day with you
gazing through your windows
at Mounts St. Helen, Hood, and Adams
the Columbia divide
a landscape you had come from California
to inhabit and as you looked with softened eyes
your voice broke.
You turned to me and asked

Would you change anything in your life if you could?
We bounced the question back and forth
in a game of philosophical table tennis
until you grew tired and spoke
in a voice already difficult to understand:

*I'd change nothing
not even this
and turned your chair away
and said*

I need to rest now.

5.

A sleepless night my mind awake to every nuance
of the dark

after sitting for an hour with Bill.

I don't feel safe he said.

Who are those people?

Your friends who love you.

Take me somewhere else.

I prayed with him to ease his passage
one hand on his forehead the other
holding his inert left hand while friends
massaged his legs and shoulders.

Look he has goosebumps someone said.

His eyes met mine when I was finished
and his death was in them.

I kissed his forehead.

To love is to choose.

The world chooses us
all things conspiring to enfold our being
and takes us to its heart in death
the consummation of desire.

Love is incomprehensible
our understanding obscured
by the body's narcissism.

Bill in perfect

stasis

body wasted

voice inaudible

breath plastic

hands rigid

succumbs to mind

holding discourse with reality beyond our hearing.

We are the talk he leaves behind.

Ken Arnold is a former book publisher and retired deacon in the Episcopal Church. He is an award-winning playwright and poet, whose poems have appeared over the years in *The American Poetry Review*, the *Southern Poetry Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, and other little magazines. Bill Newton was a neighbor/friend diagnosed with ALS in summer 2009, at the same time Ken learned he had metastatic prostate cancer. They met for lunch weekly until Bill's death in September 2011. Ken wrote this elegy and read it for Bill's memorial service, over which he had asked Ken to preside. Ken has advanced prostate cancer, now hormone resistant. He begins a clinical trial for a new drug as this issue is published. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

Jamie Sue Austin

today
you went outside
and played
just like other little boys
what modest milestones
could bring such joy

I am paralyzed by the dirty dishes

in the same way
that some personalities
freeze in hostage situations
the clutter constitutes
too much visual input
and I have lost my
data processing capabilities
as if the house
has folded on top of me
black and thick
a mat of confusion
with dusting
repairing
cleaning
cooking
holding
healing
teaching
loving

and merry making
my primary duties
going unperformed
as I sit banded and blinded
I can no longer see
a section of my brain relays
a repeated message
—External connections
to critical data inputs
severed—Back up systems
fail restore—reboot
system and clear cache
If there was more cash
and time for processing
I could overcome
my own objections
—at this point
I have blue screened.

take 2 green pills and 1 blue till tame

Some people are
made of pens
and paper,
desks and screens,
everyday objects
and mundane concerns.

A select few are
feral things that
can't find comfort
in a easy chair,
who chase the
wind, and howl at the moon.

If you knew me better
than you think you do
you'd know which kind
of person I am
and why I smashed
the vase and

ripped down
the curtains.

Jamie Sue Austin struggled with epileptic seizures, depression, and anxiety throughout her childhood and young adult life. Now in her thirties, she is the mother of a child with moderate to mild autism. Caring for a disabled child amplifies her own health issues, but it has not impeded her love of learning or dissuaded her from her long term goals. Currently, she is a freelance writer and student. Barring any difficulties with her health she plans to have her doctorate completed by 2016. For her son, she hopes that he will find happiness on the path he chooses. Her chief fear is that society will fail to recognize her son's talents and abilities.

Meg Baird

post-op dream

even the fiercest things
can be very soft
imagine tigers and snow leopards
they pad over any terrain
hot, cold, wet, soft
they pad with nails
as sharp as knives
of the finest steel
imagine
soft on soft
flesh on flesh
before the cut
so deep and clean
the scream
is
bliss

Meg is an experienced spoken-word performer and published poet. Four years ago, she had a melanoma removed from her left temple. The best comment she received about the fresh scar came from a young woman. She said 'ouch'.

Sandra Becker

Flash in the Night

You are singing me Al Jolson songs
and letting me win at cards,
you are taking me to Nunley's Park
where I try to grasp the rings.

You are offering your sorrow into my open arms
as mother, sister, brother argue
over checkers - dots of white and black.

How do I, at four years old,
know you are dying? You are dying.

On the dresser, the jewelry you sell;
sky blue opals, blood red gems
against black velvet.

There's a murmur in my own heart now;
doors which don't open or shut well.

Under Cover

I remember the fine knit suits
and silk blouses you wore,
beiges and blacks,
perfumed with Coty's Lamont
showing just a hint of cleavage,
and your wide-brimmed hats,
slightly tilted, just the right angle.

And I can't forget how you dressed-
swiftly, secretly, folded over yourself
in your walk-in closet
as if surrounded by spies,
the frightened grip
of your hand on mine,
the way you closed
the curtains.

Later, your hair fell out
in my hands
and you hid your head,
soft as a baby's,
under a wig by day,
a turban while you slept,
hid the bandages
dressed over your heart
that could not stop its bleeding.

The day you lay dying,
I finally stopped the nurse
from breaking the sweet spell of sleep
each time she shouted your name.
Even dying, you withdrew
silently, in a coma.

Now, I draw the curtains open,
squint from the light.

Invasive Species

The breast lump you hid two years, the breast
removed too late, the cancer spread

Taxifolia, killer algae, bred in an aquarium
released by accident from a museum

You broke down, cried the first time to me,
one poor judgment, dreaded deed

all that's needed to bad-seed the pristine sea.
The algae ruins the fertile bed that

Look at me, look at me
you pointed there and I realized then

feeds the fish, spawns the germ that clones
itself, that crowds out surrounding sea grass

you meant you as an object of desire,
your definition of yourself was over;

meadow from Monaco to L.A. Nothing
could halt the algae, not cobalt, not chlorine

no, nothing could be done, not chemo,
radiation or surgery

All that's left is to tug, to pull, to tear out

hair falling out into bare
and trembling hands.

impossibly stubborn weeds;

Sandra's mother suffered a difficult life: mental illness (depression and anxiety) and physical illness (breast cancer). She was a very private person hiding her breast lump until it had metastasized. These poems are an attempt to articulate her inner world as Sandra saw it and how it effected her. It's an attempt to articulate what her mother never could.

Sandra's book *At the Well of Flowers* was published by Virtual Artists' Collective in Winter of 2011. Her chapbook titled *Foreign Bodies* was published Spring 2004 by Carolina Wren Press. Poems published in Bucks County Writer, Comstock Review, Concrete Wolf, Flesh & Bone, Mad Poets Review, Main Street Rag, Raving Dove, Poetic Matrix Press/PM Books; Rexdale Publishing, Schuylkill Valley Journal of the Arts, Out of Line, Wild River Review. Runner-up in the 2004 Robert Fraser Poetry Contest. First runner-up in 2009 of the Bucks County Poet Laureate. Recipient of a writing award from the National League of American Pen Women/Simi Valley Branch, placing first in their 2000 Poetry Contest for poem "Honor the Stones." She feels immensely blessed to be part of a community of amazing and gifted poets of Bucks and Montgomery County.

Ariel Bugosh Boswell

Burdens

We carry our crosses, imposed,
not punishment but unhappy chance-
"you, Cyrene, carry this."
Some spontaneous mutation,
one slip of a chromosome changes
ereyvhtnig
But some are written in our bones;
the suffering we face spelled in amino acids,
a twisted key locked somewhere in a spiral.
And were these genes once of value?
Did they pose some evolutionary advantage,
that they remain within us?
Or is it just that our lives have extended

and our expectations exceeded
what these codes were meant to convey?

We are made in our fathers' images
and formed with our mothers' dust.
We must trace their trails
on hands and knees; recapitulation
is destiny, and the only question is
whose death shall we die?

Contemplation of reproduction
is steeped with fear - what roulette
are we playing? Will our child get
a mixed-up mechanism or
the paralysis of depression, the curse
of an ancient anxiety, or
some new struggle? And even if-
the chips fall so and they seem perfect -
there is no guarantor when things fall apart.
Certainly adoption is no less risky,
playing the odds with someone else's cards
(although altruism has its advantages).

There is no way to beat the system, no way-
just forward, and hope, and pray.

After Cancer

Disasters change the landscape: mudslides obscure roads,
tornadoes rip away towns, floods cover farms-
this too was a disaster.

Reborn through a baptism of IV antineoplastics
we explore this new geography
our paths transformed and rotated by pain;
hills changed to mountains, plateaus to valleys,
new chasms threaten where plains once rolled to the horizon.
These fields are bitter and salted with my fear;
what crops would grow here?

The first hurdle passed, the track streams into
an eternity of caregiving - and in what context?
IVF, ALL, melanoma, not to mention

the odds of further failure based on collective bad luck.
The future frays before my eyes;
the fig tree does not blossom and the fields are bare.
I touch the fragments of the pitcher by the well,
my dreams poured out like water.

Yet. This dust will rise again.
Roads and towns rebuild, floods fade,
the wilderness returns and waits -
listen, the cry of the wolf
beneath the northern lights.

Do not be afraid that this journey does not follow the map;
the alternate route is more scenic by far.

Tomatoes

She wanted a tomato sandwich
not just bread and tomato, but buttered,
and no crusts, and just so; the tomato, peeled, sliced
the proper way, everything in its place,
and buttermilk on the side-

That day I came in she wanted to go
and buy some fresh tomatoes at the farmer's market. So,
I loaded Mary and her walker up into my jeep
and we took off - an unlikely duo-
23 and 92.

I rolled down the windows,
hoping she wouldn't overheat.

Once there she rolled her walker up and then -
was too tired, so I picked out the tomatoes
while she sat, chatted up the other customers
then I got her back in the jeep
and we drove to the nursing home
and I rolled her in on her walker,
short, spare, emaciated, pale,
she crawled back into bed while I
made her a sandwich...

That may have been her last tomato stand.
It wasn't so long afterwards that she

was lying in bed, delirious, demanding pill after pill
for pain, and a shake,
the mean nurse said “she can’t eat, she’ll aspirate.”
I wanted to scream “you’re letting her die!”
but really it was just me
not letting go.

Ariel Bugosh Boswell is a 2007 graduate of Davidson College and 2012 graduate of a nursing program. Her husband, a medical student, was diagnosed with cancer in December 2011 and has undergone 4 rounds of chemotherapy. His cancer is currently in remission. Ariel regularly participates in narrative medicine workshops held through the humanities department at the Mayo Clinic. She draws on her personal and professional experiences in home healthcare, low-cost immigrant clinics, and long-term care in her writing.

Barbara Brooks

Tobacco Season

Lungs balloon, spring ribs
into oaken staves, push his diaphragm
to the bottom of his barreled chest.
Nails and lips purple as blood shunts
to the brain, kidneys. Nasal cannula,
oxygen concentrator, 50 foot tube
trails him around the house.
Can’t crank up the liter flow, stops
the drive to breathe. Yesterday,
rescue inhalers failed. His muscles quit.
At the hospital, the doctors strap
a breathing mask on him, later
a tube snakes down his throat.
Red stop sign on tobacco yellow paper
hangs above the bed—
DO NOT RESUSITATE.

Barbara Brooks is a retired physical therapist who treated many of these end stage COPD patients. She is the author of "The Catbird Sang" chapbook, is a member of Poet Fools. She has had work accepted in *The Oklahoma Review*, *Blue lake Review*, *Granny Smith Magazine*, and *Third Wednesday*, on-line at *Southern Women's Review*, *Poetry Quarterly* among others. She

Jada Broussard

You'll Find Me There

If ever you feel or sense me near
Please don't doubt that it could be
Don't think that it's impossible
For that rainbow to be me

I will be the whisper of the wind
I promise to never leave
You can be sure my presence emanates
All you have to do is believe

That song that resonates in your mind
Will be the one I sing for you
Oh darling, please rely on faith
As I help you in what you must do

As you hold our children's hands
And share this grief you bear
Just gaze into their eyes my dear
I swear you'll find me there

Jada Broussard is a 34 year old mother of two. She is living with inoperable lung cancer, and has accepted her fate in this life. She is a dedicated mother who spends her time making memories for her children. Her only wish is to create a wonderful legacy for her children so that she can be with them always.

Arthur Durkee

Needles

After the third blood transfusion, your veins are so tired

it's no wonder they're hiding from the needles. Three tries to find the fountain. Three more scars, three sorenesses. It's dry fear that makes them hide, that shuts us down. Tired of needles everywhere. No more. Arms and hands scarred with needle-marks, after three months of pokes and prods, sometimes stealing vials of life-force blood to be examined, to run through interminable tests, sometimes filling you back up again after you've been leeches dry. I've got these needle marks, these track marks, these scars along arms, elbows, hands. All my tracks are medical, I don't even have the junkie's ecstasy to recall. A similar collapse of veins, though, an exhausted cousin of overuse, internal scarring, rolling away, all used up. They use the feet when there's nothing left. Look at my arms. I don't want to see a single needle again for a very long while; I'm tired of being tired of needles. At some point you get tired of being stoic, of living up to people's expectations of strength. Actually most folks expect you to be just that. Your mortality scares them with their own. Which is why some friends won't visit you in hospital, even when they offer. It takes a needle of their own, a stiletto in the mind, before they'll face it. Most run back towards their pet distractions, fighting all the more to pretend it's all okay. Some rare few become quiet, and sit with you, their presence enough. The eye of the needle takes you to the end of your rope. Can't you see I'm dying here? Not all bruises show on the skin. Although today yesterday's needle bite on the inside of the arm shows the colors of a tornado-laden storm around the point of penetration, where yesterday's pointed embrace put the blood back in. Outside the robins and cardinals are dancing inside the shelter of the pine needles. Carpets of resinous brown points litter the root mounds. Sore arms, sore ass, sore head. Little bits of flooding that no one wants to deal with. Why should they? Bleeding out slowly, from life-force to floodwater, through the point of the eye, a sometime broken skipping record. Quit needling yourself. Make a fist, tie off the tourniquet above the rattler's bite. Sure the inside of your elbow hurts, only a point more than myth, and only until the next extraction or transfusion, the next set of needles. The sun's dagger makes a temporary needle along the labyrinth, a shard of light. Let the new blood fizz in you, the soda of provisional survival.

Switch

Some old friends seem to think it's like hitting a switch, and you reset to what you were before. Reset, reboot.

As though one treatment was enough to cure the plague.
As though none of what has gone before had gone before.
As though you could throw the switch and be what you had been,
before everything. Before everything happened. A simple switch.
But in the mirror you look older, older than you really are, lined down,
face aged, stiff, careworn, beard and hair whiter than yesterday,
than in quick memory. You never get out unscathed.
In the meantime, having circled so close to that black hole drain,
close enough to see through the grate to nothing dark inside,
when you return to old venues full of old friends and old dramas,
nothing clicks, nothing connects, nothing seems to matter.
Nothing matters more than something. It's hard
to care about paying bills, buying groceries, weeding the garden.
You know you need to, but you just can't find room to give.
It's one thing to throw yourself into the details of life as a form of
meditation, knowing that slicing a lemon is enlightenment, just so.
It's another thing to feel this withdrawal from every day, as a monk
in one's own home, forced to be this way by the slow drip of bloody
circumstance, by the constipated pressure of survival. Ill for long enough
to have lost track of what some friends say really matters. Time away
from the usual flurries of the usual personal dramas of other lives
makes them seem small, irrelevant. I suppose I ought to call some
friends who called a week or so back to ask how I was. It's just too hard,
though, to keep telling the same story. And friends who think the switch
has been thrown, one treatment and you're all well again, are too tiring,
overwhelming, exhausting to seek out. Needy people are needy enough
to drain what's left right down that black drain, sucking dry the juices
of attention. Especially when by contrast you can spend an hour by a river,
in sun, by trees, listening silent to birds and brooks, getting recharged.
When human time just drains. I try to write a poem, and the pen gets stopped
by interruptions, now that I'm supposed to be all better. Now that
I'm all better I'm available to be sucked dry again. I try to go out and
the phone rings, keeping me in. I try to go shopping for those uninteresting
needs that keep the flesh alive, and run out of steam halfway to the checkout.
Fresh meat never looked so good. Throw the sugar bowl over your left shoulder
and make room for chocolate. But getting impatient with impatience
is bad form, you offend the needy by refusing to meet their needs.
It's all about them, after all. Now, again, now, again. What's a poem worth
compared to your latest romantic fiasco? Of course it doesn't matter.
Still, when I go out to the garage and look at the pegboard filled with tools

some drained despair chokes me, waters my eyes, and it's not the cayenne kept on the shelf to pour over the flower beds after rain to keep deer from eating my roses again. What's a child of the heart to the wake of narcissus? I'll tell everyone my narcissus have already finished for the season, bulbs dormant under mulch till next spring when they'll be the second line up and blooming. Nothing to do but wait through winter. Sorry, door's closed till then. No office hours. And if I'm impatient with the unsympathetic, if I'm rude to the rudely insecure, if I'm silent in the face of redundant neurotic unbalanced nightmare gall, then at least I still have the excuse for now of saying I've been sick. I'll act pathetic, to be left alone. I'll pretend it's not a waste of time. I'll act as if the divine remains in the small things, the lemon sliced, the row hoed, the quiet stack of freshly washed stone teacups, the endless repetition of laundry and gas fire. I'll put on Mozart's Requiem and pretend it's about survival. I'll harvest bell peppers growing on the porch, ninety days of watering and turning to face the sunlight later. I'll pretend that it's okay now, that the switch got thrown, that there's no time like the present, that recovery isn't still in doubt, that in no uncertain terms shall there be uncertainty. Just because you circled that drain a few times, edged a little too close to that precipice, doesn't mean your life has changed, that you want to live, now, again. Nor does it mean that hovering near that threshold gave awareness of the numinous glint of time's long fading, nor did it make you impatient with those who refuse to perceive. Sweet strong peppers hang from their thin green stalks, a metaphor for recovery, perhaps.

Arthur Durkee is a composer, poet, songwriter, visual artist, photographer, and graphic designer. He suffered for two decades or more with ulcerative colitis, although it was diagnosed very late, gradually getting sicker and weaker over time. In 2011, after two near-death experiences from the anemia and other complications caused by the chronic illness, he underwent major surgery to remove his entire colon, and cure the UC. Even though he is physically healthier and stronger now than he has been in 20 years, he has an ostomy bag that he must wear while living in the limbo of recovery preparing for a second reconstructive surgery during which an ileac sac will be made from the base of his small intestine. So he finds himself, for now, partially disabled following the surgery, living in limbo, unable to get a date (because of the shitbag), hoping for an eventual plumbing repair, and pursuing his creative work mostly as a way to preserve what sanity he has left, and also provide a reason, any reason, to go on living.

Michael Estabrook

Help Me Nurse

You can't really sleep in the hospital. First of all, the lights are always on. Secondly, it's a very busy place like the New York subway with plenty of interesting activities going on around you all the time: the night shift nurses and physicians' assistants and cleaning crew carrying on about this and that, patients wandering up and down the hallways plopping along in their walkers peering in to check on how you're doing, the friendly nurses who pop in every couple hours to take a tube of blood, your blood pressure and temperature, a guy a couple doors down coughing up one (or perhaps both) of his smoked-out lungs, in his spare time working on the details of his legal case against Philip Morris for making him smoke all those cigarettes all those years, the bastards! And then there's the old guy with the scruffy beard right next door to my room who keeps yelling out, "Help me nurse, nurse help me, help me nurse!" over and over and over again. When I expressed my concern about what this poor soul could possibly be suffering my nurse said, pursing her pale lips mournfully, "He's confused, poor fellow." And all I could think was, he could be me.

Michael Estabrook has struggled with chronic back pain his whole life, from his first spinal fusion surgery at age 17 through to his second at age 55. He has tried everything including Acupuncture, Anti-depressants, Chiropractic, Epidural Steroid Injections, Trigger Point Steroid Injections, SI Injections, Radiofrequency, Narcotic Pain Medications, Physical Therapy, Spinal Fusion Operations, T'ai Chi / Qigong / Kung Fu, and Svaroopaa Yoga. Finally, finding no relief anywhere, he has become convinced that this is all “in his mind” and is actively studying a course of treatment for Tension Myositis Syndrome.

Natalie Easton

The Nurses Go Back to the Wallpaper

The hospice nurses
like bandages—
temporary, gingerly
irritating;
they are slightly reddish hues
against the world when I open the door
and find them pressed on
bloodless life.

They remind me of clots
being made
and stitches averted.
They say no more hospital
she is past that
she is in the void of
doctorless certainty
where thoughts drift like the flotsam
of a discharged season
and where the lights rue the dark
like holiday custom;

the nurses
they wash her
like artists preparing canvas
for watercolors

blot her
like something that tears
and ply their tools—

and I am without tools,
something primal
archaic as cornflowers
blue as the oxygen
leaving her fingertips
growing from the couch
in its webcover cat hair
I'm wildly useless,
a daughter's weed-eyed love—
the hospice nurses float
cluck like order breaking in the air,
remind me to watch her medicine,
how it seems to evaporate,
even though I have not slept—
I watch it fold in,
a grimace close on it,
purple lips puckering
like a child's popsicled mouth—

I am watching it closely.
I am watching this closely:
The nurses are home
ironing their uniforms, brushing the leaded sleep
of others from their pajama blouses
like crumbs—

and still I'm watching for
my mother, where she is
folded safe into the myth;
I watch with every sudden memory
which flies on like a predawn noise
waking a troubled sleep
back toward its shrouded sadness.

The Nurse Daughter at Work

If I was a hospice nurse
and my mother was dying
how giddy I would feel to show off
my skills to my estranged family,

ply my practiced distance,
an astrologer at work—

I've got this,
eye at the telescope where there is only
room for one at a time

see how neatly I press her coldness
into her new small space,
grievances the size of Toothettes,
armholes,
and measured in applesauce.

If I was at work
my calm
would have a face like a living room—
the one she remembers
when she says she wants to go home
and a new smile would press me
with the sound
of something in my brain clamping shut,
hiding teeth—all those little things
biting her;
her illness and the warning
she senses in my tide
like I am the ocean and strange things are surfacing:

A placid stranger
would replace the vowels of my name
and instead of pronouncing
I would never introduce myself
I would found a theory
that language wears us down
like molars and springtime clothing—
lose all my impressions, like obliterated hope—

I would be a nurse and when
she looked at me
my stainless exterior would shine with the reassurance
of disinfectant or rain
never still enough to fix a face
but flowing steadily with a soothing sound
like the rush babies keep time to

by the pulsing of a heart
the nurse with her finger on a pulse,
counting down slowly,
what to hope for
in the new year.

Remote Control

The rain sounds like static.
the world has switched channels
and you didn't follow;
that's what makes this program different.

The sun was shining brilliantly while you died.
Now that I have lost someone
jokes about death on TV
occur to me as defiant grief;
someone maniacally strumming their pain
in a discordant tremolo;

a million plot changes occurred
as your flowers rose, making me sneeze, and you
grew into your chair.

The world shifted, sank as though on a wounded leg, longingly
eying crutches, tired, ready to retire.

People became
somehow altogether colder
as though they, also,
had monitored your ice-cap skin
while you professed your discomfort in the burning room,
all the eyes on you
making you uncomfortable.
I couldn't see them then,
but I see them now, hungry for the tenderest parts
of what you'd leave behind.

People wavered
as though they, too, had monitored the perspiration
on your brow,
recognized it as the last sign
of a failing body

as I did, amazed at the predetermined route
of a dwindling existence,
at how science makes us common, reads us
like greenhouse gases
read the atmosphere.

People seemed to drink more water,
eat more chocolate
as though they, also, would never again
look at a straw the same way,
but view it as a feeding tube
with one finger capped over the end;
the few drops you could stand, resisted,
cursed me for when they wouldn't land
in your hesitant mouth
convinced of poison.

And now you're gone
I'm just sorry.
Sorry for the way it happened. Sorry it was hard.
Sorry for everything I could have done differently,
the things I didn't say, sorry for the cliché
of this script. Every morning the program starts the same,
with the humidity of the air rising
against my view of the future,
against your view of the past,
clouding us, most likely, from each other,
irrevocably.

Natalie Easton is a long-time poet; her mother was a long-time sufferer, first diagnosed with breast cancer in November of 2005. In the fall of 2011, Natalie's mother realized she had come out of remission but chose to keep the recurrence a secret from everyone, including doctors, until early 2012. By late March, at age 51, she had folded her hand in exchange for peace. Natalie has written extensively on her mother's illness, beginning with her first chapbook, "Holiday Saloon," through to the present time. What she has discovered is that the love remains, and the disease disappears. Finally.

Erin Farias

Wrapped

A package arrived in the mail today
dated December 31, 2011—
back when I was still pregnant
with colorful pictures of smiling infants
taped across the box' surface.
With my breath held and my chest pressing against my skeleton,
I grab a knife and cut along the box's ridges—
breaking in half the largest picture
of a perfectly formed wide eyed infant.
with tears streaming down my face,
I remove a small onesie and lay it gently across the surface
of my empty womb
and watch the ink smear across the card that reads, "To Mama and Baby,"
and grasp a white blanket of feather softness
that should have held my child, come September.
Instead I wrap it around my shivering body and rock myself
in still emptiness
as I carry the weight
of losing the only thing that I have ever wanted.

Erin Farias is 28 years old and lives in Grand Rapids, MI. She graduated in 2006 from Calvin College with majors in English in Spanish. She and her husband were thrilled to be expecting their first child. Unfortunately that pregnancy ended in miscarriage. The poem "Wrapped" describes this loss.

Christopher Farrell

Born with a Broken Heart

I. Cogito

Life - in all its glory -
lungs that won't breathe
a heart that won't beat,

not ready to be
born, and it's only
because he's thinking
that he may still be at all.

II. Family Movie

An infant struggles to find his feet.
Mother – ghost-like omnipresence –
just arms that reach from beyond
the screen to guide teetering child.
Hands lose grip.
Boy straightens,
blue eyes wide,
blue lips pursed,
One precarious foot before the other.

III. Show and Tell

Because the kids will point
and ask about them anyway,
he shows the wires to the class –
because technology billows, conspicuous,
beneath his shirt, running
information from his heart
to his hip-mounted monitor.
Because there's a reason for the scar
the boys see in the locker room.

IV. Tetralogy

Twenty-four years removed,
he learns what went wrong,
exactly –
 Overriding aorta
 Heart wall hole
 Narrow valve
 Thickened right ventricle
The implications of the doctor's words,
“What we didn't know at the time...”
and there's something unnatural
in the fact that he'll be split open
a second time, twice in his first
quarter century.

Arrhythmia

There is nothing less in our power than the heart, and far from commanding it we are forced to obey it. - Rousseau

At night when it's only him
and his heart he hears
it thumping against his ribcage -
he listens close but can't count
the beats and can't tell
if it's the odd timing
of a broken drum
or if he's just too tired
from a day of ignoring
it - like a little brother
he can't avoid taking with him
everywhere.

Christopher Farrell is a twenty-seven-year-old poet from Connecticut. He was born with Tetralogy of Fallot, a rare heart defect for which he has undergone two open-heart surgeries, one as an infant and one when he was twenty-five. He recently earned his M.F.A. degree from Western Connecticut State University and works as an English professor in Westchester, NY.

Michelle Lizet Flores

Movement

It started with the ovaries.
The doctor plucked one out
before you ever bedded anyone.
Next came the spine.
The scar nearly fades into your dusting of freckles, though in certain
lights its raised skin glints: spilled oil.
The thyroid was the first to be deadly.
I was eight years old trying to see a world
without your singing.
Your left breast followed.
I was in calculus learning tangents when I noticed, on the glossy
surface of my desk, how we have the same mouth.

Now it's your brain.
That fucking golf ball—

Nostalgia

I wish I could keep you forever.
I have your blood,
 your skin,
 your all too serious face.
Soon it will be me, alone
in a forest of phosphorescent trees.
I'll search for you in the stars, in the earth.
I'd change myself into a hawk for you. I'd stay that way
forever— the first of my kind,
then darkness would not be strange in my eyes.

Saying Goodbye

Once you've carved shit out
of your mother, once she bites
your finger after you try to brush
her teeth, life becomes the pebble
you never learned to skip.
You hear her call your father an asshole
as he tries to lift her up and bathe her.
When you kiss her cheek, her mouth
bobs open, mistaking your
lips for food.
You watch as she becomes a bag
of piss and bitterness.
She might not know where she is,
but she'll always remember
purple is your favorite color.

People keep telling me how alike we look.

I can still smell your soap,
detergent, and musky perfume.

Maybe if I rub my head on your pillow,
I'll find one of your hairs.

Maybe if I close my eyes,
God will speak to me.

If had known you'd be gone in five years...
Maybe that's why we fought so much.

You wanted to keep me then,
as I want to keep you now.

I keep biting my lips—perhaps their shape will change.

I find myself in your closet
pulling on your dresses.

My last real conversation with Mami.

She told me she knew. She could feel her mind slipping, her voice cracking as the hymns in her synapses crumbled to dust. Mami looked at me as though she was trying to burn me into her pupils.

She said, "Your father's young."

She said, "He's a good man, better than me."

She said, "I didn't want him to defile my bed, but he is young. I've tried to love him one

more time, but I can't, Gorda. I just can't. So if he meets someone, let him fall in love. He's a good man with needs."

She said through her tears, her spit.

I was still a virgin then, didn't understand what she meant. I knew she was talking about sex, but I didn't know what it meant to feel someone inside of myself, skin against skin.

If she were alive right now, she'd be ashamed of me—a girl who fucks a much older man to drive the pain away. The things I let him do to me... but what does it matter now?

I am a cane toad waiting in the night.

In the spring of 2009, Michelle Lizet Flores' mother, Lizet P. Flores, was diagnosed with a glioblastoma brain tumor. Lizet passed away two years later to the day after fending off the disease with an insurmountable amount of strength. Due to circumstances beyond her control, Michelle spent the last two years of her mother's life in New York City where she was fortunate enough to receive her MFA in Creative Writing from NYU. She spent every school break and many weekends visiting her family. She now lives in Memphis, TN as a 2011 Teach For America corps member where she teaches 7th grade Reading and Language Arts at the Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering.

Roger Floyd

Then She Went Away

I came home one evening and she told me she saw the doctor today,
And the doctor said an operation would be necessary.

I said, "Okay. I guess the doctor knows best. Maybe this will be the last."
But it wasn't.

She said she didn't want the operation, but she agreed the doctor knew best
And maybe this will be the last.
But it wasn't, there were more.

She had many more operations,
Maybe as many as twenty-five or thirty or even more,
But I was never able to keep track of all of them.

She didn't want any of them
And I didn't want any of them
But she went through every one of them
And I sat through every one of them—
Five, ten, twelve, fourteen hours.

When the operation was over
The doctor came out and told me the operation was a success,
That it did what it was supposed to do.
Then I went away.

I went to see her in the recovery room
Where she was coming out of the anesthetic,
But she was still groggy and she barely recognized me.
I told her that I loved her
And she said she loved me, then I went away.

But the operation didn't solve the problem.
The operation didn't do what it was supposed to do
And we found out there would be many more operations.
She didn't want any of them, and I didn't want any of them,
But we went through them anyway and somehow survived.

She had other hospitalizations too—there were many of those,
Perhaps as many as one hundred,
And I sat through everyone of them.
They came and went—they seemed to last an eternity—
Some only one day, some a week, some a month and some even more.
Most days I came to see her and I told her that I loved her
And she said she loved me and I went away.

She took the drugs too, there were many, many drugs.
She took drugs for pain, there was a lot of that.
She took drugs for nausea and vomiting, there was a lot of that.
She took antibiotics for infections, there were a lot of those,
But there was never any drug for multiple sclerosis,
And there was there never any drug for hepatitis C.

There was home health care too.
There was bed rest and being bedridden for several months at a time.
I saw her every morning when I got up,
And I saw her every evening when I came home,
And I told her that I loved her and she said she loved me,
Then I went away.

I came home one evening and she told me she had diarrhea all day,
 But I went back to work the next day.
I came home one evening and she told me she had nausea and vomiting all day,
 But I went back to work the next day.
I came home one evening and she told me she had pain in her eye,
 But I went back to work the next day.
I came home one evening and she told me she had more pain in her back and leg,
 But I went back to work the next day.
I came home one evening and she told me she had a lot of pain in her abdomen,
 But I went back to work the next day.
No matter what happened, I kept going to work
And I kept coming home, day after day,
Hoping each day would be different, different from the rest,
Different enough to make coming home worthwhile.

But I went back to work the next day.

For several years near the end we were lucky, very lucky.
She hadn't had an operation in a long time,
And she hadn't been hospitalized in a long time.
Home health care delivered the TPN every week,
And home health care delivered the pain medication every week,
And most every day I told her that I loved her
And she said she loved me.

For several years we waited and wondered, what will be next?
Will she have another operation?
Will I have to see her in the hospital again,
Or was the last operation to be the final one?
I told myself, "Maybe she won't have any more operations."
Maybe we won't have to go through the pain and drugs and infections again.
Maybe we can just ride it out.

Looking back on it now, was I just being too flighty and fanciful?
Was I looking too far ahead under the rosy sky that wasn't really there?
Was I just being too selfish,
Projecting my dreams and hopes and aspirations on reality
Instead of on her where they belong?
Had she not had enough?

Those were the questions I asked myself day after day.
Those were the perpetual questions that tore at my soul
And gnawed at my conscience.
Those were the questions that disparaged science and knowledge
And defamed the idea that man is master of his identity.
Those were the questions that threw cold water on the flame of love
And mutual respect and understanding between a man and a woman
To tell them, "No. You shall not be."
Those were the questions that violated me
And sent me drifting into despair.

Then she went away.

Sometimes I wish I knew what was coming so I could prepare, but I can't.
Sometimes I wish I could tell the future, but no one can tell the future.
Sometimes, I think, not even God can tell the future.

Roger Floyd is a retired Ph.D. virologist who switched to writing science-fiction novels several years ago. He's currently working on a sci-fi trilogy, and writes short stories and poetry in his limited spare time. His wife, Marilyn, was found to have degenerative spinal disc disease early in their marriage, and later was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and hepatitis C. After thirty-six years of marriage, uncounted operations, severe pain, and the futile ministrations of numerous physicians, she passed away in 2003.

Jessica Goody

Panic Attack in Neo-Natal ICU

This is where it begins:
Can you imagine lying
In a glass coffin, like Snow White
Strung with tubes and
Wires like tin-can telephones,
Strings of Chinese firecrackers,
Tucked into conduits and tethers?

I am only earthbound
By the sterile rubber, the plastic, the glass
Hoses linking me to my cell like a pet, leashed and caged.
Some tubes fat as tunnels, others noodle-thin.
Intravenous, oxygen, shunt, catheter,
lung-pumper, pacemaker.

Can you imagine
An extended sense of awareness,
The way a cat's whiskers tingle
And his fur rises
When it's about to rain?
Prone, supine, straining.
It must be how Helen Keller felt,
Black blindness, all-encompassing.

The beeping
Of monitors, thermometers, air-tubes;
The hiss of artificial breath, raspy and stale.
Every bodily function
Measured and rated.
Until you become your own timer, a human clock,

regulated and regular, nervous and precise.

Intensive Care

“An ironic name for things that can’t be made up for.”

I am the drumbeat of thought.

Names anchor

Us to ideas, concepts,

Images of oneself.

Picasso had fourteen names.

I didn’t have

A Namakaran Sanskar.

I was in intensive care,

In a glass greenhouse

My skin stretched whitely over bird bones,

Punctured with tubes and needles.

Struggling to suckle

The liquid compassion,

Vitamin love,

My mother’s pregnant body did not possess.

Wracked as she was

With evil fluid,

Soured her veins

And choked me.

I was cut

From my moist cave,

my fleshy grotto

With cold moonlit razors.

Crying bitter blood redly,

Like being thrown

From a body-warm bed

On a tender winter morning.

For three months I lay,

panting

in my transparent tomb,

my quartz sarcophagi.

Waiting to be lifted from this halted life,

still as Aurora draped in silk linens,
cold as a sleeping Snow White in her golden casket.
Three months
In suspended animation.

I could not tell time
But I heard
The clocks ticking,
Tapping transparent fingers
In impatience,
Waiting for the
Cosmic pause button to be released
And the glowing green arrow pressed PLAY.

Ninety days,
The average time span of an addict's
Stay in rehab.
Ironic.

I was forced to do my mother's time
In addition to my incarceration
In my mother's
Smoky sports-bar
Of a womb.

Possessing my own sense of time,
But lacking the ability to relay it,
I do not know
Whether the birthday
I have celebrated
For twenty-two years
Is accurate,

Whether my astrological self
Of the third month
Rather than the last
Is the real me.

Jessica Goody's work has appeared in New York newspapers, anthologies such as *Timepieces*, *Seasons of Change*, *Moonlight Café's Poetry By Moonlight*, and *The Sun Magazine*. She was a Featured Poetess of *SpiralMuse.com*. Her work has appeared on the blogs *Cyclamens and Swords*, *Getting Along with Grief*, *Addictive Fiction*, *Riot Grrl Online*, and *Poetica Magazine*. She has written a volume of poetry and a mystery novella and is currently seeking their publication.

P. E. Guess

Life.....and Death.....Decisions

“She’s always had a hard time making decisions.” That’s how he had described me. And, no doubt, many examples proved the accuracy of his description. Indecision about the color of bike to choose, the dilemma over which dress to wear to the dance, or the cautious search for the “right” career path to pursue—each of these scenarios, alone, would be enough to support the analytical agony of the workings of my mind.

Later, when I curiously pondered a philosophical path, he recounted moments of indecisiveness, adding, “What is ‘belief’? Beliefs aren’t facts—you don’t know enough to know the difference.” He then feverishly listed books to be read, directed long discussions into the night, quoted Krishnamurti, and shared experiences from his own agonizing search—presenting his case like an attorney passionately pleading with a jury.

Then the issue of a soul mate. “He’s not son-in-law material”, he asserted. I privately wondered what it might be about this kind, sincere man he saw that I didn’t. Maybe it was the youthful challenge, the respectful listening, the compassionate spirit this young man embodied? No. That didn’t make sense.

Many more decision points were encountered and intuitively driven actions initiated more spontaneously. Persistence toward a graduate degree, practice of an eastern philosophy, and pursuit of disdained relationships—all decisions made more assuredly than those before. Life chapters were completed, from beginning to end, with me as the primary author.

But, now, the decision before me surpasses the difficulty of my entire history of dilemmas. A whole novel of independent practice and endless thinking couldn’t have prepared me for this. Seeing him lie there silently and motionless, save for the artificially powered rise and fall of his chest, is incomprehensible. Where is he? Where IS he—this usually energetic man, full of life and ideas? Does he hear my words, reassuring him I am taking care of his beloved Chihuahuas? What does he feel as a flood of my tears falls on his still hands? Does he even sense, somehow, that I am here beside him?

My mind becomes distracted by the experience, just two days prior, of watching him lovingly struggle with a heavy cauldron, placing it perfectly in front of my window. This became the first piece of a soothing fountain I had yet to construct. I had taken that moment to offer an impromptu “thank you” for that action, a

somewhat symbolic gift echoing wonderful lessons he had tendered toward the deepening of my life. After my unsolicited offering of gratitude for his wisdom investments, he glanced at me, quickly proclaiming, "I'm glad someone was able to teach you something."

The sound of the respirator redirected my attention. I bolted from the hospital room, walking, then running, along the street beside so many places he and I had once visited. Memories flood my mind as if a dam has broken. The red bicycle, the pink dress, the beginnings of a career vividly pass through my mind. Where am I going as I remember and run?

I can't decide.

Unexpectedly, clarity surfaces and I abruptly stop my swift, directionless running. I must return to the hospital. I have to know more. What does all of this mean? Where do we go from here? Why (yes, tell me again) has this even occurred? How will we know when and whether when is even a possibility?

The doctor meets me in the parking lot when I return hours later, simply saying, "It's time." Taking a deep breath, slowly exhaling, eyes cast downward seeking to find some other answer, I instead quietly say, "Okay." Without endless thinking, the decision is made based on my father's very clear and repeated directions about how to proceed in this situation, always hypothetical before this very moment.

I once again stand by his side. With renewed strength and lucidity, I thank him once more for the unique journey. I remind him that I will attentively and lovingly care for his Chihuahuas. I gently kiss his forehead before softly encouraging him, "let go" as the machines stop and become eerily silent. This powerfully sad moment of clarity now burned into my heart forever.

Two years have passed. In that time, life, although changed, has continued. Two of his dogs have joined him. His garden has flourished with me, believe it or not, overseeing the process. I remember my past resistance to regular tours of his garden as he pointed toward perennials, tropicals, and ornamental flowerings, telling me their names and carefully explaining the unique needs of each plant. Now, I find I have not only unconsciously embraced the knowledge he so freely offered but I have also since generously added to the fund.

And, I have finally resolved the last dilemma. Wanting him to rest in a special place, I have impatiently cringed at the thoughts of him remaining in the plastic box so carefully placed on the antique buffet my grandmother once proudly owned. "But, what qualifies as 'special'?", I ask myself. Where might that be? One place or two or even several of his beloved destinations? The agony of indecision resurfaced, clouding my mind for 24 burdened months.

From the lingering dilemma, a decision boldly emerged in plain view. The garden. Setting aside all the possible future outcomes I had pondered (like what happens when the property is owned by someone else?), I decisively chose several spots that just “seemed right.” Within an afternoon, favorite plants had been selected from the nursery, holes prepared, tears shed, brief words spoken, tears shed again, and, then, I carefully placed my father’s ashes to nourish new growth once again.

Charles Guess, a self-educated, complex man who was lover of the earth, animals, and his family, transitioned from this life unexpectedly following a brief illness at 74 years of age. Pam Guess, his daughter, wrote of her life with Charles in this essay and the many ways his life impacted her own and has continued to do so.

Jim Gustafson

Scrabble Word Eyes

I have just come from my mother
She lives at a place called Manor Care
(Intended, I suppose, to evoke some sense of nobility, as in "To the Manor Born")
Where she is near, though not quite here

Her darkness blinds her light
There is no knowing her
Perhaps there is peace
She certainly has a bright smile
Always with that Scrabble word
Search in her eyes

We visit at odd times
To keep her caregivers
On their toes
As they fill-in
Doing what people like us
Once did for their own

Just yesterday, or was it
The day before, we took her
To the dentist
Where she put up a hell of a fight
The hygienist, fearful of bites,

Finally declined to clean
Mother's aging teeth
We think it was reclining
In the dentist's chair
That threw her off her game
Made her snarl and snap
Like an old farm dog
For when she sat back-up
She greeted us all
As one would greet best friends
Returning from a guided tour
Of a distant land
She looked as a child looks
Asleep after a tantrum
When whatever was
Is no longer,
It will take more than awhile
For death to arrive at her gate
When we look carefully
We can see it coming
From behind her smile
To take away
All that has not left
Almost already

Brain Storm

for Dan

It is hard to look at your head
Not that the scrubbed masked cutters did poorly
They cleaned up well and left you to live on
It is hard because the scars confront
They whisper of where you have been
Where you are and where we all will go
You walk some days better than others
But your mind's pace never stumbles
Sure footed in matters of the Spirit

You are humble, grateful, gracious
Sometimes, I think, to a fault
"I don't want this to define me," you almost shout
About this, there can be no argument
No debate, discussion or even conversation
You will have your way
That is good enough for us all

Jim Gustafson graduated from Florida Southern College with honors in philosophy and received his Master from Garrett Theological Seminary at Northwestern University, in his hometown of Evanston, Illinois. "Scrabble Word Eyes" relates an incident with his mother and Alzheimer's. "Brainstorm" is about his friend Dan who has valiantly fought brain cancer through two surgeries. Jim lives in Fort Myers, Florida where he reads, writes, works with an improve group and pulls weeds. His poems have most recently appeared in *Symmetry Pebbles*, and *Hektoen International Journal*, and *10X10*

Diana Hallare

Dinner with FOP

A typical monthly novena gathering, when my friend Charis is present, goes like this: She arrives, carried by her father. Her back, arms, and legs are bent – positioned as if she sits hunched, typing at a desktop computer. Her family has come about an hour later than the designated time, but the prayer has still not started. Everyone in the group understands “Filipino time.”

Her father settles her on an armchair and adds cushions, on which her back slumps. Soon I hand her a booklet with the picture of a blazing heart, and she takes out her red rosary, which my father crafted for her.

During the prayer, she follows along, her soft voice weaving with the chorus. Her delicate, slender fingers turn the pages with care, yet with a hint of frailty. When singing the hymns, she stays in her seat as she could not stand for long like the others.

An hour and a half pass, and the novena is over: time to feast. She waits for her mother to provide her with a full plate of entrees. If soup is available, then this comes in a disposable cup. Charis asks me to take her eating utensils from her purse: a straw and a specialized spoon, usually one with a soft padded handle and a flexible rubberlike scoop. She fixes a paper napkin onto her collar. Her mother lays

the plate on the pillow on Charis's lap.

My friend presses her navy blue spoon down onto her food – the stickier, the better. Like a bulldozer, she digs up a quarter-sized piece, and then she gently places the spoon into her mouth.

Later, she receives a brief shoulder rub from her mother, who says in Tagalog, “Which desserts would you like...?”

“Cheesecake, please,” Charis replies whenever her favorite is on the menu.

In a few moments, she asks me to call her father to pull her up since she has slid down the chair. Otherwise, she asks for her sister to re-arrange the cushion at her back.

We discuss a variety of topics, from our days back in the Middle East to her lifetime health condition nicknamed “Stoneman's Disease.” Talking about her bone disorder makes me notice the long surgical scar on her left leg and her inward “big” toes, which are actually much smaller than the adjacent ones. This leads me to memories throughout the decades: her strong will to dance, inch by inch, with her stiff leg and curved spine; her struggles up the stairs (we had no elevator in school); her valedictory address at her high school graduation. Nevertheless, I recognize her passion for life through her smile.

I pause to stack and throw away our dishes with leftovers. Then I return to her side and resume our chat, sometimes interrupted by the Filipino soap opera on cablevision.

The night has deepened by the time her father carries her back to their SUV.

Our conversation continues in our own homes, online.

Diana Hallare and Charis Ramirez have been close friends since their childhood in Qatar. Charis has *fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva* (FOP), a rare disorder where her skeleton expands as her bone cells attack nearby tissues, including muscles. She is an advocate for the International FOP Association and the Resources for Independence Central Valley. Diana Hallare obtained her Master of Public Health degree from the University of Manchester.

Jessica Hambleton

Dermatomyositis with a side of Asperger's Syndrome

For Jade

“Children's talent to endure stems from their ignorance of alternatives.”
—Maya Angelou

Angry fires burn deep in my
hands and through my feet.
Monsters bite and stretch
my limbs with every
heavy step of my
steroid-inflamed feet.
My days are not bettered
by the rush of
drugs I receive with
sharp needles.
Each night, sores break
anew on my face—
and rashes on my hands.
Other kids mock me,
teachers fail to understand me.
Mom defends me
like the brave heroine she is.
I am an ordinary kid,
wading through pain
that adults know nothing of
and suffer not.
I play Nintendo DS
and Kingdom Hearts.
My brothers tease me gently
and I like Sour Skittles
and visits to the mall.
I am better than Bach,
more masterful than Mozart.
Just hear me play, you'll know
it's true.
My music is my solace, my remedy.
On top of it all
I can't tell them about me,
who I am or what I see
because I see the world in a special light.
I hold my red and blue
clad hockey mouse close
never complaining of the pain.

I just keep playing happily
being me.

Jessica Hambleton is a recent graduate of Boise State's English program with a writing emphasis. She has been exposed to disease and medicine her whole life, and is especially close to her cousin, Jade, who suffers from both autism spectrum disorder and dermatomyositis.

Constance Hanstedt

Radiation

I lie with arms raised above my head,
shoulders and neck pressed on a cast
of my upper body, similar to those
hanging on dress racks by the wall,
a crisp spring line in the latest shade
of purple.

I stare at a giant steel replica
of the goose-necked lamp
on my childhood desk and think
nothing this heavy should loom
over a person. Then it rumbles
toward my skin, plum-colored
and puckered.

I float on a distant memory.
Sand absorbs my shadow like oil
as I look for a place to spread
a blanket, an armful of books
with titles I don't remember,
a clear plastic tote
with possessions I can't recall.
But in the hazy stillness
the sea shimmers, a lacy white,
dappled lavender.
Sunlight bathes my bare calves,
glistening like tender buds
of willow. I stop and breathe
the cool smell of water.

I pray this is how it will be.
The vast room fades while
beauty gleams: his reverent touch,
her tranquil voice,
the generous red beam of life.

Constance wrote "Radiation" following her treatment last year for breast cancer. She studies with the poet Ellen Bass. Her poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Calyx*, *Porter Gulch Review*, *Red Wheelbarrow* and other journals.

Catherine Harnett

Steep

They are right in front of me, these concrete steps and I want to say why they are hard to climb. I search for the word. My mouth goes blank. It's not even on the tip of my tongue. I know it is one syllable, commonly used. I am distressed.

I was the girl in love with words, reading Webster in the bathroom we all shared. Thin pages full of definitions, small drawings next to certain words. Wimple was a nun with something on her head; bacterium, cells with cilia some long, some minute.

I am afraid of losing names of fruit, that juicy orange on the plate, tart lemon, cantaloupe. My dog's name, and the color of her snout. Which day tomorrow is, and the day after that. Tell me it's alright, it's just one word,

one word now and then that slips my mind. I still have a gift for calling up the names of actresses, finding some four letter thing for fifty-two across. Tell me there are times when adjectives evade. And other times when they rise

to the surface, unsolicited, words like cerulean, deciduous, aphotic. They want my mouth around them, they long for me to use them to describe such simple things. Sky, tree, night.

Catherine Harnett is a poet and short story writer from Fairfax, Virginia. She was diagnosed with MS in 2006. Catherine retired from the Federal Government, having worked for 31 years in a variety of positions. In hindsight, there were symptoms for years—tripping over rugs, no tolerance for heat, a dislike of the summer sun, vague aches, vertigo—which never were recognized as aspects of the disease. She is doing fine, disliking the daily shots she must take, but grateful for the way they halt the progress of MS.

Chad Haskins

Preyed

A frozen sunrise
illuminates the mass
in my x-rayed right lung,
held up by a steady hand
with an educated voice
of concern,
bringing me to my knees,
thinking—two boys need
a dad and a future, not a
scared shitless stranger,
coughing up regret,
fearing the unknown,
unable to look in their
precious eyes:
reminding him of what
might be lost,
yet knowing they still
need him now;
he must fight...and
fight against himself,
to the death.

Chad Haskins lives in Newnan, Georgia with his wife and two sons. Chad recently underwent several tests to determine if the pneumonia in his right lung was caused by cancer or a tumor. The poem “Preyed” reflects some of Chad’s feelings during that time. Chad's writing has appeared, or is forthcoming in *Rose and Thorn Journal*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Untitled Country Review*, *The 5-2*, *Pure Slush*, *Powder Burn Flash*, *Yellow Mama*, *Golden Sparrow Literary Review*, *Dark River Magazine*, *Flashes in the Dark*, and *drown in my own fears*.

Alan Dennis Harris

The Rose and I

As I step into
my breakfast nook
the rose and I
exchange a look
It sits alone
inside its vase
and watches as I
take my place
It watches as I
face the sun
my mourning
place-setting for one
It watches as I
close my eyes
to see the sights
of days gone-by
It watches as I
strain to hear
the sounds of life
no longer near
At last I ask
Please tell me why
we both remain
but no reply
as it wonders if
inside this home
the two of us
shall die alone

As a young man, Alan D. Harris worked for several home care agencies, including the VNA of Chicago. Hospice clients whose memories were being affected by early onset dementia struck a chord with him. Today, he puts his gerontology education and past experiences to work helping older authors to write and often times re-write their own life-stories.

Art Heifetz

After the Operation

After twelve hours
Under the knife,
She had awakened like a tourist
Reluctantly returning
From the other side.
It was such a peaceful place
She could easily have stayed
But her son, who had resided there
For nine full years
Had sent her back
With the admonition that
It wasn't yet her time.

In recovery,
She was speaking French
To puzzled nurses
When I arrived.
Her shaven head
And crisscrossed stitches
At the base of her skull
Gave her the insouciant air
Of punk or pirate.
How do you feel, I asked.
She shrugged and said,
It always could be worse.
Her incandescent smile
Lit up the room.
Two hours out of surgery
She was already
The darling of the cancer ward.

Back home she was the queen,
Much admired for
Her sagacious wit.
Ensconced in her recliner,
She entertained the court

With tales of ditzy nurses
And after-hours parties
In her hospital room.
All tears and sadness were
Banished from her kingdom,
The tumors given funny names,
The angry scars concealed
By brightly colored caps,
Crocheted by her daughter
In a fit of cancer chic.
She learned to walk again,
With the slow, hesitant gait
Of a baby taking her first steps.
Later, in her beloved gardens,
She wielded her walker
Like a chariot,
Navigating seas of flowers
With a gentle wave of greeting
To reassure the frightened children
In her path

Struggling with gaps
In her memory,
At times she groped for words
As if they were butterflies
Hovering just beyond her reach.
In frustration she decided to invent
A whole new language.
Scallops became notshrimp,
English muffins were transformed
Into littleroundbreads.

By the time she left us
The scars had faded to
Tiny blue rivulets
On old maps.
She had entered the seventh age,
Become an infant
To be turned and fed,
And so there were no final
Words of farewell,

No pure adagio of love,
Only her enigmatic smile
As she greeted her lost son.

This poem is dedicated to Art's late wife, Jackie, who, during the 20 months she battled cancer was an inspiration to her family, doctors and nurses. She exhibited not only great courage but great humor. She rarely complained about her condition and always said, "I'm lucky. It could be much worse." This poem refers to her convalescence about the operation to remove her brain tumor. Jackie was French and awakened from the operation speaking her native language. Art met her while a Peace Corp volunteer in Tunisia. She died 3 days before the birth of her grandson. Art's daughter went into labor at the cemetery.

Art is a retired State Farm agent, ex-Peace Corps volunteer and ABD in Lit who finally has time to write. Poetry has enabled him to cope with the death of both Jackie and son and to win the heart of his present wife.

Paul Hostovsky

Disbelief

Take this beautiful
woman in my arms—
I don't believe my eyes,
and I don't believe my arms.
I don't believe my ears
when she says she loves me, too.
Time passes like you wouldn't
believe. I think I'm happy.
Then I think I'm sad.
Then happy again. Then not.
I don't believe my thoughts,
nor anything the past has taught—
not one belief I ever learned before
from anything. I lay aside
all thoughts of what I am
and what love is. It's not
that I believe in nothing,
if that's what you're thinking.
I believe in disbelief. I believe

you can walk through this world
and not believe it for a minute.
You can get to the end of it
and not believe that either.
You can sit in a small room
all alone with your body,
put on the humble johnny
that closes in the back,
and when the doctor comes in
with his numbers,
which are your numbers,
you can not believe them either.
You can let them fall from his lips,
skim your ears, pool
on the floor where his eyes
and your eyes have fallen.

Oath

Being sick I swear I will
seek out other sick people,
the fellowship of the sick
that heals me of the eyes
of the healthy, the terrible
hope of loved ones, the lies
that melt on the tongues
whose excellent appetites
and singing glottises
and vibrating tongue rings
do not belong to me.
I will make of my leper's bell
a symphony of bells;
I will take my bacterium
to the bacterial dance floor,
and do the bug, the viral,
the metastasis, the funky
microbial. I will shake my legs
like a tick who has found
the deer-throat of love.
Being sick I will be sick

unapologetically, and with
abandon, and with someone
else who is also sick with
all his heart and all his soul.

Long Battle with Cancer

What he needed was a little more patriotism,
a little more fight, a little more fuckin' a
for kicking cancer's butt. But the thing was,
he was a conscript. His heart wasn't in it,
whereas these volunteers, these mercenaries—
these doctors and nurses and radiologists
and radiation oncologists who made their living
killing cancer—their hearts were in it, they were
into the good fight. But his heart, for its part,
was set on desertion. And so he kept on looking
out the window of the transport vehicle
at the trees swishing by, en route to the appointed
appointments. He kept on looking for a way
out. A way to escape into the trees, disappear
into the woods, surface in some neutral country
where life was going on as usual and nobody
cared or talked about or paid any attention at all
to this tiresome old war that was still going on
inside him. But there was no neutral country,
no such place; no village, house, room, corner
of the world where the long battle he could bet
his life his obit would reference, wasn't going on.

Letting Go

This is a required poem.
You do not have to read it now.
You can wait until
you're dying if you want to.
But you have to let go of everything.
You have to let go of everything.
You can start by letting go
of this poem. Just let it

go. Let it fall to the desk, skim
the edge, spill to the floor. Let it
lie on the floor face-down
so you can't read it.
How to read this poem when it's
lying on the floor face-down
like a body?
That is the seeming difficulty
of this poem. On the one side
words are everything. On the other
nothing. Just the poem saying
to let it go on without you, saying
on the other side there's nothing
as difficult as it seems.

Paul Hostovsky was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins follicular lymphoma four years ago, a fact which has never appeared in his brief bio, until now. He is the author of three books of poetry, *Bending the Notes*, *Dear Truth*, and *A Little in Love a Lot*. To read more of his work, visit his website: www.paulhostovsky.com

Richard Jacobs

Sickness and Health

"I'm not ready for you to be sick again."

No she's not. She's ready for me to be well.

My sarcasm kicks in quickly. "OK," I say, "I'll tell it to wait until you're ready."

"You were sick for three weeks. You ruined my graduation."

She just got her Bachelor of Fine Arts. I helped with her papers, but she did the work. Straight A's, degree at age 40. She's rightfully proud, but not compassionate.

"I didn't ruin your graduation. I attended, and I put us up in a nice hotel."

"You were green and miserable."

"Yeah. That's what happens when I'm sick. I get green, and piss blood for a week, and don't eat, and have a lot of pain. What's your excuse?"

"What's my excuse? Are you joking? We were doing great. You were healthy and

working. You were writing. We were having sex. Then you disappeared and bought some pot, and I knew you were gonna be sick. You want to tell me it's my fault? That I'm not compassionate? You go away every time. Right before an episode you disappear. You want to eat crappy food, smoke pot, watch movies, and avoid your work. As soon as you ask me about eating something you shouldn't, I know an episode's coming. How could you not know this after fourteen years?"

I had no one to point it out to me for ten of them.

"You're not going to say anything? You have a wife and a son, now. That's a reason to stay healthy, to stay present, to stay here. You're not sick anymore because of PNH. The PNH is gone. You're sick because you don't have the courage to commit. You're sick because you're a coward. You're sick because as long as you're sick, you don't have to do anything!"

"What if it isn't gone? What if I have no control over it? What if the doctors are right and there is no cure for this thing. Maybe I'm lucky to even still be alive. How the hell do you know? I'm out of herbs. I can't get them for a week. I got the pot because when I do get sick, it's the only thing that kills the pain."

"You didn't get pot because it kills the pain. That's not true. You got it because you wanted to get stoned. If you want to kill the pain, take an aspirin. You never think about killing pain when you're not having an episode. You never think you're gonna have another episode when you're not sick. You want to be sick? Is that what you want? You want the doctors to be right? OK. So, we'll plan on you being sick. But you don't want to be sick. You don't want to be thought of as being sick. Anytime I mention planning around you being sick, you get upset. I can't do this anymore."

Through tears she tells me, "You get scared when you start doing well. Whenever you get to a certain level of happiness, you start getting sick. You don't get sick when you're creative, when you're taking risks. Don't bullshit me. The PNH is over. It's self-punishment. Maybe when your dad left and wasn't around to punish you."

"Whadaya mean, when my dad left? You mean, when he left, or when he died?"

"You were forty-something when he died. You were twelve when he left you. It wasn't your fault then, but you've been punishing yourself since. Then he died and left for good, and you stopped writing, and you say it's because you're sick. PNH is the same thing. It's like a stand-in for your dad. When you're not punishing yourself, you don't get sick."

So easy for her to see what's true for me. I can't stand her honesty. She justifies everything that comes out of her mouth with it being the truth. I want her to shut the hell up and let me be sick in peace. No chance. "Yeah, well, maybe to a point," I say because it is true, "But it's not that simple."

I am hungry. I do want a cheeseburger. I do want to smoke a joint. What does this mean? That I want to get sick? If I'm sick I can't fail at anything. It's insurance against failing. My dad used to say that all the time, but he said it with sarcasm, "Hey, Richie, you can't fail if you don't try."

Maybe there's something there. Play it out. Say: I created this, out of a belief I could never amount to anything as a writer. Fourteen years since I was diagnosed. Sixteen since I've been sick. I dropped acting to be the writer I always wanted to be. I got sick. An incurable disease. No insurance. Moved to another country, an island, woods. No contact with the world. No money. No family. No excuses. No nothing. A waiter in L.A. hasn't failed at acting, or writing. They're working. It's something. I wanted only to write. I needed cover. I needed something nobody could question. Something big. Something dramatic. Something worth writing about.

A disease no one knew, giving me, maybe, a decade to live. PNH. Cool. I'll take it. I can get the hell out of here. I can go live somewhere else, be Sick Guy no one expects anything from. Not even my family can argue this. The doctors will vouch for me, "No. He's really sick." I can smoke all the pot I want and call it medicinal. Tax my organs until they can't take anymore, die, and leave my journals so everyone can discover how brilliant I really was. Then I never have to finish with this thing, this b.s. disease that can right itself as quickly as it mutated into being in the first place.

But then I'd really have to write. Then I'd really have to be a husband. And father. Love and be loved.

Richard discovered the *Barefoot Review* when he began searching for a place to share his experiences with PNH paroxysmal nocturnal hemoglobinuria, a rare blood disorder affecting approximately 10,000 people in North America. He is fairly unique in that he is treating the disease on his own with the assistance of Chinese medicine and achieving promising results. He is not a believer in Western Medicine in general, or the AMA in particular. Given a prognosis of ten to twelve years to live, most of his encounters with conventional doctors reflect this belief, as does the price charged for eculizumab (\$409,000. per year --the most expensive drug in the world), the only effective 'treatment' for PNH. Richard has found caregivers without such beliefs and remains committed to curing himself of this disease.

Karen Jakubowski

Migraine

Cerebral bloat

smashing waves

against cranial plates.

Smarting

migraine.

The sunrise torments.

Its brilliant threads of searing

light

sharpened quills, fresh plucked feathers
pierce my eyes. Apparitions

float

eclipsing visualizations impede.

I left my body, watched it
speed along the highway.

Pain so intense I had to leave.

I feared for the living
corpse without a mind.

Were the mechanics of driving
rote enough to keep me sane?

Perception swam to the left of my head,
conjoined with celestial illuminations.

Is this what it's like to be dead?

Cassandra's Last Suffering

It sang with the moon, welcomed me to womanhood.

Twice it bore fruit, bright healthy and ripe.

Naturally fading, its prime withered. Gifting me
with the sweat of a sultry dance on icy nights.

I'd hoped to part gracefully, but it had its own agenda.

I think it knows my intention. The shadow looms,
dangles like a lifeless leaf waiting for the final wind to set it free.
It was ogled, prodded, picked at and medically raped.
Yet railed no protest. I thought it resigned.

Today it rallied. Pressed me to honor it.
Picketed with red smeared signs – I won't be forgotten!
We commune for one last lunar celebration
before the knife separates us.

I'm Not Ready to Be an Angel Yet

I'm not ready to be an angel yet
With flowing white organza drape
to cover skin's imperfections.
Five tiny scratch-like blemishes,
remnants of a gallbladder.
Burst appendix, minutes from demise,
belly full of toxic peritoneal fluid.
A deep scar wide enough to hide my thumb,
my souvenir of death's call.

I'm not ready to be an angel yet
with platinum halo floating o'er my head
though I've worked hard to earn it.
Multiple lesions scar my brain.
Radioactive dye courses through my veins as
glowing white images shine on the MRI screen.
Annual reminders of no cure yet discovered.
Fourteen pills daily consumed,
one injection weekly stabbed into my thigh
to rebuff my disease.

I'm not ready to be an angel yet
with gossamer wings to fly.
I have faced many challenges.
Three bedridden days with a paralyzed leg,
feet cramping nightly, toes curling under,
the gripping vice under the tips of my ribs,
a frozen bladder ready to burst.

Three hundred plus syringes
reside in red bio hazard containers,
trophies of my fight.

I'm not ready be an angel yet
with a golden heart radiating pure love.
Three contiguous years providing
nourishment to my suckling babies.
Four metal marker clips live in my "busy breasts"
Reminders of the ten inch needles
surgically plunged into once milk-filled orbs
searching for suspicious tissue.

I'm not ready be an angel yet
with glowing aura and spirit chaste.
I've loved many; birthed and raised two children,
comforted my man within the warmth of my body.
The call came today... results of my pap:
"abnormal, high grade lesion, pre-cancerous tissue."
Testing to follow, my recesses to be intimately
explored at the hands of a stranger,
more tissue to be torn from my cervix,
biopsied, microscopically analyzed.
Don't let it be the big "C".

I will continue my crusade at life.
I'm not ready to be an angel yet!

Karen Jakubowski's poems have appeared in various online publications. She was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in the fall of 2006, although she can trace back her symptoms to 1988. She came close to losing her life when her appendix ruptured in 1985. She was recently diagnosed with pre-cancer of the cervix and underwent a total hysterectomy in April 2012. At the time of her hysterectomy, the surgeon also discovered a dermoid cyst on one of her ovaries. Her biopsy came back positive for cancer, but fortunately the surgeon removed all of the cancerous tissue. She is currently healing from surgery.

Amy Murre Klemm

Farewell, Arvin

June 25, 1999

Your breaths were slow and with each one I felt
you leaving
leaving the earth this realm your
spirit filtering out into the air of the room I
didn't know if she'd chosen that soft golden light
on purpose to hide your wasted body your
ravished face but when I bent clinging to the metal
bed rail near you, I found you were neither
wasted nor ravished but smooth skin and
smiling vision and peace
Is that why I have this difficult
grieving that is not grief
but alternate selfishness, fear, speculation, and joy
for where you must be now?
It frightens me how my memory fails me
how its pictures of you are already sometimes faded
and without the detail of your eyes or
clothes or exact words which were so few,
a man who could whistle louder than the birds, than
a train, a man of strong back,
shoulder, arm, pride
the magnificent handshake - how many
babies you have held on your knee and smiled
your saintlike smile

Amy Murre Klemm lives and writes in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her work has been published in *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *The Cliffs: Soundings*, *Melusine*, and elsewhere. Throughout her teen years, her family lived with and cared for her grandfather, who passed away after many years of living with dementia. "Farewell Arvin" was written in memory of him.

Tricia Knoll

Clot Be Gone

Airtight onset
Calling all phages, friends'
hopesets, and spirits
brimming breath exchange
bust clots

Squeeze lung sponge.
Reset protein
hairs, erase blots,
massage out knots
finger friends
scrape scruff with radula
beaky horn

Spring the goblins gobble
on crust of clot.
Mobilize tight spot elves'
jackhammers and scrub brushes
working round the clock
for union wages
spall of iceberg,
onion peel,
chitin chisellers
stone sculptor nibblers
ants with eggs

Fold hands
over chest warmth
sinking soft sunset
over slow tear ripple
running to my mouth

and sandy beach
of striped sleeve.
Rinse off rucked up
held tight heart
for breath of life.

Tricia Knoll is a 64-year-old Portland, Oregon poet recently diagnosed with 5 relatively large pulmonary embolisms (blood clots), one in each lobe. Testing ruled out deep leg thrombosis and cancer. The diagnosis was heterozygous Factor V Leiden, a potentially life-threatening genetic clotting disorder. She is now on coumadin.

Anna Kurtz

Manic - Depression (Rapid Cycling)

Scattering
In the confines of my head

Gyres of masochistic thoughts
Pick me pick me pick me

Only so I can
Stumble
And forget

In the confines of my bed
Bound by the intangible

Driving me to desperation
Pick me up

Linger
Remember
What it was

To be
Okay

Anna Kurtz is a New Jersey native who has lived with Bipolar Type II disorder for her 23 years of life. Diagnosed while receiving treatment for a drug addiction that developed as a result of self-medicating the disorder, she uses writing, talk-therapy and meditation in lieu of pharmaceutical treatment.

Lyn Lifshin

The Yahrtzeit Light

Dusty, with some skeletons of
a flying thing that died
in it, as if the flame
already had been pulling
on things restless and alive.
My mother bought it, an
extra one, the year after
my grandmother died,
when my mother's hair was
still dark and curly. It
waited fifteen years in the
middle of scales, shoe
polish and liquids to make
what is glowing hot, spit
eerie light and the flicker
of death into shadows. I
couldn't throw it out:
more Jewish than anything
I owned and wondered if my
mother would have other
people leaving too fast to
say goodbye to, rub her
hands in front of this
candle, rub what was still
warm numb as a heart rubbed
raw. This morning, my mother
at ninety pounds, was afraid to
stay alone in the mall,
her face gray as the stone
squares she had trouble,
even holding my arm, getting
across. I take her bag, as
if alone she might collapse
and nobody would know who
she was to claim her. My

uncle's voice on tape
reminds it's the anniversary
of my mother's mother's death
so tonight I give the candle
to her, go down to the room
where no candle could catch.
In the glitz of fire, my
mother's cheeks are caverns
no light fills

Taking my Mother to the Bathroom

I lead her, a
child waking up
from a nightmare,
dazed by light.
She lags, hurries
then, half cranky,
half grateful.
She wants the
door shut, then
says open it,
wants my hands
the right way,
wash in between
my fingers. She
says the wash
cloth is too
wet, too cold,
too soapy. The
towels are too
heavy. You don't
she spits, cover
your mouth. Go
home, you should
not be here to
see me like this

Curling on the Bottom of my Mother's Bed

as she would
on mine in
different houses,
bring me iced tea
at midnight or
cold chicken we'd
devour with our
fingers after
a date. I don't
think she minded
having to take
my arm in dark
restaurants
or crossing the
street, a good
reason to touch
me as she does
more freely now
as light in June
starts shriveling.
We whisper to
each other these
past 41 days we
haven't been apart,
like new lovers
who feel what
they have so rare
they can't bear
to sleep apart

These three poems all involve my mother's illness. When I edited *Tangled Vines*, my anthology of mother and daughter poems, to my amazement, I had many poems about my father, or the lack of a father, but nothing about my relationship with my mother. From that time this ambivalent, mysterious relationship has been a central theme, almost an obsession in my work. Another poem written around the same time, *Mint Leaves at Yaddo*, about the changing relationship between a mother and a daughter, as a strong parent becomes older, became my subject for an award winning memoir that appeared in *Writer's Digest*. *Autumn Wind*, another memoir of the last days of my mother's life, was published as a chapbook by Portrait Press and *The Daughter I Don't Have* was published by Plan B press

Debbie C. Lincoln

Erasing Memory

You wrote beautiful stories
of places far away-
exotic people and locations-
a reader's fantasy at play.

You penned your lines with care
on an old yellow pad-
a supply of trusty pencils-
like when you were a lad.

Pages upon pages of story
flowed smoothly without cease-
writing was your passion,
your world of creation and peace.

Now I watch you struggle,
your pencil still on the page-
you write, erase and curse-
angered at this stage.

The words are muddled
refusing to be know and penned-
you feel totally helpless
and something snaps within.

My heart crumples as I watch
as you battle the demon you see,
Alzheimer's erasing you,

every word, every thought, every memory.

I hang on tight to each day we have
and stand right by your side.
You may not have the words like before
but my love will abide.

Debbie C. Lincoln is a former educator now freelance writer. She has been writing poetry since childhood and has had several poems published in local and national publications. Her poetry has received awards in various contests and is currently working on a book project.

Ms. Lincoln is currently the secretary of The Penpoint Writer's Group of Little Rock Arkansas and is a former member of Poet's Roundtable of Arkansas.

She is an avid reader and donates books frequently to the local library.

Jennifer Londry

Pickle's Birthday

Alzheimer's is a devilish twin. It's a black & white photograph of mother and child, a forgotten season, a chapel without denomination.

Inside the House of Providence is a hot flash. Summer lives here. Thin cannot survive without the luxury of swelter. I punch the key-pad to release the door to the fifth floor. The greeters are sprawled in chairs: alert sits next to fidgety, lethargic dozes next to grumpy. They are unaware of what day it is, or what calendar month. May is a slick umbrella. July is a floral skirt or a pair of men's linen trousers. September wears a shawl, carries an apple basket. November is a wool cap and mukluks.

I know each of their names, but it's less important that they know mine. They refer to me as: "Nurse. You-who. Hey lady, Girl, or worse."

Several sets of hands lunge at the mysterious box I have wedged under my arm. I deke left, cake tilts. Cake rights itself.

I see Pickle coming down the hall toward me. She wears a jean jumper, red beret, hair up in a tipsy bun. She lurches in one red shoe, one black. "Happy Birthday, Pickle!" She smiles like a child expecting of a kiss from a favourite aunt. I hug her. Hold her for a long time. "You look beautiful." I say, and then I pirouette

around her. Her strong cheekbones snug to her face, lineless, full of smiles.

In her room plush toys sleep at the head of her bed like tiny coats meshed together in a kindergarten cloakroom. Everything in the room looks like it's been caught in a butterfly net: purple wooden flowers, long red willow-finger drapes, glowy stars, and a pair of snowmen socks poking out of a drawer. I set the cake on the bed and put the yellow mums on the night table. I hand Pickle an envelope. She holds it. Smells it, takes a bite, and then drops it to the floor. I pick it up, and sit down beside her. I open the envelope and show her the picture on the cover. "That's you and me mum," I say, even though it's not. I pin the card to Love's bulletin board. Turning I see Pickle has the mums atilt in her hand, teaspoons of dirt spill to the floor. I take the plant and set it on the sill, push the drapes open, lift the window a crack. The sun leaps in the window like an anxious child rushes to a plate of warm cookies. A string of red hearts flutter in the breeze. I place a piece of cherry liquorice in Pickle's hand. She bites she chews, she's in love with liquorice. She snuggles beside me on the bed, body so close I can feel the frame of her entire being. In her left hand Pickle holds her constant companion, Annie-rag-doll, by the short reds.

Outside Pickle's bedroom door there is a riotous parade. There is fast, slow, wobbly, erect, fat, tall, lopsided, skinny and barefoot. It is lunch time, and everyone is being herded into the dining hall. Some have mouths too tired to eat and they trail off in the opposite direction; they're a chain of little string-mittens.

In the dining room, I pick out Pickle's favourite things from the cafeteria counter. Pickle eats with her fingers, prongs and spoons too slippery to feed hunger. A hot dog bun gets tossed. Mustard Pollack down the front of her top, a nip of relish on her cheek: a leprechaun's freckle. French fry gets dipped into a glass of milk.

The room is quiet chaos.

I wade past the milk puddles and the wreckage of cutlery on the floor to where I've stashed the cake and candles. Returning to the table I distribute the party hats. George, one of Pickle's table-mates, is disgruntled because his plate is empty. He spiders his fingers across the table and snatches two hunks of Pickle's diced wiener. "One for Pickle," I say, replacing her beret with a party hat. "One for Mary, George, and Hilda..."

I secure the elastic under their chins.

"Me don't want stupid hat!" Mary says.

"Get it OFF! Get it OFF!" George bellows.

Hilda tilts her head back, throws her hands in the air, and roars, "It's My Birthday!"

"I didn't order this," Mary snaps. She cannot eat. She has a throat full of thorns. Mary removes the hat and spits in it.

"It's a party," I tell her. "And people at parties wear hats, and EAT CAKE."

"Shove your hat up your sunshine," Mary says.

George drives over the discarded paper hats with his wheelchair.

I light the candles. I blow them out. No one gets hurt.

We sing. "Happy Bird-day to you, Happy Bird-day to you, Happy Bird-day Dear Pickle, Happy Bird-day to You."

Echoes of sweet fill the room like raindrops on the tongue. I smile and set the cake down in front of Pickle. She claps, lifts a mound of chocolate and presses it to her lips. I slice and distribute the rest to the non-diabetics at the table. George who hasn't any teeth slurps sugary puree. Mary makes a chocolate hat.

Jennifer spent seven years alongside her mum who had Alzheimer's disease. Alicia Londry (Pickle) passed away on Valentine's Day 2010. Jennifer's experience at Providence Manor, a long term care facility in Kingston, ON., are gently being penned in ink.

Deborah R. Majors

When?

Playmates:

Remember when Grandma Daisy threatened
to show the sepia photos
of you and me bathing, splashing naked
in the metal washtub?
You with your girlish flat chest, me
with no love handles?

Helpmates:

Remember when we skinny dipped
on our honeymoon, chased unsinkable
Ivory soap and dreams?
Later we posed for a photo

under the sign to Niagara Falls.

Teammates:

Remember when we bought the house
on the golf course? We celebrated
till dawn, ran naked
through the sprinklers near the 9th hole,
then made love on a pine-straw bed.
You worried about the night watchman.

Stalemates:

Remember when, the kids off to college,
our second honeymoon to The Mediterranean
where we lounged and lingered and laid
in the ocean, buoyant
in the salt which I hoped would purify
my infidelity? You forgave me, and we threw a party
to bore friends and family with our port-side slides.

Inmates:

Open your eyes; let me swim in pools of sapphire
so like the ring I gave you for our 49th anniversary.
Wrinkled shutters open and flutter
grayed, thinned lashes. Your hooded
eyes hold no sparkle.
You don't remember when,

my name,

or even your own.

Start Off On the Right Foot *

Easier said than done when only left
will do. Left it must be to ease my now—
it's just the way it is—right is bereft
of peace and satisfaction. Disallow
a sweating brow by using left always,
and then I'll rest the whole distance, until
I stop once more to only self praise
when left begins the tour to meet my will
again. It's easier said than done when
only left will do. Right is wrong, left is right

in my world of start offs where oxygen
depends on only left's beginning plight.
Starting on the right foot ejects the calm
inside, so shun the right, wrong be welcome.

* According to www.namigc.org, it is now estimated that up to 3 percent of the U.S. population may suffer from OCD at some point in their lives (about 5 million people).

Deborah R. Majors' grandmother died of Alzheimer's, inspiring *When?*. As an associate pastor, Deborah often counsels those who suffer from Depression and OCD. From this counseling, she has gained insight along with understanding and compassion for those who suffer from these illnesses. Brave individuals who battle these illnesses everyday inspired *Start Off On the Right Foot*.

Rebecca Masri

Inside

Long Lonely Night
It's a long lonely night
There's not a star in sight
And I'm waiting for you to come back home.
No need to worry dear
For I will be right here
My heart has no need to ever roam.
I long for your embrace
The smile upon your face
And those three words you know I want to hear.
But if you should be late
You know I'll always wait
For I would be the one to shed a tear.

Rebecca Masri was born in 1973 and raised in NE Ohio. She left school during the middle of seventh grade and became known in her small town as the little runaway. She later achieved her GED, associate's degree in business, and a bachelor's degree in psychology. She and her son voluntarily worked in animal rescue for fifteen years. Rebecca is agoraphobic with panic disorder and bipolar disorder. Her favorite phrase is, "Normal is overrated". *Long Lonely Night* is Rebecca Masri's first published poem.

J. R. McRae

Inside

Can you see the walls? No...?
They are there
Steep,
Ice smooth,
Echoing,
"No you can't, no you mustn't, don't do that, you can't, you mustn't, DON'T!"
The walls had a window.
Prisoners get the torture of looking out...
They get to see
The world that is not theirs.
They get to know
What others are denying
Them,
Are denying will ever be theirs,
Are denying.
And the pain
That doesn't stop
And the long trips to the torture chamber
Smelling of antiseptic
With white clothed guards and officials with stethoscopes
And syringes,
Who do not care
But torture you
Because you're there
And they can.

And the nuns,
Black crows flitting down corridors
Of this church institution,
Who sing ritualistic prayers
They count out on beads
And help the nurses hold you down.

Your parents
Have abandoned you.
You must be very bad.
Who wants an ugly duckling in her
Sick white skin...

You are being punished, wicked child.
You did the unforgiveable
Got sick
And cost
Far more than money.

Breathe

Some other hands
Attached a vice
That crushed your chest.

Someone poured muck
Into your throat, your lungs,
And pressed...

You sat on the bed
Arms held
Above your head
To let the air get in.

You watched your hands and feet
Turn blue,
Become cold, distant, dead,
Adrift from you...

The pain too drifted...
You were free...
Then the ambulance came.
The pain
Was meant to be.

Poetry has been a way of coping with very serious illnesses starting in early childhood with acute trauma onset asthma. An oxygen tent was part of her bedroom furniture. She wasn't allowed to read or view anything humorous or exciting in case it set off an attack – so she snuck out of bed and stole her brother's war comics! J.R. is published in numerous journals and online including *Quadrant*, *Social Alternatives*, *Antipodes*, *Speed Poets*, *Mozzie*, *Vine Leaves*, *Ripples* and in many anthologies, most recently *Poetry Pact I* and *Quadrant Book of Poetry 2000 - 2010*.

www.jrmcrae-subversive.weebly.com

Jacqueline Michaud

False Positive

In the over-lit basement of Mercy,
a windowless room reeking of puke,
Tonya works to coax my buried veins
to flow freely anew – six vials this time –
to rule out whatever is worse

than what the doc thinks I have.
"Better safe than sorry," he'd chirped.
This time I remember to avert my eyes,
stare at the faded print hanging askew
in the hallway – washed-out bunnies
by a gray brook. "That print's crooked,"
I say, trying to sound at ease, blasé.
Tonya just grunts, jabs, misses again.
"It's been that way for years," she says.
I guess no one can fix that either.

Progressive

A gull glides through the glass
sea. I follow its wake, its slow,
steady dance out-pacing the tide.
Now a heron lumbers by, flop feet
dragging over drowning mud flats.
No breeze flutters a single thing.
That's all I can see this morning,

though moments ago, watching
a gull's figure eights out racing
the tide gave a kind of comfort.
For two beats it seemed to stop
what's been advancing forever.
I wish it could do that faster.

Jacqueline Michaud's work has appeared widely in literary journals, among them, *New England Review & Breadloaf Quarterly*, *The Florida Review*, *American Letters & Commentary*, and *Voices from the Robert Frost Place*. She also has published translations of work by Francophone writers, including Mohamed Sehaba, Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, and Jean-F Brière. A member of the American Literary Translators Association, she received her BA in French Literature from Skidmore College. Her debut collection, *The Waking Hours: Poems & Translations*, was published in 2007, her second collection, *White Clouds*, appeared in 2009, and her latest poems and translations can be found in the online journals *Per Contra*, and *The Monarch Review*. Ms. Michaud was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2009.

Lynda Monahan

Red Boots in the Snow

Sometimes it is necessary to re-teach a thing its loveliness
- Galway Kinnell

the stroke has muddied my sister
made her unclear

I will tell and retell her
in words and in touch
until every tiny bud
in her stricken brain unfolds
with the knowledge of her loveliness

I will sing to her
the lullaby of her lost self
I will sing soft voiced and smiling
until everything for her is possible again

I will tell and retell her
until she understands
crystal bell clear

as these northern lakes
clear to the very core of her
that she is lovely

until her bones know it
until the blood memory
of all that is my sister
comes back to her to me

.....

these first days she cannot find herself
in the long unmarked hours
of her mind's constant turning

adrift in the hospital
she fears the nurses doctors
trusts no-one

my son writes
on the chalkboard in her room
Shawn was here you are safe
pins his picture to the wall

she touches his face in the photograph
again and again she repeats his words
these small life preservers in a floundering sea

Shawn was here you are safe

.....

when will I be my self again

the question turns and turns inside the dark swirl of her thinking
time is unmade for her now the future a mystical
landscape of distant blue shapes as indistinct as dreaming

when will I be my self again the question turns and turns

the answer is a scatter of slow moving stars
a fleck of light that cannot be calculated

a clatter of stones against the broken window of her sky

.....

she has lost her words searches for them everywhere
in books in the mouths of family and friends ahh ahh
she says when one of them escapes again ahh

I help her look give her some of mine
she borrows them gratefully the speech therapist loans
her his too at least the beginnings so she can find the ends
this is a pretty bunch of fl fl he says pointing to the picture
flowers she laughs clapping her hands flowers
I want to give them to her in celebration a whole armful
of flowers masses of them because she has finally found the word
I want to give her the word for everything flowers and puppies
and Christmas trees and this one I give her this one family

.....

this December morning we are walking along the old Shellbrook highway
not so much a highway anymore as a trail through the trees
the traffic all keeps to the new road
everyone going somewhere in a hurry
but not us we are in no rush
there is nothing but time for my sister now
no flights to catch no appointments of importance
her smart business suits traded in for t-shirts and comfortable pants
she walks in the snow now in her new red boots
shows me the fretwork tracks of rabbits
listen she says and we stop to hear the chatter of chickadees
the clean wind as it lifts and sighs
delighted she hugs the day holds it out to me
the deer she knows and morning sun
and winter days and joy my sister's gifts
and this is what matters now
this slow walk with my sister on this soft morning
having her here beside me in her red boots
the sound of her quiet breathing snow in the pines

Lynda Monahan is the author of two collections of poetry, *A Slow Dance in the Flames* and *What My Body Knows*, both published by Coteau Books. Her work has been published in a number of Canadian literary magazines and broadcast on CBC radio. Most recently she was writer-in-residence for the Saskatchewan Writers Guild facilitated retreat. In the fall of 2006 her younger sister suffered a stroke, an event which changed both of their lives in, at first, very frightening and difficult ways. "Red Boots in the Snow" is Lynda's attempt to come to terms with the loss of her "old" sister and in celebration of the "new" sister she now has.

Cris Mulvey

Dark Mother

I am of the Earth, the deep, dark Earth;
the Earth, where all things go
to fall apart, to crumble...
rot.

I eat what needs to go. I breathe them in.
I swallow them. They disappear:
fodder for the new.
I fear nothing.

I wear blood, mud, shit and age,
tears, ugliness, decay,
without apology;
triumphantly.

My loyalty is to the unseen world.

I shake the bones of the dying and dance, cackling, hopping
from one leg to the other....full of glee, excited
by the space that all this death
is clearing.

I am the Great Decider.
Eventually, everything arrives at my feet.
There is no escape. Nowhere to run.
I decide when your time has come.

I decide.

After All These Years of Illness

Sometimes I feel like a statue,
the kind they put in city squares:
tall, male, invincible, a great unfeeling slab of stone;
my gaze fixed on some far-off horizon,
the past perhaps, or maybe even the future.
Some old forgotten warrior holding onto
weapons I no longer have a use for.

Sometimes I feel blinded, struck,
thrown up against a wall too high to climb;
bound by wire that just bites deeper
with each round of struggle;
my senses blocked with dust or thorns,
closed off completely from the living earth
that somehow still continues,
shimmering and pulsing all around me.

Memories and dreams float by
like scraps of light, like leaves
deserted by the wind,
like the white and waxen petals
of magnolias brilliant
through the dark, blank page of forest.
Stories from the pages of my life,
those long gone, or those that now
may never actually be written.
Can they save me?
When they come
I follow, 'til they
disappear.

Meanwhile, in all the nooks and crannies
of my head, my chest, small nests
of twigs and moss are growing,
holding in their roundnesses
the eggs of all my gathered sorrows.
Where I stand now,
outside everything once held familiar,
my eyes cannot yet see:
Do buds hide in the cracks

of the world I once belonged to?
Do stars spring
from the ground beneath my feet?

Questions

What if
my body continues to blossom,
huge and female, and no matter what I do
I cannot get it back to girlhood?

What if
my blood returns and with it
the hormone that grows the -say it! -cancer?
What if the cancer returns?

What if my energy does not return ...
and all those days in the far off woods or high on the lofty crags,
flash of the baldy's tail so high we cannot see him,
wild, wan call of the horny elk, pale shy bow
of the lady slipper in the grass,
what if all of that stays
just a memory
echoing down
the empty
trailways
of my
heart?

What if everything I am
and ever have been
gets unmade?

What if I must start anew?
What happens then to you
and me? To us?

What happens then?

Cris Mulvey was diagnosed with breast cancer in Sept 2006. Over the last five years she has been living with chronic fatigue and a number of auto immune illnesses brought on by the cancer treatment. Born and raised in Ireland she moved to Montana in 1998 where she still lives with her husband and two cats. Poetry, wild nature and meditation are her medicines. She has come to understand her illness as a gateway to a deeper, more creative and more authentic life and loves to share this understanding through her writing and her workshops.

Mark A. Murphy

Colorado Girl

A girl is dying at my breast,
she falls into my arms with her arms and hands
and feet all lacerated,
the blood runs freely from her wounds.
She loves the bare walls of my humble room,
she wears a crown of ivy
and sings her sad songs that only I may hear.
She says she is the victim of torture,
that she has waited a lifetime
to fall into my arms with no head to live another day.

Her breasts press through
the outline of a white blouse,
she dresses all in white,
her lips part in pain, she sings in barely a whisper.

Nora Forever

I do not write like Leonard Cohen,
but I tell you the naked woman in my room
makes the sign of the cross
kneeling before a portrait of Jesus.

I do not know the words to write
to make her flesh beautiful except to say
the crosses cut into her palms caress
my flesh felt like holy water.

I awoke saying, I love you.
I thought she would die in my arms,

a gun-shot to the heart
but the revolver belonged to a ridiculous dream.
Her face fell upon mine eyes as if from heaven.

Nausea

The rebel's silhouette is stained
with death,
everywhere she turns she is met by death,
in the hallway and dining room,
in the garden under the red berry tree
where she buries the doves fallen from the nest.

My love is in mortal danger
and I am powerless as a man of poor means
to stop the injustice,
I cannot buy time, not even in the face of death,
I cannot rescue my little bird
from those that would lay her in the ground.

The death mongers
have got her right where they want her,
without hope,
without consolation in the desert garden
where the grass never greens
where children leave their bouncing balls in the dust.

Pain Eater

What words can be said to save her as she takes
the blades to her wrists and arms as if to relive the pain?
No words can soothe the mother's loss at her infant,
no words
can bring her back from the brink of self-annihilation,
loathing, despair. She would drink... bleach first
before hearing your protestations. Life is liveable,
say the steady ones. Life is beyond comprehension,
says the girl who puts the wine glass of bleach to her lips.
And so she soaks up pain as if pain were her only lot,
the pain of wars, civil wars, genocides, suicide,

nothing is missed by the girl whose own flesh,
her own blood would see her dead in the street,
before giving her shelter against the whore master
and the rapist. What words can be said to convince a girl
to keep struggling?

I was born in 1969 in the UK. I studied philosophy as an under-graduate and poetry as a post-graduate. I have had 2 chap books produced, *Tin Cat Alley* (Spout Publications) and *Our Little Bit of Immortality* (Erbacce Press). My first full length collection, *Night-watch Man and Muse* is due out in 2013 from Salmon Poetry (Eire).

Beverly Offen

My Husband's Doctor

I've heard there are oncologists who radiate compassion and empathy. A friend told me that her husband's doctor shared his home phone number and email address and responded immediately to questions she had. Another friend described visits to his doctor that were accompanied by CDs playing his beloved Chopin.

My husband's doctor is not one of those guys. His doctor has all the warmth of a turnip.

But his doctor's medical credentials are impeccable. He's head of the brain oncology section at his hospital and a professor of neurology. He has been cited as our city's premier doctor for the treatment of brain tumors. He is a formal guy in his late sixties. He wears expensive dark suits and traditional ties He addresses us by our last name.

My husband has an inoperable brain tumor. Everyone tells us that we are fortunate to have this esteemed doctor in charge of his case. Actually that is what my husband is—"a case." His identity has become "inoperable brain tumor," and mine is now "brain tumor patient caregiver."

Our meetings, which feel strangely like job interviews, end with his announcement that a decision will be made later, after additional tests have been made. We are always ushered into his office immediately after the previous candidate has left, and our exit is too closely followed by yet another anxious supplicant, also hoping for the doctor's approval. Perhaps in the future, offices for such purposes could be designed with two doors, an entrance at one end and an exit at the other, giving at least the illusion that the patient is not in a revolving doorway, sandwiched between

fellow petitioners.

The treatment of my husband's tumor is complicated because it is atypical and cannot be identified precisely. Repeated MRIs have not provided an answer, and this ambiguity does not please his doctor. Perhaps a different doctor would find the treatment of my husband's tumor to be challenging. But his doctor seems to view this case as an affront to his skill as a doctor. We have become that couple who keep turning up, asking questions he cannot answer. It's clear that he doesn't like our questions, or probably us either.

During the course of our visits to various doctors—surgeons, pathologists, and radiologists, among others—someone told us that the tumor was an astrocytoma that could not be further defined. At a later meeting with my husband's doctor, I referred to the tumor as an astrocytoma. For the first time, his doctor responded with genuine emotion. "I never said that," he said, much too loudly. "We don't know what kind of tumor it is. Here's the letter I sent to your doctor. You got a copy. I'll get you a photocopy of the letter. Even Dr. Burger at Johns Hopkins couldn't identify it. Remember I told you about Dr. Burger? He wrote the book on brain tumors."

The doctor was standing up, distinctly agitated and waving a sheaf of papers in front of me. "I'm sorry," I said. "I know that someone told me it was an astrocytoma. But obviously it wasn't you. I was wrong. I have your letter. I don't need a copy." In truth I groveled.

I considered adding, "You are always right; please don't be mad at me!" What I really wanted to say was, "Oh, just calm down. We all know you're the big honcho here."

Much later, when I was going through my husband's medical records, I found my copy of the letter from his doctor. He had described the tumor as an astrocytoma, exactly as I'd recalled.

Our quintessential experience with my husband's doctor happened about five months after the tumor was discovered. There had been an exploratory brain biopsy that revealed nothing but resulted in his incision becoming infected. The infection in turn caused a seizure that further impaired my husband's emotional balance and language abilities. Of greater importance to his doctor and the pathologists now on his case was the infection that had to be treated before any further tests could be performed.

Over six weeks went by before another MRI could be scheduled. It had now been several months since the previous MRI, and the new results were expected to be significant. After the MRI procedure, we went to his doctor's office to get his report.

Red like blood is the fountain of too many words her typewriter brain
 rat-a-tat-tat out.
Rae is light. Today she is Alice,
 falling down a hole
 landing in colors,
 eat me's,
 and meeting a queen
 who will have off with her head.
Rae sleeps as doctors remove cells and feminist angels
 brush their wings like fans,
 waiting for Rae to wake-up
 and write again —
Read, swim, float in roses, light-up
 and bleed only
 from her pen.

Amanda Gayle Oliver is a Southern Belle by birth and a New Englander by heart. First published at sixteen in *The Birmingham News*, Oliver was most recently published in the *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Lamplighter Review*, and for the Canadian Alzheimer's Society. Her second play, "Elevator Music" will be produced at the University of Alabama at Birmingham in March 2012. She met Rae Rose at Marge Piercy's poetry intensive workshop in Summer 2010. The two connected over shared struggles in life, and their love of words and of living lives of joy. Last spring, Rae Rose, who was in her mid-twenties, suffered a stroke and had to have brain surgery. Being on the opposite coast, Amanda could not be there to hold Rae's hand. However, she wrote this poem while she prayed and waited for her friend to come out of surgery. Rae is now recovering and writing again, having relearned to walk, and continues to inspire so many of her fellow poets and friends. The writer hopes she is honored by this poem.

Frances Shani Parker

Sweet Treat

A wisp of a woman, she waits
eagerly for her dinner tray.
I hide her magic ice cream cup
that makes other foods invisible.
Each mouthful of nutrition
adds time to her aging clock.
"Is this my ice cream?" she asks

before I feed her meatloaf.
She chews slowly, searches
for the missing sweetness.

Her arms bear bruises,
tender tattoos of darkness,
stained during recent falls.
In her dreamlike world,
objects sway like flowers
brushed by breathing wind.
Floors are moving walkways
that make her balance tremble.
Now, a wheelchair guides her
through the nursing home maze.

She remembers my name when
I volunteer. Many words lie buried
in a growing grave of memories.
Savoring each food, she concludes
they're almost as good as ice cream.
When I notice she's nearly full,
hidden ice cream appears.
The setting sun rises in her
beaming face. I laugh when she asks,
"Did I ever tell you I love ice cream?"

Frances Shani Parker is an award-winning writer, consultant, hospice volunteer, and former school principal. Author of *Becoming Dead Right: A Hospice Volunteer in Urban Nursing Homes*, she has been published in several anthologies and journals. Her eldercare writing reflects her advocacy for older adults, caregivers, and improvements in nursing homes. The poem *Sweet Treat* describes a scenario about her hospice patient who had dementia. Visit Parker in cyberspace at Hospice and Nursing Homes Blog and her website www.francesshaniparker.com.

Nancy Phear

It Was Already Dark

Two days before the country went to war,
years before she did,
she made us promise.

We were kids in the living room,
watching television,
listening as the president plotted
to invade Iraq.

Elliott stretched his long frame
on the plaid couch,
I lay on the floor.
Snow fell outside the window
but we couldn't see it,
It was already dark.

My mom came into the room,
she'd been on the phone.
"Promise me you
won't ever
commit suicide."
Tears pricked the corners of her eyes
We could hear them
but we couldn't see them,
It was already dark.

She made us promise.
And then told us
Jen hung herself
in her ex-boyfriend's apartment.
Her parents on the phone,
Jim and Nina,
called from California
where it was warm,
to tell us
Jen hung herself
in her ex-boyfriend's apartment.

"Promise me," she urged.
She made us promise
we wouldn't do that,
we would never do that.

We promised and went back to watching
news of an impending war.
A war we could see
A war we could talk about.

We were kids in the living room
We didn't know
we should have made her promise, too.
We couldn't see
that one day she would wage her own war.
By the time we found out
It was already dark.

Lightning Storm

I examine the pill
and begrudge it its pink
when everything else seems
so dark
so murky

I resent
this new pellet that is
small and rosé,
blushing
And I doubt.

I doubt
for it is a wonder how anything
so little
can do
so much,
So much.
I cup it in my hands
and swig it
down with water,
And I wonder.

I wonder when I
awake late
in the night,
the first night of
the little pink pill.
I wonder when I
awake
to a headache

I wonder at the lightning
storm in my head
Flashes flying from frontal lobes
hit the temple
return to forehead
And in that moment
the flashes
the flickers
the flares
 illuminate
 recriminate
 eradicate
the dark
the murk
And for the first time
in a long time
everything
is lined in
silver.

Nancy Phear survives her mother Janie Phear, who committed suicide less than a year after developing symptoms and less than a week after being diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder in October of 2004. Recently, Nancy herself was diagnosed with a mental health disorder, Major Depressive Disorder, Single Episode. Her writing explores her relationship with her mother, her mother's suicide, and her own mental health battles.

Douglas Polk

The Seizure

In my peripheral vision the explosions begin,
increasing with intensity and density as colors bomb the retina of my eyes.
Random and uncontrolled,
as if someone is loose with a pack of fire crackers,
until the whole pack lit.
The explosions began to come in waves,

rhythmic like the ocean.
I feel my pupils travel to the corner of my eyes,
attempting to find a place to hide,
as the explosions increase in frequency and volume.
Fear causes me to burrow into myself,
making myself small.
Tiny, with no mass at all,
set adrift in the black emptiness of nowhere.
with no idea of how long or of how far I have drifted,
in darkness I pray for light.
gradually becoming aware of a heart beat,
my heart beat.
The realization comes,
it is the same rhythm,
as the explosions which forced me within myself.
Unsettled and unsure,
I wait wondering if this is hell.
The explosions diminish as the heart beat becomes the focus of my existence.
Hearing quiet voices and seeing no more explosions,
I can breath freely once again.
Opening my eyes and seeing the tear streaked cheeks of my Mom,
as she whispers something in my ear.
I feel her lips upon my head,
while aware of quiet conversation taking place in the background.
Reassured I close my eyes to catch my breath,
and suddenly realize I am too tired or weak to again open my eyes,
as the serenity of sleep seduces my weary brain.

Post-Cancer Survivors

The sound of water pipes coming to life,
drives the sleep from my brain,
She showers to start the day.
Opening my eyes,
an attempt made to stifle a moan,
stifle the pain.
Inventory taken,
and judgment made regarding the day,
as footsteps heard across the kitchen floor,
her breakfast made.

Pain stabs,
and muscles throb,
blankets pulled back to greet the day.
Television voices heard,
part of her routine,
As she checks the news,
and the weather,
soon she will be off to school,
teaching children to read,
exposing them to worlds which know no bounds.
as I sip coffee and give thanks,
for this woman who is my wife,
She who is as much a survivor as am I,
washing my face and brushing my teeth,
wondering all the while where has the 'old me' gone,
later attempting to focus my mind,
and learn once more,
how to write,
rediscovering and exploring this post cancer world.

The Disaster

a seizure last night,
like an earthquake,
or other natural disaster,
a soul shattering event,
the damage evident today,
in his rigid body,

muscles abused almost beyond endurance,
attempt to assess,
and mend themselves in stillness,

The cost visible on the lines of my wife's face,
the pain in my heart,
and the worry in a brother's voice,
when told of the disaster,
in the early morning of his college day,

The seizure grand mal,
or clonic tonic,
but words, do the event no justice,

like any natural disaster,
it can not be adequately described,
only experienced.

Douglas Polk is a poet living in the wilds of central Nebraska with his wife and two boys. He has had numerous poems, three books of poems, and two children's books published. Poetry books are: *In My Defense*, *The Defense Rests*, *On Appeal*. The children's books are: *The Legend of Garle Pond*, and *Marie's Home*.

His son experienced a stroke in the womb, and began life facing the challenges of life threatening seizures, cerebral palsy and developmental delays. He is now a talented 22 year old, who delights people with his writing, painting and picture taking.

Aaron Poller

Paying Attention

The early warning signs of cancer were
neither early nor were they a warning,
more like vague apprehension, change,
because isn't anxiety about
the future, the unknown that lies ahead
as we squeeze through living day by day,
until the body says stop and we must
pay attention to the nose on a face,
the breath coming from each nostril,
the bass line, some acoustic jazz
playing along over the radio,
if we still have radios,
how voice and piano open
that twin line, how they sweep
into the waiting center, eyeless
world where the mustard seed
becomes a dream,
a song evoking home.

Healing After Surgery

What happens when we sit alone?
When noise of day and daze are done?
We face the silence of living.

Is that prayer or escape?
Will the world come back
or may we travel far, not return?

Psychologists believe
in dissociation. Buddhists
believe in emptiness.

Perhaps the soul is a bird
that comes to sing,
then decides to stay,
build a nest, settle here.
This morning questions
are enough. Let us down these
wings of anger. Let anybody
heal into the world, into
the silence of living.

Aaron Poller is a nurse psychotherapist and poet who lives in Winston-Salem, N.C. Last year diagnosed with prostate cancer, he had surgery in May and is now doing well. He is continuing to work and write and both he and his wife are currently looking forward to the birth of their first grandchild.

DC Reid

I have let the river carry me

*Who will untangle their matted hair?
Shine in the dark hole of their sleep?
Though they rattle the stones in their broken brains,
in their thicket of words, who will find a way,*

Love's Pavilion - PK Page

Who will untangle their matted hair

at the foot of their bed, the foot of my brain?
I have morphine love on the line.
I press my love once and once again
and sleep shall have dominion until I
wake and press again. I see for free
the naked lunch I wait for, and
the stomach of mine turns for the morphine
I've dripped into my freeways, my chaos
theory veins in my winter brain. Do they
shine in the dark hole of their sleep?
Oh, when I'm gone it's not deep,
sudden, drowning, it's really a nothing,
an unplugging of plug I do not keep,
for death is in everything at all times.
And the millions of salmon with fine
fenestrated bones when Alder leaves are
yellow. I have let the river carry me among
coho lined up as red arrows, not shooting
but waiting in deep November.

Though they rattle the stones in their broken brains,
the casks and rattle pods of seed explains
the pyrocanthus, the split pea, and the stones of peach.
I have a love of all alone in wilderness plains
that wait for me, when only I and the elk heavy
feet leave hearts of their going and coming
at the flattest shallowest crossing spot.
In the camouflage season I wait alone,
as an arrow, a heart with out its veins,
a song without its man, a story without an end.

In their thicket of words, who will find a way?
As though the mansion of our world's a play
not far away, where the roads can stand
the view. Man is man's best friend. Say
we speak and are conversant. We hold
a hand, a Hamlet, and conjure a Heathcliffe,
or a Haggar, some mental celluloid residue.
In the forest of green, the sea of green.
All humans with too much story in them.
The wild escapes when I am dilaudid.

An Ode an Elegy a Cancer

The tendering of my burden

be it down on flesh taken in the lens and made a permanence that makes the eye cry out at the end of itself

The lead wafers in the round machine much the same as stitching and its eye an aperture of the lead

The machine in skirts of curtains ones from heights where opera can be seen by faces of half faces these are the same as the opening where light that has no light comes through

The trees of my abdomen redness of lasers mark the cross of Jesus thrown down the holy water that burns invisible

And the scars? There are no scars only what is left when forest is taken away

The skin of my belly that in my hands lifts away from itself as I stand with pants to knees and with my underpants down from my dugs and me in my eyes in my mirror and this is the age in the middle when I no longer fear my image in its sunset the sloughing of years goes unnoticed brown bits of flesh take my face and my eyes upon my eyes is a Mona Lisa

Shall I stroll the rolling stones of Ross Bay that in morning can be heard one on one another on another ones the D-9 cats left to keep the hungry ocean from taking land into itself

The sea is no gristling red woman whose glory bleeds upon the water and in its smallest sound is each round vessel opening through the door of water from farness to the eye

I have left behind my x-rays in their albums that in their own dust resign themselves to the yellow pale of eggs

The way the body's clothes when taken will hold a little warm

The bruised gun of evening nothing more

DC Reid has published ten books of poetry, novels, literary non-fiction, and non-fiction. But his adult life has been marred by a number of health issues. He has had chronic fatigue syndrome for about 20 years and has given advice to CFS sufferers on his Web site at www.dcreid.ca. In his early fifties he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Two separate radiation and drug treatments later, it appears he is in remission. However, his hip degenerated and had to be replaced. Now he is suffering from disc degeneration in his back. He writes from an intimate knowledge of illness.

Christina Rinnert

Body

I am detached
From my body:
 Apart from it
 Like wide expanses of
 Lightless universe and
 Obsidian abyss;
I do not live inside it very often.
Its environment isn't conducive to life.

It is a place
Where I can't
Touch the skin
Because I know
 (I know, I know, I know)
That the simple act –
 One feather light touch
 Of fingertips on pallid warm sheath –
Will send flames
 Of pain, fire-engine red,
 Glowing orange,
 Blazing blue,
 Screaming green
Coursing, racing, pulsing
 Across nerve endings
 Into sinews
 And joints
 And ligaments
Causing explosions

Of crashing waves
Like briny floods I cannot stop
 Washing over me,
 Tripping me up
 Drowning
 All of the joy;
A hairy-throated monster,
 Crushing me to the bed
 Blinding me in the darkness
 Seizing a hostage
Until it elects to leave.

No.
I do not acknowledge my body.
It is better
To remain a traveler here,
 Apart from it
 Like an astronaut –
Floating, tethered,
And always
Just outside of it.

Pain Warning

You sneak in on me
When I am most vulnerable
Bearing down
Like a nor'easter
Pushing in from Canada
Or Alaska
Or Tibet for all I know –
Crashing into my life
Blowing and blustering
Your way across
The landscape
Of my skin
 My joints
 My nerve endings
Pushing yourself
Into my blood
My tears stinging

Fevered face
As your assault
Lands on my shore
And all I can do
Is hunker down
And weather the attack.

Christina Stopka Rinnert is a 45 year old woman who has endured nearly debilitating and continually under or undiagnosed pain for over 11 years. Finally, in 2010, she found two female practitioners who did not dismiss her symptoms as being "all in her head" and who were willing to listen to what she told them about her symptoms. She survived over two years of tests to include 3 MRIs, 2 CT scans, various x-rays, EMG studies, ultrasounds, every form of blood work known to the medical community, and various medications in a plethora of doses and false diagnoses (such as Lupus, Multiple Sclerosis, and severe depression) before she was finally told her symptoms were probably related to fibromyalgia. She has used yoga and writing as therapy during the entire ordeal. Now, she is a full time student at Mansfield University in Pennsylvania and works only part time. She is grateful for her doctors and her medication, as well as her supportive family, for helping her reach her goal to live a healthier life.

Michael Romary

Diagnosis

“Did you know you had polio in both arms?”

“No.”

You remember the date—January 22nd—
a mix of sun and clouds, East Coast winter,
when with wooden crutches,
still steady in your hands,
you walked from Hopkins in Baltimore.

(“It changes nothing.”)

“You should begin to use a power wheelchair.
You have post-polio.”

“I understand. Of course.”

(“Es Una cosa muy seria”, you remembered—
what Capa said while shooting pictures,

a Spanish Loyalist being shot by Franco's troops:
"This is very serious business.")

"If you apply for disability you will get it."

"I understand. Thank you.
You've told me what I need to know."

"You've got a good mind. Use it."

"I understand."

(Camera lens now wide open,
close to the coming darkness.)

Michael Romary is a retired university reference librarian who had polio at age 5. He was diagnosed with post-polio in 2007. He is working on series of poems tentatively entitled "*The Body Poems*".

Sy Roth

Cicatrix

They shaved pieces
Of dermata
To beat off the nighttime invasion
Mongol hordes streaming ashore
Establishing a beachhead
There on his proboscis.
A slice at a time,
Like a patron at the deli counter
He asked for the thinnest slice possible.
Modeling career is over, I suppose
And the shaver, without strop, queried
You modeled?
Later another bank of cells
Collided with the Barber of Seville,
More pain-deadening
His blade scraping bone.
Time passed like a receding glacier.
And a third--

More, he said, and the knife will exit
The back of the skull without laughter.

Bandages cover the area
A thick unyielding blanket of snow
Giving his face a pig-like visage
Snorting is useless.
His eyes cross seeking margins that curtain the excavation.
The plastic surgeon
Will tie the skin together
Wrap it in swaddling cloth
But a cicatrix will be the memorandum
A steaming, fecal trail of the beast
And a reminder of the warm sun on his face
Building sand castles in Coney Island.

He is a 65 year old retired administrator. In his retirement he has looked at events in his life with some degree of equanimity although they have been trying. He explores the inside of his self, he hopes, with some humor, bleak as it might be. He has hope.

Marjorie Sadin

Faces on a Totem Pole

The Sky God, the God of the Sun and the Moon. The Coyote. Papa is old. But he is sowing his oats. And Momma died. Grandma Eva died. She was old. But Grandma Rebecca and Grandpa Al died young.

Papa has a night on the town. He had his teeth fixed. He's still strong. Grandpa Ruby died in an automobile accident. I never knew him.

Totem poles. My ancestors talk to me at night sometimes. I cried when Grandma Rebecca and Grandpa Al died. Grandpa Al came to me in the eyes of an old woman. He is somewhere spirits are.

Momma had a long life, but she drank and cursed. Papa will live longer. He doesn't believe in the Spirit. I cried when Momma died, too. But then I just got scared. The Death God scared me. He with his mask so I wouldn't recognize him.

The Coyote howls. My father howls when he thinks of Momma. I can't howl back. I

am still his child. My gaze shifts to the woods. There, the Wind God whispers through the trees the names of those who have died and tells where Momma's ashes are scattered.

All the souls I have ever known live inside me. They bleed like ink on a page. I write about them but they write through me. When I wrote I love you to them, I tore through the page

Marjorie was born May 9, 1954, Mother's Day. She suffers from a mental illness, schizo-affective disorder. She is a survivor. Marjorie lives in the Washington DC area. She writes poetry and has published in numerous poetry magazines including *The Chiron Review*, *The Little Magazine*, *Jewish Women's Literary Annual*, *Fire*, *Nomad's Choir* and *Federal Poets Magazine*. She has four books of poetry in print. Currently, Marjorie tutors the learning disabled.

G.A. Saindon

Midnight at the Clinic and Beyond

The moon, a yolk, engorged,
pauses somber, cloudless,
lights stiff doors, doors sealed
to hold all tools safe and cool
against the sunlight likely tomorrow.

A shadow bars the eyes of windows;
the empty path trod and brittle
from sudden feet, while the moon
pales, rising more slowly than breathing
through dreamless nights in fine sheets.

By apogee all shadows save those
of the sleepless trees rescind, become one
with the building, a darkness inherent,
utter and unafraid of daylight
or the moon's recusant midnight eye.

The Scavengers

We are scavengers all –
crows and buzzards

after the carrion of life.
Scrounging shells on the beach
beautiful, rough ugly, or
merely novelties, once
useful to other creatures,
now tossed by waves
and small children.
We adults keep the lamp
of street urchins near
our bed, head, instead
of dousing it, to look
forward and future.
We scavenge for acceptance,
compassion, love, in the taverns,
churches, schools, intersections
and places richly grim,
but prodigal with those things
that smell like luck,
like fare, like meat.

I live on 5 acres in northeast Wisconsin, currently taking care of my wife. She is recovering from surgery, chemotherapy, radiation and some few pills – all of which adds up to severe fatigue. “Scavengers” we are, searching for answers to unanswerable questions. “Midnight at the Clinic” is peaceful, considering all that goes on during the day.

Mary Harwell Sayler

Lasting Rule

"First, do no harm...."
Do not do something. Do not
do anything until you know for
sure what's sure to help. Waiting
can be hard to take when you

just want to make things better.
Say, if she were as sick as a dog,
I'd probably pet her and wait
a bit to get her to the vet. Better
yet, I'd have a cabinet full of herbs
and home-grown remedies to whet
her appetite for getting well. I'd
keep her comfortable until a fever,
cooled with a cold towel broke
the distressing cause. Then I'd
caress her forehead and keep the
horrid side effects of pills from
further affecting how she feels.
I'd give her peals of laughter and
splash her with aromatic oils. I'd
love her back to health – alert
and keen on her well-being.

Taking Mother to Lunch

Unlearning how to walk,
she wobbled,
balanced,
closed the gait
with half a shuffled step.
"She's not herself,"
we said in voices leaning
toward a wall of portraits
in her room.
We held on
where she looked young
in outdated images of outings
when we'd been unconcerned
she might unlearn
of us or anything.

Mary Harwell Sayler is a poet and author whose 25 traditionally published books include two life-health encyclopedias and a book on pain medications. She also works with other poets through *The Poetry Editor* website, and Hiraeth Press just published her book *Living in the Nature Poem*. Her poems for *The Barefoot Review* came about as her parents and spouse recuperated from heart attacks and strokes.

Ray Scanlon

Virus

I've just finished up several days of fighting a virus, if you can call my spineless response fighting. Its fever, cough, and gastrointestinal effects weren't all that spectacular, although living with continuous hiccups for a few days was a little bizarre. What got to me was my total lack of energy. To achieve recumbency from a sitting position took a major act of will. It was so lamentably easy to just give up; I hadn't been this enervated since open-heart surgery Mack-trucked me sixteen years ago. The battle ebbed and flowed, blasting my comfortable expectation of a nice monotonic improvement curve. Then after nearly a week I could feel it: the shelling had stopped. The bad guys had gone, only a small cadre of saboteurs remaining to guard their escape, but they left me thinking, "Goddamn it, some day these bastards could win." This was a sobering thought. All the pious bull I write about death being normal and natural exposes itself as a sixty-year-old's whistling through the graveyard.

No normal kid in his twenties wastes much brainpower contemplating the idea of his own death, let alone at the hands of a pedestrian virus, nor should he. I certainly didn't. Even at that age I'd known for years that I was fair game because of a chronic disease that would inexorably get me if I failed to be overtaken first by cancer, a lunatic Massachusetts driver, or a murderous cuckolded husband. But of course I couldn't really understand. Now I know—the freaking microbes are out to get me, too. Now I know how good my life is—everyone covets it.

Ray Scanlon. Massachusetts boy. Has grandchildren. Extraordinarily lucky. No MFA. No novel. No extrovert. His work has been published in more than one place. His “virus” turned out to be Lyme disease, but that's another story. As is his 56 years of diabetes. On the web: read.oldmanscanlon.com.

G. David Schwartz

I Never Liked The Magic Shows

I never liked the magic shows
I didn't like the disappearing
I did not like the end of things
Including my very own hearing
I did not enjoy
The puff of smoke ending
I hated the loud noises
and the heads twilling around
The Popcorn was ok, but damn
there was an absence of all the clowns

G. David Schwartz is the former president of Seedhouse, the online interfaith committee. Schwartz is a survivor of anoxia and currently a volunteer at Drake Hospital in Cincinnati. He is the author of *A Jewish Appraisal of Dialogue* and *Midrash Working Out Of The Book*. He continues to write, his new book is *Shards And Verses*.

Christopher Seth

A Single Action

Pondered in thrones and dominions
and plainly stated
in sacred scriptures

a thought, an action, a movement
heralded
in a vast domino effect
to spur off crying wavelengths
and to be viewed
to alter unimaginable destinies
to be a part of the figure head
the source point
seen as a spreading
aurora borealis
it collapses
or builds
or tap dances upon
and glides across
the face of creation
to no end in sight
an origin
a charge
a flickering candle
the origin
doesn't entirely decide
a fate multi shaped
and fashioned
by sentient masses
and shaping parallel worlds
the multitude of which unseen
our time
somehow does not end
the light vibration
of each entity
maintains itself on end
a scurrying storm field
sweeping into boundless zones
the effect of our creative selves
unknown
and as it pulsates
multi-direction
we are not
created or destroyed
only changed

Christopher Seth is currently dealing with the health issue of schizophrenia. Music, art, and poetry are a part of his outlet for dealing with his illness. He has been writing for ten years and is deeply into the process of varied forms of flowing creativity – an interesting, challenging, and continual universal process to connect to the higher self.

Anne Shaughnessy

You Left the Refrigerator Open

That's how I knew. You didn't notice your hair jutting out sideways or half your mouth dragging down when you tried to talk.

You would not let me call the hospital or your doctor, so I sprinted upstairs, found your brown metal phone book yet couldn't remember your doctor's last name. So I thumbed through the whole thing and found it anyway.

In the kitchen, you watched me slow-motion dial the yellow rotary phone.

"Call an ambulance. Don't wait," the receptionist said.

The paramedics took you away. You probably don't remember any of this.

Later, I brought my dog to the rehab, and you fed her your hospital Hoodsie. We watched *Seinfeld* every night. You half smiled as you told me your hospital neighbor liked it when I wore shorts.

In a month, you came home. I know you remember that. You could not swallow solids, but you were home.

* * *

The next stroke blacked out half your brain. That's what your doctor told us. Even so, when he asked how you were, you said, "Fine."

That first night of your second stroke, I sat up with you to watch the Red Sox. Your machines beeped as I narrated the game. I told you Manny was barely walking to a ball that dribbled out to left. You laughed past the frozen side of your mouth. "He always does that," you said.

Your night nurse fell in love with you in less than a day. She cried when she hugged you goodbye. You might remember that.

Then it was hospital, rehab, hospital, rehab, hospital, nursing home. And you never came home. C Diff, pneumonia, C Diff, pneumonia, swallow test upon swallow test upon swallow test. And you never came home.

You thought I was on trial for murder.

We still watched *Seinfeld* almost every night.

You promised to get me a good lawyer.

You could no longer see but saw movies in your mind. You won't remember them as anything but real. You told me about the two blonde nurses who were sisters. They bathed you. I liked when you told me that dream and wished for my own blonde nurses.

Afternoons, I sometimes left work early to wheel you around outside the brick building. "When I say 'I love you,' I mean it," you said, your harsh voice letting me know I was in trouble for not remembering that.

On the rare Friday night, I brought beer to your room. We watched the Sox together. You still remembered every player and what team he'd been traded from, yet you couldn't drink even a sip of water past your feeding tube. My dog licked the drips from your machine, like it was chocolate milk you poured out just for her. Broken blood vessels rouged your shadowy cheeks, as though you were healthy still.

That Christmas, we gave wine and cards to every nurse. You dictated the notes to me.

As many times as you asked, I refused to toilet you. If you had been well, you never would have wanted your daughter seeing you that way.

Every four minutes, you asked me to find someone to bring you to the bathroom. I hope you don't remember the feces gunked under your nails when the staff didn't clean you right. Those dark crescent fingernails, the smell I'd like to forget.

You thought I was still on trial for murder. When I reminded you that I'm a pacifist, it didn't matter at all.

* * *

The last January, the last swallow tests, the last procedure, the last days, last hours in the snow-bright room, we sang to you past your morphine, tried to sing you out of your fear. "I will bear you up, on eagles' wings," we sang, your favorite song, your tenor voice behind ours, somewhere.

Your nurse didn't laugh when I told her I wanted a few drops of morphine to go. You would have laughed had you been awake.

* * *

At your wake, we dressed you in your favorite St. Patrick's Day sport coat, kelly green to match the shamrocks on your tie. Of course you won't remember that.

Your memory has pushed into mine now. I go to your childhood home and remember the seven-year-old you, punching your sister in the arm after the scarlet fever shots. I remember how much you hated the quarantine, how you longed to be

outdoors.

I remember the Flood of '27, when you were just four and so euphoric after the river swept the outhouse away. Six months later, you returned home to several inches of silt still blanketing the basement. Standing at the kitchen sink, you and your mother hand scrubbed each piece of coal. You heard her swear for the first and only time of your life. "It's all right, Mum," you cooed. I remember it all for you.

Anne Shaughnessy holds an MFA in fiction from Emerson College. Her poetry has appeared in *Illya's Honey* and won the Dallas Community Poets Award. She recently was awarded a residency at the Norman Mailer Center, where she finished *In Your Own Landscape*, a novel which explores the effect of mental illness on the whole family.

"You Left the Refrigerator Open" involves her experiences taking care of her father, Jim Shaughnessy, who was one of her best friends. After his second stroke, he lost the ability to see, but his mind filled in what he was missing. Anne reads extensively about discoveries in the field of neuroscience and is particularly fascinated by the phenomenon of "phantom limb."

David Sloan

Sea Treasure

He floats face down in six feet
of water, oblivious to the rasping
dune grass and the decaying fish
tangled in the shore's kelp line.

Equipped with mask, snorkel,
Wetsuit and one blue flipper,
A size too small, he peers
At the seascape below and feels uneasy.

He thinks of his mother
Who would still be sleeping
If the pain had not awakened her.
She might be fingering a photograph

Of herself posing in the yellow swimsuit
Or she might be studying the cut
Flowers in the vase, or the curtain
Pulled back to let the light in,

Anywhere but under the cotton gown
To the bandage covering the sutured line
Beginning at her breastbone
And ending just under her arm.

He looks for a treasure to send her
But he begins to feel unmoored.
His unflipped foot scrapes against a rock
And draws a bead-cloud of blood.

Reaching down between the ribbons
Of kelp and the billowing rockweed,
He prods a crab into movement.
It shuffles under a ledge. He pokes another

But it is dead and slips sideways down,
Landing on the mussel shells, jagged
Like pottery shards. Then he sees it—
Humped over a mussel. It draws him

Down. He stretches, pulls up
The starfish, with four rays and the nub
Of a promise. When it dries, its curled
tips will tilt on her sill, like a hand
saying Stay.

Heartsick

So when I say that I am sick at heart
please understand no faithless wife has left me,
no daughter's lying crumpled in some culvert.
And while I fret about the rising seas,
the real betrayal began a year ago—
a trapped bird in my chest, battering the bars,
followed by an airless hush—the low,
growing hum a guard might hear far
down a corridor, that yawning silence
from an escapee's cell. Then a rogue
rhythm arose, some drunken drummer's sticks
tattooing a beat no dancers could follow.
He never left. Between flutters and jams
he grins, then rat-a- tats the man I am.

Stunned

At ten, nothing beat holding my breath
to bursting. In bed with eyes shut,
ears plugged, I'd vanish, sink like a diver
into bottomless inky waters,

and listen below the silence—
long pause of a sea god's breathing—
for that surging thrum, *shh-dum*
shh-dum shh-dum shh-dum

those fingers drumming on a hidden hull,
steady as a string of bubbles. Later
I loped along mountain roads
loose-limbed, aqua-lunged, Olympian.

At times, when breath and blood converged
and beat in perfect two/four time, I floated
out of my shoes, *sh-dum, sh-dum,*
made the stretched skin of the sky my ocean.

Now I can't hold a long note without gasping.
My tangled heart flops like a fish
reeled out of the sea, stunned into stillness
between thrashings, bewildered

by its sudden weight and a hard bottom.

A graduate of the Stonecoast MFA program in Maine, David Sloan teaches in Maine's only Waldorf high school. He lives with arrhythmia, and is the proud owner of a tiny slinky in his left descending coronary artery. His mother, now in her late eighties, has been a breast cancer survivor for nearly twenty-five years. His poetry has appeared in *The Broome*, *Café*, *Naugatuck River*, *Northern New England and Prairie Wolf Press Reviews*, *Carpe Articulum*, *Enskymment*, *Innisfree* and *Passager*. He was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Barbara Ellen Sorensen

Valley of Fire

The day you died
I was photographing red

yucca, little-leaf sumac, fire barrel,
lace, and rainbow cacti.
Smoketrees backlit bruised
with sunrise flared,
branches busy with the rising
inflection of snowgeese.
Asters pressed against New Mexico's
alabaster sand and sunset
swept over the bright yellow
amplitude of rabbit brush.

And you were dying, though I did not hear
or feel you. Later, I saw the dissonance
of death was in everything that day,
and everything could have been you:
abrupt shadows threading in and out long
between sun-bleached wooden crosses,
in a graveyard resonating
with charms and votives;
the silence of the deaf promenading
past the Valley of Fire,
ebony lava furrowing itself
furiously across the semi-arid land.

Wings, wings
your body must have pled,
as it struggled with its seizure.
Nothing heard you,
not even birds. There were no warning
song patterns, just restless scratching
through air. There were no birds
that could have carried
your spirit that day, even with their deep-netted
formations, upward-arched,
across invisible miles,
back into my body,
to rest one last time,
my heart's desert willow
beating full with air, breath.

Sky Islands

I dream my youngest son walks
with me to the edge
of a teal-colored alpine lake.
I dream it sparks blue embers
and reflects only that I may
have imagined my son's
entire existence. I dream my own face
transfigured in blue-veined
icicles melding into cobalt
wave after wave. I dream
the epiphany of frost
hushed across cottonwood branches,
and willow in early spring,
the very day my son came to me.
I dream of bells, cornflowers,
and the effervescence
of bodies being born to dream.
I dream of undulations
and how the Maya blue
sky remembers
my son's journey even when
I have forgotten. I dream
I am beside a tarn that holds
one boulder tumbled
down from fields of many.
I dream the act of its falling
has clarity, as if in falling
it creates a line, a scar as blue
as the cord from which
my son floated, whole,
perfect. I dream my son
dances on some far land,
his young body moving
from space to space, valley to valley.
I see him beside midnight
blue lakes where he beckons, radiant.

Water From Oar

A nurse comes to my bedside,
pushes my shoulder
gently, rousing me at 3:00 a.m.
It's when they like to do the CT scans,
she tells me, and suddenly all the world
comes rushing back.
I can't feel my head; it's still numb.
My companion this night,
is sleeping, one arm crossed
over her eyes as if she is shielding
herself from a light
she doesn't want to see.
Her hair falls in a thick knot
around her shoulders
and I remember how it felt
in my hands after she broke her back
and I leaned over the tub
to wash out the tangles, her arms too weak
to lift the curled heft. As I washed
her hair, I could smell wood smoke,
juniper, slickrock, perfumes
swept down with the river's
big water and the kayaks. As they wheel
me to radiology, I think
about how I'd sit for hours
on the banks of the Colorado, just to watch
her graceful rolls,
the way she separated
water from oar. Her laughter
as she plummeted under
and then sprung back upward,
split through solemn canyon walls.
I am lucky; though I have awoken
once again into tumultuousness
of illness, I feel her pushing,
pushing me to a river's
eddies, to safety.

Barbara Ellen Sorensen is a poet, writer, and editor. She has lived with Parkinson's Disease for over 10 years. In summer 2010, she underwent deep brain stimulation (DBS), for which she is eternally grateful. Her son, Bryon Michael Sorensen, died in fall 2011 from complications of an arteriovenous malformation (AVM). These poems reflect the ongoing process of reconciling both circumstances, however, she continues to believe in the beauty and elegance of life.

Barbara recently had her chapbook published, *Song from the Deep Middle Brain*. It's available from [Main Street Rag Publishing](#). It was a finalist in the 2011 Colorado Book Awards.

Megan Stolz

A Sestina for Erik

A physiological lesson: when the human bone tears,
in medical terms we call this a fracture.

The body is stabilized, x-rays are given to doctors to read;
printed at the bottom in plain black type: Stolz, Erik.
We like to remind ourselves that "they happen," accidents,
and maybe by reminding ourselves we'll stave our pain.

Which is worse: physical or emotional pain?

I'd rather cry myself than see my mother's tears.

The results, when man and car collide, accidentally,
apparently include concussions and multiple fractures.

Visiting hours start in sixty minutes; while waiting to see Erik
there's nothing to do, nothing but magazines to read,

and once every section of People has been read
all we masochistically can find to discuss is pain.

The phone calls start; every ten seconds all I hear is, "Erik,
Erik, Erik," everyone wants to know. Dad holds back tears
as he explains in clinical terms the fractures,
the sedation, the respirator, and the cause: an accident.

For our sanity, we dismiss fate and call it an accident.

And then our children hand-make cards and we bring in red
balloons for cheer, and we talk, but don't think, don't want to fracture
into a million pieces. Consciousness brings pain,
better to smile and let the paper pamphlets in our hands tear
as the only sign that we're not okay. Erik,

are you okay? Answer with your eye lashes, Erik,
and maybe it's better that you don't remember the accident,
can't recall what it feels like when your bones tear.
To fill this empty, cold hospital room we'll read
Calvin and Hobbes comics, we'll take pains
to keep our calm masquerade from fracturing
in front of you. Relieving laughter, "now this joke'll fracture
you," we'll pass around the comic, narrate it to Erik
who can't yet talk, can't yet open his own eyes. Pain's
a bitch. This is not your fault, definition of an accident,
and though now you may feel like a broken reed,
love will weave you so tightly you'll never tear
again. No, though you've fractured, you'll never tear,
painful as this crucible is. Don't try to read
meaning into why you're here, Erik, it was just an accident.

Megan Stolz is a second-year candidate in the University of Baltimore's MFA program. She earned her bachelor's degree from Hollins University and is originally from California. In October 2011, her younger brother Erik was hit by a car while walking home. He has been recovering well and has been going through therapy to regain full use of his leg.

Lesley Strutt

What I'll Tell My Friend Who Fell and Broke Her Neck

there are times when the body betrays us and we
are all the same afraid someday we'll need crutches
a wheelchair ask to be pushed

whispering *thank you*

this morning there was a crash at the window - a bird
beautiful broken neck
the space in the air empty

I caressed the hinged feathers with
small wondering hands
and thought of a man I once loved

while he waited at a red light
in downtown LA
thieves tried to steal his car
gunshot wound to the neck —
now his strong arms replace
his legs now his strong shoulders
carry that load it cannot be dropped
it cannot be shared or comprehended
I tried but
he kneaded me daily into his hunger
unable to lean, unable to ask
his fear gnawed us both to death

so I'll tell my friend there are no answers
to the terrible whispered questions - how asking for help terrifies
how the bird's broken neck is unexplainable
how you are so beautiful

Lesley Strutt is a passionate dreamer who believes that we co-create our existence. Her poetry explores the lived human experience, essence, and love in all its guises. Lesley has had the privilege of working with individuals who are wheelchair bound and started up an organization that raises awareness about barriers in the built environment.

Danielle Sullivan

Promise Broken

Is dad going to die, he wants to know.

I don't know. All I can promise is that I will always be honest with you.

I know that, he says. I just don't want anything to change.

I don't tell him that everything already has, that his mother who once saved her tip change from waiting tables to go skydiving now panics at the slightest turbulence in an airplane, afraid that that it will plummet to the ground leaving him with neither a mother nor a father. I don't tell him that his father who never locked the doors because he was certain that he could defeat any intruder with a baseball bat now knows that the deadliest intruders don't enter through the back patio door, but

are microscopic and slip surreptitiously into the body and divide and divide and divide until it becomes difficult to breathe. And I don't tell him he, too, will discover that grief is love at its most helpless.

Instead, I tell him not to worry, that we wouldn't have to move, that he would go to the same school with the same friends.

He doesn't answer, stares at his dirty shoelaces, dissatisfied with this version of the truth. He senses that something substantial and irretrievable has gone.

Previously published in [Survivor Review](#).

To the Grocery Store Cashier

How I am is not very well at all, thank you.
I've just been to the oncologist with my husband, you see.
His cancer has spread. No longer curable.
Treatable, maybe.
But terminal, definitely.

Terminal is a place at an airport. A place where journeys begin.
End, too, I suppose,
But until today, endings were hope-filled gaps between the present
and the next stage of the future.

The thing is, he's not all that old.
Our children are young.
He ate organic food and didn't smoke.
Exercised regularly.
The Cancer doesn't seem to care about these facts.
But my husband does.
He wants it to be fair.

So when he was first diagnosed he didn't find Jesus
Or come to realize that his marriage was an unending sense of satisfaction
And he didn't bask in the precious moments of the present
Or have any of the other banal epiphanies that the books say happen
to those who stare at death.

No.
He got angry. Mad. Mean.
He could be such a bastard.

And this,
this is my secret.

There were times,
There were times, you see,
Times when I wished he was already dead.
Only because
He could be such a bastard
And I was no better than a child
who wishes her parents away when they're unjust
for lack of understanding how the cruelty of the world touches those who touch her.

But now
Today
I know I never wished that at all.
I'm a carp on the river shore
Trying to find a way to breathe.

Today

I told my husband to call the God-damn tv company because they overcharged us
again
And he laughed ,
Not at me, but because he is
Delighted to do the mundane tasks of an ordinary human being.
And outside our window, the snow drips, drips, melting in the Colorado February
sun
He will be honored to shovel the slush from the back patio
Because today he is cancer free.

Danielle Sullivan is an assistant professor of English at San Juan College and lives near Durango, Colorado, with her husband and two sons. Her husband is battling advanced stage lung cancer.

Marc Thompson

that thing you sort of wanted to know about but didn't really want to ask:

I kept going.

cuz it was either that or jump into a barrel & wrap myself in rags & kerosene & pull the lid shut & light a match & spend the next thousand years in more pain than even God can imagine.

cuz it was worse than that heart-attack feeling you get when you really screw up like that time you were speeding & the cop pulled us over & THEN you remembered the stuff in the trunk & we knew, WE JUST KNEW, the cop was gonna search the car & we were gonna pay big time.

or that oh-shit moment you had when you walked into the biker bar wearing shorts/Topsiders/a blue blazer; or that time when you were a kid & you jumped off the roof & suddenly realized that yr mother was right: you REALLY CAN'T fly & that was a big problem cuz in a coupla nanoseconds you hit the ground & broke yr leg.

it was even worse than after george w. bush was re-elected & we planned our escape to Canada cuz we expected christian storm troopers at ANY MINUTE to batter down the front door & drag us screaming into the park across the street & execute us & hang our heads on pikes as a warning to the neighbors.

it was REAL FEAR: a noun, persistent, a steady state that washes over you & drowns you & suddenly makes hard-core alley-puking piss-stained alcoholism a viable lifestyle.

STILL don't know what I mean?

It's like I was run through with thirteen samurai swords that emerged from my body at various jaunty angles and then I had to walk across a REALLY HUGE grand ballroom like you see in the movies with hundreds of crystal chandeliers & veined French mirrors and if I didn't hold my torso perfectly rigid the swords would slice me into twenty-six pieces & each piece will lie bloody & writhing on the floor in cold burning pain that I

would do anything, ANYTHING to avoid--kill my mother, eviscerate my neighbor, jump from a roof--& I always wondered what I did to deserve it cuz I was careful NEVER to argue & ALWAYS do as I was told even when it involved great personal inconvenience; & the polished floor of the Grand Ballroom was covered with a slick

pool of oil & I was wearing my finest slippery pair of leather-soled/leather-heeled shoes & in twelve seconds a secret gate was gonna open & release ten thousand rabid sewer rats that would rather rip the flesh from my bones than fuck.

but don't take my word for it: you know what happened to me? that thing that makes a meat grinder look like fun and that's so freakin scary that you can't even say its name?

it isn't as rare as you think: it's all over the place & could happen to anyone & WILL happen to maybe a coupla billion people & there's a real good chance you'll be one of them.

Now it's your turn. Start walking.

Marc Thompson is an 9 year leukemia survivor and stay-at-home dad in Minneapolis, MN. He has an MFA from Hamline University where he successfully defended his thesis while undergoing chemotherapy. Fear and anger are inextricably related and must be dealt with by those with life-threatening conditions. This is a response to those who wish to marginlize us in an attempt to avoid their own fear.

Emily Treakle-Chase

Hospital

Sick tissue feels
like hard rubber,
hiding bones

There's no difference
between muscle and fat

Thin bodies turn large
Thick bodies turn small

Bruises appear
out of nowhere

Joints refuse to bend,
Mouths get sticky,
Eyes dry out

Some people let it happen
with no visible anger or regret

Others complain,
feigning ignorance as
to why their bodies
have betrayed them

They don't know that
I can feel it,
the sickness doesn't
hide from me

I try to work it
to make the tissue
normal again

Sometimes it works

I wish they couldn't
see the hopeful, sorry
look in my eyes

I'd take it from them,
if I could,
but, I don't want it either

Scene from a Nursing Home

"I won't give up on them."

Without judgment
I uncover
her swollen feet

Neglectful, forgetful maybe,
she had
slid into
a size 6

Now her sister knits
extra wide slippers
for her diabetic feet

No sores
I grasp her toes

Sigh

Silence thumps loudly

as we wait
for her to relax

When she does let go,
her feet slip
into lateral rotation

Hands move
lightly
respectfully

“I’m not going to give up
on them.
I’m not ready to go without them.”

I don’t really
want to touch her feet-
they’re squishy

There’s no way
I can find her bones
They’re lost in
all the fluid

But someone
had painted her toenails
a pearly pink

Holding feet is part of my job
It might help her
hold onto her feet

Emily Treacle-Chase is a Licensed Massage Practitioner in Western Washington. She finds inspiration from all her patients and is learning from them how to deal with her own health issues.

Gary Turchin

I’m Not Going To Tell You Everything Is All Right

I’m not going to tell you everything is all right,
That getting a debilitating,
methodically disabling

chronic illness
has made me a richer, better, more enlightened person,
That I've made peace with the war inside
Made friends with my enemies
Made love to my beloveds
Made a compact with my God
Made myself a man amongst men.
I have not.
I have not.
I have only stood shoulder to shoulder with my frailties
Leaned on them
Had them lean on me
Stood amongst the broken weeds
Bled
Cried
Picked up my bags
And carried them down the road as before
As before

There is a difference though
There is

The load is oddly lighter
When you can't carry more
Less becomes you
Less and less becomes you
Not that you
or I
are less
Just that less truly is more
And that's what I do have to tell you.
that less truly is more
drop a bag
drizzle a few drips away
in the end
not even skin
is worth its carry
worth its wait
or weight
in gold
shed even this

you garden snakes
the only load
I can discern
on the only road
worth its weight
in marigolds
is the abundant sparkle
of kindness—
As much to self as other—
And forgiveness,
The rich deep plunge of forgiveness,
To self
as much as to others
Not that I have forgiven
mind you
or been truly kind
I'm not going to tell you everything is all right
Remember?
Just that I can't carry the load of so much loathing—
As much to self as other—
As I could before
And so it is the debilitating walk
That makes the walker lighter,
And so it is,
My condition—
My new friend and comrade—
that strips me of my stripes
And leaves me defenseless.
And so, given no choice,
I celebrate defenselessness
I defend it
Come let's walk
There's dripping to do
And dripping to be done
Remember, I'm not going to tell you everything is all right.

Second Chances

I wonder if the Universe got a second chance
would it still use the same old trick:
the Big Bang,
to invent itself?
Bit of a showy start, if you want to know the truth.
Maybe it had no choice,
technology had not evolved
and it really only had one good tool to pry it all open,
unbounded energy,
and so it erupted
like a petulant child—
One as big as God—
and so we have a petulant universe
always throwing fits
tossing babies with the bathwater,
But in the calm open seas between storms
something akin to a God
swims in the easy current of awareness
and maybe, if we swim with it long enough,
learn is permutations, embody its rhythms,
enough of its moxie, without the mayhem,
will rub off
and we, too, will swagger
toward some unknown moment
where our charge will meet its fuse
and everything we say and do
will erupt into a firework of stars
and galaxies
and spiraling comets
and life-supporting suns
and even the pitter-patter of little feet
and the water will stay in the tub,
all warm and safe,
all of us, warm and safe,
this time around.

Gary Turchin is a poet, artist and performer, and the author/illustrator of the wondrous *If I Were You* (2011 Simon DeWitt) See www.garyturchin.net. For the past 7 years, Gary has battled with Parkinson's disease, but he continues to write, perform, and illustrate and says he is producing the best work of his life. Gary created, produced and performed a one-man comedic poetry show for kids, which he has performed in more than 300 schools and libraries throughout California (www.garyturchin.net). "My art and writing are my medicine," he says. He has a one-man show about his battle with Parkinson's called **The Healthiest Man on Earth, A Poet's Journey with Parkinson's**

Kris Underwood

Going for the MRI

They call it an
"Open MRI."
There's nothing open about it
From where I lay
Wound up,
Arms crossed like Egyptian royalty;
Mummified, too, in hospital gown and garb.
I had forgotten how much noise it makes-
Clanks, whirrs, off-beat beeps, machine gun rounds-
As it takes pictures of my brain,
Landscape of knowledge, so many unknown things.
They gave me yellow foam earplugs
To stifle the noise.
Still, it penetrated, ricocheted.
Claustrophobia sets in
And I recite "Lady Lazarus" in my head-
One year in every ten.
But this is no resurrection.
A voice over the intercom
Interrupts my inner narration:
"Too much movement."
Stillness is essential here,
Which I have disrupted
With the unconscious shifting of my legs.

The room is stark,
White, sterile-
Never reassuring.

Dreams, Diagnosis, Recovery

When my back went out
That year,
My body began to
Speak to me through dreams.

In the beginning

Rats

Gnawing

Voraciously and horribly

At my feet.

And then, the real pain came-
Debilitating, numbing
Hip to toe
Hunched over, hinged.

(Diagnosis: slipped discs)

In a dark room

Body propped by pillows

Comatose in bed from pain

The nerve pulsates, exposed

Between hair and scalp.

I touch it.

Dream reflects reality.
Upon waking, position has not changed:
There are pillows
The head tingles slightly,
Pulsates, even.
The drugs don't work.

Riddles:

"You're spine is the 16th form of glass"

"This is where your back is self-repairing"

"That man is harnessing the lightning himself!"

Men's words rattle and fade

Into morning:
There is straight-standing
Movement
And no recollection of pain.

Kris Underwood is the Social Media Manager for *Hunger Mountain*, journal of the Vermont College of Fine Arts. Some of her work has appeared in *Literary Mama*, *Poetry Midwest* and others. Find out more at her blog, krisunderwood.blogspot.com, where she sometimes writes book reviews and other literary-minded things. She's been dealing with Epilepsy her entire life.

Bobbie Valentine

Killing the Axe man

A body bent on betrayal,
plotting in secret and waiting to spring.

Flogging me again and again,
always to my horror.

Growing darkness under the surface,
encased in my enemy with no reprieve from its prison.

I refuse to be a docile inmate.
I fight and hold secret meetings of my own
to design my last stand.

To thwart the persistent harrier to whom I'm bound one hundred years.
I choose victory...Tell the axe man to run.

A sufferer of Chiari Malformation & Syringomyelia. This is a condition that in simplified terms squashes the base of the brain into the spinal column. In 2003 she had brain surgery to decompress the area so that she could remain alive and breathing (much to the dismay of her enemies). She lives in constant pain that she chooses to medicate with sarcasm and laughter. Her illness has inspired a new motto and way of life for her: Live your lives with love, laughter and compassion...but most of all remove your filter and speak your mind. You never know when it will be your last opportunity.

Marian Veverka

Lady Bountiful

All summer her kitchen overflowed with fruit
Such strawberry sweetness, a little rhubarb added
Poured into small glass jars , gleaming with
Ruby promises

Strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, the wild
Varieties - sweeter than the tame, plucked from
Thickets, scratches on the hand and arms, attacks
From angry squawking birds, purple lips and
Purple hands, rewarded we carried home jams
And pies made from the bottled fruit.

And pickled, “got pickled” she joked while she
Attacked the garden – cucumbers, beans, squash
Pint jars topped with head of flowering dill.

Peaches, apples, plums and pears, the orchard
Did not escape her kettle; many a moonlit night
The moon itself a ripe fruit dangling overhead
While a thousand crickets chirped their serenade.

Then the tomatoes – nothing but work – why did
She plant so much? “The grandchildren”, she’d
Answer and point with pride, the rows of bright
Red jars waiting to be added to sauces, spagetties
Salsas, chilies, juice. She’d feed the world if she
Could. No one left her kitchen without a jar or two.

She’d puff for breath when climbing up the cellar stairs.
Then laugh off our concern. “I’m 70, what do you
Expect” We wanted to say “Slow down a bit, Your
Shelves would feed the town for years.” We never did.

It was the mailman, on his bitter February rounds who
Noticed her lights still on. He stopped to check, then
Called the 911 squad who hurried but it was hours
Too late. A stream of red ran down the cellar stairs.
Tomato juice, she had a jar clasped in each hand. It

Could have been her life-blood, poured out for all to
Share. Her bounty divided among all those in need

That summer it was a shock
To see her garden, bare

Autumn Sacrament

In the street where we lived
Smoke like blue bubbles
Rising from piles
Of run-away leaves
Maples and oaks
Beeches and sycamores
Threw down their burdens
dancing for joy
Down all the sidewalks
Watched the leaves turning
To colors we gathered
and raked every yard
Had its own offering
Ready and waiting for
Fathers to kneel
Squatting before them
With matches in hand
Flames rocketing skyward
Explosions of color
A one-minute offering
So quickly they
Sink into dark
Ashes glowing
Spirits ascending
In great plumes of
Smoke hiding our faces
Erasing the stars.

After the Warning

As I was saying before those warning sirens sounded
And I don't mind admitting to a little fear
For none of us knows what is about to happen

And we've had some very bad storms so far this year
Perhaps instead of listening to my lecture
We put some music on and settle back and listen
And talk together softly if you want to.
The truth is what I was going to say—just doesn't
Seem important. When the sky turns green and
The air is filled with warning...
We still don't know where it might have touched down
If anyone wants to say a prayer, no one will care
If the power goes out, they'll send us all back home
Which I do believe is where we all belong.

Marian Veverka has written poems, short stories and two unpublished novels. Her poetry has recently appeared in "Moondance" Magazine, the anthology "Bigger Than they Appear", "A Prairie Journal" & "Occupy Poetry." She has won prizes and awards for her work. She is a retired librarian, a mother, grandmother and gardener. She lives in "Ohio's Lake Erie Vacationland."

Marian Veverka has been diagnosed with "Parkinsonism" a condition of the central nervous system, which as yet has no cure. Parkinsonism includes several diseases of the CFN including Multiple System Atrophy. Unfortunately, a true diagnosis can only be made at autopsy.

Colleen Wells

Lithium

I am back upstairs on the adolescent ward,
lying in bed with my arms out to my sides.
One woman is holding a plastic tub filled with needles and vials.
Another one finds the vein she has been looking for, pats it with her finger,
cleanses the spot and sticks the needle in.
They are preparing me for lithium.

For nine months I've been in and out of the hospital
and I get the diagnosis of manic-depression
the moment the insurance money runs out.

We Line Up

In the hospital we line up for medication.
We line up for breakfast.
We line up.

In the hospital we line up for group.
We line up for dinner.
We line up.

Sometimes the lines get broken.
Charlie makes a beeline for the kitchen,
spilling soup as he goes.
Code red.

Meghan falls.
She's having a seizure.
The line becomes a circle.
Code blue.

Eliza's off by herself,
crying again.
Tears ride the lines of her face.

In the hospital we line up for popcorn.
We line up for bed.
Some of us sleep, some of us can't.
In the morning we line up for vitals.
We are alive.
We line up

Colleen Wells writes from Bloomington, Indiana, where she lives with her husband, three children, and numerous pets. When asked whether or not she would rather have bipolar disorder she would say she's had it so long she doesn't know any other way. She writes about her disease to raise awareness and inspire. You can read more about her at www.ColleenWells.net

L.D. Williams

Six Feet Under

When I'm six feet under, she said,

tell me, then, what is on your mind,
but for now, be my lost youth—
My prince in time.
Tactile love, my longing,
never a slave to stigma, inflames
a craving for my heir apparent—
My creation in his prime.
A mother, flesh and blood, and a
son would sup on the nectar of
sweet rapture—
If only enchanted rhyme could
ensnare him unaware and
transport him to her toxic realm
where right and wrong join hands.

Dreamscapes

The stuff and nonsense of inner self:
loose and frayed ends...
of life on a quest—
endless replays...
variations on a theme—
sift the shadowy depths beyond the
gentle wake of slumber and swim
on a luminous night tide where demons
drink their fare and rend the flesh
of troubled wounds and wrest
from the rag doll of reason
glimpses of naked self...
unbridled
on the slippery slopes of sanity
where hope and despair collide.
A playground, a carousel, fleet cameos
vanish in the depths of sleep as fireflies
winking in the distance...
silent boisterous beacons—
reality parsed in mixed metaphors,
yet staged and mercurial, they dislodge
as dreamscapes on the ebb tide.

“Dreamscapes” and “Six Feet Under” reflect insights derived from Lewis Williams' tumultuous youth. Over the years, however, he has been progressively successful in his struggle with depression and anxiety.

His childhood was rife with angst amidst the seemingly endless turmoil and violence of highly dysfunctional parents – both unhappy and contentious lawyers. His mother was an alcoholic as well.

His career path followed “the practical road too frequently traveled” – B. S., Business Administration, Accounting – which was not only stultifying but failed miserably to harness his creative energies. Now, small condensed forms have best supplied the inspiration and purpose needed to fill his retirement and compliment his other hobbies. He has been married for forty years and has two wonderful daughters.

Changming Yuan

Masking Up

to my surgeon in charge
my puffed piggy face
is just another common case
 of allergic reaction
to sensitive cefazolin
for my wife still with her appendix
 intact close to her idle womb
this face has all its wicked wrinkles
 ironed out, every caved-in surface
was evenly filled or dressed up
indeed, it looks younger, more attractive
 and even sexier, as if it had gone
through a perfect plastic surgery
but nobody except my old self
in this world of fret and frenzy
 suffering alone from the pink itchiness
as I long for the return of my own face
not handsome
but authentic enough

Vegetarian Will

All he wishes
Is to have this
Hardy heart of his
Transplanted to
A dying Douglas fir
Thus adding a bit of
Ever green to
A wild wild world
Withering

Changming Yuan, 4-time Pushcart nominee and author of *Chansons of a Chinaman*, grew up in a remote Chinese village and published several monographs before moving to Canada. With a PhD in English, Yuan teaches independently in Vancouver and has poetry appear in nearly 470 literary publications across 19 countries, including *Asia Literary Review*, *Best Canadian Poetry*, *BestNewPoemsOnline*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *London Magazine*, *Poetry Kanto*, *Poetry Salzburg*, *SAND* and *Taj Mahal Review*.