

The Barefoot Review

Winter 2011

Editors

Amy King

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

Nicholas Gordon

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.

Mel Glenn

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

Jason Teeple

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.

www.jasonteeple.org

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Sonnet Alyse

Epilogue

If I remember the echo of your laugh
and the crescent moon curve of your smile
but happen to forget your middle name
Is that okay?

If I retell your stories and yet mix up
some of the details, even tell them wrong
while trying to preserve your legacy
Is that okay?

If I remember a fistful of your faults
downfalls each of us has and endures
along with every part I loved so dear
Is that okay?

If I remember you just as best I can
each part, purpose, beauty, imperfection
each act of kindness, true as my heart recalls
Is that okay?

When I hold your memory in my heart
photographs and film reels inside my head
of your love, of your life, of you:
I think that is okay.

Sonnet Alyse is a Texas native who works for her church part-time as the Ministry Assistant and also nannies twin girls part-time. She writes about life as it comes her way, or packs her bags and takes off to see life from another perspective. She may not be poetry, but she tries to be.

Sonnet's Grandmother, Beverly, was diagnosed with lung cancer several years ago when Sonnet was a teenager. She bought hats and scarves for her when she went through chemo: tiny offerings of love. She wishes she could have heard more stories from Beverly's difficult and lovely life. "Epilogue" is a continuation of keeping her Grandmother's, and any loved one's, memory alive. Some memories may become fractured slightly over time, like worn out photographs, yet they are still treasured: a beauty no tragedy can take away.

Karen Alkalay-Gut

The curtain opens

A hushed silence falls upon the audience —
in this case the patient,
and me
curled up
next to him
on the narrow bed.

And as if
an extra old lady
mattered to the diagnosis,
the big nurse booms,
"This is really not all right,"
And I leave the stage.

To a friend:

What if I suggest
you stop asking questions
There are other ways
to show us you care
And I'm scared enough
without trying to think
Of what will come next.

When you came home from the hospital

After the diagnosis
After the laparoscopy
After the PET
Your face spoke to me
from another world
Lit from a reflected source
at an angle

Diffused
Translucent

I could not be sure
if it would grow
or fade

In the Afternoon

The IV poles
stand at attention
crowded together
in the middle of the room

All morning they have been weighing
heavy packets on their outstretched asymmetric arms
every one assigned
to a helpless patient
who becomes so attached he may
even take it with him to the toilet
and lean on it for balance.

In the afternoon
there is much need
for the company of others,
and the quiet
of a seemingly empty room.

Karen Alkalay-Gut has published over 25 books of poetry in English and in translation to Hebrew, Spanish, and Italian. In these poems, part of a sequence, she writes about her husband's sudden diagnoses of stage 4 lymphoma in March, 2008. The poems were not offered for publication until a recurrence of the disease made it apparent that other sufferers and their loved ones seem to be in need of information about some of the emotional reactions.

Michele Battiste

What your Father Said

It's typical
of my luck

to connect pain
with your quickening.
My luck to be sent
away from the emergency
room by a cocksure
doctor who smiled
as he adjusted
the position of my cervix,
demonstrating to his
intern the difference
between discomfort
and pain. Even when
the routine ultrasound
finally found cysts
tugging on my ovaries
like needy urchins,
my luck to suffer
a long weekend
before the first
surgical consultation.

Last night,
the three block walk
to the subway set loose
the pain like a coop
full of anxious pigeons
and I collapsed across
a bench, slack as a drunk,
the roundness of my belly
protesting surrender.
Your father sat
at my feet, handsome
in summer
linen, bobbling
a clutch of balloons
for the party
we wouldn't make.

"Look," I said, hoisting
my arm up to point
across the platform.

A small group of the city's
tourists aimed
their cameras.
I covered
my face with my hands.
"It's a good picture,"
your father said,
stroking my ankle.
"Let them take it."

Michele's poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *American Poetry Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Mid-American Review*, *Verse Daily*, and *Women's Studies Quarterly*. She is the author of *Ink for an Odd Cartography* (Black Lawrence Press) as well as four chapbooks, the most recent of which is *Lineage*, forthcoming from Binge Press. She wrote "What Your Father Said" after surgery during her fifth month of pregnancy to remove two dermoid cysts from her ovary. They were causing her fallopian tube to twist, resulting in unbearable pain. She was sent home from two emergency rooms by doctors who dismissed her pain as "normal." A radiology technician discovered the cysts a week later during a routine ultrasound.

Ruth Bavetta

The Midnight Horse

gallops through the night,
his hoofs striking stars
against the black,
his breath smoldering.
I can hear him
now, even in darkness.
Eight years it's been
since I came to this place,
riding on the back
of cells gone wild. Eight years
since I entered these roads
beyond roads beyond
roads. If he comes to me again,
how shall I greet him?

Between Two Poles

He is made of spiderwebs and broken glass,
driving from here to there across the city.
The phone just cheap plastic,
easily crushed.

He knows the universal answer
but nobody will listen except the drunk
he took home to the motel.
Everyone keeps interrupting
and he must talk, talk, talk.
Ideas pursue him
into the corner of the room,
piercing him like needles.

When the hurricane has discarded him
on the strand of the worn green couch,
he swings to the ugliness of want,
when he cannot rearrange himself,
when language squeezes and disappears,
and he pulls his hearing
into its deepest recesses, when
music and air and light desert him,
and he longs for everything
to stop.

Duet for a Single Voice

It's sunny here but my head feels funny,
she says when she answers the phone,
and the doctors are all in cahoots
so there's no point in finding a new one.
Maybe I should move to Sacramento, though
it's sunny here, my head feels funny.

I can't work on my sculpture, my clay's all dried up.
I was in bed all day because of my head.
And the doctors are all in cahoots.

It is? Tell him happy birthday.

I can't remember these things any more,
Even when it's sunny my head feels funny.

Aspirin doesn't help, neither does ice.
Daddy died because they wouldn't feed him,
the doctors are all in cahoots.

I don't know if my buttercups are in bloom,
I haven't gone outside today.
It's sunny here but my head feels funny,
and the doctors are all in cahoots.

Ruth Bavetta's poetry has been published in *Rattle*, *Nimrod*, *Tar River Review*, *North American Review*, *Rhino*, *Poetry East*, *Atlanta Review*, and *Poetry New Zealand*, among others. She is included in the anthologies *Twelve Los Angeles Poets* and *Wait a Minute, I Have to Take Off My Bra*. She is a graduate of the University of Southern California; California State College, San Bernardino; and Claremont Graduate School.

Her cancer was discovered in 2003. After surgery and radiation she remains cancer free. She hopes. One family member suffered with dementia, and another struggles with bipolar disorder.

Laura D. Bellmay

Into the Garden

Nine months after my mastectomy the regimen of intensive chemotherapy that had almost taken my life came to its conclusion. Inexplicably depleted in body and spirit, a depression and consequent physical decline overtook me and worried all those who loved me.

According to everyone else I was not healing fast enough. "Shouldn't she be better by now," they wondered aloud. Friends began to step away. My husband's patience wore thin. My inconsolability became the pathology for medication and hospitalizations. Willingly, I loosened my white-knuckle grip on life. The seam between the worlds was my new aspiration.

There were other things too. There were issues in my ten-year marriage which cancer bubbled to the surface. My husband, Dean, and I absorbed the first cancer diagnosis. This second time I lost my business, my sense of who I was, my health, my sanity, my close circle of friends, my ability to make a living, my sense of self-confidence and sense of safety in the world. I did not feel safe with Dean. I did not feel safe anywhere. The entire equilibrium of our relationship was undone. We

never recalibrated.

Then at a gathering of women, Susan Bradley, suggested I pose for one of the art classes at the University of Hartford. She hoped it would give meaning to my ordeal while providing young art students with a unique and challenging painting opportunity; that of a one-breasted woman. Although intrigued with the concept, the reality of taking my clothes off in front of a room full of young men and women terrified me! I remember as a child of eight at summer camp, changing into my bathing suit in a 100-degree, bug infested, outhouse preferring that private darkness to the cool breeze in a large, girl-filled tent. At least in the outhouse no one would see my body. This overabundance of self-consciousness has a sinister lineage in a bizarre combination of childhood incest, abuse and rape. Modesty was always expected but never respected.

But the diagnosis and recurrence of breast cancer altered every held concept I had about my body. Vanquished by the impersonal hegemony of the cancer culture were modesty and all other attempts to contain myself within a body of self-worth. "Boundary" has no value in the sub-culture of cancer.

To survive this depersonalization, I adapted a blasé persona. "She" seemed able to take her clothes off with comfort and ease for various "inspections" and assorted medical intrusions including an 86-minute mastectomy. Ease was not my truth though. I hated all of it and suffered for the masquerade.

The thought of posing for an art class unnerved me. In spite of this fact however, I accepted Susan's suggestion. And, although I did not know it at the time, posing was the medicine for cancer treatment, because it was so intimate.

To have raw vulnerability appreciated and respected was essential validation at a time of my escalating isolation. Exposing myself in **this** particular way, at this particular time, was the perfect antidote to loss for a disease that exacts a tragic toll no matter how you look at it.

If I posed for the class, my fear was that I would be objectified, something that had plagued me all my life because it was a way my humanity had been dismissed and so had eaten its way into me just like cancer. I was doing to myself what I was most afraid others would do to me.

Any woman, who has cancer and loses her breast, or breasts, does not have to be ashamed. With that in mind, I had nothing to hide or cover up. A woman who has lost a breast looks like me; is me. Rather than feel objectified, the experience of posing for the class transformed me. I felt honored and honorable.

This was a time in my life that I felt I had nothing to offer myself or others but my grief. Yet by posing, I was provided an opportunity to offer what I could—who I was

in a moment in time—and this produced my healing.

After I posed for the class, I recognized that on a physical and an emotional level total exposure to the art students was not possible. Because my breast was gone (actually I felt a crater in my chest), all of my body was no longer available. A part of my soul was gone too and no longer accessible. Cut out but more than that—it is difficult to explain.

To my amazement the students saw more than my "outsides". They each used all their senses to paint. To create they seemed to tune into a Higher sensibility, their gift. Student, teacher and model; each of us brought a perspective to the room—eighteen different images emerged each with its remarkable merits—each more different from the next. Only one student painted a mastectomy scar. None of the paintings had privilege over another. They were all radically different that is what struck me most of all.

And yes, a beauty they saw in me at a time in my life when I could not see it in myself touched me deeply. It overwhelmed me with gratitude. What is shown and not shown. There are no props, no distractions. There is no scenery to get lost in or distracted by; nothing to diffuse the moment between the recognition of the subject, the artist and the viewer. There is only the landscape of the outside scars and the mystery of the inside ones you are not permitted to see.

I posed for the class. I did so against my husband's wishes. This was not without cost. Posing and healing was more important than my husband's fear. No matter what, my intentions were right and true. This experience is one I will never forget.

Laura D. Bellmay, a retired fundraising and development consultant, won a "Best of Letters to The Editor", from *The Hartford Courant* in 1991. She was also featured in a series of articles in issues of *The Uxbridge Times*, Ontario, Canada in 2006.

She was hosted by The Axe Factory Players, Collinsville, CT in a reading and audience participation event of an original work titled, *Holy Communion*, an essay about growing up Catholic in 1950's housing in Foxon, Connecticut.

Laura began writing for the love of the craft, after her first cancer diagnosis in 1996 when exposed to the works of Deena Metzger; essayist, novelist and lover of interspecies cooperation. Ms. Bellmay's experience in Zimbabwe on September 9, 2011, along with five other spiritual seekers, was a salient subject of Deena's book, *Entering the Ghost River: Meditations on the Theory and Practice of Healing*. Laura participated in various one-on-one and other workshops with Ms. Metzger, during intensives with Deena in Topanga Canyon, California.

For the last four years, Laura's writing teacher and mentor has been Sharon Charde, retired psychotherapist and author of *Branch in His Hand* and *Bad Girl at the Altar Rail*.

With her husband of 20-years, Laura makes her home in Collinsville, Connecticut,

surrounded in the furry wisdom of two rescue cats; Scooter and C. C.

Linda Benninghoff

Into the Garden

Leave me alone or go
into the garden
where two chipmunks
left over from September
are mating and the fire
of the chrysanthemum shines.
In the garden there is an urn
containing your brother's ashes.
He died at age 52,
so much younger than you and me.
I don't know why,
except that he must have pulled
death towards him, as with
the oars of a boat. Did he one day
find himself stranded,
in a lake of sadness,
wanting to die?
You said he got cancer. But your
body and my body carry on,
as we walk through this apartment house
we share, even
toward winter—the snow
will start to stick to the trees.

Linda Benninghoff wrote this poem for a friend's brother who died of cancer. She was recently biopsied and they found suspicious cells in her thyroid. She published most recently in *Canary: a Journal of the Environmental Crisis and OCHO*.

Mike Berger

Wishing Well

A lonely parade
coins tossed into the wishing well
wishing for a tender touch.

Coins of curious make
splashing down, but
the wishes are the same.

The rich man tosses in
a gold coin, hoping
to buy love.

The pauper drops in a single penny
there are tears in his eyes.
Solemnly shuffling away.

Approaching the wishing well,
I hold out my hand and
drop in a handful of change.

Go Away

A psychotic orangutan swings from
clothes lines. Purple pelicans eat
green eggs and ham. Blue albatross
wrestle with Winnie the Pooh. They
dine on dandelion greens and kosher
wine.

An acre of red roses grow in the onion
patch; making marigolds weep. The
neurotic grizzly bear bays at the moon,
disturbing the yellow dog's sleep.
Superman swims in a pool of cherry
Jell-O.

The Grinch repented and is now reborn;
he preaches the gospel of fire and ice.
Alligators form a hard rock band; they play

silence. The reservoir is empty to the
brim.

You say these things aren't real. They are
psychotic delusions. They've cut off my leg,
and it's the damned pain medication.

Mike Berger is an MFA. He is retired and writes poetry and short stories full time. He has been writing poetry for less than two years. His work appears in seventy-one journals. He has published two books of short stories and five poetry chapbooks. He is a member of The Academy of American Poets.

Mike lost his left foot at the shin three years ago due to diabetes. He began writing poetry as therapy for depression. His initial works were awful. Since then he has found a unique voice and has become an accomplished poet

Rose Mary Boehm

Meningioma

Perhaps I should have felt
something akin to gratitude,
as in "Uff, I am still here...
so glad to be alive!"
Instead I took it as mine by right.
With indifference.
I existed before and I do now. However,
something important happened between.
And where was I?

I remember you were my steely walker.
Both arms around my waist, my feet on yours,
you took me for our daily slow waltz
along the corridors of that place
where I was birthed again.

When you danced me to the bathroom,
when that steamed-up mirror showed me
an alien drooping, drooling mouth,
your eyes still loved me.

How did I get there? How
did I fall into a gap filled with fragments

of someone who seems familiar?
I do recall 10 million termites feeding
in my skull; eating into carmine
and sharp yellow, swimming
in poison green across the ocean
on the inside of my eyes.
My cranium - too small for armies
of that magnitude - pushed out
my eyeballs. Fever shook me.
Was that how it was?
I saw you there.

The surgeon's face leaned over me:
"Señora, it'll be the day after Christmas."
and took my husband for a man-to-man.
They brought a wheelchair.
Curiously, I was grateful.

At the appointed time
someone wheeled me into cold.

Eleven hours, I was told, they sliced
and hunted spidery extensions
that had invaded furtively a territory
I had believed inviolate.

Locked into a choreography
of life and death, a part of me
remained awake.

*We consign our bodies to oblivion
until some of it goes missing,
or perhaps plays host
to 10 million hungry insects.*

I may have laughed.

*The surgeons don't speak English.
Could someone in my present situation
manage foreign tongues? Perhaps I ought
to be more solemn. After all, this is about MY life.
Isn't it funny?*

Some bad footage of my film
was left behind on that cutting-room floor.

Will there ever again be an uncut version?

A German-born UK national, Rose Mary Boehm writes in English and lives in Lima, Peru. She is the author of two novels: *Coming Up for Air* and *The Telling*, both published in the UK in 2010 and 2011 respectively. Her first collection of poetry, *Tangents*, was also published in the summer of 2011.

Her tumor, detected in Madrid, Spain, in December of 2000, was operated during eleven hours on 26 December. She died and was reborn. A near-death experience during those hours changed her life and opened the doors to a new way of seeing the world and her role in it.

Joan Colby

Rehab

Wheeled in, first thing she says,
You must revoke that chair
And get up on your feet. The four big screws
Securing an 8-inch plate into my femur
Scream. The long scar knits red. The bolt turns
Its stainless axle in my hip. I swallow an oxycontin.
She says pain impedes healing. Don't be concerned
With addiction. But I am
Already thinking of how soon I can
Have the next sweet capsule.

I steer the walker like a plow,
Mount the treadmill and stride,
Ride the recumbent bike,
Gradually increasing the tension.
Every session, she says, do more.
Do twenty reps. Do thirty. Balance
On the see-saw board,
A thing any child can manage

I watch the others
The man with the new knee
Who clumps stiffly at her mercy.
The woman with the hip. I'm
Doing better than she is. Competition
Rides the machines. Our horse show
Shows who has ambition and who falls off.

The day she says to climb the stairs
I look at her as if she'd ordered me
Up an unnamed peak in the Andes.
Eventually I get there, eighteen steps.
She says come down, go up, do it again.

She is unforgiving. A tartar. Makes me
Walk outside and circle the entire building
With my silver cane. Then she
Takes the cane away, my last contrition.
I hate her. Young, blonde, strong.
A Valkyrie. Gotterdammerung.

A year later, I meet her on the street.
She rushes up and hugs me.
So good to see you on your feet.

Flares

The gastroenterologist holds up
A photo of my intestines
Which are red and copper gorges or
Badlands, nothing good here.

Scar tissue, he says. The invisible torch
Of radiation. A backfire
To save me. Thirteen years
Of lucky numbers. Only,

As with any fire, there are flares
From those embers, small red hearts
In ash. Who knows
When they will catch.

I wake to burning the way a witch
Is taught the liturgy.

Joan Colby has seven books of poetry and over 900 poems in publications such as *Poetry*, *Atlanta Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, etc. She received a Fellowship in Literature from the Illinois Arts Council and two literary awards.

Her poems have to do with two separate events. The first, a bad fall on ice that resulted in a severely fractured femur. After nearly a year going to rehab, she regained most of her mobility—a hard thing for a horsewoman who was always physically fit and athletic. The second poem is about a bout with endometrial cancer that involved a radical hysterectomy

and sixty-four radiation treatments. As they say "what doesn't kill us, makes us stronger."

Harry Calhoun

Stanch the Seizure

The stanch that stops the coming seizure,
what halts the feral fear,
the ditch you dig
that fights
the next fire,
the solitary nothing
on the runway
taxiing toward uncertainty
but it is yours alone
and alone is a frightening flight
to catch, one
with no pilot,
guided toward the coming
certain seizure, with no dog
but you in the fight

Pneumonia and Rejection

I dream amethysts blooming in the night sky.
Purple on black, canvas of bruise
so slow to show its true colors. Even the beautiful
seems extraneous and unreachable.
I'm starting to catch my breath
in this slow recovery but I can't catch up
with what it is to be without her.
I never wanted any of this, disease
or dispossession. For now, I'll think
of amethysts and the impenetrable dark
and hold on to whatever remains

of this bruise of a dream.

The End, Envisioned

Wakes you up in the middle of the night
like a freight train begging you
to catch the caboose. Ruin, the last thought,
the hunger pang near the heart that you mistook
for the lazy lap of death. Face down in a pond
and drowning in what might have been.
Waking loathing what you should be healthy
napping through. Sleeping uneasy, old bones
wracked with the wheeled bump and shatter
of the cart over the bumpy rutted road on your way
to the inevitable gallows. Hung high, boots steaming
warm in the frosty air as the old legs
kick their last. And still you strive to breathe.
The seizure sometimes kills its passenger.
Pray that this time it will not be you.

Fog

1/24th of a movie, they tell me,
is spent watching black dead frames.
But it is the rest of it we remember, the color.
Here remembering my jet black Lab
under the sudden dimlit lap of morning,
I see how sun crowds in and splits
the night into its separate moonlight halves.
I've had seizures, cracked ribs and worse.
Uncertainly had been my thorny path to traverse.
Conviction is the road I haven't been able to travel.
Its direction has slipped slippery by me,
a shot that I have taken in the arm but has yet
to numb the pain. The trees are dark and moody here,
but they are all I have to anchor me,
in whatever unsure and wavering buffer

against the hurricane battering foggy,
the always threatening blackness and
the slammed door of forever knocking its last.

The fog creeps in, Sandburg has told us,
but he never told us how to silence
the moist slap of its little cat feet.

The will to live meets alcohol

Flat on your back, she's gone,
seven years of what is now bad luck
slung around your neck like a stone.

The cross you could not bear.
you struggled for a way
to pull out the nails. Alcohol

loosened, offered a way out,
tore ragged holes in the wrists
in the process. You proceeded on instinct,

forgot to ask Jesus or anyone
if the way out of one death
would lead to another. You long

for the old permanence, the hymn
resonating: I once was lost,
but now am found: wanting.

Harry Calhoun has had work published at odd poetry whistlestops for the past thirty years. His books and chapbooks include *The Black Dog and the Road*, *Something Real*, *Near Daybreak*, with a *Nod to Frost* and *Retreating Aggressively into the Dark*. Recently, he has had two Pushcart nominations, a Sundress Best of the Net nomination and publications in *Chiron Review*, *Abbey*, *Orange Room Review*, *Gutter Eloquence*, *Lily* and others. His latest chapbook, *The Insomnia Poems*, is just out and selling briskly.

Carol Dorf

from "The Book of Vows"

At the Hinge of Morning

Windows open and wives ask the husbands
"Did you have a good night," while they stroke back
prints from the bedding that wrinkles their cheeks,
and purse on some lipstick to look awake,
wiping the extra off with soft gauze. If
anything were fossilized, the future
would want to analyze color resins
that expose doubts about morning and marriage,
debris of night melting like the glaciers
into fixed fears that resist, and remind
us there is nowhere to go, no glass of
water waiting on some other planet
where we can dwell safely away from
the imprint we've left on this broken world.

Bypass

Red is for hearts, though you wouldn't see red
on the echo, where somehow a doctor
determines what stands out in a range of grays.
Mostly your scars are healing well, the line
traversing your chest pale pink and smooth;
the three that travel from groin to calf, more
visible, still raised, red but not bloody.
What kind of valentine's card is this?
This note contains scars, but who wants that
when there could be chocolate, or love; and french
toast in the morning. Twenty-nine years
complete with scars. "Carpe diem," Shakespeare
wrote. Today we'll walk the bay trail, maybe
drink red wine and talk in the old cafe.

need for surgery was quite a surprise to both of them. He is doing well, is back at work, and finished a book that was in progress before his surgery. Carol Dorf's poems have appeared in *Sin Fronteras*, *Spillway*, *Hip Mama: The Parenting Zine*, *The Mom Egg*, *In Posse Review*, *Moir*, *Feminist Studies*, *Heresies*, *Fringe*, *The Midway*, *Poemeleon*, *Runes*, and *13th Moon*. They have been anthologized in *Not a Muse*, *Boomer Girls*, and elsewhere. She is poetry editor of *Talking Writing*.

Iris Jamahl Dunkle

The Flying Trolley

The year I started at Goldwater I was hit by a car and temporarily disabled. Navigating the streets of New York by crutches and then by cane was daunting. But the Golden Writers saved me from my own self-pity. They taught me to not worry about the troubles of the body. And I learned by their example, watching their minds fly across the room, out the windows, and into the bright city air, while their bodies sat in their chairs.

Each week, I would take the F-train up from Brooklyn and get off at the Roosevelt Island Trolley to soar across the East river on that tiny wire. Roosevelt Island was a different place from the audacity of Manhattan. The long, thin island is book-ended by state institutions. The island itself was all but deserted. Goldwater was drab and grey. What you would expect. The food was institutional, but free and to a young graduate student that made it a feast. But the true feast happened each time I walked into the classroom, or sat down bedside with my students, many of whom could not write or even speak for themselves, to record their amazing thoughts and visions.

Before Goldwater, when I saw a sick person, or a person with a physical or mental handicap, I was polite and did not stare. But I certainly didn't see the person inside of that sick body that was still there. I thought I did. But I didn't. The first time I visited the hospital I was scared. The halls were lined with sick, disfigured people whose bodies were contorted beyond recognition. I had never seen people who were this sick before. I was afraid to look directly at them. When I met with the social worker who helps run the program she saw by my expression that I wasn't used to this sort of experience. She said, "Don't worry, they won't bite" with a smile and encouraged me to smile and get to know every person I came in contact with at Goldwater.

At Goldwater, many writers told of their lives before: their houses in Brooklyn, their busy lives commuting to work in the city. One re-told the first time her MS made her

fall while running to the bus for her late-shift as a nurse. She said she felt drunk and everyone looked at her as if she were a delinquent. Can you imagine that? Being a professional care provider and then your body shutting down on you, and everyone looking at you like you are some kind of drunk? But that's just it. Most of the students didn't dwell on the difference between before and after the disease, because in their mind's eye they still sat up straight and danced and sang just as they once had.

The most powerful moment I've ever had teaching happened the day I walked into Leticia Torres's hospital room. She was bedridden, so I sat down at the side of her bed and immediately began speaking. I introduced myself, and started talking about a writing exercise I wanted to do with her. But each time I reached a point in my speech that warranted a reply, she just lay there without moving, her eyes blinking and blinking. I didn't know what to do, so I went to get a nurse and asked what was wrong. She said. "Oh Leticia, she uses a letter-board, she's blinking because she has something to tell you. Nobody told you that?" When I walked back in with the clear plastic board, Leticia smiled at me. I held the letter-board up to her eye level and after many sorry attempts at trying to figure out which letter her eyes were pointing to, we worked out our rhythm and we were able to communicate. She was amazingly patient and she had a wonderful sense of humor. When she found out she could no longer eat solid food, she asked that the nurses give her strawberry ice cream in her feeding tube. "What's the difference?" She said. "I've always wanted to live off ice-cream anyways!" Leticia was able to stitch stories from the bare minimum of our language, the slow walk of letters to words to sentences. I was amazed at how she never forgot what she wanted to say. Her mind was as clear and deep as a well that waited to nourish. Every day I spent at her bedside was a joy. She taught me about the life of the mind, even after they body has all but completely shut down. She taught me about my own stereotypes and how the treasure I experience in my life: my baby's first smile, my first trip overseas, will always be etched in my mind and if I ever find myself in a situation like Leticia's, I can keep my mind alive through love and joy and vibrant thought.

I'll never be able to repay the Golden Writers for what they gave me in the two years I worked with them while I was a creative writing student at New York University. But since then, my life has been altered. I know myself in ways I never thought I would. And, I have again and again agreed to teach creative writing in places where it is most needed. The hospitals, the prisons, the institutions where people are no longer seen as individuals are where I am drawn to teach. Poetry is about the raw emotions of life—the things we cannot speak in words. These students have the most powerful voices because they have experienced things most people couldn't even imagine. The poems they produced while I worked with them were some of the most

powerful poems I have ever heard in my life. I'm so grateful I was privileged to listen in.

In Case of Emergency, Break Glass

The saints that lean from the rooftops on Smith Street
have grown tired of watching traffic.

I've walked through their second-storey stares
for weeks on my way to recovery,
without incident, but yesterday,

ground level, on the disheveled cement
Half-a-body poked its thin legs
out from beneath a parked car.

For a moment, I thought I'd finally found an accident,
a body to mourn.

There is a science to it:
the way a human body will react
when it's struck by a car;
the hip causes cartwheels, the knee,
a dramatic slide onto the fragile metal hood.

The positions, where and how
the body might fall, can be predicted.

My physical therapist tells me
my accident was well-choreographed.

Of course, that's how I knew
The body was a fake—a mannequin—
a false idol.

There was no question about your death.
We were told it was instantaneous—
And at the funeral we were confused not to have
A body to mourn. We buried your ashes—

My mother, dumb with grief,
Said it was because you'd been decapitated in the accident.
The firemen who found your twisted car threw up their arms.

My accident was different.
I was on the outside—a pedestrian,

Given the three-second gift of flight before
The weight of it all struck me.

There were three swollen seconds,
When I actually considered my own death;
How it would feel to be inside the twisted car

*There is a slow motion
There is no fear in an instant*

And the peace of it startled me.

Tamika

Whenever the boat is sailing
far away,
the wind moves slowly,
like soft music.
The boat like a feather.
The wind rides through the boat
filling the sails with sorrow.
I see my best friends
tired, on the boat
fading into the light, blue ocean.

—from "The Ocean and the Wind" by Tamika Walker 1997

When I think of her face,
round as a balloon
it is rising, tethered,
like the flying trolley
to Roosevelt Island.

Tamika, who could speak
metaphor unconsciously
through a sweet and breathless voice
punctuated by the rise and fall
of ventilator.

Her head, a large planet,
orbiting the tiny waste of body
spent and left to a chair.
She cometed the white tile halls,
always a child. Sprinkling tin giggles
and waving to the ones who could no longer

look up from the pattern on the floor.
Her past, seared from her mind
like a wild fire
that burns clear where
Giant Sequoia tress
will seed and rise
away from the institution
to whatever heights exist.

Esther

"I celebrate myself and have a party.
And what I assume is that everyone would have a party.
Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess a lot of fun.
You shall no longer have any troubles.
You shall look at the boys.
You shall listen to sweet music."

—-from "Delight Song of Esther Muro" Esther Muro, 1996

The cat-eyed woman curls
like a comma in her hospital bed,
blue-beaded abacus of her heart
held in her hands.

It's been eight weeks, counting,
that I've sat here bedside
in a borrowed metal chair
my body bent to hear
her graveled voice
as I hold the rising blue-tributaries
of her bird-like hands,
learn, her 10 years, 6 months
27 days and counting
institutionalized is nothing
to be divided by sorrow.

But this morning,
before we could begin writing,
the bed that neighbors hers
stared blankly back at me,
as if, it too had fallen sick,
and I couldn't help but ask

where her neighbor had gone.

"She's passed away."
She answers smoothly,
as if pushing back her hair,
as if death itself doesn't gawk
at her as it gawks at me.

And because I cannot
comprehend the equation
of 10 years, 6 months, 27 days
counting deaths,
we begin writing about
ordinary objects, the light
from her kitchen window
in Brooklyn, that if she closes
her eyes tight enough
she can still see.

Why I Work in Hospitals

How the hospital smothers things—you said
you could not work there—too much death—I said,
outside, it's everywhere, as uncontained
as lightning. Twice this week already I
was almost hit: the tongue of air that slipped
my rubber legs getting off the subway
on Wednesday—the open wound of water
that spills from the electric light, steady
as a deadly waterfall. My life has
never been so precious as it is now.
I tried to tell you how those corridors
saved me. When you come so close to death that
you believe it's yours—it's difficult to
let go—hospitals bleach that want away.

Josephine

He glanced casually into the shop windows as he ambled down the street. He was almost past the shop window when out of the corner of his eye he saw something that made him stop and turn. Retracing his footsteps, he looked more carefully and

couldn't believe his eyes. There, in the window, was the car of his dreams. It was painted a rich chocolate brown on the outside and its interior was almost the color of nougat...A salesman approached him. "How much is that car in the window?" Learning of the price he said, "I'll take two!"

The cars arrived the very next day. Eagerly, he unwrapped them and called all of his friends. He took a big bite out of the fender and said, "You see, I can eat a car!" Yes, he could, for the car was made of candy. So, don't question people when they say that they can do what seems to be impossible things."

—from "The Man Who Ate a Car" Josephine 1997.

I've lived here
now not yet a season,
where the
cherry blossoms bloom,
Washington D.C.
Our nation's capital.
you called it. Said
you couldn't write
about a place
you'd never been,
and then frowned
at the familiar eruptions
that began in your hands,
your arms, your head.
The eruptions that islanded you here.

This is Goldwater.
We are writing postcards—
poems on the back
of pictures
I've brought in.
We eat donuts
between earthquakes
and you explain
how you'd like instead
to write a letter
to the President's
cat, Boots. You'd
read about him in the Times.
But those cherry blossoms
are enticing. I wonder

what it would feel like
underneath those trees,
you said.

So I put the pen down
steady to the white page,
look up to see your face
drifting far away,
the fault-line ripping
the land from the land—
your mind from your body.

I get up, get a nurse,
she soothes you
and the earth settles.
You close your eyes to rest.
but before the watery sleep
pours over you
you take my hand,
whisper—I have more to write.

Now, your body drifts
where it is familiar.
Mind and body reunited
on the same solid coast,
and I send this postcard back
from the city we never
had a chance to write about—

The air is moist and
alive with the energy
of the city. I have not yet
seen blossoms, but I've seen
the trees preparing for
their brilliance. When
it is Spring I will bring
my children to play
in the popcorn air
of blossoms tumbling.
We will giggle and
eat donuts and tell
secrets. I will tell them

of you. This will be
one of my stories,
Josephine, the kind
we talked about.
The kind your body,
even as it erupts
and divides, can't
take away.

Iris Jamahl Dunkle teaches writing at University of California, Santa Cruz. Her manuscript *Alphabet of Bones* was a finalist for the Four Way Books Levis Prize in 2011. Her chapbook *Inheritance* was published by Finishing Line in 2010. Her poetry, creative nonfiction and scholarly articles have appeared in numerous publications including: *Fence*, *LinQ*, *Boxcar Poetry Review*, *Weave*, *Verse Wisconsin*, *Talking Writing*, *Yalobusha Review* and *The Mom Egg*.

Elizabeth Dunphey

Dr. Baum's Girl

My therapist. I was twenty four years old. I waited and suffered four years. I picked a man, and maybe I wanted to have an affair with him, in a stupid girl crush way, it's so juvenile, but I guess I thought if I fell in love with my therapist, he could cure me and whisk me away. But nothing like that happened. Dr. Baum was too professional for that. Still later on, afterwards I would always pick women — just to be sure. I think I was burned by my experience, the hospital aftermath, and I found females helped me just slightly more, like a sister, or a girlfriend, than even the most helpful man.

Dr. Baum was located in farther Northern New Jersey, in a ritzy suburb with a big mall. I told nobody I was seeing a doctor. I thought of him as a doctor, somebody who could cure me, the deep dark ailment I could not understand or name on my own, as a civilian.

Dr. Baum listened. When I think of him, I think of the calm I felt in his office, the kind of sleepy comfort you feel with grown ups. He was subdued and wore a preppy polo shirt. I could see the pictures on the wall. He liked to golf. He was even a little handsome, but I tried to focus on the task at hand.

"I fell for a boy in my class," I said, first off, point blank. Had to start at the beginning. "I think I loved him but we never spoke and he doesn't want to see me or

talk to me. I email him late at night and even sent him my picture. It's been four years ago, this December."

"December?" he inquired. It was the middle of May. I forgot how normal people were, I forgot how they didn't think the month December mattered, didn't measure time in snowflakes and Christmas trees, in menorahs and fur coats and Leonard Cohen songs the way that I did. December wasn't just a month, it was a year and it was an eon, and I lived in my snowball and you could shake the ball and there I was, right in the center, and shivering.

However, he did think I could try a new anti depressant called Havoran. It worked well on young women.

After a couple of weeks, I had finished the bottle. Something was happening though. I remember it so clearly. I was on my bed, reading an Susan Minot novel, when I saw the paper on my desk move.

At midnight, I called up Dr. Baum and informed him of my master plan to wed Nicholas Rosen. And, by the way, what was Nicholas's phone number? Satan told me this was all a web, like Rosemary's Baby. You never knew who would turn you in.

"Did you finish your medication, Layla?" he asked,

"Yeah," I snapped. "I finished the whole bottle," He was quiet. I have two week's worth, and those weeks had passed. My doctor misunderstood. He thought I took the entire bottle that night. And so he called an ambulance, and a hospital pumped my stomach, which is hardly a small undertaking but they did it without asking me.

The nurses crowded around me. They didn't seem to like me and the psychiatrist I had chosen.

"This is Dr. Baum's girl," they whispered, like I was his possession, his chica. We were close, me and Dr. Baum, and he listened to me with consideration, and I trusted him, and I called him all the time.

They pried my clothes off and filled me with charcoal, they pried my legs, they talked about how I had not shaved my legs. They spoke as if I was dead. Then after I couldn't have been more embarrassed really, hearing that about my hair and legs, they took something and put it between my legs and it felt metal like a speculum, but they vowed they had never put a speculum in me, I imagined it, they said. It was brutal and shocking for women to do to another woman and I was mute with terror. And then something in me rebelled: I began to scream bloody hell. I screamed for life. Then after a few minutes, a time I could not measure in human time, it ended and it was very quiet and I had stopped screaming and I could hear the sound of people in the hallway laughing and I realized some of them were my nurses.

"They're always like this," the nurse drawled in her South Jersey twang and it was like the nail in the coffin.

All we did was watch TV and eat chicken pasta. I do not know if the nurses raped me or not, if I imagine it or not, if my mind extrapolated, but I did feel slight an odd sensation when urinating and there was dark smudges on my toilet paper, looking a lot like dried blood.

Afterwards, I was diagnosed as bipolar and released. I went home and knew keeping a job would be impossible. I applied for disability for my mental condition and qualified. The small amount I received helped me focus on my writing, and I found a new solace in art. I regularly saw another therapist who made sure I never took Havaron or anything that would affect my system.

I have never forgotten Nicholas. Some things are in your bones. Sometimes I feel the chill of December even when it is not December. But under my medicine, the mania awaits. It lingers in the distance, a shady and attractive stranger, the guy at the bar you know you will never call, no matter how handsome.

J. Michel Fleury

Putting my faith in you

I'm giving to you
all the burdens I hold on to
all the worries I carry
all the pain my heart can't bear to keep
all that keeps me from you

I pray to be granted some peace
to trust in you
be able to give myself
completely to you
So you may provide me
with all that I may need

I'm letting go of all my worries
asking you to help me through all
that I need; I'll be putting my faith in you
so you may provide me with the strength
to hold my head high

To keep my dignity and pride
I'm letting all my anger go,
forgiving all wrongs
leaving my shackles behind
and letting go of all the pain I hold inside
I've carried it far too long
My past I cannot change;
I'm moving forward to brighter days

J. Michel Fleury grew up in Louisiana but she currently resides in Texas. Her family has overcome many struggles including being ill with cancer to the sudden loss of their father. Yet as a family they move forward with life, for although everyday is a new day and a new struggle their smiles continue to shine as bright as the sun.

Meg Harris

The Trouble with Babydoll

The Problem with Babydoll's she's always on the floor,
hard-plastic-finger-chewed with crazy matted nylon hair.

The thing about Babydoll is she can't hold her water,
one bleached eye, squeeze box's broke, no words—

She's empty-headed, Babydoll, naked too.

Her body's wrong: never a vagina, never a penis.

Poor little Babydoll, her face is scary and there's
The black and blue bruise of newsprint on her ass

The trouble about Babydoll is her head comes off.
She's not like her mamma at all, she has no heart.

Sloth

On day four, the prompt was to write a poem about an animal.
I had the idea to write a double sestina about a sloth.

I always felt bad for the sloth; a sin named after it.
Or did they name the animal for the offense?

I thought I'd personalize the poem by tying in my reclusive
tendencies, the clinical depression, my dormant ways.

The sloth keeps an inconstant body temperature—almost reptilian.
My normal body temp is 97.3 degrees. The sloth's known to maintain
a grasp for some fifteen to twenty hours after death. I grind my teeth,
even during afternoon naps when shoved by a drowse into a cavernous sleep.
The sloth is sedentary enough that a symbiotic alga grows in its fur.
It's not a disinclination to work, I don't think. But that's how Webster
would couch sloth. In the treetops—that's where it all takes place.
The sloth eats, sleeps, and gives birth while hanging from tree branches.
I'd even planned the end words for the sestina: sleep, bough, suspend,
hermit, nocturnal and sloth. All month it's made me feel out on a limb;
this unwritten poem: sluggish, idle, like I wasn't getting things done.
There are days when stillness, like a death, is the place where I'm suspended.
There, sometimes for hours, I hang.

Inquiry into Loneliness (Surveying only companions)

Robin: turns a slate tail-feather
upon my approach flies away.
Diego: Licks between his claws then
bumps his head on the edge of the laptop.
Frida: Pounces up-nails in denim, ouch!
Sam: Lies flat, legs extended, head dropped
between paws, stuck to floor like dog-rug,
and then rolls his gaze up woefully.
Dave: After scraping a final forkful of peanut butter
from the plastic jar, dozes off in his chair.
Rock: Says nothing, remaining perfectly still.
Anna: Smiles and nods, "a little bit."

Teacher and graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts, Meg Harris' work has appeared in both print and online journals; *The Whistling Fire*, *Whiskey Island*, *The Cafe Review*, *Upstreet II*, *Willows Wept Review* and others. While Meg was recovering from a stroke (2007) her adult daughter, Anna Harris, who has both physical and learning disabilities, experienced a psychotic break (2009) for which she was hospitalized. Together with their family the two women share a journey of recovery and writing. Meg wrote some of the poems included here during the weeks of Anna's hospitalization and while she (Meg) was dealing with depression and other health issues.

Meg and Anna live with their family and pets, Diego, Frida and Sammie in Massachusetts. Meg maintains a blog of her creative writing at www.blumoonnortheast.blogspot.com. Anna, who has an associate's degree and volunteers her time assisting people disabilities, keeps a blog at www.annasblog-banana.blogspot.com.

Anne Higgins

At the Gettysburg Cancer Center

Cozy club you don't want to join.
Brigade which enlists you on the side
of the invaded
in a Civil War battle.

To sign up,
admit that you are bleeding,
or that you are dizzy,
or that you feel a lump.

The anteroom
smells like coffee,
offers fruit and graham crackers.
Soon you won't want to eat
any of them.

Door number one: Chemo-
big easy chairs arranged
around a sunny room with high ceilings
cozy as a hair salon
where the hair evaporates
from most heads.

Door number two: Radiation-
more Star Trek than Cemetery Ridge.
The uniformed sailors leave you alone,
retreat behind leaden walls,
while the hammerhead cannon
grinds and rotates
around every side of you.

Feeling slippery with fatigue,
you leave for another evening

of diarrhea.
Recurring depression
delusions, dehydration
accompany you home.

After six weeks, leave the clubhouse
and almost forget
what membership cost.
You wonder about the other veterans—are they
melting, wild cells galloping away with them?
Are they, like you, returning home
scarred, but breathing victory?

Chimera

New gene called a chimera made by fusing two genes formerly located on two different chromosomes—the head of chromosome nine, say, fused with the tail of a gene in chromosome thirteen.

— *The Emperor of All Maladies*

worm of the world,
Fabulous crawling, knotted energy,
The doctors have concocted new monsters.
Herceptin will get you—
Chimera engineered
from cancer to oncogene
to targeted therapy
to human trial
Organized chromosomal chaos
Will eat you.
The Philadelphia chromosome,
chimera to cure one type of leukemia
will smother you.

Stop hesitating on the edge, cancer beast,
Take shuddering steps into the woods
where you will find the Chimera
drinking water from the plate
you left behind, beside the chair
where the weary breastless woman
takes the Chimera one drip one sip at a time
through the flexible straw

below her shoulderblade.

Oriented

My mother, though almost blind, almost deaf,
no longer able to care for herself,
is oriented.

She knows me, knows my name,
answers questions with perspicacity.
She's oriented.

The word comes from Middle English, from Old French,
from the Latin *oriens*, for the rising sun.

She is aligned with the rising sun,
familiar with family,
with her position, with her situation,
where she sits, in her wheelchair.

Actually, she's occidented.

Related to *occidere*: to fall—of the sun—
but she has fallen, broken her hip,
fallen out of bed.

Now she slides herself out of the wheelchair,
gently lowers herself to the floor.

The sun falls, and she's set.

Anne Higgins' poetry has been published in a variety of small magazines. Garrison Keillor has read two of her poems on his radio show, *The Writer's Almanac*. She has published five books of poetry: *At the Year's Elbow*, Mellen Poetry Press 2000, a republished by Wipf and Stock in 2006; *Scattered Showers in a Clear Sky*, Plain View Press 2007, a chapbook, *Pick It Up and Read*, Finishing Line Press 2008, another chapbook, *How the Hand Behaves*, Finishing Line Press, 2009, and *Digging for God*, Resource Publications 2010.

Her cancer was discovered in 2008. The aggressive treatment—radiation and chemotherapy—killed the cancer, but left her with radiation damage. Her father suffered from Alzheimer's disease, her mother, from dementia, macular degeneration, and congestive heart failure.

Val Morehouse

Sacrificial Egg

Bird beak gnawing

from within the gravid breast shell,
hatching
the lump speaks its name.
Cancer.

Cancer will give my body to medicine in a flare of anger,
my secrets become a sudden petroglyph traced
on the cave of my life,
constellations rising across celluloid nights,
a sonic flicker of my regret

measured like music and scored
on a computer screen.

Doctors will go after me with knives,
peel me like an artichoke until I learn the essence
of each next breath...

until I offer my arms to steel-toothed vampires;
until my veins leak tastes of tin cans and old seaweed;
until I fly on a wind of nausea and pain, and strangers
give me blood cells like bouquets of roses;
until I learn to accept enough wishes and prayers

for a wedding, or a funeral.

Only then I will shed flesh and curls like a sacrifice,
my head, baby bald rising like a moon
to transit anew the angle of every new
morning like an experiment in the sizing
and staging of love.

Survivor

— After surgery

Counting time, blood runs like sand under this hourglass of skin.
Shadow gathers under each cheekbone
like some dark message.

Once an arabesque of curves that was its own excuse,
I stand inside the window of my life,
and give death a kiss on the cheek.

Like a house shorn of youth's cheap gingerbread I am a
survivor of my own womanhood.

Breasts, nipples, womb, belly, hips, hands, thighs once

decorations hung on the backbone's stalk,
my woman's body is become a yard sale of
removable parts, sculpted memory of
life scarred or reshaped, plowed over and under, grown back, given away,
quilted with self-denial and cobbled with hard decisions.
Pain. Labor. Betrayal. Loss.

My heart feels stitched together like a much darned sock
that keeps turning up alone in the wash, still bearing a promise of warmth,
a gift for connoisseurs of second hand junk,
who never stop throwing it back.
Under this flotsam of regret is one used woman,
and caring buried deeper than scars,
passionate to meet each waking the way birdsong
greet air: "Laugh," I say, "and love anyway."

Former poetry reviewer for *Library Journal* and columnist for *the American Library Association's Booklist*, Val Morehouse's work has appeared in *Boston College Stylus*, *Old Colony Memorial (Plymouth)*, *Tall Windows*, *the Woods Hole Press' A.N.T.H.O.L.O.G.Y: A Collection of Cape Cod Poets*, *Bay Area Seasonal Review*, and California Poet Laureate Al Young's website under "Wild Blue Yonder." She is a breast cancer survivor, and was diagnosed with sarcoma and melanoma in 2009. A native Californian, she lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and is in remission.

David Mullen

Special Child

some live as essence,
as fundamental. looking into
their eyes goes back and back
to something beginning

joining
with everything
living. he is
that way. his silence

is a tap root, beyond words
that wither like grass
in droughts of memory.

oracular soul that moves
me to die at nights and
drown in dreams where
he runs on the green
and says "chase me,
Daddy."
but he cannot.
follow.
the mourning sun
fills his space.
but less than
the grace in his eyes
in an hour she will feed him
her body will curl above his
in her hand a tiny cup
that holds the moon
then she will clean and comb
she knows the kiss of every
scar, the wayward curves
swelling the sea of his white skin
there is a heavy weight
in sights no sun will ever see.
but still no shadow finds
his touch or clouds
the mantle of his smile.
like a holy childhood shrine
as Buddha, as the Christ:
love connecting all to all
the whole light of my broken child.

David is an academic child psychiatrist at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine. Although he is an Oklahoma native, he's lived in New Mexico for about 24 years and has become acculturated to the spiced collage that is New Mexico. He enjoyed reading poetry and literature for several years and began writing poetry actively about four years ago. As a psychiatrist, he is particularly interested in exploring the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and the "spaces between" that ordinary discourse does not capture. He also focuses on the particular sense of existential vulnerability and pain that accompanies social exclusion as well as states of anxiety and depression.

Five of his poems have been published in *the Medical Muse*, a biannual literary Journal of the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center.

He is the father of two children ages ten and thirteen. His oldest child, Daniel, has severe CP and multiple associated disabilities. He is the subject of the poem above.

B.Z. Niditch

Maxims and Aphorisms

An eye reflects upon itself, so thought ponders thought.

Paranoia is the maddest form of loneliness.

Everyone wants originals.

The trouble with confessional poetry is that it does not allow for conversation.

Art, religion and politics thrive on commentary.

Sentence is the sentence of the poet.

Those who live for catastrophe always have one.

Every art is voyeuristic.

Poetry carries on from contemplation.

Remorse always finds its way.

Along the Corridors

Blank walls
and faces
seeking
a good report
from whispers
between bodies
and nobodies
a breath and shiver
from uncovering
memory's shadows
of survival.

Two of the surgeries failed on the operating table because they could not operate on Niditch. He took the opportunity to work on maxims, aphorisms and poetry. He then became the first

to have laser surgery.

B.Z. Niditch is a poet, playwright, fiction writer and teacher. His work is widely published in journals and magazines throughout the world, including: Columbia: A Magazine of Poetry and Art; The Literary Review; Denver Quarterly; Hawaii Review;; Le Guepard (France); Kadmos (France); Prism International; Jejune (Czech Republic); Leopold Bloom (Budapest); Antioch Review; and Prairie Schooner, among others.

Darlene M. Pagán

Biopsy

Beside the number for each floor,
 animal totems—
 deer for psychiatry, butterfly
for radiology, turtle for oncology.
 The elevator
 doors open onto sunlight flooding
the windows and a wooden
 salmon
 bending mid-air for specialty
clinics. My son whines, shields his
 eyes by burying
 his nose in my neck. Last time,
he kicked and clawed me. Now
 he swears
 he'll never play with me again
if I take one more step. When
 I do,
 he says I'm not beautiful anymore.
I pull his spider man pajama
 shirt down
 his back, make sure the feeding tube
isn't tugging his cheek. Even
 his hair smells
 like formula: wet clothes forgotten
in the dryer for days. At night,

he wakes
crying, tangled up, once with
the whole tube coiled in his lap
like a snake.
Of all things today, it's the fish
that gets me. Give the kid
a hawk,
a bear, a saber-toothed tiger,
a shark, something he could
sharpen claws
on as he waits for the funny medicine
to kick in and dull him enough
he'll have
no idea I'm gone when they wheel
him away. His stomach growls,
his eyes dim.
The doctor kneads him like dough.
On the walk to the prep room,
anorexic
fluorescent lights buzz. I promise
to see him soon. He nods, eyes
fixed on
the ceiling. The doors swing shut.
I'd kill about now for a little
funny medicine
for me. Or paper to make birds
to send flying off the roof. Or
scissors to cut
them in a thousand tiny pieces.

Janus

Record rains batter the saplings,
tapping
out the seconds on the window
as I pin my toddler to the couch, his

arms twined
in mine, to force a feeding tube
down his nose. We wrestle like Janus,
two-headed
beast facing opposite directions,
him toward the past, painting toy
soldiers. Me,
inching into a future moments
from now, when I'll stand in the rain
to let
icy tendrils snake down my face,
neck, breasts. For now, the wind
shifts, gathers
dark blooms of clouds as I plunge
the hollow of his throat. He bares
his teeth.
The sun bursts across his mottled
cheek. All done, I say, pulling him
to me
but we are the god of gates and
doors, beginnings and ends. We
finish
one fight to turn for the next.

Darlene Pagan's poems chronicle moments with her son, who was diagnosed with a rare autoimmune disorder two years ago, at the age of two, called Eosinophilic Esophagitis. It's impossible to imagine but it entails the body rejecting food, and in Blaine's case, at the moment, all food. He's fed a specialized formula through a tube in his belly, which will likely mean a life without solid food unless someone finds a cure. She says writing has saved her life these last couple of years. Swimming helps too, as does digging in the rain with her sons for worms, riding roller coasters in the summer, and wrestling to show off ninja moves.

Natalie Parker-Lawrence

The Breasts of a Tall Woman or Why I Write

The reaction to trauma reflects what it means to be a human being.

Leo Tolstoy tells us that any idiot can face a crisis, but that it is the everyday living that wears us out. I think what matters, what separates us from sheep, goats, monkeys, and mean people in the presence of horror is the presence and degree of grace. Very few people in our lives ask us to understand this concept, this rising to the occasion.

We can't practice reacting to bad news. It comes, not like an approaching train with whistles and multiple cars and long wooden arms halting our approach, but instead like a squirt in the face from a surreal clown with the plastic flower on his wide lapel who previously seemed too far away to do unimaginable harm, riding an absurd toy train with no sounds and no smoke.

Since being diagnosed with breast cancer in 2005, I have had four surgeries and thirty-three days of radiation. At the first mammogram after the burns under my arm had healed, the radiology technician said that everything seemed fine. I exhaled and there was sweetness and light as far as I could survey.

"But," she said with a too serious tone, "You have something else."

Icy ball in my stomach. Sweat forming over my lip. Don't bite it. Don't cry. No moisture. Incoming. Bad News. Infinity in a moment. No oxygen. Struggle to inhale. Terror. Profuse sweat. Freezing body. Bodily functions in check—fluids and gases. Wishes and dreams. Duck and cover.

She must have noticed my face, a melting, blotchy mask of Impressionist good manners. Then she added, "You have the breasts of a tall woman." I stared, incredulous. What?

She repeated her proclamation. Then she smiled. I did not smile. And then she smiled wider, trying to be comforting in some kind of macabre raven-over-the-door way. I tried to exhale. I squinted through tears of relief. I tried to inhale. Still there was no spit in my mouth for a good fifteen minutes. All I could do was nod and smile and smile and nod, dressed in the attractive white waffled fabric that was my robe.

A week later, I told my oncologist/surgeon about this new diagnosis.

What? He had never heard of the breasts of a tall woman, and he has seen more than his fair share every day for years. He was even more offended than I at the glib tongue of the technician, wreaking damage to my flashing mental health sign, somewhere at the intersection of Death, Be Not Proud and Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night.

We English teachers know what to call our crossroads whether we stop to die or go on living. We can be Guinevere or Grendel. We can be Vivian Bearing or Voldemort. We can be Ophelia or Oedipus, Siddhartha or Stella, Icarus or Isolde. We can be Jane Bennet or Jem Finch, Medea or Marlow. We know all about choosing our nightmares: we choose not to be known only by our scars.

Writing comes after living with and through a tornado, parenting, death. I have lived through divorce, ice storms, breast cancer, jobs, betrayal, dementia, burnt

cooking, earthquakes, teaching, juvenile diabetes, lust, bigotry, being lost, and the evils of math.

This catalog, while autobiographical, is not listed in any particular chronological order. The essays in my first book occur in chronological order, I would like to think, to show noble resilience through an archetypal journey. I am more apt to believe, and my family and friends would agree, the order shows ornery stubbornness: earning an MFA in Creative Writing (creative nonfiction and playwriting) at 55 is a testament to tenacity and luck (if it ever gets published) and a few nods to mental health.

Life does not come in order of the crises you can accept. Ask that Tolstoy guy and his bud, John Lennon: Life is what happens when you're making other plans.

Besides, if chaos is not happening to you or me, it is happening to somebody you love or a total stranger.

So what is the antidote for confronting fear and trauma—the refiguring of the lungs to take in a free breath and to exhale with some regularity? Sometimes I cannot stop long enough to tell myself or discuss the answer with my friends or even strangers. I am working on that. But I can tell you what to consider: Keep Amazingly Busy. Before relinquishing your bodyfluids to the abyss called the unknown or the bathroom toilet or the coffin, hide from death. Drink, screw, and sleep with abandon. Recover. Write.

My grandmother said that anyone who could cook was well. I believed her most of the time. My friend's grandmother said to put on a little lipstick and things would look much brighter. Of course, she also said that she would rather see the crack in her ass than the crack in her granddaughter's toes and to get over it and to put on some real cute shoes.

Sometimes, you can't just "get over it," but in the meantime when it is a mean time, I think what my grandmother really meant was to think about something else, do something else, anything else—knitting, listening, kissing, walking, singing, baking, loving, gardening, dancing, planning, talking, buying cute shoes, cooking, and eating. She did not mention drinking and screwing or sleeping. She did not mention writing. But after an assault on the body, writing takes us to the other side of the breath. It is the ability to inhale again, a salve on the radiated psyche.

I am, perhaps, 5 foot 3 inches on a good day. I have the breasts of a tall woman—whatever they are or are not. Breast cancer, like any disease, is terrible. Its effects can be out there, obvious, even if only to the woman under her own clothes.

While society tries its mightiest, on television commercials and in every magazine ad, it cannot define women by their cup sizes. We are bigger than our chests full of breast tissue, linens, and hope. Instead of stuffing our bras and our egos, we stuff our heads and our hearts with things we can control and change: our awareness, our attitudes, and the number of years before researchers find a cure.

And we have to practice this living business, these choices, before and after we get breasts. Before and after we get sick. We write about the practice of doing better than the day before. Not perfection, just better.

I do not believe that my grandmother would approve of my book, a chronological collection of personal essays. She believed that people should keep their own counsel.

But creative nonfiction writers don't do that.

In my writing, my cups runneth over.

Natalie Parker-Lawrence, a writer since 1994, earned her MFA in Creative Writing (creative nonfiction and playwriting) at the University of New Orleans in 2010. Her new play, *I Bet They're Sleeping All Over America*, will have its first staged reading at the University of Memphis in Spring 2012. The Just Passing By Theatre Company in association with The Morris Theatre Guild (outside Chicago) produced *Bob War* in 2011. Adelphi University produced *Earlybirds* in 2009. The Women's Playwright's Initiative staged a regional reading in Orlando, Florida of *Upright Position* in October 2008. Her other plays have been produced in Memphis theatres. Her essays have been published in *Wildflower Magazine*, *The Literary Bohemian*, *Tata Nacho*, *Knee-Jerk Magazine*, *Edible Memphis*, *The Commercial Appeal*, *World History Bulletin*, and *The Pinch*.

Jason Parsley

Map

I have charted out the dimmest realities
like an ancient cartographer charting out
the dark side of the moon with a lantern
of feeblest light
held high,

and I cannot die now.

Pencil tracteries of madness on rice paper
vein the borders of my sanity. They draw
out the screams of crazy from the scars
I carved, no, were etched,
into my flesh.

And I will not die now

because I spoke to the moonmen, those
ungestured gestures of pain, those

unvoiced ghosts
now fading to the otherside,
of how to accept and to forgive and to medicate.

And in exchange
now I know the topography of the Tropic of Saturn
and where therein the poltergeists
Mania and Depression reside—
their scale.

Patients on the Crisis Stabilization Unit

We wait on the ocean floor six miles down
in the crushing darkness. We wait so that
we might be released and rise up to the
surface, human, in bright sunlight to
disturb the sane bathers with our bloated
minds like drowned whales.
But we are not drowned whales.
We are sea worms huddled around the tube
as if it were a lava vent watching
reruns of ER and Seinfeld. We wait
for the meds to correct our minds, to make
us want to live again, to stop the voices.
We sway in the impossibly cold currents, blind.

To: KitKat1960

From: jaysapien

KitKat1960, you told me that
after your second failed attempt
the psychiatrists finally
got you to take their
get-well pills. The meds
kept you sort of sane all these years
but at the same time they rotted out your insides.

The psychiatrists soaked your brain
in a psychotropic salve in an effort
to leach from your mind the muck of mental illness.
and so your hands tremble,
and your mouth is always dry,
and your liver function is impaired,
and your thyroid function is impaired,
and your kidney function is impaired.

What's your sanitized mind think
of the meds now as your organs snuff out one by one,
charred through and through by the slow, smoldering chemical burn?
If you had to do it over again would you take their meds
like a good patient or go out young in a dark flash of insanity?

Jason Parsley lives in Clermont, Florida. He is a student in the Creative Writing MFA program at the University of Central Florida. He has bipolar disorder and deals with it, in part, through his writing. The above poems were written during different phases of his illness over the span of about five years. Jason writes fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and hopes one day to write a graphic novel.

Amber Peckham

Eight Days

The first day you are aware for around a minute, and for half of it the room is full of your grandmother. She is injecting something into your IV, something clear that burns in your veins like the way your feet burn in winter when you come in from the cold. She is standing by the bed in three places, all of her staring at you with solemn, fearful expressions. One of her is holding your hand, and as you focus on this one you realize you are actually looking at your little sister. Her face looks too young to be standing next to you because she isn't wearing makeup. She is still wearing the pajamas you think she was wearing last time you saw her.

"You had an accident," says the grandmother at the foot of the bed with your mother's mouth, mother's gentle voice trying to break the news to you like you are made of glass. You feel like you are made of insulation or cotton candy, cotton candy made of real cotton, shot through with veins of toxic lead. You wonder if the remaining grandma on the right that is still injecting things into you knows that she has been dead since February.

"Your eyes look like hard boiled eggs," your sister says. You say something back but you don't remember what it is.

"I don't think a mirror is a good idea," your mother says.

bad ideas

mirror
sleep
accident
pain
eat
stand
morning

The next time you are awake the room is full of shapes that are people. They talk to you in happy voices and as they move close they become brilliantly clear. Their revealed faces make you think of artifacts from pirate ships, dredged up from the depths of jewel-colored oceans. They move in cycles, the people you love flapping in and out of your limited field of vision, linens on a line.

Your father has a disposable camera that he tells you is half full of photos of your car. You ask him how it looks and he makes a face that brings the first unhappiness into your lucid joy. The face would have told you the answer to your question once, but the meaning of things keeps dancing away from you. Lingering to the left and right of your eyes because it knows you can't turn to look at it.

"Don't ever go there," your brother says. "Just forget it. We got all your stuff out." He is holding a sock monkey and he tucks it into the space between your side and your arm. Your father raises the camera, and you make a symbol that communicates the way you feel better than the endless runners of sentences ever could, your fingers forming a perfect V that means both victory and peace. Later your mother will tell you it is the most beautiful photo of you she has ever seen.

beautiful things

sock monkey
disposable camera
your sister (no makeup)
laugh
saliva
colors
sunshine
present

They wheel you from intensive care to a room where you will continue to recuperate. On the way your dad gives you a new cell phone because your old one is gone. Your parents are vague about this. You have returned to yourself enough to know that this means you shouldn't ask. The world is becoming sharper around the edges and there is something in your shoulders, your neck and down your back, that is making you angry. It is twisting knots into the place under your belly button and you can't stop thrashing your legs and arms because something heavy has settled into your joints. Moving your fingers to type the text message is like moving with glass between your knuckles, but it is faster than calling all the people who need to

know. As you lower the phone to the mattress you try to remember what they need to know and why, and wish you had words for the stars behind your eyelids.

wishes

words

visitors

memory

freedom

Next time you wake up, you are already awake and you and your mother are arguing.

"You are not allowed to walk to the bathroom," your mother says. There is a nurse standing behind her in scrubs that have pictures of potted plants. Her arms are crossed. "You have a catheter, all you have to do is pee."

You want to rip the world apart at the edges, climb the walls, anything to exorcise the demons from your limbs and bring something into the wasteland of your back and neck. You can feel something lying latent there, a sleeping creature made of knotted rope. There are flakes of rust caught in your muscles when you raise your arms.

You cannot turn your head because of the cervical brace around your neck and you are propped up in the bed like a baby doll, one of those baby dolls that wets itself when you put water in its mouth. Finally the pressure becomes too much and you decide to trust your mother. You sob as you pee and the nurse and your mother exchange a look. You see that the nurse has a syringe in one of her hands and she comes to your shoulder and doses you with more of the liquid winter. This does not put you to sleep and you spend hours upon hours in sick delirium, unable to stop kicking your legs. The anger comes from deep inside your knees and the balls of your hips, locked behind the protrusion of your pelvis and sparkling in the creaking mania of your elbows. Your mother tries to still you and you kick her too. You wish that you could kick your way out of the bed, swimming through space like a mermaid, and you would never ever trade your voice away for the curse of legs again.

things that make you angry (days 4-7)

elbows

knees

television

hospital food

thirst

blurred vision

being awake (longer than half an hour)

catheter

dirty hair

being denied

falling asleep
visitors

People come to visit. Your phone rings constantly, and the room is full of voices buzzing low around your ears like flies in a hot summer room. As you drift in and out of awareness words collect around you like water in puddles. The guests talk as if you are a stick of furniture. Occasionally you burst into awareness and say something in a high, light voice that is trying to convince the room that it is not falling apart.

Your dead grandmother visits again in the night and you whisper to her, about how you are alone in the whole world. You think she hears what you are saying even though you aren't whispering at all, just letting the air rasp in and out of your lungs in long, slow arcs of sound that carry you up into the twilight. You hold her hand as you swim the deep tropical seas of delirium.

Once, you wake up from these voyages as a shoe, the box around you shrinking ever closer and the plastic holding you rigid, choking your screams off, tying a bow neatly around your throat and tongue. The nurse's calm voice, and her hands on the sides of your face wiping your tears away with cool and gentle strokes, remind you that there is skin and bone and a foot of metal anchoring you into the dirty world.

things people bring

puzzles
walking sticks
advice
jealousy
cards
flowers
stuffed animals
balloons
books
medicine
questions

The nurses are coming less and less frequently and there are times, mostly in the evening, that you are fully aware for three or four minutes at a time. In these moments every beat of your heart is an eternity. You are forced to shrink the entire universe to the span of your thumb on the call button. If you thought about anything it would be the pain spreading black out of your spine, the creature unknotted and rampaging through your worn and wasting body. In those moments you are not a person. You are nothing other than pressure on a button. If you looked into the world you would go mad and jump screaming from your bed. The alien presence of the implant keeping your spine from betraying you is infuriating, and if you could you would rip it out and stab it into the wall.

There is the patient woman who gives you your sponge baths, early in the

morning. She comes in right after the priest who gives you communion and anoints your forehead with the cross you have not felt since childhood. You take the communion in fear that a god you don't believe in has spared you. It doesn't feel like it did when you were a child. The pure feeling, the one you used to think of as the menthol feeling, is gone, left somewhere in the darkness between losing control of your car and waking up in limbo.

Your nurse is big and black and the only thing she can't wash is your hair even though you beg.

"You got too many stitches," she says. "Gotta wait to wash your hair for a few more days. You're gonna go home as soon as you walk. You can wash it there."

You do not say anything, but you hold the word home in your mouth and it melts like hot butter.

words that mean something

wake

stretch

bend

bleed

grip

struggle

smile

home

walk

The linoleum is far away and gleams in the fluorescent lights. You can see how much weight you have lost because your feet are skeletal, the toes knotty and the sides drawn tight against the bird bones that make you up. You have not seen your feet for days and you are glad when the nurse tugs the socks over them, socks the color of oatmeal with white rubber on the bottom so you will not fall. As soon as falling comes to mind you are paralyzed with fear, and as the nurse gently helps you to your feet your hands grip the walker so tight that your knuckles are bloodless and numb.

Your legs are luxuriously taut, free of the confines of the bed for the first time in over a week. All of your weight is pressed against the walker, and you are glad it does not have wheels or you would be careening into the hallway. The first step is little more than a drag of your muddled foot across the floor, but it is the best step you have ever taken. As you gain the bathroom, your legs are already trembling with the effort of standing. Your back is wooden and will not support your weight for more than a few seconds.

You pause.

The face in the mirror is a strange one. Your black eyes are fading into yellow, but the left side of your hair has been clipped into short tufts that immediately remind you of the comb of a rooster. The stitches are like an exclamation point, the black scab running back toward your ear, the dot at the bottom a clot over your left

temple that is the thickest thing you have ever felt, thick like beef jerky, like the skin of an elephant, crusty and a little damp.

"Don't poke it," the nurse cajoles, taking your elbow. She encourages you toward the toilet, her hand impatient and competent and completely unaware of the triumph surging through you.

the hardest words in the world

sit down

Amber Peckham is a first-year MFA student at Northwestern University. She is pursuing her degree in creative nonfiction writing. In 2009 she fractured her spine in three places in a car accident. Her life was saved by a spinal fusion.

Lisa V. Proulx

The Path of Death

For my mother Victoria
3/17/1929 - 4/30/2006

I can hear their voices and feel their breath as they lean in to get a closer look at the cancer patient.

"She's so thin...I feel so sorry for her."

They think I can't hear them, but I can.

Trapped in this body that was once my home, now an empty shell of a woman who used to be.

The pain began months ago but I ignored all the signs, every warning...I listened to no one but me, mother knows best.

Given only months to live and now agony is my only friend.

I have put my daughter in charge of my care. Good girl that she is, we have butted heads many times over the years and she feels the need to challenge me, even now.

I hear the whispers of people as they pass by my door and I hear the silent hums of my family as they discuss my approaching death and arrangements. Or is it angels that I hear preparing me for my eternal ride on this path of death?

I dream of angels and an open door and they show me the way. They tell me to simply close my eyes, go to sleep and I will awaken in another room to face another day, another tomorrow. Angels coming to earth to show me how to die...the simplest of acts was obviously not so simple. There was a way to die, a method, and they had taken their time to come and show me how to do it.

Angels? Demons? Only they know...will I follow or ignore them...only I know. Nurses come and go and others only stay long enough to earn their wings and then they fly away. Some are a constant reminder of what is to come, only to the dismay of my family who tire of their nonstop sympathies and agree to disagree about what used to be my life.

I long for the release that death will bring and I pray that God will show me mercy before I loathe the very thought of it. I am tired of the burden of this sick and heavy body and I am bored with its decay.

To my family, I am already gone; they are only waiting for the body to follow.

But I can still feel the wind as it blows on my face knowing that in reality it is simply the fan that is forever running by my side.

I can still feel the warmth of the sun on my body but somehow knowing that it is only a blanket that has been placed over me.

I can still smell the spring flowers, only to find they are cut and wilting in a vase and yet to be discarded.

Just like me...wilting and waiting to be discarded.

But no! I am not ready to go just yet. I still have a fight inside of me. A battle I must win.

But although, I love my family, they can no longer make life worth living for me. Sadly, the battle is over and I must now face this ordeal on not just my terms but His.

I can no longer function on my own. A catheter takes the place of a trip to the bathroom. An oxygen tube fills my lungs with much needed breath. Morphine winds its evil way through my withered veins and confuses an already old and weary mind. But a sharp mind none the less. I can still squeeze the hand of my daughter when she tells me that she loves me. No, I have not left them yet.

I have not eaten for days but yet I am still alive. Water has not touched these parched lips for days yet I still breathe. My body unable to digest the nutrients I so desperately crave.

Stillness is another story all together, I am so still, I ache. Being turned three times a day is not enough. I want to stand again, to bend again to move again...to live! I want to feel again, to smile again to speak again...to cry! I want to eat again and pee again and wipe myself clean.

But I know that my body will die when it needs to and I shall forever leave this shell that I have borrowed and look back fondly with sweet memories of a life worth remembering and a family whom I loved. Knowing that we shall all meet again one day on this path of death.

Lisa V. Proulx is a feature writer and columnist for *The Brunswick Citizen*. She is also the author of the horror novels, *Puncture*, *Dragged Into Darkness*, *Beneath the Battlefield* and

King of Shadows. Although she started her journey writing horror, after losing her mother to cancer in 2006, she became compelled to write more inspirational tales of healing and becoming a better person through personal tragedy and growth. She lives on a farm in Maryland and has raised Rottweilers for over 13 years.

Michael Rowe

Grave of My Child

Your flowering cherry
I plunked and nudged
and paced around drops its
still blossoms south
like your right side hitch
running cast forward
from infant hydrocephalus.
The firebush behind your stone
flies off illogical, unkempt
in all directions like you,
like you, the old refrain.
Your odd-shaped stone
sited and squared on its
concrete base to a line
of scrub trees as the glue set
shifts right, too, your
bluestone black with lichens
as though you just walked off
one day, perfect, down
a thousand mile road.

Flowering Cherry

The drooping top half of the cracked
tree that old grief worn down to
human scale looked away from
sears me a day late, pendulous vessels
of leaves the color of snow on late
autumn green dreaming of yellow,
heads tipped down blood rushing
full tilt to earth. The sky looking over
pale, electric, cool as glass or
a woman who's through with you

doesn't wink at the accidents of memory.
These views begin in liminality,
darkness posing in light's pose breaking
news not to be spoken or heard.

Michael Rowe, a sociologist in the Yale School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, writes about homelessness and mental illness, and about citizenship, in more than the legal sense, for people marginalized by mental illness, homelessness, and the criminal justice system. His poetry has been published in *Commonweal*, *Journal of Medical Humanities*, *Ars Medica*, and other journals. He writes: "I came to these poems fourteen and sixteen years after my son Jesse's death in 1995, 'Grave of My Child' from wondering how his gravestone and flowering cherry could be off kilter when I'd worked so hard to set them straight, and 'Flowering Cherry' after a snowstorm that I thought had killed the tree. As it turns out, it's hanging on." Michael is the author of *The Book of Jesse: A Story of Youth, Illness, and Medicine*, among other books.

Willa Schneberg

At the Seaview Nursing Home

The attendant spies the daughter walking down the hall,
and sucks on every last illicit second
of telephone time to gab
with her friend about their girlhoods in Barbados.
When the daughter enters the room
she hangs up.

The daughter barely listens to the attendant kvetch
how rudely the practical nurses and the other aides treat her.
The daughter understands their outrage.
She pays her three or four times more
for diapering one old baby
than they make removing bed pans
from underneath seventy-five behinds.

The daughter won't fire her.
She needs to pretend
this nurse's aide is keeping one father alive,
and that his brain
like dried porcini mushrooms,
soaking in cold water,
will spring back to life.

The Spoon

Every holiday with a diamond cutter's precision
he carved plump, juicy birds;
white meat left side of the platter, dark on the right,
wings, legs, thighs piled high in the center.
Now he looks like a wild rooster
in a country where people are starving.

His arms flap, his talons reach towards his daughter,
until he notices the attendant's
metallic spoon and its contents—
orange baby food.
He swivels his head, mesmerized,
watching the spoon
inch towards his mouth.

Removing the Intravenous Line

Written on my father's 4th Yahrzeit

Had you already begun to die,
potassium and sodium
barely pumping into your cells,
while I walked on cobblestones
through the arched Lane of the Messiah
in Zefat's old quarter painted white and blue
against the evil eye?

Did I try to chant a *niggun*,
hear an unearthly echo in a dark corridor
above a pool of water
in the Old City's Church of St. Ann,
as you started to dehydrate
and your mouth opened
to receive ice chips?

Was I in a conference room at the King David
when I conjured your cat eyes and lips like mine,
and knew your muscles had forgotten to contract?
Wish I was on the women's side of the Wall
among those fueled with God's spirit,
my cheek against stone, tucking
a slip of paper into a crack
with my farewell:
Go gently, Dadzill.

Phone Calls, 3 a.m.

I

The Mother

I must call.
Maybe it can wait until morning.
Did we agree:
two rings or four,
then hang up?

I don't want to bother them
in the middle of the night.

At first, I think I'm not bleeding.
In a dream scrambling
up a jagged cliff,
I cut myself,

but when I go to the bathroom
the front of my nightgown
is drenched in blood. It oozes
from the corroded skin
around my peg tube.

I tape down gauze bandages.
They swell with blood.

Two rings or four?
I'll stay on the phone.
My breath will insist.
She'll know it's me.

II

The Daughter

Only breathing.
I hang-up.

The phone rings again.

We hope it's a wrong number —
an adolescent calling back his girlfriend
who just slammed down the phone,
a pervert's exhalation,
his heavy breathing
before climax,

but I know that cry hidden
inside frantic breath,

the husky voice
that doubled for Lauren Bacall's.

Ma, we're on our way.

Hospice

Esther smelled like rotten eggs.
A low wheezing sound emanated from her stoma.
The skin around her feeding tube was raw and pussy.

No chatter, cancer took her voice box.

She agreed to a morphine patch,
let the nurse rub it directly on her gums.

She couldn't eliminate,
skipped some nutrition times,
complained of nausea.

Her daughter was a poet
with a book. I saw it by her bedside.

Esther's handwriting become harder and
harder to decipher. She pointed to this
in her notebook: *I'm Jewish.*

There is no God.

I hoped the job would last a few weeks.
I hate calling families after 1 AM.

Her eyes grew wide,
her face soft and silky.
I wrapped her in the afghan she crocheted
and called The Mondrian.

Willa Schneberg's father was a librarian who struggled with agoraphobia and died of brain atrophy. Her mother was a high school English teacher/guidance counselor, and a larynx cancer survivor, who lost her ability to speak. These poems are from a new manuscript entitled "A Good Time to Die." Willa's website is: threewayconversation.org.

Doug Schroeder

Bad Ass

Post an old picture to Facebook
Son posted the comment

"Dad was BA"

Got me thinking about what it really means

The old picture was with my favorite motorcycle, an 1100 Suzuki

The 1100 was about the fastest thing made back then

Riding it required skill and focus

A real hardcore bike

Being wheeled from intensive care to surgery

Was a frightful ride

Waking up from brain surgery

Like climbing from a well

The week after surgery was a fight

Driving away the demons

That stole my balance

Vision swallowing and strength

Bad ass is waking up

At 3 A.M.

Drugged on pain meds

To walk in the hall

Forced to have a walker

I carried it

Told to slow down

I leaned forward

I am getting better

Fighting this monster

Never giving in

Because I am Bad Ass

Doug Schroeder, a devoted husband and father of three was diagnosed with an Ependymoma brain tumor on a sunny day in 2010. He was immediately taken to the ER then underwent emergency surgery. After four months he returned to work and continues to fight past the 'deficits' that are reminders of the tumor resection. He is a normal and otherwise healthy guy who let a team of surgeons get inside his head.

Aftab Yusuf Shaikh

New Morning

Each morning

I have to be ready,

To gulp down scores of tablets and capsules,

Be ready to bear the continuous
Prick of syringes, the whole
Troublesome day.

Be ready to see father hold back his tears,
And be ready to escape the vision of mother
Smiling fakery, while her heart bleeds
At the plight of her blood son.

Be ready for the momentary visits of people,
Relatives, cousins and friends,
Who come with heavy hearts and leave with silent prayers.

But today it is not that morning,
Those mornings are left far behind,
The grasp of prayers has pulled me back,

And for this new beautiful morning,
I thank with all heart,
My Caring Lord!

Aftab Yusuf Shaikh has been writing since the age of eight and much of his works have been published in popular journals including *Muse India* and *The Istanbul Literary Review*. In March of 2010, he was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. After undergoing many treatments including chemotherapy he now depends completely on Homeopathy. He is back as normal as he was and praises God for his health.

Anne Shigley

Invisible Tears

Sweat runs down my face
as I run fast as the wind.
Sun shines on the rain puddles
and reflects on my tears.
Nobody knows I'm crying—
the sweat mixes with tears.

A grin pasted on my face
for the world to see.
Sometimes I have joy,
some days I'm boiling.
Anger, frustration, confusion
fill my aching heart—
I finish running for now.

I should be studying,
but I take off for a swim
I am not finished weeping.
Nobody can see my tears,
in the chlorinated pool.

I pull myself together
to paste that smile on me,
for the world to see.
Yes, I am doing just fine,
inside of me, I'm normal—
Normal—like everybody else.

Anne was diagnosed with Neurofibromatosis Type 2 at the age of seven, when she found out she was already functionally deaf in one ear. She had first surgery at age nine to remove an auditory neuroma that had attached to the facial motor nerve, overnight. She had perfect hearing in the other ear until the middle of her senior year of high school, when another tumor caused her to become deaf—a year later she got an Auditory Brainstem Implant, which she does very well with and can even talk on the phone some again. She hasn't allowed her disorder to stop her from doing anything—she got engaged this past summer! She has completed five full marathons and recently completed first 70.3 Ironman! (although she is not supposed to be able to ride a bike or swim in open waters, due to lack of balance nerves.)

Shelby Stephenson

I walk through The Narrows, by Depression and Guilt

Here is the sketch of a 6-week depression:
constipation, stress (waffling, wobbliness, phantoms, hallucinations,
grotesqueries, bodily queries: teeth, thyroid, throat) and the usual
indecisions and missions unaccomplished—
for I have brought Nin to the GYN this morning, 12 May, 2010—
and I must keep my calm in darkness, the beltway tight with traffic.
A guy on a cell turns into my lane, Cricket trembling in my lap as a
storm's coming up
and Nin's analyzing meds the doctor may give—and he has not seen her
yet, the M-3 in its rumble,
traveling incomprehensibly with you and me; yet the earth never tires,
dirt under the pavement, the times never tiring.
This morning I watered Mama's lilac in the hedge.
I watered it with water in a green watering can.
This is progress, I thought, for I have left the hundred

feet of hose rolled up next to the house.
Our house is a home: yesterday Nin played her uke and sang.
She was faking this depression.
I started writing the epithet I was breathing.
Lord, give me your deed for the best in me.
May your wisdom be commensurate with my grandmother Nancy
Who looked at me (I was nine)
And said, "Shub, be a preacher."

Well, here I am, the splendor vacancy levels.
There is no stratagem, no envelope I may
pick up with answers to what we are in.
My rod comforts me, my railing strong,
the bait I used yesterday, bloodworms,
swirling in the summer of the trees the waves reflect.
Cricket's waiting in the car, temperature approaching 80 outside.
I'll walk her and we'll go to our eye-appointments.
Depression is the soul-mate of stars,
no less than the mulch I put around the lilac,
more still than the grounds, coffee, black from the espresso
expressly for the heart-shaped leaves
blowing in the hedge for the good times.
We emerge from the GYN and she says,
Infection!And Dr. S prescribed the brand name instead of generic.
It is so expensive.

I praise the negative as the positive,
just as the posts on the battery in my 850 John Deere needed cleaning,
this find after we boys stood around the green machine,
first charging the battery on 2, then 10, then with John's SUV,
then overnight on 10 for 24 hours, no less.
I come home from work, turn the key after the longest charge:
blank, no sound at all
and in the dark the Carpenter Ashley comes and he sandpapers the posts,
plus and minus,
shakes out the cables, cleans them up, too,
and attaches them to the battery and the tractor trembles John Deere green.
What mysteries cluster:I salute them,
along with all the bacteria the doctor could name.
When Nin asks, taking what she's given, is this me?
I say in silence I must not get ahead of Time.
I blame myself, taking the mighty woods with its ticks,
as Nin changes her mind about every single thing-
whether the awning is perfect for our ranchhome,

whether her infection may be cured with anti-biotics,
whether I go to school to work, getting home to hear her say,
hold her hand to her chin, my throat, I can't swallow,
whether meds a future doctor might prescribe
might conflict with her EMSAM Patch.
(Preparation for clinical depression risks the Giver of Care
running broadsided into becoming a victim, if you know what I mean.)
Praise the subtle negative past and the post-its, the paces, the twirling-
all for the sake of this One Woman,
her face sideways, glancing into the sky,
knowing that instinct conquers doubt.
I see you cross the street to me,
receiving me, saluting your nonchalant and natural self I love,
your walk the one I've been waiting for,
staying up late at night, playing my songs for you.
If I could make you well!
I see the pitch and sway of the summer tanager, that red sleekness blowing
my larceny here, these words, right out of the air.
Even the seed-ticks glorify; the starlings beak yellow for spring.
Cricket's snoring away on her L.L. Bean Bag.

Shelby Stephenson's work appearing here is from a book-length manuscript (unpublished) called "Nin's Poem: A Bipolar Memoir." Nin is the "Nin" of the poem here. Nin edits Shelby Stephenson's writing. They have been married 45 years. Nin edited 2 recent books Shelby wrote—*Playing Dead* (Finishing Line, 2011) and *Family Matters: Homage to July, the Slave Girl* (Bellday, 2008), winner of the Bellday Prize for Poetry, Allen Grossman, judge, and the Oscar Arnold Young Award from the Poetry Council of North Carolina, Jared Carter, judge. Shelby Stephenson was the editor of *Pembroke Magazine* from 1979 to 2010. He is professor emeritus, UNC-Pembroke.

Marc Thompson

Pier 54

a filthy
human

tired
hungry

sleeps
in the corner

of a chain

link fence
doesn't see
us laugh
wave french fries
feed
seagulls
on the
other side
my father
and i
sit at
a corner table
after lunch
compare cancers
and enjoy a perfect
Seattle
summer afternoon

Leukemia Blues

Well I woke up this mornin', and I was feelin' kinda low
Well I woke up this mornin', and I was feelin' kinda low
My hemoglobin baby, it just dropped right through the flo'
I bumped into an armchair, and my leg turned black and blue
I bumped into an armchair, and my leg turned black and blue
When it comes to platelets honey, I just got me way too few
My blood counts gettin' crazy, don't know what I'm gonna do
My blood counts gettin' crazy, don't know what I'm gonna do
Gotta go back down to Mayo, have 'em fix me good as new
I'll say doctor can you help me, and I'll bring my lucky charm
I'll say doctor can you help me, and I'll bring my lucky charm
I don't wanna have that chemo, start drippin' in my arm
These lymphocytes ain't dyin', they're gonna try and do me in
These lymphocytes ain't dyin', they're gonna try and do me in
But you know how I am now, there's no way they're gonna win
I got that big ol' hound dog, got that demon on my tail
I got that big ol' hound dog, got that demon on my tail
I'm gonna get my mojo workin', send that demon back to hell

something stealth

rattles the jack pines
crowding his rented tent

he checks the watch
he wears only when
asleep—has worn
every night since

pauses . . .
rattles again . . .

chemicals triumphantly
crushed the uprising
(his cancer)

once there was
a loon fat and seaworthy

in victory
he learned
survival
and necessity

bobbing complacently
on this dark translucent lake

he searches for stars
in the duende
of each silent tick

Marc Thompson is an 8 1/2 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. His poems have appeared in various journals in the US, Canada, England, Japan, and Australia. These poems are from his unpublished manuscript, *Something Stealth*.

Judith Williams

Holding on to a Memory

When did it become
my normal way of being
to watch others walk?

How did I forget

how easy it was for me
to run down the street?

How do I retain
my fast fading memory
of who I was then?

The Inevitable

I'm resigned, I think,
to the inevitable
though I may hate it.

Fighting is either
thoroughly exhausting or
invigorating.

Making up my mind
which to embrace, fight or flight,
a work in progress

Judith Williams publishes daily poems about MS (which she has) on her blog, [Peace Be with You on the MS Journey](#). Her haiku-style poems in triptych allow her to distill the Multiple Sclerosis experience into very few words. Six of her poems have been included in Dan and Jennifer Digmann's *Despite MS, To Spite MS*, a book of essays about living with Multiple Sclerosis.