

Dawn Horizons 2026

Poetry of New Beginnings

Edited by
James P. Wagner (Ishwa)

Dawn Horizons 2026

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Mary Anne Abdo is an author, poet and photographer. She graduated magna cum laude from Luzerne County Community College with a degree in Human Services. She is the owner of Blue Stained Glass Poetry and Art. She has been featured in many print poetry magazines and anthologies. Her self-published poetry book, "Fractured Lollipop Poems of Brokenness Healing and Hope. Her children's book, "Pumpkin The Cat Who Plays With Words". Her new release, "Droplets of Crystal Poetry for the Soul." is now on Amazon along with her other poetry and children's books. Her 2nd children's book is due July 2026. You may check out her work on: Facebook: Mary Anne Abdo/Poet/Author Word Press: <https://bluestainedglass.wordpress.com> Mary Anne resides in Scranton Pennsylvania.

Joseph R. Adomavicia

The Climb

We don't start the climb because it is easy,
nor because it is a passing phase.
It is a daily grind:
dirt under nails and sweat on the brow,
torn clothes and withered soles.

It's performing at your peak
even when you've only got twenty percent to give.
It is acting in spite of doubt and opposition;
it's making your mission
success over
submission.

A year's time is the war,
and each day new ground to battle upon.
To move is to leave footprints in the dust—
to stand still is to turn to landfill.

I don't know about you,
but I don't have time to kill.
You're one stubborn son of a gun.
Keep it up; you'll get there.

Julio César Aguilar

Rebirth Among the Bodies of Water

You are reborn like the silt that pushes its way through the surge,
like the warm pulse that expands at the root of silence.
The embers of the air still hold the names—
those syllables that burned in the throat of time—
and from their shadow springs a new clarity,
a radiance that fears no decay.

Some bodies awaken when you breathe,
bodies that were ash, sand,
veins of what you were before the collapse.
Now they return—trembling, intact—
to seek each other in the moisture of your name.
Your skin resumes its river language,
its tremor of leaves touched by the dawn.
Each pore is a cell that remembers the fire,
that recognizes, with eyes closed,
the depth of the loss.

And yet, it dances:
a precise tremor, almost imperceptible,
that names the persistence of desire.
Light enters your side like a seed,
opening tiny cracks, breaths;
each crack is a beginning.
Threads of sap run through you,
minuscule pulsations that dictate
the contour of a being that does not fear dissolution.

The day expands—its gold, its slow tide—
and you, newly born from the shadow,
drink from its current.
You learn again to see,
to name without the weight of dust,
to touch with closed eyes the exact form of love.

In the center of your chest:
a clear flame, barely audible,
repeating
that everything is reborn if someone dreams it,
that even the remnants hold a rhythm,
that from the collapse emerges transparency.
And you continue—because rebirth is not return, but impulse—
a salt that purifies, a breath that grows
among the bodies of water.

Julio César Aguilar is a poet, essayist, and translator. He studied medicine at the University of Guadalajara and then earned a master's degree in arts in Spanish from the University of Texas at San Antonio. He also received a Ph.D. in Hispanic Studies from Texas A&M University. Aguilar has published over thirty poetry collections. He currently teaches Spanish at Baylor University.

Ala Amoachi

Winter Blossoms

The wind billows
through the red maple's
leaves, hanging on like embers.

Thanksgiving, soon a memory,
folded into dozens of others—
each moment pouring
into nostalgia's cup.

Maybe this winter,
when I light the fire
and make warmth
for the little ones—

warmth could find me too,
unexpectedly—
not the kind that gives chase,
but one that kindles
a part of me
long frozen in place.
Even when deep winter
lingers in January
and the new year,
its promise of renewal
barely arrived—

even in that frost,
the red maple
begins to blossom—

my heartbeat
under the snow.

Ala Amoachi is a poet and immigration attorney living in Northport, New York. Her work explores themes of identity, connection, and the search for self. Her writing has appeared in multiple anthologies and literary journals, and her poem "Wonder" was nominated for the 2026 Pushcart Prize. Balancing her professional life with her creative pursuits, she continues to craft poetry that resonates across dimensions of personal and universal experience.

Justin Anderson

Listening to the Whispers

I wake up raw.

Mind running in
Different ways
Wondering around
The edge of my
Room in full
Bloom of frightened
Doom. I feel
Trapped in dark.

Somewhere
Around me
I hear you whisper
Listen to the whispers

The dripping sink
And creaking tree
The wind's full force
To the brink of crashing in
Your breath subsiding
The fans that blow
Leaves snapping as
The sun begins to show

Listen to the whispers you said
For they guide you home
The are the words not written yet
Poetry unread.

Justin Anderson is an English teacher in the upstate of South Carolina.

Francisc Edmund Balogh

On the brink of dawn

My heart and the night
have swapped places,
an angel and a devil
have swapped worlds,
it's 4.45 am,
the night's curtain of quiet
is still pulled over,
a sleepless thought
is circling around me,
around the light bulb,
anoyingly as a fly,
taking me into its whirlpool of nuisance,
like an empty can who's destiny
is in the hands of the wind,
like a word barely escaped
between your teeth
from the grasp of a poem.
We are like two halves of a walnut
still under the shell, of darkness,
of peace
that is about to crack at dawn,
from inside like a primal,
metaphysical egg.

Francisc Edmund Balogh, is a poet from London, UK, winner of the Best Foreign Author prize at I COLORI DELL'ANIMA, contest's 2022 edition, organized in Italy, by Mondo Fluttuante Association.

Jason Kirk Bartley

A New Life in Christ

My heart trembled in the dark,
And my life was dim without a spark,
scared of hell,
no life in Him,
One day I looked up in my drunken stupor,
My life had not been that super,
With low self-esteem,
I was headed south or so it seemed,
When money couldn't buy the happiness I needed,
My life was sad,
to God I pleaded,
I knew I was in danger.
Without a relationship with the one born in a manger,
I cried and cried 'till one day Jesus came,
I was reborn into His name,
the difference I felt when He came within,
And started to cleanse me of my sin,
A light came on within my heart,
I was reborn with a new start,
The Holy Ghost fire blazed my way,
I had begun to stop and pray,
I was still young in Christ,
with one foot in the world,
I wanted to be holy,
but I was still in sin.
I wanted to give my all to Him.
One day I came to my senses,

I rededicated my life to Jesus with no pretenses,
I knew I had been reborn,
and I only wanted to please God,
by getting rid of my sins
and not caring about man's applaud,
Jesus welcomed me with a warm embrace,
As tears were pouring down my face,
Out of the ashes like a Phoenix I flew,
With holy boldness and scripture I grew,
Into Christ where I wanted to be,
He had opened my blinded eyes so I could see,
One day to live with Him for eternity.

Jason Kirk Bartley. He resides in Ohio. He is 50 years of age. He is married to his forever love and wife, Nila. He has a Masters degree in ministry from Ohio Christian University in Circleville, Ohio. He has won many awards and been published in various places.

Damien Betner

Spoken in a reverent tone, planted where they always grow 'em.

Behold the sacred square...

Learning how to live in the fourth world...

From first to third... off second-hand shares.

Dividends are paid where profits are unfurled.

There are four sides to every story...

The first side is about

the things in our body that allow us to have life...

The second side is about

the intelligent design that accepts our place in the light...

The third side is about

the elegant alignment that forgives all strife...

The fourth side is about

the elemental pull that pushes us towards visions beyond sight.

Life means Movement...

If we can think on it,

and feel right about it...

We can move on it...

and live with it.

Taking the time to think things out...

Offering logic to reason...

Connecting feelings with perceptions...

Delivering action to what's been happening...

There are 4 types of death that we recognize in this life...

A thoughtful death is the death of an idea...

An emotional death is the death of hope...

A spiritual death is the death of a relationship...

A physical death is the death of an Earthen vessel...

These deaths are lessons in transformation, and they teach us that there's more to each of us than meets the eye within us. Deep beneath the surface of our everyday performances... bread-winning circus work... we find a greater purpose in the process of actualizing the collective itself... at which point we either help it or hurt it... like a late spring worm trying to cross the misty morning walkway.

There are 4 types of kindness that we recognize in this life...

...and they all come in full... a thoughtful kindness, a heartfelt kindness, a universal kindness, and a purposeful kindness.

Let them be known in every home as if they were...

a part of a poem.

"Spoken in a reverent tone, planted where they always grow 'em."

Damien Betner is the owner and operator of Cooper's Scoopers Central Long Island! We scoop the poop and walk dogs, too! Offering pet care wellness services, including cat sitting and dog training. Damien plans to help with environmental stewardship and resource conservation through waste conversion to support a sustainable future on Long Island. He continues to write poetry between the moon and the ocean through the trees, as it is, and he has been attending great musical services with Island Christian Church while learning from the most excellent open mic events at book stores, libraries, and coffeehouse-cafes across Nassau and Suffolk county. He has also been teaching people how to throw tomahawks at the axe-throwing range in Huntington with NY Axe, don't be shy, let the hawk fly!

Jeff Bettger

The New Road

And what happens when the smooth
paved road of life suddenly ends?
We have been lulled into believing
our life was always going to be easy.

But why should life be so pleasant
for us and not for everyone?
Why should others bare the burden
of the work that needs to be done?

Clarity arrives. The road did not end.
Another road began. Perhaps a dusty,
bumpy road. A road filled with those
unable to travel, in need of our help.

Yes we have lost some friends, some family.
We feel alone without our team, our crew.
But will we now sit and weep for lost pleasure?
We who have so much to offer? So much to give?

No. Like a hammer that is not used. Like a
shade tree that no one sits under. Like fresh
water that nobody drinks. We shall not waste
what we are able to give and what is needed.

Our loved ones, whose work is done, look down
from above. We will not disappoint them, for
our time to join them will arrive soon enough.
We take a first step now, our journey begins anew.

Jeff Bettger is a poet living in Chula Vista, CA. He also publishes two community magazines: The Towne Local Chula Vista and The Towne Local Bonita.

A.C. Blake

Not Starting Over

Everyone talks about the new year
as if the past were a mistake—
something to erase,
to repent,
to reboot.
But I am not starting over.
I am curating.
I am keeping what worked
before it had language,
before it was measured,
before it was sold back to me
in smaller portions.
The pace that let me notice.
The ways my body knows when to stop.
The rooms that don't ask me to brace.
I am letting go
without drama—
not because it failed,
but because it never fit.
This is not reinvention.
It is continuation.
Becoming more myself
is not a beginning.
It is the discipline
of staying.

Maggie Bloomfield

The Turning

I had to stop fighting with the trees
Since I loved them so

I wanted them to stay in their warm summer dress
But only their solemn trunks remained the same

The fickle leaves trembled and grew
And changed from tint to green, from green to brazen

This dazzling progression thrilled me so
But that last lustful thrust a warning
Because I knew what follows

For then they throw themselves upon the ground
Gone from the sturdy home that reared them
I felt my friends betrayed me so

It was hard to learn about the times we call the seasons
That beauty fully formed would never live forever

But I could not weep on each October
They did their best the lovely trees

I need a longer season to forgive
That I will turn and join the leaves
That summer is for living things.

Anne Shelley
Missing Children

In the months
when you wouldn't talk to me,
I learned that blood owns no one,
merely passes on.

Maggie Bloomfield is psychotherapist/ poet//playwright/ performer/ Emmy-winning lyricist, Sesame Street. Two chapbooks: *Trains of Thought*, Local Gems, 2017, *Sleepless Nights*, Finishing Line Press, 2020. Poems appear in *Oberon*, *PPA Journal*, *The Southampton Review (TSR)*, *NCPL*, and more. Maggie co-hosts Poetry Street, a hybrid poetry venue, at The Riverhead Library and on ZOOM.

www.maggielbloomfield.com

JT Brennan

The Colors in Love's Prism

Red

Vibrant and exciting

Maybe even dangerous

Hot and yet

Deceptive

Orange

Sunsets and rises

Sips cool drinks on seashores

Dances deep

Into the night

Yellow

Midday sunshine

Smiling faces and buttercups

Dandelions

Sunflowers and hope

Green

Grass, of course,

And deep forests full of life

And Christmas trees

And, yes, frogs

Blue

Clear, eternal skies

Waiting for kites and picnics

And oceans and lakes
Endless possibilities

Indigo
Endless nights
Deep and full of stars
And whispered secrets
Gentle and soft

Violet
Rare and bold
In a world that devours
But rarely comforts
Such beauty

You
Every color
Has a memory, a smell
A texture, a taste
A feeling

You
Filled my senses
Showed me the colors of
A world that I had
Only seen

You
Opened a dimension
Where every color carries
Hues and shades
Of magic

You
Poured me out
Onto a world, filled me up
With its full color
Love's prism

You
Poured into me
All of your colors and hues
Dying my spirit
With your light

And I,
I am transformed
And the colors of my life
Began to pour

JT Brennan is an actor, tour guide, musician, activist, and brain injury survivor. Author of *Ghosts of Newport*, and, in collaboration with artist Rafael Medina, *Newport Live*, and *Newport Eats*. His poetry appears in the *RI Bards Poetry Anthology*, *Harmonic Verse*, *Ghosts*, *Echoes and Shadows*, *Gathering by Poets Anonymous*, *Bards Poetica*, *Dawn Horizons*, *The Eagle and the Maple Leaf*, and *Bards Across the Pond*. The maddest man in Newport writes from a secret library in an Odditorium with his wife Michelle and son, Felix. He is blessed with additional loving support from Mackenzie and James, Mike, Rafael, the Killavey, Bagley, and Zatz families, and the historian Arcadia.

Jane Flint Bridgewater

Sounds of Butterflies

Waterfall from oyamel fir trees,
roosted atop volcanic mountains,
diapause ends with warm lengthening days,
milkweed monarchs migrate from Mexico.

Rasping hiss of peacocks' wing flicks,
owl face eyes deter predating birds,
emerging from dark winter sites, where sonic
and ultrasonic sounds scare mice away.

Drum cracks from rain forest Hamadryas,
defending courting territory on
camouflage bark of cracker colour,
percussive forewing claps, veins meet and click.

Hushed twittering from pupae nursery,
twerking wiggle triggers sounds between
unlocking sound plates, inversely sculptured,
In swallowtail and brush-footed pupae.

Nature's angels accepting change, no fear,
rarely sound around that we can hear.
Pearl-bordered Fritillary threatened near,
Wood White finds time enough in moments dear.

Writing poetry in retirement from Cardiology practice in UK, this poem about the seasonal behaviour of sounding butterflies was initially written to inspire a harp accompaniment, and reflects Jane's interest in the science of nature. She has been previously published in various including Bards anthologies, and Consilience, communicating science through poetry.

Betty Brown

train whistles

they call me as dawns of new days
laundry and breakfast wait
as i listen in my worn-forever house shoes
train voices harmonic and dissonant
deep-in-the-earth rumbling of wheels
humming dark nocturnes
wrapping me in far places
and other lives to live
i have chores and duties—
but train whistles call me
i have phone calls and meetings—
but train whistles call me
to leave all behind
as dust on tabletops
drifting into weary slumber
carrying cargoes of regrets and what-if-lives
rolling nowhere on the steel rails
as train whistles call me

Betty Brown was born and raised in the Northern Appalachia region of southeastern Ohio. Her poems have been published in *Common Threads*, *Botticelli*, *Poets of the Promise*, *Harmonic Verse*, and *Ohio Bards Poetry Anthology*. She is a member of the Ohio Poetry Association. Her work is supported by a grant from the Greater Columbus Arts Council.

Michelle Burgess-Morris

Chapters

She read the last page out loud, for everyone to hear,
closed the cover and placed it uneventfully on the shelf.
The story of her most recent trip around the sun,
filed away for posterity, perches atop the bookshelf,
patiently awaiting the next installment of her life.

The author's preliminary scratchmarks decorate her scratchpad;
grandiose plans for a new year,
recorded with graphite in anticipation of their being erased.
Nonetheless, a quiet recording of the beginning of a fine invitation
to a life replete of adventure and freedom.

Another chance to barricade the door, take the skeleton key and try the next
lock.
She walks resplendent into a new room decorated with the flowers of possi-
bility,
All the while, willing to welcome failure to the table,
She is secure in her knowledge that doing something new
means doing something she is afraid of.

She'll make no resolutions this year but will instead make promises.
A pledge to focus on what can go wonderfully right, not woefully wrong.
A vow to soar from the top of the mountain, even if she can't see the ground
below.
An idea to see the world as her own bright, white, blank canvas.
And a promise to distance herself from struggle, to live each moment like it
is her last.

Michelle Burgess-Morris spent her childhood between the mountains of Appalachia and the oceans of the Eastern Shore. After 30 years as an educator, she is now pursuing her lifelong dream of becoming a writer. Her poetry has been included in multiple anthologies including *Bards Across the Pond*, *Walt Whitman Two-Hundred Five*, *Ghosts, Echoes & Shadows: Poems & Stories for the Halloween Season*, *Gathering A Poetry Anthology* (2023, 2024), *Poets of the Promise an Anthology of Poetry* (2023, 2024) and *The Maryland Bards Poetry Review* (2023, 2024, 2025). The proud mother of three has also published a book of her poetry titled *Write Yourself Out of the Nightmare*.

Ryan Buynak

coyote hills

we lived for a while
in a house in the hills.

the coyotes would start
their song at dawn.

dawn and dusk
were their main appearance times.

the coyotes would come take notes,
edging closer every day.

mornings were my king,
like a righteous floating tide.

the coyotes would drift
into our world.

predator and prey blurred,
the past and the present blurred.

the reality is
I was their future.

Ryan Buynak is the most prolific poet you've never heard of, having just released his 16th book of poetry which details his battle with cancer in all its chaos, comedy and philosophy.

Vanessa Caraveo

Symbol of a New Beginning

The bends of life come with challenges,
some which may shake humans to their core;
it may leave them sad and broken.
They may even be twisted and malformed,
or it may leave them untouched,
just the way they always were.

And when some seek a new horizon
to water the seeds of their dreams,
voices in some places scream at aliens,
while others welcome them with open arms,
confirming the irony of life and its people.
The newbies are called outcasts by some;
they shun them and tell them their ways are parallel.

You look different to me,
dressed in those foreign costumes.
Those were the thoughts of some,
forgetting we all come from different ways
even though we share the same flesh and bones.

My way is a symbol of my beginning,
one that has always been part of me since eons ago.
No human transition can alter that,
the same way I won't alter yours.
And we all thrive when we mix and blend,
and strive to let all forms of enmity end.

Vanessa Caraveo is an award-winning bilingual author, published poet, and artist who has a passion for promoting inclusion, empowerment and equality for all, helping others discover the power they possess within themselves to overcome adversity and persevere in life. She is involved with various organizations that assist children and adults with disabilities and enjoys working with nonprofit groups and volunteering in the promotion of literacy. Her work has been published in *Literature Today Journal*, *Poetrybay*, *The Raven Review*, *Anacua Literary Arts Journal*, and for various anthologies throughout the years.

Abella Leialoha Carroll

You and Me, Song and Sea

Our kindred spirits met long ago
By way of sunshine, surf and sand
Young friendship ripened steady ... slow
As your music fell into my hand
We traveled well from like to love
With songs and poems from above

Our story lives upon the sea,
Waves and seashells warm our toes.
Future dreams appeared to me
Yet you were always in the know.
While in this unsuspecting trance
Your spirit entered through my dance

Embracing vows our love allowed
Two bairns born to fill our home.
We could not have been more proud
Of our family to call our own.
Then just like that, they found their lives
Soon free from us, we recognized.

Decade seven, now here we are
With life taunting us, come back
And travel toward that skyward star
Where we could live another path.
'Tis you and me, as we were then,
Back on that beach 'twas heaven sent.

Could new beginnings start right now,
After all those lives we learned to lead?
Winds whisper yes, go learn how
Return back to that youthful sea.
Journey on new songs galore,
You and me, forever more.

Abella Leialoha Carroll is a seaside writer and has been penning poetry all her life. In addition to her love of letters, her profile includes Polynesian dancing, essayist for national magazines, and retired editor of The Walt Disney Company. Abella is a mother of two daughters, grandmother of three, and married for 47 glorious years.

K Castrataro

Stratify my Heart

Little seed wrapped in earth,
wondering whether you will ever
see the sun,
do not fret these quiet
shadowed days.
Each drop in temperature
softens your hard shell.
Each extra hour of daylight
warms your cocoon
warms *you*.

You see the quick-germinating
weed-like basil, marigold, or
dill and fret: “What’s
wrong with me? Why
am I still here
alone unchanged?”

Do not compare yourself to the
short-lived annuals that
bloom today and disappear
tomorrow. You are a mighty
red oak who will not sprout until
after it has weathered winter’s
cold and snow but then will

shelter, shade, and feed
a dozen generations
or more.

Rest well. Your time is coming.

Kristen M. Castrataro, an Expressive Living Facilitator, helps people experience greater purpose, time, energy, and abundance. A fifth-generation farm kid, she is the author of two books; a featured columnist for *Country Folks Grower*; the founder of Pen Light, LLC; and a podcast host (*Food, Flowers, & Fun: Visits with farm women from around the world*).

Rose Cervone-Taylor

New Beginnings

We are ready for new beginnings,
a new era, one that is decent, peaceful
where we all prosper, not just a few.

I am ready for a new beginning,
one where we make our voices heard
instead of sitting on the sidelines
not wanting to cause strife.

It's time for new beginnings of all kinds,
not just politically, but as humans living
on this earth that is slowly dying, because of our greed
and not paying attention, except to our own little world.

It's time to awaken, to stop spewing blame,
hatred and fear, and get back to a time
where morals and honesty, compassion, kindness
all meant something.

I don't know the answer, how do we get back to that,
were we ever really there? Was the world ever truly peaceful
or was it all a figment of our longing. Whatever it was,
a new beginning must be, for ourselves and the next generation
who is looking to us, the elders who've come before them,
they are hungry for direction and answers,
for boundaries, healthy boundaries
built out of respect, and mutual caring.

I truly believe that the upcoming generation is not interested in walls,
but bridges to a better future. Is it possible? I hope so,
it all starts with us.

Let us be the force of bringing about
new beginnings,
new hope!

Rose Cervone-Taylor, a retired mental health professional, loves writing, photography, and travel. Publishing credits include *The Scene*, various anthologies including *Bard's Poetica*, *Gathering 2025*, *New Generation Beats*, *What Unites Us*, *NCPLS Review 2025*, *The Eagle and the Maple*, and *Long Island Quarterly December, 2025-2026 issue*. Rose has performed her poetry and prose at many Nassau County venues including Molloy University. Her photos and poetry exhibited at galleries including Salmagundi Club in NYC, and others in the tri-state. Rose is a member of the Celebrated Authors of NYSOSDIA, the LI Writer's Guild, and various others.

Joianne Cimler

The Universe Knows

“All of my words, if not well put nor well taken, are well meant.”

- Woody Guthrie

The Universe knows what we need
Though we may not ourselves see
It's safe to trust the Universe
If brave to open one's heart first
Every good intention breeds an equal deed.

Why should we not have faith in thee?
Us, small parts of a summary
Living life, a cosmic traverse,
The Universe knows.

With every objective plants a seed
In life's eternal passing feed
Be your journey prose or verse
A single moment or one you rehearse
Trust it will bring you what you need
The Universe knows.

Joianne Cimler teaches English at a public charter high school on Long Island. Her poems have appeared in Local Gems Poetry Press anthologies, including Harmonic Verse 2024 and 2025, Dawn Horizons, Nassau County Voices In Verse 2025, and Bards Annual 2025. Additional poems appear in Wyld Syde Press's All the Women Came & Sang and 1 In 8: An Anthology for Those Affected by Breast Cancer.

George Colkitto

This night I stare at Stars

nothing has changed
in the darkness come ancient fears
shadows seem to have life – hold imagination
how I sprinted as a child through the isolated
yet I knew beyond was home and comfort
and nothing ever did drag me away

nothing has changed
age brings more devils to evade
now I cannot run as quickly – have little strength
to repel those armies of doubts and failure
somehow friends have remained holding out hands
telling me they are waiting for me to come

nothing has changed
doubts still clamour for my mind
assaults have better weapons – my armour is thinner
there are times I would extinguish my candle
blow out the light and surrender to black
but there is the glow of Mum and Dad
the arc of all my ancestors

nothing has changed
I shrivel in the nightmares of memory
relive falling falling falling – the shock of landings
that crunch of bone and how every breath is painful

how I limp and how I am bent – the rituals of ageing
and yet somehow hills are still climbed and the views
never lose that enticement that promise of beyond

George Colkitto was born, brought up and lives in Paisley, Scotland. An ex-Inspector of Taxes, Chartered Account, and Bookshop owner, he writes both poetry and prose. His latest pamphlet if you want to know her (Cinnamon Press) will be published in Spring 2026.

Linda Conroy

Dawn of Hope

Here is dawn without a sun,
a grey smock reaching, winding its sleeve
around this home.

Is it feeling for a way to fill the space
where light will be a sign-post
when we rise?

Now, here's the dawn of faint surprise
eyes opening to rose and amber
filled with promise
dancing on the wide horizon line.

Linda Conroy, a retired social worker, enjoys writing about the complexities of human nature and spirituality, as well as our connection with the natural world. Her poems appear in many journals and anthologies. She is the author of poetry collections, *Ordinary Signs* and *Familiar Sky*.

Jennifer Gawinski Cuming

Your Vacant Seat

Your vacant seat at our Thanksgiving table
holds an emptiness
we cannot help but feel—
an arctic chill
moving through the room,
clinging to our hearts.

We remember the way you favored
candied sweet potatoes
topped with bruléed marshmallows,
brussels sprouts tossed with cranberries
and crisped bacon,
a plate piled high with turkey,
creamy mashed potatoes,
and wild-rice stuffing—
the foods we've made
year after year,
together.

How anything sweet—
especially warm apple pie
with cinnamon ice cream—
would make you smile most.

Such abundance at our table now.
After the meal,
“redneck Tupperware” containers
in the fridge

are stacked with leftovers.
More than enough—
yet I am not to share.

Because in these past years,
you've spent the holidays
with your pipe,
not with us.
We've hoped you'd come back,
sit with us once more,
choose us over the hunger
that lured you away.

But we have had to detach with love,
to protect your grandchildren
from the heartbreak
of watching you return
to what tastes best to you.

So we learned to set boundaries
instead of mixed signals.
Our door is open
when you've spent months in recovery—
still, you must knock first.

And today,
I'm thankful for our family gathered here,
for the warm affection we share—
yet I still wish
there were one more place filled,
wish everyone were here,
including you.

There will always be a seat for you—
even if, this year,
you're only here in memory.

Jennifer Gawinski Cuming is a writer whose love of language began in childhood and was shaped by the movie *Dead Poets Society*. Her recent work is inspired by the passing of her loved ones, and losing people in her life who are still alive. She has been published in previous Local Gems Press poetry anthologies.

Nick Davis

Trolling the Chesapeake

Love is not a dog from hell
Love is the beast howling in the yard
Bearing it's teeth at the half moon on Christmas Eve

After (*In a Silent Way*)

Play Miles Davis in the dead of winter
Submit yourself to the divinity of your woman
Find the blessings of this sleeping earth
Sleep knowing God has got you

Dreaming before the snowstorm
On these harsh North eastern nights
I remind myself of the summer time desires.
And to the image of me walking along the beach.
Maybe this time next year I won't be so damned lonely.

Nick Davis is a Morristown New Jersey native, currently residing in Annapolis Maryland. Nick has been writing poetry for a number of years. He has worked extensively with the New Jersey group *Arts by The People* based in Morristown, New Jersey. Works include (Jump the Turnstile 2019, Moving Words 2020, Intonation 2021) Nick has also been published in the Maryland Bards Anthology (2022,2025), the Harmonic Verse Poets for the Holidays (2023) and Eastern Sea Bards(2024) New Jersey Bards (2024) His most recent publication came in the New Jersey Bards Anthology 2025.

India DeCarmine

Healing Song

Don't breathe; time is suspended.
As the world comes back,
is mended.
As fear sounds a far off roar.
Come and dance the ragged shore.

Come dance, though your dress is torn
Come dance, though your body's worn.
Come dance. Spirit and stone.
Come dance. Rhythm and bone.

You're scared, and a little scarred,
and the world is a little marred.
But listen, if you take my hand,
we can dance upon the sand.

Come dance, though your dress is torn
Come dance, though your body's worn.
Come dance. Spirit and stone.

Come dance. Rhythm and bone.

Come dance, and never leave.
And breathe,
and breathe.
And breathe.

India DeCarmine lives, works and kayaks on Long Island.

Debbie De Louise

Twelve Months

Every year is another chance.
Twelve months to start anew.
Each day is a different opportunity.
Twenty-four hours to fill.

The minutes fly around the clock.
Quick hands that pass the seconds.
Time gives, takes, and borrows.
Always moving forward.

Another birthday, another Christmas,
another NEW YEAR.
Another reason to celebrate.
More time to spend, grow, and create.

Dreams are born and hopes are killed.
Yesterdays are buried.
Tomorrow waits in the wings
for today to start something.

Every year is another chance.
Twelve months to start anew.
Each day is a different opportunity.
Twenty-four hours to fill.

Debbie De Louise is an award-winning author and retired reference librarian. She's published over twenty books including three cozy mystery series, standalone mysteries, and a collection of cat poems. Her stories and poetry appear in over a dozen anthologies. Originally from Long Island, she moved to South Carolina where she now lives with her husband, daughter, and three cats. Learn more about Debbie and her books by visiting her website at <https://debbiedelouise.com>

John DeSantis

The Crossing

When the old immigrants came to America
they came on boats
No luxury liners or steam ships these
The immigrants packed around cargo
tight as sardines

Many succumbed
to the horrible stench
of the hold below
to the diseases that proliferated

Others grew sick and afraid
as many of them
scarcely children themselves
watched the ocean mercilessly break
over the bough

They wondered would they ever make it

On such a ship as these
my seventeen-year-old father
his yearning for America
exceeded only by
his longing for land

embarked
from Italy and
disembarked
upon Ellis Island

He kissed the ground
he told me
not so happy to be in America
as to have left behind
the stormy sea

John DeSantis has been writing poetry since about the third grade. His poetry has been published in numerous anthologies here and abroad. He lives in northeastern Pennsylvania with his wife Abby who also writes poetry and five feathered and furried children.

John M. Doherty

Peck

The catalyst
A sharp beak
Pecking on the inside of an eggshell
Each arduous blow
Creating fissures of vulnerability
Crack upon crack
A mosaic of persistence
Opening a door to a new world
Finally a breakthrough
At the very moment of exhaustion
Escape perpetrated by a weak neck
And the oversized head of a chick
A once protective and nourishing home
Now the remnants of confinement
A transformative moment on life's continuum
Struggle is the key and quintessential nature of all living things
The crucible of birth
And the dawn of a new life.

John M. Doherty is a retired deputy sheriff. He and his wife live in West Fenwick, Delaware. His romantic western novella *Darlene and the Deputy* is available on Amazon Kindle. John recently began writing poetry and his poems have been published in more than twenty anthologies.

John R. Doherty

The Weight of Quiet Things

Some men shatter like glass.
He broke like the tide.
Over and over he collapsed like the surf,
Never the same shape twice,
But always returning back to shore.
He doesn't talk about the end with her.
There is no poetry in someone closing the door on you,
While you're still offering the key.
He knew it was futile to fight for something that no longer existed.
He had to make the choice to simply let her go.
Turning to hide in the shadows, he became a ghost,
Not because of fear of being seen,
But because he had learned that to be hidden was a kind of freedom.
There he learned to mold his mind and soul,
A slow, deliberate tempering in silence,
Where thoughts became sharper and more clear,
And emotions turned into something stronger and more resilient,
Like the blade of a chef's knife, forged in Solitude,
He becomes unbreakable.
However, not many know his circumstance,
Labeling him a cheerful and caring person,
A friend willing to do whatever it took to bring happiness to others.
They don't know what it took to remain this mentally strong.
They don't know the amount of hours, days, and weeks that he dedicated to
self-reflect on the loss,
And how he constantly battled an army of demons he once embraced with
open arms.

Through the hellfire that he was forced through, he emerges like the phoenix from the ashes.

He is able to walk alone now without fear or consternation,

Because his mind and soul are at peace.

This tranquil mindset brings upon dreams of the future.

He dreams of hands that hold, foreheads to kiss, a family to be shared.

He wants to give every bit of himself to that special person,

Guided by faith and walking with conviction, given to him by a higher power.

And when that day arrives, when she makes herself known,

He will not ask her to fix what's already been mended.

He will only offer her what he's always had,

A soul that knows how to survive fire,

And still stay warm.

John R. Doherty teaches English/Language Arts to middle school students in Sussex County, Delaware. He coaches middle-school strength and conditioning and wrestling, and enjoys creating delicious food in his spare time as a private chef.

Lynette G. Esposito

Bird Eggs

The nest was not newly formed
but useable.

The eggs were not hers
but were.

When the child came,
the birds who used the nest
left behind a gift
so beautiful
the new mother cried.
Her tears were a mother's tears
as she held her new baby
that belonged to no one but her--
the beginning was not relevant.

Lynette G. Esposito, MA Rutgers has been an adjunct professor of English and creative writing and has critiqued poetry and short stories at teen art festival and others, Her poetry has appeared in North of Oxford Poetry Quarterly, Self, Glass Post, 50 Haikus, Bards Anthologies, Sheepshead, and others. She was married to Attilio J. Esposito and recommends everyone have a cat or dog as a muse.

Julie Essenberg

A Year of Reflection

As the year loosens its grip,
I turn and look—
not counting losses first,
but blessings that arrived quietly,
sometimes disguised as endurance,
sometimes as breath when breath was hard.

I was given mornings
that asked me to rise anyway,
hands that steadied me when I wavered,
and lessons that did not shout
but stayed, patient,
until I was ready to listen.

There were doors that closed
with a sound like thunder,
and others I never noticed opening
until light spilled across my feet.
I learned that survival is a kind of grace,
and joy, when it comes,
is never late—only precise.

Now the new year waits,
kneeling not in submission
but in invitation.
It does not promise ease.
It promises possibility—

raw, unmarked,
listening for the courage of my next step.

What magic might unfold?
Perhaps the kind that hums instead of dazzles.
Perhaps the kind that asks for faith
before proof.
Perhaps the kind that rises
when we dare to hope aloud.

So I bow—not to fear,
not to regret—
but to the unseen work of becoming.
May what comes next
find me open,
find me brave,
find me ready to believe
that wonder is still learning my name.

Julie Essenberg is a Michigan-based poet and writer whose work explores themes of life, transformation, and quiet grace. Her poetry often reflects a deep sense of place and introspection, drawing inspiration from nature and everyday moments. Julie's writing has been featured in local literary projects and she continues to celebrate the power of language to heal and connect.

Adam D. Fisher

Looking At The Future

A sad-eyed young man,
his face bearing the scars
of teenage acne, wearing
his blue Lowe's vest
helps me find some screws.
I follow him down the long aisle
of screws in brass, steel, stainless.
I thank him, tell him
how much I like the store.
He smiles, "Glad to hear that,"
but his face turns sad
as he looks at his future:
an aisle filled with screws.

Adam D. Fisher, Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Isaiah, Stony Brook, NY is the author of numerous articles and two books of liturgy. He is also the author of a book of short fiction, and four books of poetry. He was the Poetry Editor of the *CCAR Journal* from 2006-2014.

Jamey Fitzpatrick

Gratitude

For the broken pieces
you have held
in so many of us,
now and in years past.

You wait for us to sew ourselves up again
with an invisible thread,
each one different.

Waiting together for the moment to pass,
the deep breath in,
the healing to continue.

For the laughter you have shared,
the tears you have born witness to,
watching ourselves crack open again,
feathers molting,
and the new birds we become –
the Golden, the Browns, the Black and the White,
and all the colors in between,
we fly up into the clear blue skies
fresh from the rain.

Gratitude from our future selves,
more confident, more sure,
even in a world
and life

with so many ups and downs,
craters and mountains,
we hike into and back out of
on our own feet.

Gratitude from our current selves,
getting up from the conversations with you,
more solid, more centered,
more empowered
than even you realize.
Made whole again
from the presence
of your kindness,
your faith in our own becoming.

And gratitude from our past selves,
and all we have risen from,
long before you met us
on this journey.

We are all grateful,
that you took the time,
the call,
the extra moments,
to listen, be present,
and sit with us at the table.

“Thank you” is not enough.

Gracias.

Muchas gracias por ayudarme y ayudarnos,
por todo tu das...

Thank you so much for helping me, for helping us

For all you give....

For holding the broken pieces
and letting us
find our way in this world:
Tears, laughter,
Silence, conversation.

As beautiful birds
flying up into the sunrise and sunset,
we carry you with us
into each new day.

Jamey's a recent graduate in speech-language pathology and has made her living working with spoken and written language. She has written poetry, plays and short stories since she was a teen, which has kept her afloat in this crazy world. Publications include *A Year in Ink*, *Cellar Roots*, *Bard's West*, *Threshold*, *Dawn Horizons*, *Bards Across The Pond* and the *San Diego Poetry Annual*. Her plays and creative projects were featured in symposiums at Eastern Michigan University and CSUN. She is writing a novel about kids dealing with substance abuse who time travel.

Jackie Flaherty

In the After

We lived like swimmers under glass,
the world slowed, voices muffled,
days drifting into each other.

And now we stand in the after
asking what remains.

We learned how easily a line can split a country,
how some cling to disbelief
like a shield.
They call it fiction.
A hoax.

But a hoax does not bury the dead,
does not bruise the lungs,
does not echo in the spaces
where someone used to be.

We learned the truth hurts
and some would rather turn away

Jackie Flaherty lives in St Paul, Minnesota, but was born and raised in North Dakota. She worked in the book industry for many years and retired shortly before Covid.

Rich Follett

gradation

four in the morning, still no sleep, and
all the life-doors i never could open
flicker in psychic firelight, yawning—
a cruel mockery of youthful dreams

tossing, turning, ever restless,
searching for answers that fail me still
i wrestle with demons ‘til break of day
when numbness once more takes hold

the cycle repeats, and so the years go
with nothing but regret in their wake
no epiphany blooms, no hope filters through;
in a vacuum, darkness is oxygen ...

the cosmic clock winds down,
echoing perpetual disappointment—
insignificance reigns supreme and
futility subjugates resistance

at the absolute nadir, hope all but gone
vestigial spunk kicks in—slowly at first,
then gaining momentum until, at last,
change
is possible ...

Susan Fredericks

Augury

A narrative from east to west
A rushing cadence, painted with a nimbus brush
Obscuring now the backdrop blue with gradient glyphs,
their bottoms dark with weather,
tops of numinous gray -
Nature's aubade, heralding change.
And I, the watch do keep.

Susan Fredericks, long island native, endeavors to capture the sacred within the everyday by distilling ideas, experiences, and relationships into resonant meaning. Susan holds a BA in English with a minor in poetry from Muhlenberg College and was recently published in the Bards Annual 2025.

Paula Frew

Eternal Resolution

As the clock hand strikes twelve,
the journey through the year begins.
Like a hike through the countryside,
I begin rolling up the hills
and rolling back down.
I strip my clothes
from last year's treadmill, and set
the resistance to one and
step on beginning my walk without
the flakes of white
to carpet my way.
Tomorrow, the resistance will be two.
By year's end,
resistance is daily.
The shed pounds taunt me as they
overtake me in time for the next
champagne countdown.

The author is a 54-year-old former resident of Ohio now residing in Kentucky. Her first poem was published at fourteen. Poetry has been her close companion. She publishes to share her dreams with others. Afflicted with MS, she now resides in a nursing home, publishing in several journals and anthologies like *Ohio Bards* and *The Walt Whitman Anthology*.

Spencer Gallup

To begin anew

It's end of year in the dead of the cold
I hear my feet crunch on the white canvas
I've come back to the clearing feeling bold
this clearing had used to make me anxious,
I felt it when I let go of balloon
it's a year ago after a hard year
I pause and hear silence, it's nature's tune
on this bright winter day, silence is here,
while I stare in the clearing, I reflect
as if staring down at winter's deep well
this was quite a good year in retrospect
I hear bird's call and I'm out of the spell,
I smile knowing I'm in a better place
and go into new year at steady pace.

Spencer Gallup (He/Him) is a poet and a Legal Assistant from Mississauga, Ontario. His work has been published with Half and One Magazine, Local Gems Press Anthologies and Four Tulips Publishing. He writes and explores themes of nature, mental health, identity, disability, authenticity and Autism. His Instagram handle is [poet.sg](https://www.instagram.com/poet.sg).

Shawna Galvin

When Time Disappeared

Every moment is a new beginning.
I see this now more than ever,
and I live it better than I have before.

We constantly return to some sort of starting point.
Continuous movement:
a new year, season, month, day.
Cycles: birth, life, death.
Moon and tides, day and night. Energy flowing.

It's no mystery that life events are uncertain
and can change at any moment.
These truths can become lost and buried
among our busy lives, until they're not.

Appreciate that meal that was cooked for you
or that you are able to make for yourself,
or even afford.
Even the red light stalling you in traffic,
for at least you are alive to experience it,
and life, with all its ups and downs.

In the midst of my recurring hospital stays and surgeries,
one doctor reassured me that one day, it would all be over
and I would be able to tell the stories
of what I had been through,
that I would look back on it all one day,

And now, looking back, it's hard to believe it all happened.

There was a point where I existing but fading and debilitated,
I didn't want to die,
but I also didn't know how I was going to come out of that mess.
I said Hail Mary's constantly as time disappeared,
unknowing that other medical complications were coming my way.

I have crawled out of the ashes so many times
Lived through the darkest times I could have never imagined
I experiencing survivors guilt and even shame for surviving during the pandemic,
wondering, *why me?*
when millions are experiencing and suffering through
horrific circumstances and situations.

The magnitude of my appreciation for this second chance is often overwhelming,
astonishing even—
thanking universe every day as I am able to do even the
simplest of tasks, while my body is growing stronger.
With ongoing support,
I'm grateful for another day of being able to even wash dishes,
when there was a time I could barely move out of a bed or chair.

Over the past five years, doctors and surgeons have told me that it is a miracle
that I'm still here after a surgery gone wrong led to all the terrifying complications.

I had heard this so many times along that journey,
from my home health nurse, and many other hospital staff.

A miracle.

Well, to me, it is a miracle that any one of us are here.

Like most, I have been through dark days throughout life,
through many obstacles in which the human condition presents,
intertwined with so much love in my life.
Though the feeling of dying, declining, evaporating, felt different.

There were a times when I felt like I was neither dead nor alive,
neither here nor there through a slow recovery,
I was given a chance to stay here on Earth for a while longer.
Survivor's guilt and residual debilitating anxiety has since settled down.
I have more to learn and an opportunity to continue growing.

During those days where I felt like I was fading away,
and had fever dream death encounters,
I had no great moments of going through a tunnel,
No great white light or stories of how I learned everything on the other side.
There was nothing grand about it,
except that I survived and am still alive—

Eternally grateful to my husband and my son,
my understanding, supportive boss—
and my Earth angel of a home health nurse
who said to me as I made slow progress, “Your body likes to heal.”

I've been quite private about everything—withdrawn.
Everyone has their own hardships and challenges in life,
and many are struggling more than I have been.

It has taken a long time to process,
work through, and absorb, while some pandemic behaviors linger.
Though, what I take away from it all is a humbling feeling.
Appreciating every morsel of good moments in life
in a new and gloriously profound manner,
because we (I) never know what is in store next.

Back then, during the pandemic,
when millions of people were dying,
hospitals were understaffed, nurses scarce, and overworked,
so many had to wait for medical care—
nothing was ideal.
I was given an opportunity to go on living
when many people were being denied care because of COVID.

During and since the pandemic,
much darkness slowly seeped into the world,
as it has been for years, but growing stronger.
Wars, mass shootings, cruelty, social media madness,
mainstream media gaslighting, unhoused, violence, sickness, food shortages.
..
and those like me, given a chance to go on.

In these current times as we move past the pandemic years,
I keep hearing and reading about how it is a time of reawakening,
timeline splits and dimensional shifts.
Perhaps we're gradually entering new realms of collective goodness.

There is so much more to do with what time I have left in this life.
I don't have a grand message for anyone,
or advice to offer from what I've gone through,
as it was personal,
but one never knows how sharing an experience
may connect to someone out there in this mysterious existence.

Shawna Galvin is the writer of *The Ghost in You*, a novel. Her work has appeared in the literary journal *Words & Images*, *Local Gems Press*, *Horrified Press*, *Virtual Writer*, *Postcard Shorts*, *Pill Hill Press*, *Static Movement*, *Macabre Maine*, and more. Her second novel is due to be released in 2026. She lives in Maine with her family and enjoys being by the sea.

Nina Garfinkel

On Burning the Box of Beautiful Things

One day I fell in love with the notion
Of burning the box of beautiful things
Chuckling the past into a beautiful
Bonfire of all my insanities

A smoldering ash heap of illusions
Jejune fantasies and inane delusions
Glamorous trips to chic destinations
Fascinating talented eccentric friends
I was so driven I drove myself crazy

I'd grown desperate to escape it all
Leave behind people, places and the
Glittering things stuffed in my Pandora's Box
From which even stubborn Hope flew the coop
Leaving nothing but paste gems and bad memories

I started slowly to see through myself
Finally working up the nerve to
Burn the box of beautiful things
Torching my precious pipe dreams
I felt so proud and free

It felt like a blazing new beginning
Until I realized no sooner had I lit the match
Then I started to collect new beautiful things
One day I'll need to burn those too
New beginnings are never ending

Nina Garfinkel has been writing poetry since age 14. She is now 71. In the past she has written nonfiction works and book reviews for a small press newsletter. She lives on Long Island near the sea.

David Green

How it began

I know this is the first time.
It will not be the last
We met at Sandy's corner
For a short repast
The table bare with dishes
The kitchen in a mess
The chatter in the background
To loud to be quite clear.
So, words were softly spoken,
then they would disappear
The plan had been for coffee.
It now was for a show.
A long-forgotten favourite
Back ten years or so
It next became a movie.
Which became a cruise
Soon the evening soirees
And whose key was whose.
A cat upon the blanket
A dog I never knew.
A friend who asked a question
What next began the muse
Could this be our future, I know not, you choose.

David has been writing prose and poetry for most of his adult life. He is retired and enjoys nature and island life believing communication the peace and comfort of life can sooth other's souls.

Marley Greiner

Existence

We live on borrowed time.
Ponder fate.
Dismiss the inevitable
Abstractions of history
We will dissolve into time
Our punishment for existing
as if we never existed.
Did we?

For 20 years, Marley Greiner was active in the Columbus, Ohio lively poetry scene, giving dozens of readings.

Danielle Guarracino

For me

And in the new year
I strive
I try
I fail and yet
In the golden time
Before the year
Takes hold
Where 5 and 6 are
Both written with consistency
And the flaws
Of the
Past months
Replay in slow motion
Each sunburst of
A bright new day
Brings promise
Hope
That this is indeed
Different among
Sameness
That this is the year
The year for what?
For me

Danielle Guarracino, Ph.D. has been writing for pleasure since first grade. She is a Professor of Chemistry at The College of New Jersey, specializing in teaching Biochemistry and Organic Chemistry, and mentoring undergraduates on peptide research. In her free time she enjoys reading, writing, spending time with her family, and playing flute.

Maureen Hadzick - Spisak

Resurrection

We now sit waiting, watching
As nature performs her miracles
Forsythia and pussy willow
Resurrect
Bulbs and buds
Rebirth
It is as inevitable as
The redness of a cardinal
Flatworms, starfish, salamanders
Regenerate
Earth is spirited, green,
And full of life
Renewing, dawning, arising
And as we enter this blissful oneness
We too shall resurrect

Maureen Hadzick – Spisak is a retired Language Arts Teacher, an award-winning poet, and the author of two poetry books: *A Bite of the Big Apple* and *Yesterday I Was Young*. Her poems have appeared in numerous anthologies. She is currently working on her third book, which will be a combination of her photography and nature poems. She enjoys sharing her poems at local venues.

Michael Haldas

The Bowerbird and the Lady

The Bowerbird's color was a smooth satin blue.
It shimmered so brightly and sang while it flew.
It came to my window and sang a strange song.
I knew in my heart I must follow along.

The Bowerbird flew while I walked a brisk pace.
Across a green field toward a faraway place.
To a lone single mountain whose peak was so high,
Majestic and tall it reached up to the sky.

Onward and upward to an old sacred place.
The Bowerbird flew with such elegant grace.
It hovered in front and sang into me strength.
For I'd never walked a path of such length.

It went on forever and I passed four blue streams.
I drank from each one and had visions and dreams.
Two were of orchards with two tall great trees.
Two were of water and crystal calm seas.

Two were of lands of both emerald and gold.
Two were of cities both ancient and old.
The visions then ceased and I felt the sun's light.
It seemed that this place had never known night.

The sun's yellow light sank into my skin.
It burned without pain and renewed from within.

It reached a deep place that I couldn't define.
Perfect and pure without need to refine.

The Bowerbird changed to a fresh and new tune.
A song of such beauty that I wanted to swoon.
But I heard in the song a slight urgency.
To get to the place that it brought me to see.

We went to the top and it was a plateau.
A garden of trees that all grew in a row.
Hemmed in by a wall made of white stone.
With an east gate, and beyond the unknown.

The gate then swung open, not making a sound.
The Bowerbird landed and walked on the ground.
Head down and eyes shut, it walked through the gate.
The path that it walked was narrow and straight.

I walked through head bowed and breathed a deep breath.
This place was a place where life swallowed death.
There came to my nose a sweet, lovely smell.
It was a strange scent that I couldn't quite tell.

The trickle of water was a sound I could hear.
It filled me with awe and a bit of some fear.
The bird kept on walking, why wouldn't it fly?
But I kept myself silent while pondering why.

We came to the center, and there in the midst,
was a white fountain. I couldn't resist.
I plunged into the waters, so icy and pure.
I rose and I saw what was no longer obscure.

A lady in white stood by a white tree;
From it hung fruit that was pale silvery.
The Bowerbird flew and perched on a branch.
The look from the lady caused me to blanch.

Filled with a beauty both terrible and fair.
Long limbs of white and raven dark hair.
She offered a smile and with it came choice.
In words from her heart, she spoke without voice.

A great silver fruit hung beneath the bird's feet.
It smelled so delicious and ready to eat.
I plucked it so gently and with tender care.
I raised it to bite and then was aware.

A glance at the Lady, both our eyes met.
I heard in my heart, the time was not yet.
The Bowerbird uttered a lone single note.
One of great power but also remote.

The Lady then smiled and I knew what to do.
There was a place where tall fruit trees once grew.
The Bowerbird sang and took to the sky.
I looked at the Lady and nodded goodbye.

I followed the bird with the fruit in my hand.
Out of the garden and back down to the land.
While we descended the great mountain slope,
the Bowerbird sang a renewed song of hope.

I planted the fruit by the still lifeless lake.
Its surface was calm but mostly opaque.
The ground was so hard the soil was dirt.

I dug with my hands and they bled till they hurt.

Nearby to the lake was a pasture of sheep.
I lay down with them and went into a sleep.
The Bowerbird hovered then laid down with me.
His song was subdued and a little off key.

I awoke to the sun and a sweet smelling smell;
of ripe silver fruits and a land that was well.
The fruit had become a great towering tree.
Its leaves shone with light and I bowed reverently.

The fruits on the tree peeped out like young stars.
The dirt became soil now cured of its scars.
The lake turned to blue and the land became green.
A breeze blew about that was pure, fresh, and clean.

People then came and they bowed and they kneeled.
They ate of the tree and they all became healed.
The tree became taller and planted deep roots.
It was its delight to give of its fruits.

At last it was time for me to eat too.
The Bowerbird tweeted a song that was new.
The Lady appeared and said to partake.
For the land had been healed of its great mistake.

Then a voice spoke that only we heard.
Just the lady and me and the blue Bowerbird.
Suddenly surrounded by a wild bright light.
We all entered into its final delight.

Michael Haldas is an author, educator, and speaker. His published works include books (non-fiction and fiction), short stories, articles, and poems. His poetry has been published in multiple Local Gems Press publications, the Fellowship and Fairydust website, and the Rule of Faith: Journal of Orthodox Thought and Culture. Four of his poems were recorded as songs by the Pano Hora Ensemble for their album Evlogía. He has a long running podcast show on Ancient Faith Radio, and teaches online adult religious education classes through the Orthodox Christian Network. Visit www.michaelhaldas.com (sacramentaliving.net) to learn more about his work.

Fiona Halliday

Aspire

Aspire to fulfil your potential
Aspire to live out your dreams

Aspire to give from your heart
Aspire to listen closely

Aspire to speak only the truth
Aspire to love fully

Aspire to live abundantly
Aspire today, tomorrow, and always.

Fiona Halliday is a teacher and poet and lives with her family in Manchester, UK. Her pamphlet, 'Thoughts on Life' was published by Hedgehog Poetry Press in 2025. Fiona writes for both adults and children. She hopes to help others discover a lifelong love of learning and poetry.

Charles Hamilton

Rebirth or New Beginnings?

Hard to think of rebirth or new beginnings
In days cold and dark
Icy snow stubbornly sticking
Tree silhouettes against the cloudy sky
A long way from budding

Hard to think of rebirth or new beginnings
As we goosestep towards darkness
An SS larger than most nations' armies
Targeting those of darker skin
And those who speak the truth within

Hard to think of rebirth or new beginnings
As a young mother dies
Bullets to her head
No justice to be seen
Loudspeakers blasting lies

Hard to think of rebirth or new beginnings
As the rule of law crumbles
Throughout the world and here at home
Our forefathers' plan not accounting
For such a cowardly syndrome

Hard to think of rebirth or new beginnings
But I can try
As I watch my children parenting so well

And my grandchildren flower and smile
Hear the toddler utter “love you” for the first time

Hard to think of rebirth or new beginnings
But I can try
As I march arm and arm, raised fists
Loud and hopeful in our good trouble
So my grandkids’ kids will know I did resist

Charles Hamilton is a longtime resident of Long Island, first of Syosset, and for the past 40-plus years in Baldwin. He’s married for over 43 years to Debbie, a published poet, and the proud father of two amazing daughters, Kristen and Jessica, and doting grandfather of Summer and Jackson. A former attorney and retired union fund administrator, and currently a consultant and President of the Association of Benefit Administrators and Vice President of the National Labor Alliance of Healthcare Coalitions, Charles enjoys his family, traveling, reading, photography, running and, after a long layoff, writing poetry and “making good trouble.”

Michael Harris

The Transition

I stood by its bedside
speaking to it in low tones
it could not hear my voice
spiritually
it had packed its bags in the early hours of the morning
reserved parking spot is now empty
gassed up
and on the turnpike headed north

reminiscing about the good days we shared
how we first met
the mutual attraction
the promises
the commitment to each other

I smiled
wiping away tears from the corner of my lips
it lay there before me
motionless
faint heartbeat
fading
cold fingertips
clasped inside my warm blooded hands

someone closed the shades
there will be no sunshine when it's gone
approaching the time of final departure

the last breath taken
a final sigh
eyes closed
lifeless
I wailed in heartbrokenness
the first moments of finality
reality
yet
still asking it to come back
not to leave me
I would take its place
I would do better
get
by all means necessary
the medicine it needed to make it well again
but its condition was terminal
irreversible

it was now gone

a dream
I once had

Michael Harris has been published in the 2023, 2024 and 2025 NJ Bards Anthologies, as well as the 2024 and 2025 Poets Of The Promise collections.

He was also one of the featured poets at the Paterson (NJ) Fall Poetry Festival and contributor to the Word Press Literary Group. Harris, who currently lives with his wife in Warren County, has nine unpublished books – “She Loves The Color Blue;” “Blue Lights In The Basement;” “Words From The Blue Room;” “People, Places, Thangs;” “Out Of Sight, Out Of Mind;” “No Signature Required;” "Apocalypse;" "Standing In The Shadows Of Love" and “Chapter 9.” He is a regular online contributor at Poetry Vibe.

J. M. R. Harrison

Blues Notes

My blues gleamed almost golden
in the midmorning sun, but they still
felt gray and drier than desert dust

that rose like a storm and engulfed me.
West and East scrambled. True North
nowhere, erased. I was lost. I was blue.

I sang. The storm calmed, then stars.
Still misplaced in time and space,
I no longer fretted that I was alone.

The air suddenly clear, I could breathe.
Release: this was the gift of the blues.
Freed, phoenix-like—first flame then flight

J. M. R. Harrison has studied at the independent Writer's Center in Bethesda MD and is a graduate from the low residency MFA program of the Naslund-Mann Graduate School of Writing in Louisville, KY. Her poems have been published in *Pensive*, *Mande*, *Ivo Review*, and elsewhere. Her work has appeared in several anthologies and was featured in *Fluent Magazine* and *The Good News Paper*.

Sharon Ruth Hensley

Secondhand Salvation

Like many a thrift store find,
Eagerly hunted for, acquired,
Left too soon irretrievable.

Drawn to effervescent, new,
You pulled me in with design,
Disillusion not long behind.

We subsisted as memories,
Each a dream for elsewhere,
Would be tangles together.

There remained not known,
Marbleized tentacles shatter,
Time too often held hearts.

A proponent of practicing do no harm, Sharon Ruth Hensley is a multi-genre creative who has been primarily poeting since the eighties. Fond of truth, justice, and folks staying out of each other's way, she aims to entertain and elevate through art. Recent publication credits include the 2024 and 2025 editions of the annual anthologies for Lyrical Iowa, Harmonic Verse, Texas Bards, and The Writers' Rooms.

Arnold Hollander

Rain On Me

Rain on me
Rain on me.

Mistakes I made now haunt me
And I've lost my family

Rain on me
Rain on me

The sun shown oh so brightly
Until I'd made that run
Everything had gone so smoothly
I should not have brought a gun.

Rain on me
Rain on me

I thought the place was empty
Especially as Sunday rolled around
But the caretaker brought his daughter
Now both bodies on the ground

Rain on me
Rain on me

The judge's harsh judgement
ensures that I'll never be free,

For the memories of that moment
Will always rain on me.

Rain on me
Rain on me

Poetry is life; life is poetry. That sums up his life. He published Grassroot Reflections, a literary magazine that included writers from across the country; his poems and short stories have been published in a variety of anthologies and online, bewilderingstories.com.

Kevin Holmes

Adventure 2026

They were out
On the run
In a ruptured old Subaru wagon
Plain Jane
Marian Rachel and Alissa
Sprung and free
Melting miles
Carelessness of the young
Cross country
With barely enough money to cross town
And
Not a credit card among them
It was night
Rachel said look at that star
Like it's following us
Flakes as big as eyes
Floated light as Lilliputian lace
there was peace and quiet
Marian at the wheel
Nothing but pure peace
Calm and night and a star
Following
Right on the star
A meadow just frosting
And a single trailer
A glow
Drawn they all were

Marian parked the aching car
They slowly walked to the door
It was stuck a bit but open
Warm
Warming glow
They then saw
A worn couple with a baby just born
Softly feeding
Each of the three
Drew simple breath
Rachel placed a half sandwich
Marian a beef jerky
Alissa a bag of chips
No words were spoken
Faces thanked faces
Plain Jain waited in heat
It was miles before the simple joy reached the three
But
The change was forever.

James E. Hopkins

The Lake

I walked down to the lake, the geese watching me.
Elder woman on the bench providing them their morning repast.
Picking my way among the leavings and the goings
Gone aowl.

Sun warms me now, ironing out the wrinkles that I slept in.
Fresh scent breeze opening lungs for business.
Soul joints crack as they expand for the day, like chrysalis-born
Butterfly wings awaiting their emergence.

Across the swan-ploughed glass stands the Temple
Where Christ-borne mysteries stately spangle Light
Uplifting seekers where they lie awakening drowsily,
Taking the sustenance of this New Day.

Birch trees spreading their canopy over the gathering
Green carpet floating gently, lapping its whispers
Against the stone of earth-edge bordering well-footed path.
Bridge spanning sluices asperging out to Bay.

The geese have walked their way, the elder woman squawked her say,
And I've enjoyed another day among the leavings lakeside
And the goings of the crinkles that I leapt in,

Sun Day.

A life-long resident of Long Island, Jim is a published poet and novelist. He has a B.A. in French and an M.S. in Metaphysics. He is an emeritus board member and featured speaker for the Language Creation Society. Retired now, he lives with his wife Suzan in West Babylon, NY.

Mark Hudson

Paleontology

A paleontology exhibit,
at the Florida museum of history,
Leaves nothing to prohibit,
about these ancient mysteries.

Live interaction,
visitors see a laboratory,
bringing on satisfaction,
to a prehistoric story.

Scientists seen at work,
working in the spotlight.
Just a visitor's perk,
giving the people insight.

Visitors get to learn,
from displays, placards, and props.
People get to take a turn,
the curiosity never stops.

Many people talked of dinosaurs,
as they saw skeletons and bones.
Seeing all these carnivores,
the displays to see out on loans.

The scientists were rather surprised,
by the enthusiasm of the crowd.
The people at Florida museum,
have a reason to feel rather proud.

Mark Hudson is a long-time contributor to Local Gems. He looks forward to contributing in 2026.

Jay Jii

Mark the Moment

Library stage

Waiting

In the wings

Ready to step

Into the glow

Of spotlights

That interrogate

My tongue poised

To bring truth

To script

My foot lands

On a strip

Of gaffer's tape—

It reads:

Step here;

Rewrite the play

Not a cue

Not blocking

Epiphany

Fiction melts

Beneath the parcans

I am suddenly untethered
Not pretending

Becoming

Jay Jii

Purveyor of Poetic Cabaret.

Curator of the Avant Garden Poetry Amphitheater.

Writer. Composer. Adventurer. Romantic.

Musician. Thespian. Artist. Film-maker.

English Bulldog enthusiast.

Stuff like that...

Kristi Hager Johnson

Dear Amy

We sat in my bright, sunlit kitchen,
my cat stretched out luxuriously,
the baby sleeping in her little pastel zoo room.
Everything was as it should be -
for me.

Dear Amy's heart opened with a rusty can opener.
Pops, clicks, twists.
We were barely strangers and I had somehow
taken hold and was twisting her open.

She dreamt of a little house, little rooms,
a little yard and a fence too.
No garage, no driveway -
not necessary,
just what was on the inside.

Stains of rust, half torn tin, jagged edges.
The corner of her roof was lifting off.
They were three in a house of One -
sore, raw,
a part of her sacrificed.
She didn't even know if she cared,
but the house meant so much.

The sunlight filtered through the thick canopy of live oaks.
She learned to dance on concrete.
If only it would grow.

Nothing grew.
No grass, no garden - not in sand.
Fruitless, futile - this puzzle house.
Another rough twist, a jagged edge.
The house of One now housed four.

Vacant eyes stared out,
shadows moving across walls.
She tore down Yellow wallpaper with paint -
the pallet of India,
of bazaars, spices, peoples.
The merciless opening, pouring, bleeding ceased.

The One house fit four.
Sun and moon passed overhead.
Their shadows came and went.
The One house settled with the weight of time
-just a slight shifting.
The roof recoiled dryly,
the trees cocooned tightly,
air became still.
A thin strip of Yellow wallpaper crept out of hiding,
crackling as the can opener popped once again and
fear was released.
If only she could go...
the house of One fought five to fit.

The thing,
some thing drove her away.
Every second, every chance.
She could not hear the twisting, creaking, the cutting.
She grew numb to pain -
forgot how to dance on concrete,

only ran on shifting sands.

But, at night with singular vision she saw -
a little house, little rooms,
a little fenced yard.
A place that would replace the One house.
Where they would all fit,
all have space and air,
a place where she could be sure.

Singular vision turned to singular desire,
singular purpose to singular will.
Whether she wished it,
prayed it,
made it up,
it became hers.
Each room a testament of her devotion.
For nothing had ever truly been hers before.
This pouring out was pleasure.
It tasted sweet in her mouth.
The sun and moon shone in equality on her bungalow house
fit for five.

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away-
she held out her tongue, a sugar cube;
she reached out her hand, a Devil's club.
Blessed be the Name of the Lord.
The dear little bungalow,
minus All
was empty.

She was hollow walking back through
the One puzzle house.

It had waited eerily for her return.
She stood on the threshold looking, searching -
while the four found a way to fit.
In the black cardamom kitchen she spied the speck of yellow yeast,
the unholy thing making unclean her dreams.
She swept, she cleaned, she crawled on her knees -
she trapped the yeast,
finally spying the slice of Yellow wallpaper.
Destroying it meant
scratching, pulling, tearing away.
The wall was rusted underneath,
made of tin,
her fingers cracked, her nails broke, she was bleeding.

The ever present crushing noise of the can opener ripping out her heart -
stopped.

She could still taste the sugar cube on her tongue;
her hands wept blood from clutching the Devil's club.
The dappled sunlight crept across her face;
the shadows danced coolly over her body.

She threw the primordial stick through gaping hole above,
spinning around the One house,
losing herself,
loosing this place.

She lifted her Dear face and wounded hands skyward,
her raw soul to the heavens,
and in triumph she cried,
I release the One! A place for four it shall be!
Take away the puzzle, the sadness, and renew me!
This Your home, oh Lord - where I and my three will abide.

Make this, My house, a Home of delight and pride.

The can opener stopped.

There was nothing more to see.

Peace for my Dear Amy forever will be.

Kristi Hager Johnson has lived in North Carolina for over 40 years. She has always had a love affair with words. Born in Ohio she claims to have a buck-eye heart, tar on her heels, salt water in her veins, and a soul made whole through writing. Her first book of poetry, *Routes Of Remembrance*, is available on Amazon.

Dawn Karima

New Moon Winter Solstice Song

A gift for Duane Brayboy

As I slipped the last stitch
Into my son's medallion,
Tawodi, rendered in blues and greens,
I heard a screech in the trees.
A hawk perched in the branches.

I held my beadwork up so the raptor could see,
And wondered if you would appear,
If I wove a Bear from my beads.

Dr Dawn Karima is a Native American Music Award Winner, a four-time Global Music Award Winner, a two-time Indigenous Music Award Nominee and the Winner of an Indigenous Artist Activist Award. Dr. Karima hosts the award winning World Entertainment Award nominated podcast, CONVERSATIONS WITH DAWN KARIMA.

Susan Keller

Revolution

There is such a thing
as a revolutionary sunset
and sunrise.

Not the dawn of a new society
or the twilight of an empire.
But the dawn newly seen
and the sunset freshly remembered.
The reds intimately felt,
the fading blue fully understood.

And this:
To fall asleep with resolve
and rise in the morning
a reflex.

Susan Keller has worked as a book editor, a high school English teacher, and a nonprofit communications professional. She has been writing poems since Girl Scout sleepover camp in 5th grade. She is one of the organizers of Philly Poetic Resistance, which hosts monthly poetry gatherings. Her work has been published in *Apiary* and various Moonstone anthologies.

Edward Kenny

Salmon

We came to them in human form
From the water of the spirit
And sang to them an ancient song
Oh, if only they would hear it.

And then, in time we changed again,
And set off upon our travels,
But through the years, the meaning's lost,
And the tapestry unravels.

The first food was a holy gift
That's important to remember,
Don't let it fade from our sight,
Like a fire's dying ember.

For why else were we given life
By this bountiful creator,
If not to love and take the path
That was drawn by someone greater?

Oh, Father, when I first awakened here,
'Neath the fountain of fresh water,
My eyes were clear and I saw you appear,
Before each son and each daughter,
But, the time has come for my leaving now
On my voyage to the ocean,
Until I come back to where I was born,

The salmon's eternal motion.

The whale, the seal, and the great shark,
And the dangers they present me,
A gauntlet I was born to pass,
By the will of he who sent me.

Intrepid and courageously,
I must always keep on swimming,
Take solace that I've done my best,
When my final sun is dimming.

And bring back to the place of birth,
All that nurtures our existence,
In the cycle of our sustenance,
In spite of the man's resistance.

But, does no one see this miracle?
Or wonder how it all began?
Or celebrate the brotherhood
Between the salmon and the man.

Oh Father, when I first awakened here,
'Neath the fountain of fresh water,
My eyes were clear and I saw you appear,
Before each son and each daughter.
But, the time has come for leaving now
On my voyage to the ocean,
Until I come back to where I was born,
The salmon's eternal motion.

Edward Kenny is an author, lyricist and librettist. He has published several books of poetry, lyrics and children stories, including three verse plays/librettos. He has written the book and lyrics for 11 musicals, including one that was selected as a finalist in the New York Drama League's Grants Competition, along with some 1,600 lyrics. His lyric "BROKEN MAN" was recently recorded by "The Bowmen."

Annette Ketner

The View is New

He said, “So what do you like best about retirement?”

There was a long pause while I waited for something remarkable to come to mind.

I expected it would be something profound, like researching the meaning of life,

Exploring what dark holes actually are, and whether the Universe is really what we think it is,

To read great thinkers on the importance of work, the hideousness of war,

The odd societal structure mankind has created,

And what our lives mean in the end, and why were we even here.

Instead, the answer was embarrassingly unremarkable...

“Clouds. I love looking at the clouds; they’re so beautiful, changing all the time,

Some fluffy and wispy, others bubbling, grouping, traveling quickly

Some with storms inside, some just moving quietly across the sky.

I never had time before to just sit and watch them, passing the day

As they have for millions of years above Earth’s many changes.

“And Music. Having the time to really listen to music

To hear the melodies and let the vibrations settle into my body;

To sing along, or hum without the words.

To really listen to the lyrics and understand the stories they tell.

To feel the peace and comfort they bring. That takes time I didn’t have.

“My Front Porch. The pure joy of sitting on my front porch
In the quiet of the early morning with a cup of good coffee
Sun breaking in the east, birds waking each other up .
Calm quiet in the midst of a bustling city protected by a treelined canyon rim.
That magic of early morning and being able to not rush through it to go to
work.”

He looked a little disappointed with the simplicity of my response
He had expected continued striving of some kind, some product, some thing.
Instead, nothing big. Nothing intellectual. Nothing remarkable.
Just the truth of finally having some time that wasn't sold for a paycheck.
Simply, time to experience what was here all along.

Retired from the University of San Diego, M. Annette Ketner is embroiled in writing a memoir on growing up in a midwestern family diner in the 1950s. Now living in San Diego, her stories/poems appear in multiple anthologies published by San Diego Writers Ink, International Memoir Writers, Local Gems. (Writers Ink's A Year in Ink V.11, 14, 15, 17; International Memoir Writers' Shaking the Tree V.4, 7, San Diego Poetry Annual and Local Gems anthologies.)

David R. Kleiner

Retirement

I was so caught up in the mechanics of it...

This thing called retirement

The health insurance, the pension choices, the notifications

The good-bye parties, the thank-yous, the cleaning my desk

I hadn't stopped to FEEL

I hadn't felt the freedom, only the mechanics, the planning

How do you feel? they asked

It's complicated I'd say

Too many emotions I'd say

But I didn't FEEL

yet

Now I'm here

The seemingly endless future before me

The seemingly endless possibilities

The choices

Or the not choosing

The doing

Or the not doing

The thoughts

Or the not thinking

The resting

Or the not resting

Very much like graduating high school

Without the hair

With the wisdom of age
With the aches and pains of age
With the medications of age
With the money I managed to save

Today I take my binoculars to the marsh
The birds will know how I FEEL.

David R. Kleiner recently retired from a career as a public school teacher. He has been writing songs and poems all his life, and has recorded four albums of original songs. You can follow him on YouTube and TikTok at "Daves-SongToday." He enjoys playing the guitar, traveling, and devouring good food.

Denise Kolanovic

If I Were Immortal

If I were immortal
I'd know everything
I'd learn from the past
And be afraid of nothing.

If I were immortal
I'd no need for the future
And the present wouldn't be a present
But rather another day.

If I were immortal
I'd watch my world change
Over and again as I'd stay exactly the same -
nostalgia would have no effect on my heart.

If I were immortal,
Slowly, I'd lose my friends and family
And each new group would know me less
So I would love them less
And eventually love would die.

If I were immortal
I'd no longer be human.
I wouldn't need food or fun or romance.
I would be a vampire
Or I would be a monster.

If I were immortal,
I'd be miserable.

Michael Krasowitz

I am the horizon

Looking back to the shore
Filled with undulating mammals
Awaiting some sense of purpose while designating the infrastructure of the
universe as ambiguous.
I can tell them
But I do not comprehend their apprehension to almost any sense of change
I feel the sun rising behind me.
Soon they will all cover their eyes.

I only exist as a manifestation of the viewer.
Shifting a metaphor for change
Like the idea of tomorrow
Or a future yet undetermined.

I am the dawn of a new era
But I have my price
I take from your sense of destiny
Shatter illusions of safety and doctrine
I try to reassure you
Everything will be fine
All the children dance at the possibility
Others cower to injustice

When will I arrive
I am already here, the future
Now I am settling in
You are just starting to notice.

I am sorrow and I am joy
I am resilience and I am trepidation
I am fixed and I am amorphous
I hope and I am despair

Everything in between
Fluctuating within a matrix of modular components
A paradox without and within
As hope drives the engine to unknown destinations.

The horizon meets the new dawn
Shattering the night in a burst of understanding
Silently travelling throughout the sky
Unlimited potential radiating through the firmament.

Michael is a local in Huntington NY. In the past couple of years he has not written much poetry, and is trying to incorporate words into his visual art and sit down to develop his writing chops.

Joan Kuchner

Inheritance

the house died too
cracks appeared in the ceiling
paint flaked
showers leaked
screens tore
tiles turned their backs on each other
the furniture stood unmoving
waiting for the clock to stop

then slowly the house began to heal
sunflowers smiled on the hearth
carpets tickled bare toes
shades opened to greet the changing light
fading memories of old conversations
chairs shifted to fit around new bottoms
the ticking tide clock could be heard
over promised footsteps
as the house listened to new laughter

The year Joan F. Kuchner, Ph.D.'s first grandchild was born, she retired from the Psychology Department at Stony Brook University where along with teaching and research, she served as Director of their Child and Family Studies Program. Embracing this new chapter of her life, she devoted time to her family and creating poetry on some of the same themes that she focused on in her academic career. Her poems have been published in Oberon Poetry Magazine, Suffolk County Poetry Review, Bard's Annual, and Nassau County Poetry Laureate Society Review as well as several anthologies including Writing Outside the Lines Anthology, To Be Completely Honest Anthology, Saving Ourselves: An Anthology Advocating for Women and Girls, Minute Musings, Gathering Poetry Anthology, Ghosts, Echoes and Shadows, Harmonic Verses, Eastern Sea Bards: A Poetry Anthology, Bards Across

Ronnie M Lane

Casting Bread On The Water

there is no way
no definitively manner

in which to prove
we are not world
without end, a universe
in both directions,
the microcosmic as well the macro,
and whatever comes
before and after them.

I like to think
the bad guys
are transported,
at some point
in eternity,
to smaller
and smaller
universes
until they are
so tiny
that tiny
is gigantic.

They could stay
in the minor leagues,
where they belong.

And transversely
the heroes

and angels
and dead innocent
move on
to bigger things
at some point
in eternity.

Ronnie M Lane is a transplanted poet from Michigan to Florida. He lives with his wife of many years, Judy. Among the many books he has published is Sea Green Dreams 2025.

Kirk Larsen

Deep Breath

I'm sitting outside with my feet in the shade...
My cup full of coffee, my bed yet unmade.

And I breathe and I smile at the vibrant blue sky...
And I know that my life did not pass me by.

The chirping of birds and the waving of trees...
As they welcome, embrace and hand off the breeze.

All the sensations at the start of the day...
All come together near the ending of May.

And I sit and I sip, and I ponder and write...
All the joys of this morning
All this color and light.

I'm sitting outside with my feet in the shade...
And it feels in this moment as if I've got it made.

Kirk Larsen is a true renaissance man recognized with over 206 awards for writing, painting, sculpture, photography; a writer of poetry, essays, articles and screenplays as well as a film and TV actor. Poems published in many anthologies including editor's choice in NCPLS review. He's a mentor, motivational speaker & actor, twice Nominated Poet laureate of Nassau County, a gourmet cook, plays blues harp and a heavily addicted classic & modern sailboat racer.

Alicia Lavoie

Salvation

A small voice reaches out
beyond time and space, a
prayerful sonnet aching
upon lips drenched with tears.

The wee hours, midwifed and
guarded by eagle song,
cradle freedom, a mere
breath, gratitude-grounded,
deep within soul center.

I speak their names, the ones
who fed the inferno,
cauterizing my wounds;
still, apathy festers.

I must break chains, lest I
trigger my doom spiral:
bitter, heartless despair —
a poisonous apple,
Society's shadow.

Snow White took a small bite,
sleep-dying, heaviness
crushing her throat, a truth
rapidly extinguished.

Her gift, a latent seed,
unfurls green growth, its roots
cracking toxic bedrock —
fear, its apparition;
self-worth, my salvation.

Alicia-Marie Lavoie is an untamable poetic soul walking an intuitive path with two feisty cats. A 2003 graduate of Northern Vermont University (Johnson), she holds a Bachelor of Arts in Feature Journalism and Political Science. Her writing has been featured in the 2023, 2024, and 2025 *Connecticut Bards Poetry Review*. Alicia's work honors being fully, ferally rooted in life and nature. Her website: <https://aliciamarielavoie.substack.com>.

James von Lenz

The Morning Show

The radio glares back
Dead eyed and vapid
As I frequent the same tragic routes

A sprawl that breeds resentments
Placated with amber calm
Warm and strange

But underneath it
The mounting promise of annihilation
No way out

There are some, backs to the wall
Who would welcome the change

James von Lenz is a songwriter and poet based in Crofton, MD. His specialties include limericks, haikus, and lyrics.

Iris Levin

lost in thought

new years day
and i am snug and cozy
in front of the fireplace

lost in thought
i am grateful for this time
in the new year
to quietly reflect
on knowing that
despite whatever happened
despite whatever is happening
despite whatever will happen

there will be music
a hug to bring comfort
a baby's smile to bring joy
changing seasons to bring beauty

and

a new day
to bring humankind
a hopeful second chance
to heal
a hurting world

Iris Levin writes to never forget the human experience. An observational poet, she sees her work as snapshots of life, short probing images, telling a story.

Lori Levy

Laughter In The Face Of Death

We celebrate her 92nd birthday early
because we think she is dying
and won't last another two months
until her actual birthday.

We sing her version of the song:

Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you.

You look like a monkey, and you act like one too.

We make monkey faces, noises, like she always did
to amuse her grandchildren, her great-grandchildren.

The doctors say our mother won't walk again
after her stroke. Won't talk again.

She can't swallow anything—except jello,
inserted with a syringe. They say it won't be long,
so we gather around her bed to say our goodbyes.

We hold her hand, tell her we love her.

Tell her it's okay to let go, we'll be okay.

She smiles, as if suppressing a laugh.

Let go? There she is, two months later—
this time sitting at the kitchen table,
feeding herself birthday cake with a fork.

The cake keeps slipping off,
but she gets it, finally, to her mouth.

She holds her cup, drinks coffee by herself.

Later, she walks down the hall with her walker,
her caregiver beside her. Some words come out,

mostly sounds we can't understand.

We can't help laughing. We imagine her talking.

Words that make sense. Her dementia gone.

Lori Levy's poems have appeared in numerous online and print literary journals and anthologies, as well as medical humanities journals. Two of her chapbooks were published in 2023: "What Do You Mean When You Say Green? and Other Poems of Color" (Kelsay Books) and "Feet in L.A., But My Womb Lives in Jerusalem, My Breath in Vermont" (Ben Yehuda Press). Levy lives with her husband in Los Angeles near their children and grandchildren.

Sheri Lynn

forgiveness rain

poetry is never too ambitious
when a politician never apologies
and nightmares shout no remorse

surging inspiration to safeguard
liberty for next generations
see it *inhale* imagine it *exhale*

believe in possibilities
even as revenge is witnessed
silent acquiescence is demanded

spinning chaos to deafen hope
NO!
we won't be stifled by such intentions

I'd rather believe in a world led
from merciful compassion than dissolve
into despair under charcoal skies

as long as we stand, unite, vote
envision our collective home
a sanctuary

aspire *treat each other as you treat yourself*
beseched by cultures and religions worldwide—
let us heal

because if we can imagine it
we will create it
standing under a forgiveness rain

Award winning poet and photographer Sheri Lynn, has over eighty works across dozens local to international publications including *Ms. Magazine* and *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. *Dream Believe Publish* published her chapbook *Nature's Breath*. Sheri leads weekly UUCSR poetry discussions, belongs to LIPC and other NY & VA poetry and advocacy organizations, is grateful to Bards and all for support and encouragement on this artistic journey. She invites you to connect and learn more about published works and events by visiting her site BreatheInsights.com.

Tatiana Lyulkin

Slow Healing

Don't be afraid of the night,
Take a bath,
Have a cup of herbal tea,
Say a prayer
Before you drift off to sleep,
Leave the nightlight on
If you must-
It will guide you back home.

Don't be afraid of the silence
That comes after the storm,
Learn to walk barefoot on the sand,
One foot
In front of the other,
Step by step,
Until you
And the raging sea within
Become one.

You can't heal overnight,
Rebirth is not cheap,
Embrace your inner light,
Your fear, your confusion,
Embrace
What little hope is left,
Grab your wings
And learn to fly.

Learn to soar
Graceful and strong
Over the churning dark sea.

Tatiana Lyulkin is a Ukrainian American poetess, playwright and photographer whose work was published in various literary magazines and online.

Mary Beth Magee

Compass Rose

She trailed her fingers along the inlaid globe
And watched it spin on its mount at her touch.
How many times had Papa fussed at her,
“The earth is not a toy!”
It had always been more than a toy to her.
The cool touch of its curvature,
The colorful relief details of the continents,
The soothing blue of the seas.
She treasured every part of it.
She always stopped the globe's rotation
When the compass rose came into view,
Savoring the delicate beauty of its points
Radiating with information, inspiration.
Each pole pointed to a potential adventure,
A new place to visit.
Under Papa’s tutelage, she had visited in print,
Reading of curious customs,
Exotic cuisines,
Lyrical languages.
Now she visited in person,
Her passport covered in stamps
Identifying those same lands she once studied.
Her treasured memories held the sights and sounds,
The melodies and fragrances and flavors
Of those destinations.
And still the compass rose guided her
As a painting

From a large frame on her study wall.
As it watched over the smaller compass rose
Embedded on the globe on the table below,
It shared delight and inspiration
With the woman who still held
The child who once spun the globe
And thrilled to the dance of the compass rose.

Mary Beth Magee explores God's world and writes about it in many genres. She is the current President of the Mississippi Poetry Society as well as the 2025 Mississippi Poetry Society Poet of the Year. Magee is an award-winning poet and author, freelance journalist, a Storyteller and a speaker on a variety of topics. She serves as narrator for The Everyman Puppet Theatre. Visit her website at www.LOL4.net for more about her work.

Brittany Malico

Helium:

I've let myself go, like a toddler holding a balloon at a parade. Bystanders silently peer at me as I float away, marveling at the speed of my ascent. Now I'm a tangled mess, caught in these branches of depression and regret but hope is like helium. It'll fill and lift you higher than the tallest trees, but sometimes I wish I never knew how free it feels to believe, that I could soar amongst the clouds of recovery.

Katherine Marotta

Tempering Steel

quote: "The good lord made us all out of iron. Then he turns up the heat to forge some of us into steel." marie osmond

Character is not built from
pounding suffering and pain
What would be the gain?

Holding tight when set on fire
from burning hurt disappointment and loss
Isn't there a cost?

Hearing pounding words:
this too shall pass- you must let go
Isn't this pacifying low?

The idiot that fires words like
get over it- tomorrow is another day
Shouldn't you push that fool away?

Negative and hurt inflicted toward any
will inevitably make them strong
Don't you think this wrong?

A human like steel from iron
being pounded fired up then cooled
How can anyone be fooled?

There is no room for suffering
in any form – I will insist
Tell me please -Why would any 'lord' say this?

Lynda McClary

I Think I Saw A Phoenix

She walked like she was recovered
It was amazing to see her smile
That smile had been gone, you see
Good teeth, good posture
displayed delicate ember bones
Flowing yardage of dress feathers
draped as if to take flight
Hair swept in a swirling nest of ribbon
teetered in height, staying erect
Clearly the message was Upward
Cameras were flashing, buzzing, clicking
Crowds were mesmerized
No surgeons, no subterfuge, no doubt
This was no vanishing act
She walked like she was flying
She smiled and she sang
There were no smoldering remains
She was risen

Lynda McClary is a published creative writer of poetry, stage plays, and lyrics. Her poems have been published in *Time of Your Life*, *Maryland Bards Anthology* and at Manor Mill Arts Center, announcing their "Poetry Day". Lynda has a degree in Theatre Arts and Nonprofit Management.

René McKeel

A Watercolor Beginning

Silver greys drift through emerald boughs,
Embraced by color of unseen hallows.
Moments intertwine, defining each their fate.
Leaves crystallize in surrender, every vein aglow.
Cascading into icy droplets, to crystalline fields below.

Curling wisps of smoke blur distant on the horizon,
Wind's hum farewells bidding farewell to the tyranny of 2025.
Ice dust metamorphoses into colors anew.
Gale brushes caress each new blank canvas, melding shadow with light,
Capturing winter's embrace in broad textured strokes.

As flowers cannot last forever,
So too must ice eventually fade.
With old teardrops falling gently,
New blossoms break the ground,
Heralding the promise of a new year watercolor.

René McKeel is a passionate poet who began her writing journey in her senior year of high school. Over the years, her love for poetry has blossomed into a profound appreciation for the art of expressive writing.

Tina McKeon

My Road to Redemption

Freedom lies
in a reckless dance
So, I spin,
flailing my arms
Feet thud
across the hardwood floor
Scratching my flesh,
I bleed in release
Screaming out loud,
I revel in liberation
My body now spent,
as my soul's rebirth dawns

Since 1993, Tina has achieved success as a freelance writer. Her poetry has been published in print anthologies, as well as online. To date, she has self-published five books, written and published editorials, and conducted writing seminars. You can connect with her on Facebook at Tina M McKeon- Author.

Rosemary McKinley

Wisp of a Child

A new addition
A sprinkle from heaven
a wisp of a child---a baby
even the word evokes
a precious, innocent creature
for the family to love and cherish

A new family member
a clean slate
begins a life enveloped by love

Rosemary McKinley has had short stories, poetry, and articles published. Her three books: 101 Glimpses of the North Fork and Islands, Wampum Exchange and Captain Henry Green, a whaler, showcase the rich history of Long Island, New York. <https://www.rosemarymckinley.com>

Stacey Militana

A Journey Begins

A thousands steps started today
I took a single step forward
Opening the door and stepping outside
Unknown adventures waiting for me
Leaving my quiet, hobbit like home
Comfortable, warm and safe
Venturing into the unknown
Uncomfortable and a little scared
I wander into the sunrise
Excited, anxious
Wondering where my wandering will take me
What stories will I collect on my journey
An adventure awaits me
All because I took that first step
Out the door
Into the wild unknown

Stacey is a South Carolina poet who enjoys the simple things in life. She loves hanging out at the beach, reading, watching documentaries ranging from true crime to sports and music. She is trying hard to make room for new adventures.

Marie Miller

Eulogy For a Crow

There were no mournful church bells,
No hearse passing by.
No flowers sent. No tears to quell.
The crow lay dead,
On the sidewalk cement,
A place to depart: a final descent.
No songs were sung, no candles burned,
Nothing sentimental, nothing sullen.
Lying now in graceful content,
Its body, like a ballet dancer spent.
Feathers glistening,
Head bowed, closed eyes,
No sign of struggle or lament.
Graceful and poised in black,
Quiet, dark beauty,
The crow's only raiment.
Then the sun sent its rays-
A spotlight for the showing.
The single mourner, a passer-by,
With bowed head, shoulders bent:
Unbidden tears start flowing.
Feathers no longer meant for flight
Despite the prayers' imploring.
Instead, dancing on shiny dark shroud:
Lilac, mauve, forest green, aqua blue,
Magenta, purple, emerald, indigo,
Colors of every hue.

A rising chorus of iridescence all aglow.
Moving to music I cannot hear, but only sense.
It spoke of magic, death, and transformation.
Black Holes: the silent potential of the unknown
...all tottering on the edge of creation.
It spoke of reluctant courage: raw, unadorned.
The grace to embrace darkness,
To step into the mystery of the unknown,
Where all is possible, still being formed,
Then translated into something even more.
Like the crow,
To carry the surprise of beauty
into places that seem only dark,
To come to the edge of time
And reenter graciously...
A dynamic spark
Into the depths of eternity,
Seems to be the appropriate eulogy.
May we all fall so gracefully.

Marie Miller was raised on a farm and now lives in Columbus, Ohio. Her poetry is influenced by the beauty of nature and the spirituality of the living world. She has been a teacher for her lifetime sharing the magic of the extraordinary in the ordinary.

CR Montoya

The First Walk

A new year and fresh, soft snow
the waxing moon still graces the sky
fresh rabbit prints creating patterns
not snow angels, little faces
visages of unborn smiles
tear drops from snow crystals melting
creating patterns, puzzles for the day

New challenges, adventures
a world of fresh ideas bursting from each melting flake
each shape, a unique story
a tale waiting for verses
rhymes announcing a year filled with promise
potential to awaken the soul
fill the spirit
embrace the day
and lift words rejoicing in the greatness
waiting to be composed
waiting for a voice

A new sunrise, a full moon
butterfly mysteries
creatures awaiting the time of renewal
to aspire
to create
to live another life
raise others up

create a view filled with joy and hope.

I turn and see my footprints
time crunched into the snow
leaving the past year behind
welcoming the new year

CR Montoya is an active participant in the Long Island poetry scene and has contributed to anthologies such as Nassau County Voices in Verse, various Bards Anthologies, and others. Since 2012, he has published children's stories narrated by Papa The Happy Snowman. A favorite story for young readers is Sophie's Unicorn, A Tale of Wonder. A recurring theme is the positive message conveyed by the stories.

Davion Moore

The New Day

The sun rises
And gives life
To a new day,
A perfect opportunity
For new beginnings.
Taking the first step
Is the scariest part
Yet the most satisfying part.
In the end
It is a necessity
And puts one on the path
They are destined
To travel.
Take advantage
Of the moment
Do not let it pass
The gift is the present
Not the past

Davion Moore is a writer from Ohio. His passions include sports, poetry and documentaries. His poetry can be found in works such as the 2022 Poetry Marathon Anthology, the Bards Across The Pond Anthology, Lost at 27: Musicians, Artists, Mortals and more. He also has drabbles in various Black Ink Fiction projects.

Ralph Morini

Old Age Teachings

As a young person
my focus was on
finding my path,
supporting my family,
building a successful work career.

There was pressure to perform
in many aspects of life,
luckily at a time when motivation and energy
were up to the tasks.

As an older person
with most of life behind me,
challenged by age and illness,
my focus is different.

Rather than compete
I want to give more than get,
feel our connection to all living things,
sharing what I can afford to share with others,
physically, emotionally, educationally, financially.

I don't want to compete,
but rather support other people, our allies, our environment
imagining a friendlier more broadly loving world
than the one we experience today.

While my life has gotten narrower
and my impacts smaller,
I want to do what I can
to add joy to people's lives
and spread a positive message to all
without judgement, resentment or hate,
making best use of the time and energy I have left.

Ralph Morini is a retired manufacturing company manager. He has worked with poetry his whole life, mainly to process and memorialize various life events. He has lived up and down the east coast, currently residing in Charlottesville, VA.

S.M.C Nelson

Forget them

Once I met you,
You clapped so loud.
I stopped remembering those who didn't.
Those who threw stones upon a fallen woman,
A woman lifted by you.
You embraced so fully, so entirely,
Memories of half hearted hugs ceased to exist.
As you lifted me from the rubble of catastrophic destruction,
You surrounded me in support, in love,
And suddenly,
The past no longer mattered.
The demons dancing upon the grave they created vanished from my mind
And the voices calling me to join silenced
For reasons to persist emerged.
You gave me reasons to live
To breathe
To try.

Poet S.M.C Nelson, based in eastern Maryland, chronicles transparent tales of grief, healing, trauma and transformation. Their work respectfully explores loss, resilience, and hope.

Karen Neuberg

A New Beginning

(an abecedarian poem)

A new beginning is usually
bright with blaring
colors that climb
desire sending wafts of
expectation into propulsion.
First, you step into an unfamiliar
grammar that describes
how you're proceeding and how
it wants to go and how you want it to
jump to the desired conclusion without
kicking and screaming

like a tantrumming child in the super-
market of your own heart or

negating every two steps with
one back while an ice-rimmed
puddle confronts your bare feet and you
question the validity of this now-old new beginning
running your life and maybe even ruining it
so that you seek something new
to call a new beginning
until you've stacked up newer new beginnings and
vault the older ones in a dark place you still

wish upon and recall as something almost
xenobiotic to your person now or
yarn-like, a story of a story that continues
zig-zagging like a tempest buzzing in your dreams.

Barbara Novack

December 31

A winter sky, layered gray
this December's end
pale yellow, wisp of blue,
the distant horizon's
streak of sun, slice of sky.

It is enough.

As this old year's roller coaster ride
swoops to its twisty-turny end
with a 10-9-8 . . . glittery slide,
we raise our glasses, raise our eyes
catch life's confetti
in our palms, toss it joyously high;
the new ride already inches ahead
with its deceptive slow rise.

It too will twist and turn
drop suddenly only to
again swoop and climb.

It too will end with layered gray
and a winter horizon's gift:
streak of sun, slice of sky —
hope in a brand new day.

Barbara Novack, Writer-in-Residence and member of the English Department at Molloy University, is author of five books of poetry and a Pulitzer Prize-nominated novel. On campus, she founded and hosts Poetry Events and off campus conducts highly regarded creative writing workshops. *Marquis Who's Who* has honored her with their Lifetime Achievement Award.

Robin Ortega

The Graduate

The sun beats hot through the windshield
As the dissonance of honed palm fronds
Sting the wispy dove clouds
The beginning of a frigid winter

A stop for a favorite or two or three
And a blown kiss of love and miss you
Pack up the books and belonging
It's a one-way ticket for now

The end of a year and adventure
Time to spread your wings and soar
Write the next chapter
Blank pages stand at the ready

Robin Ortega is a published poet from Northern California. She creates from a place of empathy, and her fondness for the beauty of nature, the Pacific Coast, and the simple pleasures of daily living, which are reflected as “glimmers” in her writing. Robin’s writings can be found on Instagram: @musings.in.less.than.3

Carrie Pancake

The Last Night

The last night
Wonder what
The new voice
Will sound like?

'Cali' girl
From the west
And by God
Newly fresh.

Shedding gone
Poisonous
Cry for now
Letting go.

This message
Loud with fear
So fucking
Soundly clear.

Got it now
Session past
Light this change
Future tense.

Snowflake fell
Gracefully,
Perfectly
To go on.

Carrie Pancake is a fun loving, peace seeking, Reiki Master. Mother of two, wife of one, her passions include; writing, reading, her dogs, and Earth's bounty. Her family and friends are as sacred as her soul and life.

Tom Pawlowski

Reboot

Erasing old thought
Cleaning slate for new concepts
Tabula rasa

Eden

Plotting the planting
Thumbing through seed catalogs
Dreaming of harvest

Grapefruit League

The start of the thaw
Pitchers and catchers report
To spring training camp

Tom Pawlowski (tomp) is a life-long resident of South Jersey. In 2012 he made a New Year's resolution to write a haiku every day, and he hasn't stopped yet. He has previously been published in numerous anthologies. Daily exercise / Seventeen short syllables / Some better than most. His day job is in engineering.

Sandra L. Place

Potential Possibilities

All things, alive and dead
Exist in a state of possibilities.
Potential awaiting coagulation
Into something, be it form,
Action, realization of an idea,
A goal moving to completion.
From thought to form,
Coding to existence, spirit to form,
Form to spirit, all that is or was
Comes from the stillness of the possible,
Forming function and action. At death
The living, the idea, the sound then
Move back into the womb of potential.
Death feeds life, and life feeds death.
This is our universe, expansive
And contractable. Like breathing.
Like the potential within a possibility.

Sandra Place has lived a life of rich experience and education. She holds a graduate certificate in holistic health and a master's degree in counseling psychology, both from Western Michigan University. She has had a highly successful career in Healthcare Administration across the continuum of care and now consults and educates in this field. She teaches at Michigan State University, and is an End of Life Doula. She is a published author and public speaker. She has a continuous stream of creative projects including writing, gardening, art, and pursuits of the spirit constantly percolating. For more information, blog, events and workshops visit www.asandyplace.com. Contact Sandra at sandy@asandyplace.com.

Brian Potter

What is a Day?

What is a day?

Is it merely the framework between sunrise
And sunset—a period marked off between
The void?

Make of it what you will—and most of us do—
A day is lightness punctuated like a sentence
With food, people and whatever we add.
Some of us are haunted by the darkness of night,
Seeing it in the rain, the suspicion of our people,
Perhaps even the blandness of our food.
Some of us cast away the darkness and let
Ourselves be filled with the light, enjoying work,
Knowing people as friends, eating delicious food
And sleeping restfully through the long dark night.

But what is a day?

And what are we that get to decide what a day is?
Are we beings of light or darkness?
Make of it what you will—and most of us do—
We are made up of both darkness and light
And the light we shed bounces back and forth
Between the spaces we create and have created
Casting shadows and colors and glimmers
Like thousands of bits of glitter that will
Soon vanish in the wind.

Brian Potter is a retired high school English teacher in Idaho who enjoys spending his time writing, being with his family, and staying active in the outdoors. When he isn't writing or reading you can find him outside in the garden, hiking the mountains, or training for his next half marathon which is often combined with some travel.

Bill Quinn

The lottery

A man pulls a number out of a bingo
machine to determine if you live to 19 or 99.
Winning means you're going to Vietnam and dying.
Losing lets you go to college,
get a job, and raise a family.
Winning means bullets will fly a few inches
above your head while your knees
swell with the agony of each sharp rock
you crawl over.
Winning means your feet
are painfully full of blisters
from 20 mile hikes daily.
Winning brings abusive yelling
for a piece of dust under your bed
or a wrinkle in your pillowcase.
Bullets, blisters, and hours of screaming
Becomes just enough sensory impact to hate
everything in life.
The winning number means
you go to a country
where everything
is trying to kill you.
Losing means you live.

I won the lottery that day.

Bill Quinn started poetry when COVID hit the country and made him isolated from his family. Retired from the Air Force and retired from teaching high school he decided to write poetry to give his grandkids stories of the long life he lived through. Bill has a Master degree from the University of Southern California and Bachelor degree from Marist College. He has been awarded a National Teacher Award while teaching in Washington D.C. Bill has two poetry book on Amazon which can be found by searching: Bill Quinn book or Bill Quinn kindle

Crystal Rains

Under The Big Top, Once More

Sitting under the big top,
the show is over.
No finery—
No cakey makeup, no sparkling jewels.
Leggings and a cable knit sweater
to keep out the draft.
The lion's hoop is gone,
tightrope packed away,
cannon in tow.
No spotlight on me—
the place is so dim.
No music,
no tympani,
no noise.

My work is done—
I should be relieved.

I'm just me,
alone.
No need to pretend anymore.

My head is in my hands.
Now I'm lost—
not sure what to do next
or where to go.
Not a map in sight;

he never gave me a plan.

The tent is open—
the whole wide world
open to me at last.
Newfound freedom
from all I ever knew,
right in front of me.

But like a mirage
he's still here.
I imagine him emerging
from behind the partition.
Shadows of him flutter
along the paper-thin walls.

The circus will always be
a part of me.
It will always be home.
I never learned how to leave.

Crystal Rains is a poet whose work explores the lingering effects of violence, silence, and power in domestic and intimate spaces. She writes about memory, grief, and the unseen consequences of human relationships.

Irina Ranelli

Eastward Glance

Sitting alone at the harbor,

thoughts veiling a vapid mind,
a gray cloak rolls in to shroud
myself, the trees, and ground.

The humid breeze combs my hair
as I gaze over the pier.

Gentle waves caress the wood
as my vision turns to black and white.

But then I see myself below.

Lifeless and going with the flow
of the ice cold humming blue.
I drift so far out to sea

and lose my visibility,
so I briskly saunter away.

Glancing back for one final time,
a beam of faint light clears the sky.

Irina Ranelli is a young, up-and-coming artist. Besides writing, she enjoys painting, creating soft sculptures, playing music, and more. She hopes to continue to expand and improve her skills as time goes on.

Jaque Reed

Yesterday's Child

It rained last night.
The variegated greens of the forest
sparkle in gratitude.
A few lingering drops
slide from the tips of gently fluttering birch leaves,
landing on my hat brim.
Birds call out to each other
from all the deep, hidden valleys.
Life springs up with fresh reasons to live.

The narrow, two-rut road
leading deeper into the unexplored
is slick, and I must watch my step,
for my stride is far from what it was once,
so many years ago.
I pick my way carefully around small puddles.
Forgotten feelings steal back into my soul.

Moving along, I become aware
that I am no longer alone on the trail.

Turning, I see, following in my shadow, a little girl.
She wears bib overalls, has a sun-browned face,
and a serious expression in her large eyes.
Something about her is familiar.

I give her a nod of welcome,
and we continue together,
wordlessly, in the silence of an early summer morning,
the kind that bursts with promise,
filled with small surprises.

We pause to examine a giant mushroom
that has sprung up suddenly during the night.
What a marvel is its carefully fluted underside,
radiating out from a pungent center!
It will be gone tomorrow.

From just around the bend, comes a harsh, rasping sound.
A half-grown black bear is lazily scratching his back on an old stump.
Seeing us, he gives an oddly human screech,
and bumbles off to a safer part of the forest.
The little girl giggles and claps her hands.
I do the same.

In a wide puddle stretching across the road,

Tiny frogs hop with wild abandon,
As if competing for the Olympics.
I can't help but wonder what will happen
when their water source dries...
I would carry them back to the lake,
but have no bucket, and do not fancy
a pocket full of frogs.

We come to a familiar meadow where the blueberries are ripe.
I stoop to gather a handful~

all my back will allow.

Sitting on a mossy bank to eat them,
we notice a curious fawn watching us from a nearby thicket.
His mother, hidden,
gives a warning snort.
With white tail pointed up,
he disappears back to where the wild things are.

My body is telling me it is time to turn homewards.
I can tell from her eyes; the little girl is disappointed—
I am disappointed too.
The walk has been short, not even a mile,
but warmly fulfilling.
the company delightful,

filled with whispered nostalgia,
and snatches of half-forgotten songs.
Circling back from a past life.

I watch as she slips away into the forest again
where past, present and future
fold themselves
into the constant murmur of creation.

Jaqueline Reed, always fascinated by word-play, has been writing poetry ever since she was old enough to use paper and pencil, but not until she was 89, at the urging of friends, did she publish. She is now nearing 96 and has published three books of poetry with another on the way. She has also been printed in magazines, and rather to her surprise, won a few prizes along the way. "Words are like tiny crystals," says Reed, (who can't spell, by the way,) and I love stringing them together, hoping to create a thing of beauty."

Kent Reichert

Cockcrow

Like an ancient poem
written with the light of remembrance,
dawn dances to recurring rhythms
as the world is remade
before our eyes.

The promise,
uttered amid the lengthening
shadows of dusk,
materializes
in medieval tapestries of cloud
momentarily hung upon the stars.

A melody,
composed across the heavens,
steals to the eye
across the void of space,
spoken first in lambent syllables,
soon to fracture tranquility
and hastily recede into memory.

Kent Reichert spends autumn beside Becky's Creek on the Intracoastal Waterway across from Topsail Island. He passes the time walking his dogs, practicing digital photography and writing. His poetry has appeared in a number of journals and anthologies.

Neill Reilly

The Stark Beauty of Winter

The trees have lost their foliage.

The branches are now naked to the sky
and to us.

The branches reach, twist and turn to the sky,
always stretching to the sun.

They form a lattice that frames the sky,
a portion of the sky,
but never the whole sky.

The trees are silent sentinels.

Waiting, waiting for the warmth of the sun.

For photosynthesis to begin again their gestation of leaves and color.

The branches are singing silent alleluias,
their many hands upraised and interwoven in prayer.

Marie Emmons Wayne Reinstein

Encountering Me 53

I'm about to open the folder
amber-aged and edge-curl'd, treasured
DONOVAN in hippie letters adornment all.
As always__in the bottom left
drawer of whatever desk I utilize.
Written some 30 years ago, telling
tales, relating woes--youthful despairs of
identity, maturation, growing pains, Ailments, malaise:
ennui

In search of my first erotic poem. What else
will I find there on this eventful eve for my
current erotic poems. I am 53 now. I may
I think at last understand the sensate lures.
May at last be, the sensate me.

So now I'll turn my attentions inward
and in doing so hope to find, to examine,
caress and adopt
the child/girl/woman
that was me.

I am
all that
I am plus that poetess
prolific long ago
and when my acquaintance ripens into
love, I will have found myself whole.

Marie Emmons Wayne Reinstein {March 13,1952-May 22,2007}

Marie was a critical care nurse and a poetess. She had a collection of poems from her teenage years and a new poetry collection 30 years later [beginning with the poem above} when Marie and Phil Reinstein fell in love with each other.

Phil Reinstein

Marie

She brought out the best of me
I am driving to be better
daring myself to establish new ways to attach to me life
finding real reasons to care

she sought out the rest in me
I was striving; I let her
baring myself midst happy days by *my Baby*, my wife
minding our seasons to share

she caught hold of my heart
releasing deep shame and past pain
sensing so soon since the start
increasing, unceasing gladness to gain and retain
unwinding our love everywhere

i brought to her happiness
allowing her wholeness to blossom, to bloom
loving her deeply and purely and hotly
sweet smelling scents surrounding our room
twining two lives with laces of love, soft and rare

we had this small gift that we shared
creating our own time and place
the honeymoon couple that cared and who dared

blending family and friends in our space
with embrace, bonding two sweethearts in love
she and me, matching pair

she's with me in daytimes and dreams
dressed in dark dawns when I wake
mining memories of playtimes it seems
ardor adored and adorned we would make
bending bodies both beautiful and bare

sweetness sighed that night she was taken
purpose passing out days remaining...still
compassion cried, bright light unforsaken
I loved my Marie Marie loved her Phil

Phil Reinstein is an insurance broker and also a poet, songwriter and musician. Inspired by the poetry of his late wife, Marie Emmons Wayne Reinstein, Phil has been on the Long Island poetry and open mic music scene for almost two decades.

Royal Rhodes

Anatomy Of Words At Dawn

when I spoke them,
the startled words
understood themselves
as never before
and resolved to be free
from being imprisoned
on a page I wrote
while being so mad
at themselves
for not believing the
power that was in them
apart from me
and knew that before
the beginning was the word
so my later role
was only to inscribe
a link of letters
as I admit that the word
recognized it had
a body of flesh
instead of asserting
the writer is in control
choosing and emphasizing
words to describe
the desire to connect
and think we craft words
but we are what they offer

in communion that is real
presence in communication
we hunger and thirst for
and had failed so long to know
in what we said about words
was the language
made by the word

Royal Rhodes is a retired educator who taught classes on global religions. His poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals in the U.S., the U.K., and Canada. He lives now in a small village, surrounded by a Nature Conservancy.

Kaci Rigney

Declutter

Don't dwell on chaos;
Elect positive attitudes.
Cling to what is good;
Let go of negative words and thoughts.
Utilize a mindset of gratitude;
Train your brain.
Take back your thought process;
Every thought counts.
Refresh. Restore. Renew.

Kaci Rigney is an award-winning poet, writer, singer/songwriter, and photographer. She is the author of the Like That poetry series and A Love Trio: Chasing Love, Finding Love, & Losing Love. Follow Kaci at <https://kacirigney.substack.com> or <https://kacirigney.com>

Michael Ringhauser

Bridges

I was a lost soul in middle school, a directionless spirit without a location to maneuver toward.

My lunch periods consisted of cream cheese bagels, inserted with nacho cheese Doritos

And playing chess with my equally lost friends and the mentor teacher we were assigned.

One of her lasting messages after we told her about the tribulations of home and beyond was:

“You can’t burn bridges.”

That advice ignited a flame within my essence the size of an atomic bomb.

I was fully into my phase of pushing buttons to see which of life’s floors I could navigate to.

I didn’t want to *burn* bridges; I wanted to *torch* them -

Envelope those *bridges* in the metaphorical sparks and flares that illuminated my existence.

The actual experience beyond those nuclear moments, however,

When a perfectly situated bridge of equally cut and spaced wooden planks is set ablaze,

Is that all you are left with is the cremation of something that once held value,

Yet now resides simple emptiness.

I felt emptiness, and its accompaniment of loneliness, for many of those formative years,

Where bridges would be built, perhaps even used for months and years in a cycle,
And like the rotations of laundry, eventually it would conclude - with new waterways in view,
Inevitably, going down in flames so red an impassioned bull would run to battle.

In those days, my motto was, "Let the bridges I burn light the way."
But, without the bridge or a way across those rivers that stood between myself and everything,
Did the light even matter beyond illuminating what I could no longer possess?

In my older years, I have grown to appreciate the overpasses.
With The Throgs Neck being my most cherished.
Two thousand nine hundred ten feet connecting Long Island to the universe.

I wandered as Siddhartha for many journeys where bridges would've led to quicker discoveries.
Now I see their true design, beyond the wood of ages ago turned into the metal of the present.
But a place where footsteps can connect and life can begin anew.

Michael Ringhauser is a rejuvenated poet who is looking forward to the journeys his words will take him on. He has recently been published in The Suffolk County Poetry Review and as a contributor to three anthologies (Snowfall and Starlight, The Bard's Annual, and The Bard's Poetica). He can be found citing the inspiring words of others @thethoughtindex on Instagram.

Heidi Ritzel

Beginning Again

I am engulfed in a sea
of my own tears.
Grief grabs me by the ankles
pulls me under forcefully.
I struggle to the surface
tread water until I'm exhausted
gasp for air and attempt to make it to shore.
This has been my life since you left me
when I went from loved to alone
from living with my best friend to an empty chair
from wife to widow.
Drowning would be easier.

I emerge shivering and drenched
to enter a new beginning alone.
Alone I will eat.
Alone I will sleep.
Alone I will travel.
A soggy phoenix rising
not from fire but from torrents of tears.

Yet as I rise,
my new normal lonely without you,
I know that wherever I go
you will be with me,
forever leading the way
as I begin again.

Heidi Ritzel has a bachelor's degree from St. Bonaventure University and a master's degree from William Paterson University. She recently published her first book of poetry entitled *Crossing Over*. Her writing has been published in *Florida Bards Poetry Anthology 2025*, *Eastern Sea Bards Poetry Anthology*, *Florida Bards Poetry Anthology 2024*, *Rhyme and PUNishment Comedic Verse 2024*, *Florida Bards Gulf Coast Poetry Anthology 2024*, *New Jersey Bards Poetry Review 2022*, *Cat Fancy* magazine, the Lewy Body Dementia Association website, and the Authentic Writing Stories blog. She lives in Bradenton, Florida, with her two cats.

Daniel Rodriguez

Beginning At Zero

From the backroom of the small theater behind the bookshop, the lights dim. The crowd goes quiet as the host's voice fills the silence, setting the stage for what's to come.

My stomach churns, a storm of nerves is building inside me. I steady myself, remembering this is the dream I've worked toward since I was young, to perform in a production of any kind. No role is too small, no dialogue too dull. I was simply happy to be included.

Yet I still wonder why me? Why was I chosen over other talented performers with resumes that could run rings around mine? What made me stand out? That thought kept running through my mind.

"I wrote this character for you," the playwright told me, as she handed me her work. "I know you can bring this character and my vision to life. You may not see it, but I do. I believe it with all of my heart. And so should you."

After months of rehearsals, I stand here and wait for my cue to enter the world I've dreamed of. A world created not just by myself, but by a brilliant writer, a director with vision and by an amazing cast and crew.

Daniel David Rodriguez is a Texas-born performer and writer. He began acting in independent films and local theater in 2003. He is currently an active performer and writer with Zero Untitled, a theater company based out of Kingsville, Texas.

Judith Rosner

Old Soul, New Spirit

The boarded-up windows of the building
across the street are being replaced,
its eyes now open.

Scaffolding around the building there to help
workers ride up and down its body
to bolster its bones.

While I do what I can to keep my skeleton intact
without scaffolding, I find the windows
of my mind shine brighter these days,
catching rays, so that I see the world
in a new light,
see myself differently.

Sometimes it takes a lifetime to find out
what you are made of,
who you are supposed to be.

Judith Rosner is the author of the poetry collection *Paradigm Shift* (Kelsay Books). Her poetry also appears in the literary journals Soul Poetry, HerWords, the Living Peace 2019 Art of Poetry Anthology, the Jewish Literary Journal, the Naugatuck River Review, the Gulf Coast Poets Anthology, the Bards Against Hunger 10 Year Anniversary Anthology and the Eastern Sea Bards Anthology. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology and retired first from a career as college professor, and then from her firm *The Rosner Group*, a training and consulting company that specialized in leadership development and executive coaching. She and her husband split their time between Sarasota, Florida and New York City.

Murali Sappa

Echoes

Sorry, my friend -
The train you seek a ticket for
had already left the station.

Clinging to the past,
you are bound to the tracks.
How can you keep pace with the reality?

The signal lights once flashed fervently
hoping you would awaken and move.
Now they are dim, exhausted.

Whether you noticed or not,
we, as humans, must keep up with the times.

Strive to have your name inscribed
in tomorrow's history,
But let go of yesterday's wars.

History cannot be changed -
Its pages are sealed by time.
What remains is the present,
and the future yet to be born.

Even the lost civilizations of yore,
buried, obliterated by mighty time
find a way to raise their heads again
when a patient archeologist brushes off the dust.

Murali Sappa is a seasoned computer professional whose interests include poetry and painting. The beautiful beaches and mountains of North Carolina, and the quirkiness of life fuels his imagination.

LB Sedlacek

Gentle Cycle

We leave the paint party after
paying to paint an elephant, a mason
jar, a truck, a cut out of a
shape of one of the United States
and the road is busy so busy for
a couple of blocks of this small
southern town not even large
enough to be a suburb and the
wafting gentle scent of suds, laundry
soap, fills the air, taming the traffic,
calming the senses until we are
accustomed to this manner of crossing
the street emancipated from the
trap of being on one side but needing
to be on the other where our cars
are parked so many stores and
ancient buildings in use but so many
offering trades and goods like manicures
we sniff the air on the wicked
breeze the wind whipping Spring around
as if it is Winter and once inside
our vehicles our meekness
surrendering to the cold the laundromat
all lit up at night washers churning and dryers
tumbling as people spend their
Friday night cleaning their clothes
while we ignore our paint spattered

threads happy to have painted decorations
with our friends delighting in that clean
clothes smell our last scent in this town.

LB Sedlacek is the author of several poetry collections including "Unresponsive Sky" published by Purple Unicorn Press, "Words and Bones" published by Finishing Line Press, and "The Poet Next Door" published by Cyberwit Press. She has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize as well as Best of the Net in poetry.

William John Silverman, Jr.

Cracks in the Pavement

Cracks in the pavement, little
imperfections, remind me of the
cracks and imperfections of our lives.

The pressure of life cracks us, but
the joy of life holds us together
like the pavement holds together despite

its cracks and the heavy burdens it carries.
Sometimes the pavement begins to
crumble, leaving potholes, other

dangerous driving conditions, but
we can fix it. We can patch the holes
and if necessary re-pave the road.

Sometimes life drives over our roads,
Each one goes somewhere. Immense
pressure threatens to break us.

Sometimes we drive over life,
wondering how far to the end
of the road. Is it always about the journey?

Our road bumps and grinds,
but there is smoothness, too.
We all drive to the unknown, are we lost?

Others experience the same uncertainty.
Others believe only their road needs work.
Our odysseys is sometimes treacherous

but we keep going, driving toward
the bright orange hues of dawn
and the brilliant light of a rising sun.

William John Silverman, Jr. is Associate Professor of English at Suffolk County Community College, where he teaches writing and literature. He has published several poems and lives on Long Island with his wife and their three boys.

Elizabeth Singletary

Hibernation

Bare to the bone without a bud
Sugarberry leaves shriveled and gone
winter's hibernation a time to settle down
pause renew different challenges to be found
bitter cold long nights warming by the fire
settled down opening up new writings to inspire
all that was hidden now exposed
no shade or shield mind ready to unload
what is hidden underneath nourished by time
take root take a chance new book to come alive

Winter may not be a favorite time of year for some because of the bitter cold. Elizabeth was born in winter, is a native Bostonian, and feels winter is a refreshing time to relish in the cool air and gather new inspiration for writing. She has poems published in several Local Gems Press poetry anthologies, Bethesda Urban Partnership, and shares her work at local Poetry events in the metropolitan Washington, DC area.

Emily-Sue Sloane

A Change of Heart

The drears have pulled me down.
No amount of tears float me higher
but when grief surprises into laughter
I look up and ask

Is this what the gulls who laugh
have been trying to tell us
shouting from rooftops
landing in a cloud
of high-pitched screams:

Stand up to the cloud-makers!

There's no end to the crying
until the heart reaches
past curtains that block the view
to find a wing to lift you
out of pain's maze

into clarity of vision
steadiness of flight
defiance
and in time
love

Emily-Sue Sloane (<https://EmilySueSloane.com>) is an award-winning and Pushcart-nominated poet whose work has been published in numerous literary journals and anthologies. She has two poetry collections, *We Are Beach Glass* (2022) and *Disconnects and Other Broken Threads* (The Poetry Box, 2024). Sloane lives in Huntington Station, NY, with her wife, singer-songwriter Linda Sussman.

Donna Marie Smith

From The Ashes

From the ashes of its predecessor,
The phoenix's ascension advances higher.
Signifying its rebirth,
As it rises from the fire.
A transformation, resurrection,
A renewal after death.
A perpetual eternal cycle,
Each time it takes its final breath.
Always turning full circle,
Surfacing from its predecessors remains.
A new life created from the embers.
To then die in the heat of the flames.

Donna Marie Smith is a British poet residing in Oldham, Greater Manchester, England. She is a published author with her own Anthology Marmalade Hue published in May 2024. She has over eighty poems published in various anthologies including Wheelsong Anthologies 1-7, Invisible poets 1 and 2, The Endeavor compendiums 1-8, Wildfire Words, Local Gem Press and Buzzin Bards. Her poems range from quirky poems to light-hearted observational pieces to deeper heartfelt poems often based on her own experiences.

Nicole Smith

My 2nd Act

A new adventure
Full speed ahead
Goodbyes clog the air
Tears fill my eyes
I'm leaving a place
That for so long
Was my home
Memories everywhere
Nerves and hope
War within me
Excitement thrums
Like an undercurrent
It's never too late
To try something new
My second act is about to begin
Thank you,
For everything.

Nicole Smith is a published poet living outside Pittsburgh, PA with her husband, daughters, and pets. You can find her work in several anthologies. Follow her on socials; Momoetry blog on wordpress, facebook.com/momoetry or Instagram @Momoetry22.

Stan K. Sujka

Walk in the Woods

I go to the wood often
In silence I walk and think of you

Dead branches under my feet, sounding like Louis Armstrong, start a
crackling song
The Northern cardinals
whistle along
Trees with crowns of gold
murmur and moan in the breeze
Red bellied woodpeckers
tries to keep the beat.
The woods come alive
and so do I

Dr. Stan K. Sujka , Retired physician, writer, poet from Winter Park, Florida. His poetry has appeared in multiple anthologies, and magazines. He has two poetry collections. **Man Behind the Mask**, and **Love Story, Passion and love poems**. He is a member of the Florida State Poets Association. Dr. Sujka is working on his third volume of poems.

Douglas G. Swezey

#1651 (Vehicles)

We have turned a corner
Revolutions have angles
But this is easy, organic
The decay of
One year into another
This is a cycle
A gentle pedal
Into the unknown
Down a cement sidewalk
Steering straight
Yet unwavering
This is cutting through the waves
Lapping against the hull
Oriented toward the future
Regardless of wind or white caps
This is persistent:
Ever on our way
To the great beyond
Where seed is the game
And growth executed
A means of travel
Stow your baggage
In the overhead compartment
Return your trays to their
Upright position - everything erect!
Stand clear of the closing doors
Mind the gap

This is
This is
This is a trip of different sorts
This is New Year's Eve!

Douglas G. Swezey received his B.A. in English and Art History from Stony Brook University, has written as a journalist for many weekly newspapers, was Managing Editor of *Government Food Services Magazine* and author of *Stony Brook University: Off The Record* (College Prowler, 2005). He currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Bards Initiative, Long Island Poetry Collective at large, and formerly collaborated with the North Sea Poetry Scene. He is the host of the First Fridays Reading Series at the Dog-Eared Bard's Book Shop and co-creator of Super Poem Sunday. His feature at the Conklin Barn was covered by the New York Times, while his poetry can be found in the Northport Art Coalition's Poetry Path, featured on CBS 2 News.

Gayl Teller

Did It Happen That Way?

My sister claims
we came from different families.
What I remember,
she says never happened.
She'd like to scrub
my memory raw,
erase it
down to hers.
But I know
in the wilder light
at night, we reach
into each other's dreams,
safe beyond the limits
of our personal lores,
and then, we are home,
where we can never go again,
where we can never leave.

A former Nassau County Poet Laureate and Walt Whitman Poet of the Year, Gayl Teller, a nationally and internationally poet and award winner, is author of 7 poetry books, most recently, *Flashlight: New and Selected Poems*, and editor of 2 poetry anthologies, *Corona* and *Toward Forgiveness* (NY Decentralization Grant for the Arts winner). She directs the Mid-Island Y Poetry Series in Plainview, NY, and teaches at Hofstra University.

Brooks Thomas

Those Days Have Passed

Ain't nothing I can't do,
I'm young and got that spirit.
This world is full of dangers,
But man, I'll never fear it.
If I can't succeed today,
I've got plenty of time.
Got forever and a day,
To make this life rhyme.

I was young and full of hope,
And stupid before I was crazy.
I loved life and was optimistic,
A bit impulsive and damned lazy.
But those days have passed,
I ain't that kid any longer.
I haven't enjoyed getting older,
But I love that I'm getting stronger.

Dreams have started to fade,
Things are more realistic.
Experts say I'll live to 77,
Trying to outpace that statistic.
Living to raise my kids,
So they can fix the world we broke.
Raising them to be stronger,
Yet still be decent folk.

I was young and full of hope,
Then the world taught me some truths.
Blamed everyone but me,
And it wasn't much use.
But those days have passed,
I ain't that man any longer.
I haven't enjoyed getting older,
But I love that I'm getting stronger.

*We all start dying,
The moment that we're born.
In between we live a life,
That causes good people to mourn.
We start living,
The moment we stop fearing.
Live fully each moment,
Before the end we're all nearing.*

I'm out of time,
To worry about needless shit.
Trying to live fearlessly,
Yet trying to not submit.
This life ain't over,
This phase has just begun.
Man, I got a lot of living to do,
Before this life is done.

I was young and full of hope,
And I'm still young at heart.
Now I try to live in the moment,
And play a greater part.
My best days haven't passed,
But I'm not the old me any longer.

I don't enjoy getting older,
But I love that I'm getting stronger.

Brooks Thomas is a history teacher, runner, and occasional poet who writes in a lyrical style. He currently lives in Northeast Pennsylvania but has also called Pittsburgh and the DC/Maryland/Virginia region his home. Brooks is constantly in search of the right artist to put his words to music. You can find his most recent works on Instagram [@brooks_thomas_poetry](#).

Donna Collins Tinsley

Spring Restored

Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh:
is there anything too hard for me? Jeremiah 32:27

Can Spring be restored to a heart devastated by the streets of Daytona?
Can a hardened, drug-addicted soul find peace?
Is every life sacred before the Lord, including the life of a woman gone astray?
Will there be hope and healing for that woman who finds herself at rock bottom and needs a helping hand up out of the mire she has sometimes willingly climbed in?
Is there anything too hard for our God? Not if we believe His Word,

Spring can be restored to every woman's heart, even those who have been abused and tossed aside.

Spring Restored

Before and after,
It was like winter, then spring
Barren, junk-filled yard,
Now a garden,
Fit for the King.

Disgrace will give way
To hope for the day,
The Son's glory
Shines bright here.

Frozen in pain,
No more.
Frozen in shame
No more.

Tears are mingled here,
Prayer dissolves the fears,
Futures are restored,
Spring forevermore!

Donna Collins Tinsley, a sister among you, wants to live out the rest of her life as a poet and word artist. She is a wife, mother and grandmother, (with one great-grand), lives in Port Orange, Florida and has been included in magazines and book compilations, as well as on WAPN, 91.5 radio programs. She is a member of Word Weavers International, Volusia County Group. You can find her on Facebook, or on one of her blogs: A Sister Among You <https://thornrose7.blogspot.com/> or email her at Thornrose7@aol.com

T.W.Trainor

Renewal

Sun is setting
Thoughts are fretting
Ominous of future plight

Past is broken
Pain awoken
Darkness drapes a soul with fright

Patience tested
much invested
Desperate days and lonely night

Hope is fading
Wants and waiting
Not a hopeful scene in sight

Then a brightness
Ushers lightness
As dark clouds float into dust

Shadows brighten
hopes are heightened
Wash away the darkening rust

New day dawning
Fresh, Clean Morning
Hearts ablaze with love and lust

Sun is shining
Hearts are pining
It's our destiny to trust

Will is last
To end our fast
Yes it just might, Oh yes it must !!

T.W.Trainor is an Occupational Therapist from Northport NY. He is an aspiring poet and writer and explorer of all the arts.

J R Turek

Dawn on the Horizon

Tattered and torn, but breathing
we made it through another year --
some days harrowing chaos, others
silent night quiet. We endured poetic lines
that failed us, mocked our right to write,
metaphors that fell flat on our face, and
reveled in those verses that hugged our hearts,
shared with an encouraging community
of kindred spirits. We waded through
streams of tears and rivers of laughter,
losses that will never leave us and
fears that will never leave us alone.

Beaten and battered but not broken,
we wake on the other side of yesterday,
head above hurricane winds and floods
crushing all in their path, prevailing over
heatwaves and blizzards, voracious wildfires
devouring hills and valleys, sadness; perhaps
these messages we overlooked from she who
chides her children to preserve her, save her
from their flagrant destructions.

Conflicted and inflicted, we've done our best
to endure the nosey neighbor, the slow cashier,
the tirades of traffic that never relent, red lights
stuck on stopping us from careening forward,

plowing new paths in tarmac to spread wings
and fly toward tomorrow but we wait, obey
the crimson lights, the siren, the close call
that flashes awareness and we slow our speed,
our need to get past today when today
has palms open offering us all we can take.

Older and wiser, we moved beyond
the darkness of winter's grasp, birthed
in fertile soil to spread roots and bud forth
a fragrant bouquet to waft on balmy breezes;
we tanned and turned on the ac, swam
a hundred miles and sat in sprinkler spray,
blinked three times and we're raking leaves
in sweater weather moments before Santa
and his sleigh ride toward an ending –
yet where did the time go, what did we do,
what can we undo or redo before the ball
falls.

Here we are, a new merit badge pinned
to our chest, a new year, new start, new chance
to get it right, a glittering new day dawning
hope on the horizon and we grasp it, hug it,
vow to never let it go

until this time next year.

J R (Judy) Turek, LI Fair Supt of Poetry, LI Poet of the Year 2019; editor, mentor, workshop leader, Bards Laureate, recipient of 2 pushcart nominations, recipient of the Conklin Prize for Poetry; published in Romanian, Korean, Italian, and French; author of 11 books of poetry, most recently *Heeling Soles* and *Wednesdays With Writers*. The Purple Poet has written a poem a day for over 22 years; she lives on Long Island with her soul-mate husband Paul, her dogs, and her extraordinarily extensive shoe collection. msjevus@optonline.net

Mary A. Turzillo

Magic Glasses

Sister Archangela moves her to the front row
but she still can't tell bee from see,
has only her granny's word she's not stupid

or crazy, because she sees dragons living under honeysuckle,
wearing wings of petunia blossoms,
waving tiny green claws, blowing puffs of white flame.

She sits two feet from I Love Lucy and Captain Video,
so they take her to Doctor Magritte:

a camphor-smelling man with glasses himself.

"Read that sign", he says. She can't.

"Never saw such a near-sighted child," he mutters
as if she is also deaf.

To her: "Keep reading all day like that, you'll wear glasses
thick as Coke bottles."

Riding home from the glasses store, she spies telephone lines,
birds, leaves, billboard words,
and things she thinks she doesn't need to see.

She wears her thick glasses out to play
and where there were dragons
now there are

dandelions, ants, horned green tomato worms.

So she must make her own magic.

(end)

Mary A. Turzillo won a Nebula award ("Mars Is no Place for Children," 1999) and two Elgins: *Sweet Poison*, with Marge Simon, 2014, and *Lovers & Killers*, 2012, solo. Her novel *Mars Girls* (Apex) features two Martian girls rescuing themselves from Face-on-Mars crazies. Her story collection *Cosmic Cats & Fantastic Furballs* (WordFire) appeared in 2022 and was given a Certificate of Merit by the Cat Writers Association. She is working on a novel, *Calisto*, about a girl sabre fencer who time travels when she fleches. Her husband, author Geoffrey Landis, and she live in Ohio with two cats who are learning to use computers to talk to us.

Deirdre Veraldi

Maybe

Think of me as a lotus.
Strength and resilience to anything that opposes.
Like the thorns on some roses.
Even opportunity knocks when that one door closes.
And if you don't answer sometimes it imposes.
Entombed in this life as obligation encloses.
There has to be more once the afterlife has chose us.
The day I meet my fate will be the day God discloses.
Deaths never late every day it approaches.
Maybe death is our freedom from this life that encroaches.

Deirdre has written several children's books and poetry books. They can be found on blurb.com.

Bernardo Villela

Thistledown Memories

Thistledown memories meander,
dandelion spore feelings float,
on the winds of days
both dark and light alike.

With time, emotional flotsam
only becomes more vivid, more perfect;
rose-colored sunshine
warms frigid waters.

After days dark
nights burst alive
with remembrances and
worries yet to come.

Peep inside, those
gossamer impressions
of bygone events
offer oases;

Salvation from present
concerns and uncertainties.
Thistles, asters, dandelions, and burdock
constantly attempt regeneration.

So too do memory
and imagination try to
motivate, empower, and
regenerate the soul.

Bernardo Villela has had short fiction included in many periodicals and anthologies. He's published original poetry and translations. His first chapbook "The Prismatic Menagerie" is due out in 2026. Read more here:

<https://linktr.ee/bernardovillela>.

James P. Wagner (Ishwa)

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Kathleen Wagner

Resolutions

Every year I promise myself:

“I’ll really get it done this time.”

From the first month until the twelfth,
every year I promise myself

to lose that weight, to clean that shelf,

to reach the top and make that climb...

Every year I promise myself:

“I’ll really get it done this time.”

Kathleen Wagner is a writer and a reader through and through. She has a long reading list to finish this year, and plans to keep her skills sharp with plenty of writing prompts throughout 2026. She hopes some of these prompts will lead the way to bigger projects.

Margarette Wahl

Flipping Through The Calendar

Autumn arrives shades
of auburn in time
for September
later brown and orange mix
for October and November.

Red and white candy canes us into December
with some dreidel blues
until the cold whiteness
of January arrives.
Then we feel red love
whole heartedly
into February
until the shamrock greens
of March appear.

We know Spring is soon
pastel shades of pinks, lavenders, and greens
bunny hopping us
into April.

May becomes
a warm shade
of yellow sunshine
closer to Summer.

June is cerulean water
splashing like swimming pools of promises
for dragonflies and butterflies to appear.
July is patriotic red, white, and blue saluted
in parades and barbecues.
August is a last minute
shade of beige
before Summer's end
when we'll see Fall
once again.
Rainbows appear
in between aftermaths
of storms
reminding us the beauty
of spectrums

lasting longer than seasons.

Margarette Wahl is a poet from Long Island. She has four chapbooks with Local Gems Press and a self-published memoir to her late crush. She is a member of Bards Initiative, Nassau County Poet Laureate Society, and Performance Poets Association. Her poem was inspired using seasons and use of color.

Glenda Walker-Hobbs

New Words, New Beginnings

sparks swirl in the imagination,
words join with words
to form ideas, phrases,
or poetic lines and stanzas
which race across
a white screen or paper,
this is the start of a new creation,
every poem begins
like the dawn of a new day,
sometimes like a glorious
orange and pink sunrise,
other times emerging
from a cloudy grey sky,
every poem is a
new beginning,
and a new journey
for the poet

Glenda Walker-Hobbs (Glennis Hobbs) is a Canadian poet and writer from Flin Flon, Manitoba. She graduated from Red River College with a diploma in library technology and from University of Winnipeg with a Bachelor of Arts. She is a long-time member of Writers Village University. She has achieved her Certificate in Creative Writing and is working on her MFA there. She and her husband co-facilitated a poetry course at WVU. She has published several books of poetry including eight chapbooks with Local Gems Press. She has three poetry books forthcoming from Local Gems Press. She has had prose and poetry published in various anthologies and e-zines including Village Square Literary. She has a poetry web page at <https://gwalker-hobbs.angelfire.com/>

Kevin Whalen

Another First Dawn

Breathing deep the dawning air
Savoring this spectacle renewed
I close my eyes
Absorbing the sense of sunrise
Feeling what is usually viewed

Bird songs enter this aura
Musical interludes
As daylight stretches her warmth
Over forests, fields and farms
Toward western longitudes

This generous moment
This calm solitude
Wraps its arms around me
Easing my mind and body
As I exhale
Pure gratitude

Kevin Whalen is a poet and songwriter who writes, sings, fly fishes, gardens and lives in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. He has had poems published in the Northern Virginia Daily, the monthly Mountain Courier and the NoVA Bards 2024 and 2025 Anthologies. He has recorded three original song CD's and is currently working on his first book of poetry.

Huw Williams

Dylan

Only moments born I was given you to
Hold and the tremor of your slight being
Passed through me, whilst I held you,

Wrapped in that white cotton, a priceless
Package of portent, beneath that lamp,

Where I sat sedentary with your ease
Watching your eyes move new and blue
In the lamp light which cast over us,

Where the dawn could not muster a wink
Towards the dark and your small weight
Rested upon me only to endure.

Huw Williams was born in North Wales and now lives and works in Manchester England. His poems have recently appeared in *The Gathering Anthology*, *Buzzin Bards Anthology* and *The Ghosts, Echo's and Shadows Anthology*.

Penne Wilson-Gailer

Course Changes

Outside the campus hub a freshman hangs,
First year French major with dreams aglow
Thinks to be an interpreter, c'est beau,
Lingers in the spring sun, but then he sang
Into her ear. relayed swagger and zing,
Convinced her to leave behind and outgrow
Parental control and mother's shadow.
Moonlit console of 66 Mustang
provides private location and soft space.
She thought she knew, but did not really know,
unbridled passions, silken words embrace.
Notions of world travel she will replace.
Her naïve young heart in the afterglow,
believes that sex equals love in life's chase.

Penne Wilson-Gailer is a poet and educator whose first poem appeared in *Pegasus* at South High School, Pueblo, Colorado. With three advanced degrees, Penne has taught and led in schools and colleges across several states. Now living on Anderson Island, Washington, Penne published her debut poetry collection, *On Island Time*, in 2025 and is completing her second, *Share My Fire*.

Deborah Wilson

King Of The Mountain

We challenged each other to climb the rock
To stay meant to push the others off.
Who would be king of the mountain?
Until the school bus came
And play came to an end
Each claiming the crown for the day.
But life moves on,
Away from the rock, and playmates of yesterday.

On the platform people stand as the train takes me away
Past fields of corn and cows having their fill
Through flatlands and hills.
Rivers rush under trestles as the train crosses.
The rhymlal sound of wheel against rail lulls me to sleep
Until I lose the awe of all nature has to offer
And I forget there is more to life on this Blue Marble
Than everyday sameness and a workday schedule,

It is time to strap on boots,
To tread the mountain paths,
And walk the trails of past generations,
Where stories and muscles come to life.
With rustling leaves and birds in flight,
As the Sun rises in the East,
All dirt and grit and clinging shirt,
I touch the very Heart of Heaven
Breathing in the panoramic view.

I was never king of the mountain.

Coming down from this sky-high experience
When I trip over pebble or stone
Or struggle with life's everyday problems,
I pick myself up again, and know of what I am made.
“God is God and I am not.”

Born in front of her grandmother's Texas home, Deborah Christine Wilson is the seven of nine children. Coming from a mostly military family, she takes inspiration from the many different places she has lived, both internationally and within the United States. She currently lives in Winston-Satem, NC. Essays have been published as part of the Daniel Boone Personal Essay Project. Her poetry has been published in *Bards Against Hunger* and as part of Poetry in Plain Sight.

Chris Wood

A New Reign

After the thaw,
when the earth loosens its grip
and sings again,
a new queen emerges
from her wax-dark chamber
molded in royal jelly.
She climbs the air in spirals,
finds her way to a budding crabapple,
its white blossoms unfolding
like paper wishes.

The hive, sensing the shift,
splits like a fault line, some
tethered to tradition, the old order.
Others swarm to her side,
new subjects born just before
the summer solstice. She carries
with her a new breath for life,
an earthly tone of leaving,
a rhythm of release
from the four walls
that could no longer hold
the shape she was becoming.

Chris Wood is a poet and writer whose work explores memory, history, and identity through a lens rooted in faith, language, and place. She is the author of *Yesterday Echoes*, a poetry chapbook from *Finishing Line Press*, and author of *Word Vignettes: Unraveling the History Behind Every Word*. Her poems have appeared in *Heart of Flesh*, *Salvation South*, and numerous anthologies including *Women Speak* (2025). Learn more at <https://chris-woodwriter.com>.

Nina (Nanette) Yavel

The Long Snow

In the *Winter* of forty-seven, forty-eight and fifty,
snow covered the backyard
clung to the splits in the cherry tree
sculpted the willow's thick fingers
bowed limbs, knotty breasts.

A reeling wind spun snow into mosques
shaped spines along alleys
buried the summer cottages.

Resplendent, snow drifted against the church,
nuns in their wide habits
shimmered along the walkways.

My father and I walked
through carved backyards
below the frozen shapes of children
in multi-colored clothing
that hung from clotheslines--

Pellets of grey snow, black snow
funneled to earth covered
tops of cars, street lamps, fences--
settled in window crevices.

Boys crawled in and out of
new-fashioned igloos,
roasted mickeys at the icy hearths.

When the long snow ended, igloos melted away
willows claimed their shape
sap ran from the split bark of the black cherry--
the cottages, again, were crisp in daffodils

Dr. Nina (Nanette) Yavel is a poet and short-story writer whose work appears in the Paumanok Transition, Empire Poetry Verse, Bards Annual 2025, an anthology of International Poetry; Nassau County Poet Laureate Review, Bitterroot, Beyond Words, and contributing author to Risk Courage and Woman, a prize-winning anthology which featured Maya Angelou and other woman writers.

Joanna Zarkadas

Begin Again

When this world
Becomes a distant memory
And the differences
We thought defined us
Drift away and disappear
Like clouds in dazzling sunshine

When all our walls
Gently crumble
And vanish before our eyes
When no barriers exist
To keep us apart

When we see only
The purest essence
Of who we are
Maybe then
We can begin again
In love

Joanna Zarkadas has been writing poetry and prose since she could hold a pencil. Her working years were spent encouraging middle schoolers to do the same. She has been published in several anthologies, magazines and newspapers. As a retiree she spends her time meeting with other poets and sharing her poetry with live audiences when ever possible.

Jason Zeigler

You'll Get Through It All

Harder than the March wind blows, harder than an angels fall,
Life is tough but so are you and you'll get through it all.
Mighty rivers dry, old leaves wither, autumn bows to bitter snow,
But like the sapling deep in winter, you're much stronger than you know.
The resilient leaf-she shivers-with the burn of cold defiance,
clinging to autumnal color with a bold and bitter self-reliance.
Your soft soul shimmers -oh so slightly- like a calm and vibrant guide;
It frees your mind's uncertainty and splinters binds that once were tied.
Crows will circle but so do doves and if you press on you'll find the light,
Just hold on to the summer's warmth and you'll survive the winter's night

Jason Zeigler lives in Millville, MA and currently works as a Clinical Director and behavior analyst working to help children with autism and providing their families with a better quality of life. Although helping others has always been a significant driving force in his life, literature and writing have always been his passion. He graduated from the University of Massachusetts Amherst with a degree in English and has been writing and reading voraciously ever since."

About the Editor

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