

Shoreline of Memory

A Mosaic Chapbook of Collaborative
Poems

James P. Wagner (Ishwa)
& Other Poets

Shoreline of Memory

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Foreword

As bad as it might be for a poet to confess...sometimes I get bored of my own poetry. Not saying I think my own work is bad, other people still seem to like it. But since it came from me, and I am familiar with it, it is not as exciting to me after awhile. Artists of all kinds deal with this problem—finding a work they just completed horrible a week after the fact and wanting to rush to something else.

For me, collaborative poems, writing with other people is a cure to that. (And a cure to writer's block as well.) There is a very simple reason for that—the poems become more alive, organic and fluid when you are writing to someone else's prompts. I confess that I barely remember writing half of this book, because I responded to the other poet in the moment and went in the direction they were leading to inspire me. In that sense, it did not entirely come from me, and so,

being less personal, I can enjoy it more going back and re-reading.

Another thing I love about these collaborative exercises is to see the many different directions the different poets take my starting stanza...how many different paths and journeys can be taken from the same starting point. It's a great metaphor for life itself, and the various flavors we all bring to the table.

~ James P. Wagner (Ishwa)

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James P. Wagner (Ishwa)

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline...*

& Thomas Zampino

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

I would first set out to look for you
To take your hand earlier, mindful
That your love will accompany my fate
Through every twist and turn ahead

*so much more of my journey
do I wish to have shared with you
the stars, the moons, the flowers on the bank
that you never saw, or saw me see*

And even if I must travel alone
Your face, your breath in memory
Will ease my way, and lead me home
Neither birth nor death can breach that

& Jennifer Criss

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

If I could craft a spaceship
To fly through forgotten dreams
Could I forge a new path
Could I recapture the stars

*Could I weave a basket, tight enough
to gather the wishes, hopes and memories
that I no longer remember I have forgotten
from slipping through the spaces.*

Hold tightly the oars
As they slice through turbulent waters
Seeking calm and truth and love
Seeking solace in your face smiling from shore

& Cristina M.R. Norcross

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

I would step softly on the beach of time,
gather conversations like sea glass,
create a mosaic of my father's words,
build a mural with his laughter's
lingering music

*And at this spot,
I'd build a dock
to halt my ride on the river
so that I may take a pause
whenever
I felt I needed to*

I would savor connection with open palms,
reach through the veil with my heart,
sit on the dock with my father,
listening to the tapestry of his stories

& Megan McDonald

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

Is the shoreline a dream?
Or do we remain
Adrift in a vermilion sea
In a painting with no frames?

*I have no idea just how far
this river flows ahead of me
but I can remember how far I came
and the pieces I seek to forget...and remember*

Across the waters
The flow is a still life
In the painting in the dream
we almost meet but sweep away

& Gloria Cassandra-Jainchill

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

I would reach beyond
What I had not known
And touch that part of me
I needed to touch, to set me free.

*But can one truly be free
of their own river?
We can decorate it,
line the shores
with bits and pieces of our journey
but we can never truly land*

Oh that thou must know
How much we must row
Pass the flowers and grass on the shore
To the lighthouse where we look
no more.

& John Dutton

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

I'd sail near the rocky banks
Bury my pole in the sandy bottom
Bait a hook and throw it in
I'd settle back and remind myself to breathe

*But are there any fish in this water
any left after the long journey
perhaps more than I even realize
just waiting to take a bite of what I cast*

My day was blissful as was the breeze
I'd stay just for the nibbles; however,
Having responsibilities to keep
I grasp my pole and push off for home

& Tchalla Williams

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

Would memories play like a Bogart film
Starring a damsel in distress
tussled and tossed mistress
or fancy and free poetess

*and would these memories look the same
drifting backwards, as they did forwards
would knowing
what was farther down the river
enlighten me,
or would nostalgia tint my vision*

Like I wear shades at night
run from plight and dream of days when it's all
Alright
all right
to the right side of me tucked like love often is,
cuffed

& Jim Landwehr

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

Past the bitterness on one shore
Jealousy and sadness on the other
Searching only forward, with intent
For the goodness in every person

*and on this river,
I see myself
perhaps clearly, for the first time ever
the many deeds of my days,
the good and the ill
and judge myself accordingly...*

for I was once innocent and naive
tempted and corrupted by the world of self
corrected and redeemed by the wisdom of others
assured and confident in the promises of heaven.

& Jeannie E. Roberts

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

What if I unearthed pearls of wisdom,
as a knowing whisper played,
“Keep to cherish, don’t ever cast away”
Would I string a stylish necklace

*and how many pearls of wisdom
once fastened around my neck
that once held prominence
have been lost at sea*

Though I know that nothing’s lost,
for wisdom trumps distinction.
Luster thrives beyond the flash,
endures in pools where rivers sing

& Glenda Walker-Hobbs

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

The magic of pink clouds
Reflected in the river.
Are these dreams that will come true
Or temporary chances to reflect?

*was this river, always this way
a set path, with only the shores to decorate
one water way to traverse
or were there other choices?*

Should we choose to tackle white water,
Run rapids, fight swift currents?
It will take much courage to steer
Through difficult watery challenges.

& A.A. Rubin

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

What ghosts half-remembered
Would haunt me from the ancient shores?
What monsters half forgotten
Would lurk beneath that Lethen canal?

*And would the ghosts and monsters
look the same
as I see them now?
Maybe older eyes
would look on them better
or maybe...even worse.*

But nothing good ever came of looking back—
Though those monsters made me what I am—
I must resist the temptation of Orpheus and of
 Lot's wife,
And paddle my gondola onward ho!

& Janet McLaren-Wade

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

I would quickly sail by the crevices hiding man's
deceit

The hidden sorrows awaiting prime
romantic conceits

And then down the river I could navigate
through the wonders of life

Escaping the traps that before couldn't be
easily avoided

*but can anything truly be altered?
The river, although I row backwards
only flows in one direction...
these memories, just imprints
of a former shadow*

So into Life's Eddy I'd freely row!
Where the currents are extremely strong
Into the whirlpool of God's mercy!
I would paddle my Gondola along
Gathering reefs of worship
in appreciation as I go
For the upstream challenges facing my gondola

& Jay Jii

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

I'd fix my gaze on the holy moments
Times spent in God's love
When grace brushed my cheek
With the softness of a lyrical kiss

*Gratitude is everything
the river reminds me as I gaze upon
ancient happiness, and even ancient sorrow
thankful for them, for making me*

To paddle onward, to face the sunrise
To float on ripples of humility and peace
As the joyful tide of salvation
Carries me home

& Matthew Powell

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

I would retrace my path
Back down the wide, easy streams I had taken
Find the river full of jagged rocks,
And man eating fish
Even if my vessel became stricken
And I had to swim the perilous waters.
Because this is the river that leads to you.

*but will I find you
at the edge of the shore, where I seek you
a fixture in my memory,
or floating somewhere else
in your own life's river*

At last!

A glimmer of what my heart has been longing
for!

I eagerly dig my toes into the sand

On the river Bank

Threw myself into you

But I went right through

You were never really there

Just a reflection in the mist

A still frame

From a dream

That will never come true

& Linda Wlodyka

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

Weighty sprigs of berries
roses in full bloom
trickling of a waterfall
waning of full moon

*the glistening light flickering
I row without sight, but from memory
I remain unconcerned with my course
able to traverse the river of my life, blindly*

I row uncharted waters without a care or fears,
a gale kicks up,
whitecaps surge disbelief rings in my ears

& John Donley

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

Could I return to moments of joy
and contentment
Without remembering depths of sorrow and
fear
Not understanding that one cannot be known
without the other

*and would I be able to identify
Those neutral notes in between
for which they really were?
Does wisdom truly come with age
or only the ability to hide our ignorance*

That place between joy and sorrow is
not devoid of either
But a time of neutrality stepping by rote
A numbness that may be comfortable or
deadening
Sustain the figure eight scull
Move forward
The gondola has no reverse

& Ann Marie Murzin

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

As I drift out to sea
With the current compelling me: go quickly;
And the moon pulling me: hold tightly --
I am alone, held in someone's
shoreline memories

*how many other rivers exist
crossing mine, parallel to mine
the decorations on the shoreline
make it hard to see, which ones are which
or who still remains in their own vessel*

Their sandy feet grounded
While I stand on the tips of my toes
Chest pressed against the bow
Straining to see past the horizon
As my eyes catch a clump of tangled
Seaweed floating back to shore

& Melissa E. Filippelli

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

If bounds were limitless
If the passing of time but a dream...
Forever, I'd be deaf to all the malignant noise
Forever, I'd hold fast to every
opportunity for joy...

*and how differently would the banks
of this river be
had I had the fortitude and discipline to do that
all along...
would I truly, if given the chance again
make such different choices?*

I can only hope I'd be strong enough to be so
brave

To row far out towards the unknown horizon
To leave behind my familiar heartache at the
shoreline

Awake, yet unblinking with my eye fixed on
what lies ahead.

& Ushiku Crisafulli

*If I could build a gondola
To row myself back down the river of my life
What would I eagerly sail beyond
What would I grasp at towards the shoreline*

How many melodramas
were trickles disguised as torrents?
If I could dance amongst my time-stream
which fords would fork into being?

*and are the forks that show themselves
actually choices,
divergent from this river
was the path I rowed, my choice
or was the river decided
long before I ever traveled it...*

If I could know for certain,
I would in kind know less.
The now is a gift, a present in name and nature
that unravels as we row towards an unknown
future.

About the Author

James P. Wagner (Ishwa) is an editor, publisher, award-winning fiction writer, essayist, historian performance poet, and alum twice over (BA & MALS) of Dowling College. He is the publisher for Local Gems Press and the Senior Founder and President of the Bards Initiative. He is also the founder and Grand Laureate of Bards Against Hunger, a series of poetry readings and anthologies dedicated to gathering food for local pantries that operates in over a dozen states. His most recent individual collection of poetry is *Everyday Alchemy*. He was the Long Island, NY National Beat Poet Laureate from 2017-2019 and the United States National Beat Poet Laureate from 2020-2021. He was the Walt Whitman Bicentennial Convention Chairman. James has edited over 100 poetry anthologies and hosted book launch events up and down the East Coast. He is the owner of the Dog-Eared Bard's Book Shop in East Northport, NY.

