

Trees in a Garden of Ashes

Poetry of Resilience

Edited by
James P. Wagner (Ishwa)

Trees in a Garden of Ashes

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Dedicated to every Phoenix that rose from the ashes...

Foreword

2020 has been a year with some unique challenges. The world was hit out of nowhere with an unprecedented level of shut downs that we haven't seen on this scale in human history. Suddenly so many things were uncertain, so many things were up in the air, events that had been planned for months or even years needed to be cancelled or postponed, and April, poetry month, had to be shifted to a virtual environment. But we did it. We made it work.

I remember early on during the crisis, only a couple of places were offering virtual poetry events. As I write this, I get over 30 invites to such events a day, no longer limited by geography the options have become plentiful. For our part at Local Gems Press and the Bards, we put up a website to host an online poetry convention, and thousands flocked to it--from poetry communities across America and beyond. We did virtual workshops, the results of some becoming best-selling books on Amazon, we hosted interviews and provided free eBooks. Poets from different corners of the country and globe--many whom had never met, starting writing collaborative poetry together, connecting, creating, forming new virtual communities.

And now, books that were postponed are starting to happen again. Launch events are trickling back, and as always, we will overcome. We are resilient; Poets and creators especially so. There is always a silver-lining, during this time of hardship many of us learned and adapted to various new forms of technology that can spread our poetry even further. And of course, this will only add to the already rich tradition of live gatherings to hear poets perform that has gone back over 6000 years.

As we go on this new journey together, I share a poem I wrote during this crisis. Thank you all for being a part of this book, and a part of our poetic journey.

~ James P. Wagner (Ishwa)

*One thousand dreams and desires
never written down
never spoken aloud
fleeting, floating, like a passing breeze...*

*I wrote down a desire
and it became a vision, a goal
a path materialized
and I took my first steps...*

*My eyes looking forward
at all the places yet to go
overlooking what was behind me
and how far I had already traveled...*

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Lloyd Abrams

covid nonstandard time

for over forty years
i wore a wrist watch every day
particularly when i was teaching
because the classrooms in our high school
had no clocks

and so to commemorate my retirement
eighteen years ago
i stopped putting on a watch
... though i still had my cell phone

along with climate change
and disastrous political decisions
but *especially* with the coronavirus pandemic
comes the horror
that the world as we've known it
is self-destructing
and our lives will never be the same

so i've felt anxious and out of sorts
ungrounded and *fatootsed* as they say
even though our home is so comfortable
and when the weather is warm enough
we enjoy breakfast and high coffee outside

... so i shouldn't complain
we're doing admirably well

i do know
that *orientation* is a function of the mind
involving awareness of the three dimensions
– person and place and time –
and with the sun setting later each day
every day stretching forward
is broken up by writing and reading
by working on the *times* crossword puzzle
by walking almost every afternoon
– and sometimes bicycling –
while keeping social and physical distance
by sporadic conversations with neighbors
by occasional calls and video chats
with our children and grandsons
instead of hugs and squeezes and kisses
by meals prepared at home
by zoom sessions
with their own peculiar pseudo-intimacy
by going through hundreds of emails
by burrowing down into the internet rabbit hole
by searching and shopping on amazon
by playing solitaire and sudoku
by listening overnight to sports- and talk-radio stations
blaring *all covid all of the time*
by watching television's hundreds of channels
broadcasting their own warped version of the universe
...and while all this is going on

it's so difficult to *not* feel lost
to *not* be at a loss
to *not* feel the precariousness
to *not* be suffused
with energy-sapping anxiety

last night
in a moment of serendipity
i strapped on a rarely worn
comfortable and unobtrusive
seiko analog quartz watch
that was bought around 1990
and had stayed hidden
in a night stand drawer
and *amazingly*
it is still keeping perfect time

now
to check what time it is
instead of switching on my cell phone
and seeing a photo of us on the lock screen
with its ever-present notifications
with its multi-pixel demand for attention
all i have to do
is turn my wrist
to feel
a semblance of control
and a sense of normalcy

Lloyd Abrams, a long-time Freeport resident, is a retired high school teacher and administrator and is an avid recumbent bicycle rider and long-distance walker. Lloyd has been writing short stories for over thirty years and poems for more than a dozen years. His works have been published in more than three dozen anthologies and publications. www.lbavha.com/write

Austin Alexis

Vocal

The day continues and continues;
the sun sizzles in symphonic sky.
A worm stretches and pulses
in an ocean of moist soil--
aromatic, cool.
Zigzagging through fire escape bars
a gaggle of sparrows
flirts with invisibility.
An owl peering and hooting
over urban backyards
is one prolific voice
that somehow represents
what the globe needs to ask,
what nature needs to know.

Austin Alexis has been published in the anthologies *From Somewhere to Nowhere* (Autonomea Press) *Suitcase of Chrysanthemums* (Great Weather for Media Press), *Rabbit Ears: TV Poems* (New York Quarterly Press) and elsewhere. His full-length collection is *Privacy Issues* (Broadside Lotus Press, Madgett Poetry Award, 2014), and his two chapbooks were previously published by Poets Wear Prada. His fiction, poetry and reviews have appeared in *Home Planet News Online*, *Barrow Street*, *Danse Macabre* and others.

Dee Allen.

Reclaim

From out of nowhere flew an owl, just moved into the trees, new to a block in Berkeley. The night's stillness was instantly filled with his frequent singing, recalling, to one housed resident at least, the sound of the woods.

Somehow, wild birds could sense a vacancy, absence of human activity on the block. While the humans, under quarantine, stayed in their homes, the birds left theirs. Nests have gone empty so they can reclaim the street for their own winged kindred. Tweets, chirps, caw-caws and hoot-hoots are louder and clearer to human ears willing to receive the cacophony of diverse beak-songs. Spotify can wait.

What the urban world have usurped, nature proceeds to take back.

African-Italian performance poet based in Oakland, California. Active on the creative writing & Spoken Word tips since the early 1990s. Author of 5 books [*Boneyard*, *Unwritten Law*, *Stormwater* and *Skeletal Black*, all from POOR Press, and his newest from Conviction 2 Change Publishing, *Elohi Unitsi*] and 25 anthology appearances [including *Your Golden Sun Still Shines*, *Rise*, *Extreme*, *The Land Lives Forever* and *Civil Liberties United*, edited by Shizue Seigel] under his figurative belt so far.

Michael Lee Bross

Niagara Falls, NY

Today is today, but like most days, I am not where I am. I am on vacation. Michael Bross is the Billy Pilgrim of Pennsylvania.

Today, it's 1997 and we're driving through Ramapo, making for New York State. It's 11pm and New Jersey is made of traffic and taillights. Paul loves how the road doesn't talk. My Rush mix on the radio and Paul just drives. He talks about QVC Christmas presents. I talk in circular nonsense, about time travel and how I can't play the real drums but am the best air-Neil Peart south of Toronto

Today is 1991. My father is buying me my first bass guitar for 50 bucks. The pick-ups are shot, the action is an inch off the frets. Unplugged and without sound, I blister my fingers and grow out my ponytail to look like Geddy Lee.

Today is 2011. Paul's giving me his father's computer monitors that are full of cigarette smoke. Paul's father is dead, he doesn't talk about his dad. I don't either. He has no need for his father's junk anymore.

Today is 1994. Paul is shy, builds sound systems out of scratched

car speakers in his basement. 26-point stereo sound for Star Wars movie nights and Mortal Kombat-Pong marathons. We meet weekly to play Dream Theater and Rush covers. His father builds amplifiers and Paul plays the drums I can only fake. At 10 o'clock, we stop being loud and play Sega till midnight.

Today is 1995. Paul the senior leaves town with a stripper from *Winner's Go-Go*. His wife smokes on her couch and cries to the Television how love has made her grave. The QVC tells her to act now before the offer is gone forever.

Today is 2001. I sink the lead doll of my father into the ground. Paul drives me to work. Too early to talk, the light of the sun burns our eyes as he drives.

Today is 1945. Billy Pilgrim wants out of Dresden, so he leaves for outer space.

Today is 1997, and we're driving through Ramapo, making for New York State. It's 11pm and Paul wants to drive to Niagara and I laugh and dare him. He shrugs, calls my bluff, and I fold just short of Palisades. Paul loves how the road never speaks, even as I keep us in the country of our forefathers, a country of waterfalls. Niagara: America's jumping off point, where we all line up the river, thump the barrel and dive, desperate for destinations to our cascade, looking for a view of Canada, to know our fathers' country ends somewhere, even as it crashes into a river the shape of the entire sky in reverse. And for the length of our fall, we see that the threat to our borders is our borders—borders we love and fear both more than God.

Today is today and so it goes. I write poems on Paul's father's
monitor about vacations I
never take.

And Today is 1998. Paul is driving for Niagara, his passenger seat
full of mix cd's and empty space. He'll make the border by dawn,
just in time to see the sun rise out of the water.

Michael Lee Bross hold an MFA in Poetry from Drew University where he was the recipient of the Jane Coil Cole Poetry Scholarship, and the 2015 Arts by the People Chapbook Award. His debut poetry chapbook, "Meditations on an Empty Stomach" was published by Finishing Line Press (October 2019), and his poems have appeared *Lifeboat*, *Mobius Poetry Magazine*, *Let's Talk Philadelphia*, *The Northeastern Poetry Review*, and most recently in ZPublishings *Best Emerging Poets Anthology 2019*. Michael currently teaches English at the University of Scranton and East Stroudsburg University

Ryan Buynak

writer/dancer

lost habits.
long pauses.
especially after.
vulnerability.
ends of songs.

we believe.
like paper.
near fire.

hope is a luxury.
that neither of us.
can afford.
especially at this time.
in forever's history.

still.
try.

the things.
we are not permitted.
to breathe.
carry with us.

heavy rise.

pretend to be.

when the world is in your voice.

out of a million.

possible outcomes.

only one.

ends.

positively.

Ryan Buynak is a pugilist poet from New York City, who hates writing bios. He has published 10 books of poetry, which sit on bookshelves and backs of toilets all around the wide world. Everything Ryan produces is shared under the brand Coyote Blood, which you should Google right away or else! He loves the Yankees, wearing overalls, and eating freshly baked chocolate chip cookies.

Adina Cassal

Predictions

Some say
tomorrow, when the world
rotates back
to open doors,
full stores,
handshakes and hugs,
we will be kinder
we will be more grateful;
humanity will have improved
and a greater peace
will descend upon us.

I don't say
what some say.

I say we will still be
stubborn and full
of misunderstandings;
we will be angry and confused,
at times greedy or wistful.
We will try to find
a way back
and we will get lost,

because a way back
could never exist.

Instead,
we will forge,
day by day,
a way forward;
we will cry at times
and sometimes we
will laugh
at the thoughts we once had.

And,
I say,
we will breathe deeper
and slower
not because we will be better,
but because we will know
that we have -
that humanity has -
survived.

Adina Cassal resides in the Washington, DC area and works providing human services to people she deeply respects. She has been published in online journals and anthologies to include *Poets Anonymous 25 and Beyond*, *Poets Domain, Vol. 32.*, and *NoVA Bards 2018 and 2019*.

Jamie Ann Colangelo

**So Much of the Sweetness
In Life Comes From Family**

The walls that surround me here
Could tell a tale or two
The times we had to share
And memories – more than a few

For every passing year
Was filled with laughter
Joy, sorrow and tears
Times, I reminisce, days after

Moments that I treasure
Etched upon my heart
Love beyond measure
Never to be apart

My family's grown and gone
From the walls that surround me here
But the memories live on
Held always to me dear

Jamie Ann Colangelo is a Christian, living on Long Island. She is the mother of twins, Liane and Christopher, now adults. She is the author of *From The Father's Heart - A Book of Poems and Suggested Gifts To Inspire, Encourage and Bless Those in Your Circle of Influence*. She found her passion for poetry

Susan Collender

**Rainbows
In Coronavirus Times**

Rainbows in our windows
Children's rainbows drawn
with sidewalk chalk appear
Rainbows all around the world
Uplifting people's spirits everywhere
Love to play rainbow songs
Guitar and piano
The Rainbow Connection
Over the Rainbow

Thank you to all the essential workers,
Heroes globally, and across the USA
Rainbows all around us sending out
A message of hope for a brighter day

Lyndsey Collison

Be Free

Life feels broken
Tears fall freely
Soul needs to be awoken
Emotions fear me

Tremble as I stand
Let the world see me
Two feet needing to land
To rise above and be free

From expectations given
From resentment inside
Happiness is worth living
I am ready for the ride

Linda Conroy

The Fire at Newhalem, Four Years Later

A forest screen once tucked me in this luscious space,
thick growth that hid the view of Douglas Fir,
Red Cedar, Hemlock. How tall they were
above the maple in the forest's middle layer,
the ferns and sisal at their base. Now
I look through grey ghost trees, the last few
dead ones holding selves upright.

Others stand with bark burned black
though at their heights sparse leaves still grow.
Some hollow, splintered, lie sideways where they fell,
some fallen since, too fragile to hang on.

The creek bed, split by fallen boughs,
makes new routes rushing round the ravaged scene,
tumbling clear like glass through which its history gleams.

Now I see the notches of the Pickett Range,
of Table Mountain. The glaciers beneath
the rich treed slopes of more abundant times
remind that devastation is a part of nature's tale.
Here, already, progress has been made
with fireweed six feet tall.

Linda Conroy is a retired social worker who uses poetry to show the simplicity and complexity of behaviors that make us human. Her poetry has recently appeared or is forthcoming in Snapdragon, Door is Ajar and Soul-Lit. She is the author of a poetry collection, *Ordinary Signs*.

Terry Cox-Joseph

Promise

Ten years' cacophony. Yet
crescent wingtips dip,
altered skyline mere

redirection. White-breasted
swallows of Argentina
have returned. One, ten, thirty.

Loyalists huddle beneath
overpasses. Serenity blankets
valley with dawn's fog,

hazy headlights steady.
Red brake lights pulse.
Decade of scaffolding

shouldered them out, bully
on the playground. Who
would have known?

Capistrano, red-tile roofs,
touristas collecting trinkets.
Beckoning sky and dreams

of ladybugs lure beyond
200-year homestead. Magnetic
field summons with promises

of Big Bear, Chino Hills.
Squee of arrival: *We're back,*

we've adapted,
we will always return.

Terry Cox-Joseph is an artist and writer who freelances from Virginia. She has been published in *Chiron Review*, *Avocet* and *Prairie Poetry*. A former newspaper reporter, she and has had one book of nonfiction published, *ADJUSTMENTS*, (Hampton Roads, 1993), and one book of poetry, *Between Then and Now* (Finishing Line Press, November 2018).

Barbara Crooker

Instructions For Getting Through To The Other Side

Remember that each day has two dozen hours.
In how many of them did you dance?
Behind even the thickest clouds, the sun is always shining.
Look for one object of beauty every day; it isn't that difficult.
Love who you love. Love fiercely.
Count the number of red cardinals (four) in your cherry tree.
The ocean will continue to shuffle its cards; soon we'll get
 better hands.
The sun will pop up every morning, a child's rubber ball.
Be a filament of light in the darkness

Barbara Crooker is a poetry editor for Italian Americana and author of nine books; *Some Glad Morning*, Pitt Poetry Series, is the latest. Her awards include the Best Book of Poetry 2018 from Poetry by the Sea, the WB Yeats Society of New York Award, the Thomas Merton Poetry of the Sacred Award, and three Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowships. Her work appears in a variety of anthologies, including *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*.

Abby DeSantis

the morrow

time dissolving into itself
a shapeless continuum
of hours and days
of sadness and isolation
vulnerable flesh concealed
by masked fear
only buildings
concrete and steel
stand in quiet defiance
emptied streets lie silent
under the pounding hooves
of the Pale Horse
just as light turns
into cover of darkness
the sun will rise
bestowing a new day
illuminating hearts and souls
for we are
no ancient civilization
to lie in ruin
for future generations
we will discover
today is not our last tomorrow

Abby DeSantis is a retired fashion executive from NYC who is currently living in rural northeastern Pennsylvania. Her poetry has appeared in Pennsylvania Bards Poetry Review 2020, Thirteen Days of Halloween, Tiny Seeds Literary Journal and Covid-19 Poems from the Lockdown. She is a member of Poets Live of Scranton and NEPA Pencils writing group. She lives with her husband and several furry and feathered friends.

John DeSantis

Faith

Faith is belief
belief in the self beyond
beyond the beginning
and the end of
this brief appearance

Faith is belief
belief in a power
beyond our strength
an explanation
we can't explain

Faith is belief
belief in reason
beyond the conceit
of science and logical
exegesis

Faith is belief
belief beyond all
reason and sense
that we be able
to outlive death

Faith is belief
belief that we
can do whatever
we ought not
or cannot do

Faith is belief
belief that when
we pour ourselves
and all our assets
out to nothing

we will be filled
again and the universe
or god or whatever
we believe will rush to
grant our greatest wish

John DeSantis is a retired NYC high school mathematics teacher recently relocated to rural Northeastern Pennsylvania. He has been writing since about third grade. In addition to poetry, he writes short stories and plays. He has been published in several anthologies.

Liza DeStefano

Peace

I hear you little bird singing your song,
tweeting oh so sweet as the soft winds are blowing along.
Sitting back with my face towards the sun,
the heat seeks hypnotically a place to calm.
Rhythm of the heart leisurely slows
asking the mind to join in the stroll.
Tranquil softness close eyes which fight the flight,
Peace achieved when waves voice a crashing might ..L.

Liza DeStefano, is a poet with hundreds of poems dealing with grief and life challenging events. She has published two inspirational volumes of poetry. Liza has touched many by her honest and expressive release of emotions, creating poems of truth. She resides in South Jersey. Liza is a small business owner and enjoys writing and helping others.

Alex Edwards-Bourdrez

Rescue Dogs

I knew a little girl who had a dog.
Tiny, he was, but what a ferocious defender!
Once, he leapt on the couch when she screamed in distress,
Convinced he existed just to protect her.

I knew a dog who survived a bad crash.
(The curve was too sharp for the speeding Land Rover.)
The driver near death, the dog sprang to action
And danced on the shoulder 'till someone pulled over.

I knew an old lady who had a dog,
Her humble friend, on Earth her sole delight.
He crossed his paws each evening on her bed
To pray with her she'd make it through the night.

Alex Edwards-Bourdrez's poems have appeared in various anthologies and have won recognition in Long Island contests. His collection, "Transformations," which won second prize in the 2019 NaPoWriMo contest, will be published soon by Local Gems Press.

Karl Elder

Arboreal

Life only as full as it is empty,
you've chosen this lot, as if now sitting
cross-legged, fixed on a huge hickory,
without thought, the tree caught growing a ring.

Thing is . . . beneath trees you can't always see
above, the soundest mind opines, nor wring
the self of the ken of identity
when light's lost, insight sought in the squinting.

Which degree on your watch's three-sixty
shall no such thing as time's revved chainsaw sing
TIM-BER!, stir you aware this is the *thee*
blur—the snap, crackle, and whump—come crashing?

Whether hear it here or on heaven's ground
depends upon definition of sound.

Karl Elder is Lakeland University's Fessler Professor of Creative Writing and Poet in Residence. Among his honors are the Christopher Latham Sholes Award from the Council for Wisconsin Writers; a Pushcart Prize; the Chad Walsh, Lorine Niedecker, and Lucien Stryk Awards; and two appearances in *The Best American Poetry*. His novel, *Earth as It Is in Heaven*, is from Pebblebrook Press.

Lynette Esposito

The Power of a Seed

How many birds dine
on breezes
filled with seeds
tossed like
dust pebbles
filled with hope--
scattering magic over a hungry land.

Where there is a barren twig,
green responds to the sun.
Where there is dry dirt,
sky tears moisten through
the weeds
so daisies, tomatoes,
and squash emerge when spring
calls to them.

All this from something so small
you would think it is nothing...

like the power of the human heart
less than the size of a raspberry
when first formed.,

yet nurtured,
it powers amazing things,
gives itself wings
like those that lift the birds
who feast on seeded air.

Lynette G. Esposito, MA Rutgers has been published in Poetry Quarterly, Remembered Things, Bards for Hunger, Right Hand Pointing, Three Line Poetry and others. She and her husband, Attilio, are lovers of cats.

Timothy Evans

Ecstatic Saints

spring...jaunty
(eternally fourteen)
hallucinogenic
hysterical alive
promising the
melt of snow
uncovering the
skunk cabbages
and crows chasing
after bleak winter's
dirge, brings new
weather along for
the ride, hayride
a sleigh ride,
taken for a ride,
taken for a cab ride
through the park
old men playing
chess, which is
okay if you have
all the time in
the world which
they do not but,
hey, who am I to

quibble, they've
come this far...
carry on gents...
carry on...
carry on

Timothy Paul Evans: Tim came to writing poetry late (in his 60's). His poems have appeared in the 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 San Diego Poetry Annual as well as the 2018 National Beat Poetry Festival 10 Year Anthology. He has just completed his first book of poetry, "Litanies of the Moon" to be published later this year. He is also a finalist for the 2019 Pushcart Prize Best of Small Press Awards for poetry

Yvona Fast

New Reality

The world is in chaos. Uncertainty reigns.
Everything is closed. Schools. Colleges. Churches. Libraries.
Pools. Gyms. Hair salons.
No more book discussion groups.
No more water aerobics.
No more concerts, theater productions, art gallery openings.
Restaurants are takeout and delivery only.
Disconnected, separated, alone, we don't congregate.
We practice social distancing.
Our new reality: Surreal – yet real.

Rest. Relax. Read.
Life has slowed. A hiatus.
But the earth still turns and rotates.
Listen – to dripping icicles, gurgling brooks, melting snow.
Robins, blackbirds, bluebirds return, filling the air with melodies.
Crocuses bloom, then daffodils, then tulips.
Spring will come. Then summer.
This, too, shall pass.

Yvona Fast's poetry chapbook, *Different*, was published by Foothills in 2017. In 2018 the chapbook *Blue Seasons* was published by CWP. In 2015, she brought *PoemVillage* to Saranac Lake. Her poems have appeared in *Aurorean*, *New England Memories*, *Farming Magazine*, *The Poeteer*, *Oswego Alumni magazine (online)* and several anthologies. The author of 3 books, a weekly food column running continuously since 2005, and over 200 magazine articles, she lives in the northern Adirondacks, where she's a member of the Adirondack Center for Writing and The Poetry Group. More at www.wordsaremyworld.com.

Linda Perlman Fields

To A Newborn, 2020

You are the gift we waited for.
Now you are here an innocent
blameless and naïve
raw like unmolded clay
arriving in an outbreak of dirges
echoing from empty rooms and beds
when people speak words for the dead
and men cry for what they've seen
when our own reflections said
yes, we are weaker, poorer, sicker,
bereft of love, compassion, harmony.
You are the promise of a future
free of division and disease,
no mother consumed with dread
no father confined and solitary
no children with visions of orphaned lives.
There will be no talk of the expendable elderly
or the ones too damaged to save
and no mention of those whose bodies
were placed in unmarked graves.
All are victims, the doctors said,
of the ill-named threat we share
call it Happy Hypoxia, a surprise attack
that stealthily takes our breath away

and we don't realize what we're losing
until we struggle to get it back.
Here is my vision for you,
a child with the purest of hearts
and unspoiled dreams
a roadmap yet to be drawn
with approaching scenes to view:
You will have a world with a future,
an earth full of life, delightfully clean,
where kindness abounds with
a reverence for nature, and everything.

Linda Perlman Fields is a former English teacher and a Peabody-winning journalist who spent most of her career in broadcast news in NYC. Throughout those years, she never lost her passion for writing prose and poetry. Her work has appeared in *Northeast Poetry Review 2020*, *New York Magazine*, *Hoofstrikes*, and at *CBS.com*. She currently writes for a nonprofit foundation and newspapers in the greater Pike County, PA region, and is working on a novel from her home in Milford, PA.

Melissa E. Filippelli

Seasons

many things have come to pass
the blooming flower, the withered grass
the rising sun, the slowing tide
the first cry of life, the blushing bride
seasons come and seasons go
they also change, they also grow
the windswept sands on near and far shores
were once massive rocks, solid to the core
beaten and battered relentlessly
until rendered and crafted into what we now see
the faded dandelion seed, violently uprooted from its home
taken and rooted far away
to give another dandelion the chance to grow
a woman's honor, brutally betrayed but results in a child
a tired world watches waiting to be beguiled
who's to say there's no rhyme or reason?
without each stage, there would be no seasons

Melissa E. Filippelli is a native Long Islander who writes because she must. Every hard thing in her life has given her a deep, clear, and tender voice that others can relate to. You can find more of her writing in Suffolk County Poetry Review 2020 edition, Bards Annual 2019, and Poets to Come, an anthology dedicated to Walt Whitman.

Robert Fleming

Passed Over

here cause i was born after,
my great-granny, first born, was inside
a ram blood painted door, in Egypt -
here cause i was asleep in a house,
next 2 a house bombed,
to separate Quebec from Canada -
here cause i hid behind a bathroom door
or behind a chair, when daddy
brushbeat sister, who liquored at 12 -
here cause a president said AIDS,
gave AIDS \$, and CDC found
transmissions & bred a pill -
here cause i marched the millennium march,
marchday, the capitol steps were bird pooed,
not rainbow blood -
passed over in Egypt
passed over in Quebec
passed over in alcohol house
passed over by AIDS
passed over as gay
passed over

Robert Fleming lives in Lewes, DE & is a member of the Rehoboth Beach Writer's Guild. He survived writing for > 30 years. In 2019, he was nominated for a Lambda Literary Award, as a contributor to the anthology *Stonewall Legacy*. He has been published in *The Beat*, *Stonewall Legacy*, *Poets to Come*, *Poet's Domain*, *Nova Bards*, *DE Bards*, *Spoonfed*, *Radical Fairy Diary*, *The Watch*, *California Quarterly*, *Dekalb Literary Arts Journal*, *Catalyst*, & *American Poetry Anthology*. His poetry masters are William Shakespeare, Robert Frost, E.E. Cummings, Dorothy Parker, and John Berryman.

Melody Frances

creativity

art and poetry are meant
for times such as this,
times of hopelessness,
times of hopefulness,
times that need
to be written down
and our feelings
finger-painted
onto the page so
we can feel some peace
in creativity just like
my little girl with
a pair of scissors,
a glue stick, crayons
and oversized popsicle
sticks created
a popsicle stick framed picture
of three ice cream cones
little things that give her joy
when she doesn't
understand why she
can't see her friends,

little things that give me joy
when I can't see my friends either
so glad we have each other

Melody Frances is a NJ poet who spends her days looking after her family and pets, and writing whenever she can get a spare moment. She hopes her poems can bring comfort or a smile to anyone who needs it.

Joanne Kennedy Frazer

Good News In Troubled Times

(after Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Good News*)

The daily news broadcasts
only fear, divisiveness, and pain.

Let us air good news that we
may hear it and benefit.

The important news is...

...we have eyes to see
the deep green magnolia
and nose to inhale
its white flowers' fragrances.

...We have ears to catch
the wren's aria carried
on breathless breezes.

...we have time to look at forsythia
blossoms, yellow arms waving
haphazardly to the world.

...we have the leisure to throw
our heads back, arms held wide,
to welcome the gift of the sun.

The breaking news is...
that fear will pass
and we will journey
to new places and spaces.

Joanne Kennedy Frazer is a retired peace and justice director and educator for faith-based organizations at state, diocesan and national levels. Penning her life's passions into poetry has become the delight and vocation of her silvering years. Her work has appeared in several *Old Mountain Press*' anthologies, *Poetic Portions 2015 anthology*, *Soul-lit Journal of Spiritual Poetry*, *Postcard Poems and Prose Magazine*, *Panoply Literary Zine*, *Snapdragon Journal*, *Whirlwind Magazine*, *Kakalak* and *Red Clay Review*. Five of her poems have been turned into a song cycle, titled *Resistance*, by composer Steven Luksan, and performed in Seattle and Durham. Her chapbook, *Being Kin*, was published in 2019. She lives in Durham, NC.

Trina Gaynon

COVID-19 Haiku and a Tanka or Two Too

Haiku of losses--
New realities bite-sized
In a time of plague.

New *kigo* flower,
Preceding Lenten roses,
Darkening Easter.

Basho's formula—
Count syllables. Calm the mind.
Your breath comes and goes.

Look beyond your balcony.
Cherry and plum trees blossom.
Rain washes the petals down.

Upright and distressed,
Four peeps, a pause, four more peeps.
Poor little scooter.

Four cars huddle close.
One car isolates in lot
Social distancing.

Advance directives
Waiting to be notarized,
One virus too late.

Virus manifests
Its delicate corona.
It crowns us with grief.

Rising in clusters,
In shadows of Douglas fir,
Trillium in bloom
Scattered through woodland debris.
The gates of Tryon Creek locked.

Passed by, yet plague
Leaves us broken and afraid.
We will remember
Orange tulips in a blue vase
At our Passover seder.

And oh God we ate,
How we ate because we could,
Because we did not
Know what the harvest might bring
To tables in high rises.

Recently Trina Gaynon's poems appeared in 45th Parallel, Fire and Rain: Eco-poetry of California, and a chapbook The Alphabet of Romance. A volunteer for literacy programs and WriteGirl in California, she currently leads a poetry reading study at Senior Studies Institute in Oregon.

Tony Gentry

Places I Still Am, NO. 4

There is a trick to blowing bubbles
but like so many things you'll learn
in life, where everything is bubble
fragile, it's easy once you get it.

That measured puff -
its reward your own hot breath
packaged in a glistening globe
and floating oh so buoyantly
with its fellows on a current
you can't otherwise see
before of a sudden expiring
with a silent pop at the prick
of a blade of grass.

Somewhere in my childish heart
I glimpse a glint of the lesson there:

Blow more and more until
the breeze across our yard
is flagged with bobbing spheres
that stir a sort of expectant glee
there not there, exactly!

And the little bottle it came in
gone finally empty, too.

Tony Gentry is the author of a novel *The Coal Tower* (2018), a story collection *Last Rites* (2019), a poetry collection *Yearnful Raves* (2020), and five young adult biographies (*Paul Laurence Dunbar, Dizzy Gillespie, Jesse Owens, Alice Walker, and Elvis Presley*). An occupational therapy professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, he lives in Bon Air with his wife Chris, also an OT, two sons and their dog Buddy.

Darcy Grabenstein

Answers During a PANDEMICONIUM

The world has become a surgical suite
with gloves, masks and gear
to protect us from an invisible invader.
But who will protect us from ourselves?
*We must find internal strength
to fight this external threat.*

We are obsessed with the news
as the corona carnage continues
and we ask our elected officials:
How can our leadership help?
*We must find the inner resources
to sustain us.*

Panic has taken hold of our lives
while we attempt to preserve
some semblance of normalcy.
Is this the new normal?
*We must redefine “normal”
and give new meaning to our lives.*
Many of us are torn
between believing and questioning

our long-held faith. Our new mantra:

Why is this happening?

We must hold on

to that which is dear to us.

We strive to find joy

in the simple things

but our mind wonders:

How long will this go on?

We must not count the months

but cherish the minutes.

Our days are filled

with virtual connections.

Our hearts are filled with fear.

What does the future hold?

We must focus on the present

with an eye toward tomorrow.

We search for acts of kindness

despite mistrust in humanity.

And the question lingers:

What's *really* behind the masks?

We must find our own answers

and our own peace.

Darcy Grabenstein has always been a lover of words, and started her career as a journalist. Now a marketing writer by profession, she turns to poetry as a creative outlet. Darcy is a contributing writer to the Philadelphia-based thINKingDANCE publication. She also has had two short stories published in the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series.

Heidi C. Hallett

Spring Indigo

Migrant jewel on the wing
Through our fleeting, stained glass spring

Indigo Bunting lapis shard
Transient inlay - on guard

Then rising up, free to fly
Indigo within the sky

Heidi C. Hallett sees creative expression through poetry as a way to collaborate and converse with others. She finds that poetry enables us to examine and appreciate life, and she enjoys working with the imagery in poems to explore an idea. Heidi is a small animal veterinarian who paints with oils as well as words, often using these two mediums to complement each other. Her poetry has been published in several anthologies. www.aquartideas.com."

Mark Heathcote

A Guiding Faun

I remember a willow tree half-eaten
By fire and lightning;
And later a blue tits nest a living scroll
Within a cracked open blackened vest.

I remember a frozen landscape
A winding stream with yellow primroses
And a personal agony back then-
I imagined would-always-remain a torrent.

I remember thinking, how do I fit.
How do I survive-identical a blue tits egg?
Will I endure lives every misfortune;
Equal half-eaten willow trees apportion.

I remember thinking this is no dream.
It holds nightmares of every persuasion-
Of joy and misery of equal equation;
It evolves as do the season's opposite.

I remember thinking, how life goes on
How it flourishes with virtuosity,
How it fights back from adversity,
Inhabits-remote places, a guiding faun.

Mark Andrew Heathcote is from Manchester in the UK, author of “In Perpetuity” and “Back on Earth” two books of poems published by a CTU publishing group ~ Creative Talents Unleashed, Mark is adult learning difficulties support worker, who began writing poetry at an early age at school.

George Held

Grackles and crows
dominating the landscape—
a robin sings

A Carolina wren
carols in mid-canopy—
daffodils raise heads

Dreary winter days
without birdsong—
“Listen,” caws the crow

George Held, an eleven-time Pushcart nominee, won the blue ribbon for haiku at the state fair, Old Bethpage Village, 2019.

Wendy Hoffman

Recognition

My old dog sleeps, doesn't care to walk.
Now I go alone.
Couples stroll close together.
A large black dog
with beseeching eyes

circles me, sniffs hedges,
circles back.
I turn a corner
at the wisteria vine
by the neighborhood park.

The big black dog sculpts
figure 8s around me.
Are you asking me to help?
With all the sunny people on the street,
the dog chooses me!

Light flashes on tag numbers
jingling from his red collar.
But needing space and time,
I don't carry a phone.
A kind-looking man with two dogs,

big and little standing in the middle of the field,
calls from his. The owner drives up, hollers
Peppy. Peppy swooshes to her like wind.
Still I feel the dog stretch his paw into the air,
unfurl a thread, tug me toward life.

Wendy Hoffman is a retired social worker. Karnac Books, London, published her memoirs in 2014 and 2015, and a co-authored book of essays, in 2017. Her books are now with Aeon Publishers in England and Routledge in New York. Her first book of poetry was published in 2016. A memoir is forthcoming. She has a MFA in creative writing.

Kevin Holmes

Broken Plates and Good Skates

The beneficent factor
that takes the strands of this land
and holds them not for ransom but for time
time to roll the roost and case harden the lines
of these broken and unbroken ones

these that are broken plates
most erase and do not take home
left on the bench
echoing their middle name waste
they that make pokes a way of life
and nugies a diet
they that unite in mind sense and form
alliances that win for once
but not for all

Broken plates
dashed emotions and fruitless dates
they know their geography ever over there
away from the action
and in the corners looking out and never fitting in

they bind they bond to one another
by the twos and threes

eating words to find light
listening to some drone
and placing energy on alone

and then sometimes they leave the floor
and find each other in the quiet
and decide to make some noise
they call us to attention
and let us know what to wear
and who to worship
they seize the energy of difference
for
there in lies change

Lloyd Howell

Sacred Grove – Tastanaki Preserve

Off the beaten path, along a seldom used trail, deep in the
Preserve –

behold a grove of grand ole live oaks!

I veer off the trail making my way through the thickets.

They stand reaching out to each other hand-to-hand
forming a voluntary brotherhood
calling suppliants, chosen pilgrims to enter their sacred circle.

Their silence is monk like
suggestive of a minyan of praying partners.
Their muscular branches, bearded with Spanish moss,
rise and arch into a vaulted monastic canopy.
The earthy floor below free and clear
covered only with a brown, dank carpet of years of decaying oak
leaves.

And although I haven't prayed in many months
I find that here it is automatic, instinctual.

A need to listen overwhelms me.
I know that I am a tree lover but
just what is this speechless awe I am undergoing?
Are ancient Celtic Druid ancestors prompting me?
Can the lost dialogue of the oaks become accessible?

Who could have imagined their murmurings!

The brothers tell me they haven't been touched in decades –
so I go from one to the other,
touching the trunk of one and a branch of another,
gazing up at the twists and turns of their limbs.
I honor them with taking photographs.

I can see their bark is not unlike my own aging skin –
as if reading Braille, I run my fingertips
over its rough and deeply furrowed edges
trying to comprehend their wooden messages:
they talk of their advanced years;
they look forward to their impending decay –
their return to Mother Earth, piece by piece, ad infinitum –
but no hurry, their demise still decades away.
Then, some will no longer be able to bear the weight
of their massive branches; one breaks off,
an irreversible exposure to fungi, to bark beetle, to rot.
They tell me one may go by lightning, another toppled by wind.
They are reconciled to their destinies, come as they may.
Wise in knowing that their circle will be broken but not the circle
of life.

There are lessons here for me.

This walkabout is not about how far I can go into the woods
but into myself.

There is an internal compass
and when I get to the heart of things –
I will not need to find my way out.

Hálpata Tastanaki (Alligator Chief) Preserve is named after a Seminole leader and is located below Ocala, Florida and consists of 8,000 plus acres open to hiking, biking and horseback riding.

Lloyd Howell has a bachelor's degree in engineering and a master's in religious education. And although recently retired he still lives as a poet/spiritual being on the boundary between these two worlds.

Mark Hudson

Trip to the Botanical Gardens (2012)

On a field trip with my writing class,
We went to see the Botanic Gardens.
On a day of sunshine and spring,
The sun was a window for everything.

The flowers bloomed over well-cut grass,
Exotic plants in houses made of glass
See how the soil tends to harden
in Chicago Botanical Gardens.

A bunch of birds gather and sing
And I wish I too had some wings!
I stop to write poems by the lake
The rest is no excuse for a break.

Writing a poem and a haiku
About a place where nature is true.

Mark Hudson is a frequent contributor to local gems books. He is happy they selected the botanical gardens poem, because it is a local place closed because of the Corona virus, and it is a place that Mark has many fond memories of. He hopes this poem will help the reader see it in their minds.

Maria Iliou

Life Alteration

In theory within
Mythology...representing
Phoenix, bird

Eternity of long life

Combusting, burning
Decomposed...rebirth
Regenerates...new life
Arising from ashes
Creating humanity
Life continues, repetitively
Mother nature, repeats itself

Silence remains, no
One listening
Dark shadows...virus
Disrupts...disrupting
Symbolically shifted

Life alteration
Quarantine
Social distancing

Wearing facial mask of
Protection...protecting our health
Contributing new shift
Worldwide shut down

Storyteller of
Universe
Wisdom...be mindful
Be observing
Connecting our gifts,
Focusing on our strengths
Networking...learning
Working together
Rebuilding our communities

Maria is, Autistic Greek Gifted Artist Poet, Photographer, Actress, model, Maria Enjoy Acting, theatre, performing live on stage. Maria scenes of her soul self deep connected Connecting with Performing Arts solace Quietude within inner soul self through meditation, ITA and yoga Maria is Publish Author, Maria Designing her own Documentaries, Maria designs her own college, Magazine.

Bethany James

Penetrate My Bone Marrow

In the times of sorrow
The master is always nearby
Swayed from the straight and narrow
Pain is amplified.

When tomorrow is dim
So it seems,
Until your truth pierce
Straight than an arrow ,
Deep to the bone marrow

Shame is removed by your word
Quenched in your savor
Deeply moved and no more hurt... Flowing deep in my bone
marrow.
Peace within me
Truly you're the fountain of life
Dry bones back to life
Your DNA of grace , am alive

Brian Donnell James

The Artist

Depression Is the canvas that we use to create beauty
Despair, are the blank pages that we write upon to tell our stories
We are the indigo children
Born for this suffrage
For us this is a mood familiar
And Now is our time to re-craft the image

So let us set fire to the crucible turn and twist
Lift a voice so that we can sooth and subdue
Sculpt art in clay and etch away fear
Light the kiln ablaze to form and shape
Mold metal and copper, anxiety and doubt
Dip brushes in uncertainty to paint our masterpieces
In vibrant colors

For now is the time,
To make our dreams anew.....

Brian Donnell James is an emerging writer who has been published in Africa, Europe, and throughout the United States. His work has received a letter of encouragement by the poet Nikki Giovanni , and his work earned him praise as a finalist for the Virginia Prize, sponsored by the University of Virginia.

Nancy K. Jentsch

Butterfly Ballads

Butterfly ballads
would tell of chrysalis
bondage, where darkness
blinds hides
the prize
of color sound flight

till the seam bursts
and crinkled, wet
carnelian wings
stretch and lean
into a song
in the key of dawn

Nancy K. Jentsch has taught German and Spanish for over 35 years. She has recently published poetry in *Eclectica*, *3 Elements Review* and *Panoply*. In 2019, her poetry appeared in the anthologies *Riparian* (Dos Madres Press) and *A Walk with Nature* (University Professors Press). Her chapbook, *Authorized Visitors*, was published in 2017. Seven of her ekphrastic poems appear in the collaborative chapbook *Frame and Mount the Sky* (2017). Her writer's page on Facebook is

<https://www.facebook.com/NancyJentschPoet/>

Patti Barker Kierys

A Time Of Caring

The feelings this day for the unknown
scary, fear, sadness, love and kindness
it is a time to draw close family and friends
a time to reflect on the world around

Try not to panic, but be aware to help
yourself, family, friends and community
rest your mind, let your heart speak
reach out with words of kindness and support

Take time out and chat with those you love
let them know they are not alone
lessen their fears and anxiety
reassure each with hope and caring

Though we miss our hugs, kisses and touch
we can let that go for the moment
filling the space between us with words
of love, compassion and encouragement

It may even be a time to reflect on our life
are we living it the best we can to serve
it may be time to review and simplify

letting many material things slip away

Time to share and give to those in need
let them know we are with them
we are a community for one and all
let us go forward without panic and fear

Let us live in the moment knowing
we are dealing with what comes our way
with strength to overcome and survive
and the will to live for today and tomorrow

In closing I say, you are not alone for I am here
with you in thought and touch with words
of hope for healing and love – always love

Patti Barker Kierys is a woman of many interests. She is an award winning artist, Reiki Master Teacher, author and photographer. Her creative passion and spiritual inspiration can be seen in her poems, paintings, collage, photography and inspirational messages. She writes articles for the international organization Reiki Rays. Upon retiring after 50 years in law, a surprising passion arose. She began writing poetry and continues to enjoy it to this day. Patti resides in Connecticut with her daughter. She can be reached at pmkierys@att.com and on Facebook - Patti Barker Kierys

Kim King

If We Were Quarantined

together, I would wake you with coffee, black,
and a kiss before our breakfast of scrambled eggs
and toast, no jam. We would catch up on the news
and glide into our favorite chairs, toes touching,
fingers connecting to the internet and beyond
until lunch— which could be served back under
freshly laundered sheets or not at all. It's a crisis.
We have plenty of booze, and "aperitivo" starts at
two o'clock with an Aperol spritz or a glass of wine.
We have no milk or butter, but a brownie mix suffices
for that sugar fix, and Netflix leads us to the future
or back to Casablanca where Rick lies to Elsa and you lie
with me waiting for that plane to Portugal which never
arrives, but still we stand there in the fog, listening.

Kim King's poetry has appeared in *Wild Onions*, *In Gilded Frame*, *Point Mass*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry*, *Potnia*, *Poets for Paris*, *O-Dark-Thirty*, *SWIMM* *Every Day*, *The Hands We Hold* and other publications. Kim has an M.A. in Writing from the Johns Hopkins University. She blogs sporadically at

KSquaredPoetry.wordpress.com

Judson Klein

Things and Nothings

It took him years
to complete the list

the television a lake of color, with its own sun
pouring over his couch
the paid-for car, in personal parking space 5
awaiting its next well-financed repair

The table, the chairs, shelves, bed and dresser
containing more clothes than he could wear
all well-folded

Galaxies of movies on his remote
bill is not due for a month (or more)
what's to do? well I'll go do it
the running register in his head

a lawn to relax on, with reclining chair
if I could be calm for minutes
messages on the phone, its wallpaper art
the bliss of air conditioning, refrigerator humming
expansive bookshelf boasting knowledge
the DVD collection much less
it's all left me unwanted!

and of course, something was missing

as he knew it would

when he thought of it, he looked to the air
where nothing was

She put the car in P, closed her eyes
and quietly gave thanks, for another day of driving safe
without insurance
But last month's rent was paid, though the late fee could have
bought
some groceries for days
or paid the electric bill, o shit

inside the refrigerator light exposed
three slices of bread stale, a soft apple, a few eggs
and half a burrito stiff

the credit card was a raptor on her arm
the hot water scarce, the vacuum dying
heat a luxury well-timed
the time to get sick was never
the boyfriend wasn't faring much better

her ribs rolling hills on either side
the antenna's local stations a pixelated mess
dust was thick again
nothing left to read
with another *ugh!* she stomped outdoors

where

she raised her face to leaves rattling, on blue sky

drew the freshest breath, took in the joy eternal

from nothing

Judson is a writer of music, poetry and literature with a history of performing at open mics, coffee shops, book stores, small festivals and clubs. Growing up immersed in all genres of music and literature, both fiction and non-fiction, Judson has accumulated a portfolio of self-published novels, short stories and all-original records. Free downloads of the original music are available at: Soundcloud.com/Judson-Klein.

Denise Kolanovic

Flying

I'm moving fast, very fast.

I love this feeling.

my body is quicker than my mind can process.

I feel like I'm outside my body,

no need for words.

Multi-tasking thoughts, tasks.

Fingers flowing, grabbing, taking, pulling across
the materials.

I'm starting to float upward –

my face is smiling and I am exhilarated

because there is no pressure,

no one to negate me.

Denise Kolanovic is an ENL Teacher and Poet published nationally.
She is the author of ASPHALT SOUNDS, ForeAngels Press.

Carissa Kopf

Head Held High

Words can hurt
Cut like a knife
Bringing all sorts of painful feelings
Not knowing how to let them go
It can be the worst

People might not mean it
Or think it's said in good faith
But, maybe they should replay their words
Before speaking
Were those words said to them

Find the courage to continue
Dig deep, deep down
See your true self
Be proud
Hold your head up high

You are the one
That decides
How to gather the knowledge
Of positive words to make you stronger
To be able to let go of the past

Carissa Kopf is an inspiring poet who has published a number of her poems along with a romance/suspense novella called Time For Me. Carissa will soon have a poetry collection of her own poems published in the near future. When not writing Carissa enjoys gardening, cooking, reading, and drawing.

Karen Koven

Freedom

“Freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose”

~ Janice Joplin

When I had everything it never occurred to me to be grateful for a full jar of peanut-butter.

When I had every material thing, I was not happy, everything was nothing.

Now I am alone. I am broke. I am free.

Nothing is everything.

I am grateful for a full jar of peanut butter.

I am grateful for peanut butter and jam for lunch.

I am grateful for time in the car when music is solace and the open-moon-roof-breezes dance in my hair

like a colt’s mane on a spring day.

Karen Koven is an author living in Clearwater Fl. She received first place in the Romeo Lemay Poetry Competition, 2018. She has had her poetry published in the 2018, 2019, and 2020 Odet Journals and with Florida Bards, 2020. She has retired from a career as a Senior Consultant with an International Training and Development Company.

Tom Lagasse

Enough

Pre-dawn

Tuesday

A dream of
easy tranquility

Reading

a poem

Writing

a few lines

A crackling

fire

contented

with coffee

Intruders

from within

Held at bay

tranquil

As the world
remains asleep

And only
you and your kin

Are blanketed
huddled together

standing
and waiting

For a
new day

Sunrise
the thin

Line
B
E
T
W
E
E
N
the new

Morning
and yesterday's

Night.
Tranquil

Like knowing
the pantry

Is stocked
enough

The house
is warm

Enough
the children's

Stomachs
are full

Enough
so they

May dream
into being

A new
world

Tranquil
enough.

Tom's poetry has been published in Word Mill Magazine, Wine Drunk Sidewalk, The Monterey Poetry Review, Wax Poetry & Art:, & iamnotasilentpoet.com, Plum Tree Tavern and two anthologies. Other writing has appeared in Edible Nutmeg, The Feminine Collective, Faith, Hope & Fiction, and The Sun. He lives in Bristol, CT.

Geoffrey A. Landis

Your Ghost on my Machine

You called, and left your voice on my machine.
Last year you said there didn't seem to be
a point in our continuing to see
each other, but to be polite you said
you'd keep in touch. I waited and I hoped
you'd call. If not to be a love, then friends.
You didn't call. I thought about it quite
a while, decided finally you'd been right.
(My heart said otherwise. It has no sense.)
We had too little in common, you and me.
I let you go. It hurt. I let you go,
turned my heart to other things, a year ago.

It was a shock to hear your voice again.
If I don't call back, I hope you'll understand.

Geoffrey A. Landis is a poet, a science-fiction writer and a scientist. His poetry has appeared in a number of publications, ranging from *ArtCrimes* to *The Year's Best Fantasy*. He has won the Hugo and Nebula awards for science fiction, and is the author of the novel *Mars Crossing* and the story collection *Impact Parameter (and Other Quantum Realities)*. In his spare time, he goes to fencing tournaments so he can stab perfect strangers with a sword. More information can be found at his web page, <http://www.geoffreylandis.com/>

Jim Landwehr

A Few

There are a few things I do not miss
constant traffic streams in front of my house
the obligation to say yes to going out
fear of missing out because I choose to stay home

But there are also a few things I do miss
my Tuesday morning coffee with my buddies
hugs from my family and friends
the freedom to go where I want, when I want

So this pandemic has taught me a few things
my life is not always just about me
those with the most have the hardest time with less
crises can bring out both the beauty and the ugly

Just as much, it has revealed a few things about our world
that time to ourselves is the blood of our creativity
our environment sighs its relief at our forced rest
and we may come out the other side better for all of it

Jim has two memoirs, *Dirty Shirt* and *The Portland House*. He also has five poetry collections, *Thoughts from a Line at the DMV*, *Genetically Speaking*, *On a Road*, *Written Life* and *Reciting from Memory*. Jim is a past Poet Laureate for the Village of Wales, WI. For more, visit: <http://jimlandwehr.com>

Ellen Lawrence

Passover 2020

more than four questions
we ask this year
why has covid 19
trounced tradition with fear

what makes this night different
we usually say
at the seder table
as we sit back and pray
our customary guests can't
be with us today

-
reading the Hagadah
the story is told
of the suffering of Jews
slaves_in Egypt of old
and how God freed the slaves
with promised plagues tenfold

there's a pandemic now
like the plagues back then
it doesn't pass over
women, children, or men

we've got to wear masks
wherever we go
it's like we're in some
kind_of weird movie show
the question now is
when will this virus go

Ellen Lawrence has been writing poetry since she was ten years old. Born in Switzerland, the child of Austrian parents who fled from Hitler, she is writing her memoirs, but poetry is her first love. A former owner of an Aamco Transmission Center as well as an animal welfare worker, her poems have been published in several issues of Bards Annual, PPA Anthologies, Songs of Sandy, and others. She has, also written poetry columns for local organization newsletters.

Amanda Little

The Sum of All Things

I am
 frankly
the sum
 of all
 my failures

The crux is
 I have
a choice

I can choose

rolling around
 in the rubble
wallowing in
 the filth
 of defeat

or

or I can let
the math work
itself out
accomplishments
rising

brick
by
brick

out of the dust

hoisting me

along with it

truly, no one
got anywhere

without getting

a smidge

dirty

I can choose
humility
choose

to dig down
 in my chest
in the depths

 and quagmires
of all my futility
and learn to fight

with every
 instrument
provided by that experience
instead of burying
 that treasure chest

in a hole so deep
no one could find it

I will display
my calamities
 catastrophes and
 delinquencies

My derelictions
 debacles and
 inadequacies

proudly
declaring
all I haven't done

showcasing
all that I have

for
one day
when someone else
looks up to me
I need them
to know
to embrace
their failures
as the dawn
of their future

Amanda Little is a mother of two and a native of Salina, KS who has been teaching ELA and Public Speaking to juniors and seniors for the last 7 years. She earned her bachelor's degree from Kansas Wesleyan University and recently earned her MA in English at Fort Hays State University, graduating Phi Kappa Phi. When she isn't at school serving her students, she is serving through the church, scrolling Facebook far too much, reading books that are past due to the library, and writing poetry. Her first publication was published in the local newspaper when she was in kindergarten, a short poem about Christmas trees.

Patricia Martin

The Farmer's Market Life

It's now the brilliant season
and so I imagine living a farmer's market kind of life
one which so often eludes me
Eyeing the perfection
of my new woven French market basket
found for a song at the thrift shop
I imagine drifting gracefully from booth to booth
hand picking perfect produce
for my evening table

I step outside and cut a bundle of peonies
This sunny June day
Trying to decide between the white, pink, and burgundy purple
Heavy headed they are
Like ladies wearing layers of frilly petticoats
I decadently gather some of each
To arrange in the squat green metal vase
They look so lush and abundant
I go out and pick even more
To nestle in with my austere bamboo stalks

Stepping back

I feel satisfied at last
The heady scent filling my cottage

Shutting out the world
I need to shut out the world
And I am thinking
this is the way to do it

Itchy for more sunshine
I drive to the new sacred garden site
After the party is over
To meander in solitude
Along the stone paths
Among the raised annual gardens
As the Zen rock waterfall
Babbles soothingly
Minding its own business
Not questioning my motives
Or asking anything of me

Turning into a different maze
I face the labyrinth
Intricate with stone and brick circular paths
Some patterns seem vaguely Moroccan
Others like man-made best attempts at industrialized nature
In shades of slate and faded terracotta

Stepping deliberately
Slowing my pace
Slowing my breathe

I know I cannot hurry to the center that awaits me
With the simple stone bench

It's about the trip not the destination as they say
Listening to the chattering sunset birds
Moving one step at a time
Sequestered from the chaos of the outside world
Cloistered from the hubbub
The exhausting useless energy
I find that prayer wells up easily
Like another song chorus
I did not know I could sing
On this most brilliant day

Patricia Martin is an author, poet, performer/actor, and freelance writer/communications professional who has been featured at numerous venues, festivals, on the radio, and published in various periodicals and anthologies. A member of the Author's Guild, she is author of six books, and recorded a spoken word and music CD with composer/producer/musician Gus Mancini. www.patriciamartin.com

Cristian Martinez

Strength

Feeling as if you can no longer go on,
Feeling weak,
trembling with fear.

Waves crashing down on you,
the heavy weight crushes your soul.

While enduring the pain,
thoughts creep inside my head.

I can overcome this!

I am stronger than my fears!

I will overcome it all!

A choice that is hard to make,

Finding the strength to battle on.

Cristian Martinez is a 13-year-old 7th-grade student at Ronkonkoma Middle School and award-winning poet. He has been published in Bards Annual 2018 and 2019, PPA 23rd Annual Literary Review, Suffolk County Poetry Review 2019 and 2020, Mankh's Haiku Calendar for 2019 and 2020 and the Long Island Quarterly. Cristian won first place in the Princess Ronkonkoma Awards competition for his poetry and prose submissions in 2018 and 2019 and first place in the Mid-Island Y 2019 Contest. Recently he was awarded for his poem, “Glimpse of Tomorrow” with recognition as the Grand Champion for the Walt Whitman Birthplace Contest and published in their anthology. *Glimpse of Tomorrow* is Cristian’s first book. He has been mentored by Robert Savino for the past two years which has helped Cristian fine-tune his craft. Cristian also loves to play soccer.

Anne McCrady

Next Step

To feel your feet
shift the body's weight
so your heels lift
to let your heart know
you are ready to move
forward

To raise your chin
like a frightened child
and lengthen your gaze
as you try your best to be brave
enough to find the horizon
of your next step

To swallow the knot
of courage that is stuck
in your throat
as you taste the salt
of the days you had to
do things for yourself

To blink back tears
against the cold wind
of what-could-happen

as you zip up your coat
a gift from someone good
who believed in tomorrows

Anne McCrady is a poet, speaker, storyteller, and peace advocate. In addition to her prize-winning poetry collections, *Along Greathouse Road*, *Letting Myself In*, and *Under a Blameless Moon*, Anne's writing appears internationally in over sixty literary journals, anthologies, contest collections and online sites. More about Anne and her endeavors is available at her website, InSpirity.com. Anne lives in Tyler, Texas.

Brianna McNamara

I thought I was home once
But you ripped me out
Roots and all
Replanted me in a pot
And said, “this is as big as you can grow”
So I did
But my strength cracked the pot
My leaves grew too tall
And I realized no one knows
How far I can go

Brianna McNamara is a 28 year old currently residing in Robbinsville, NJ. She shares her life with a partner of 9 years, and many animals. She has been writing since the age of 10 and has used poetry to overcome every obstacle she has ever encountered.

Joan McNeerney

Nightscape

Fog horns sound though
air soaked in blackness.
All evening long listening
to hiss of trucks, cars.

Shadows brush across walls
as trees trace their branches.
Gathering and waving
together then swaying apart.

While I sleep, stars glide
through heaven making
their appointed rounds in
ancient sacred procession.

Dreams as smooth as rose
petals spill into my mind
growing wild patches in
this dark garden of night.

Joan McNerney's poetry has been included in many literary magazines such as Seven Circle Press, Dinner with the Muse, Poet Warriors, Blueline, and Halcyon Days. Four Bright Hills Press Anthologies, several Poppy Road Review Journals, and numerous Spectrum Publications have accepted her work. Her latest title, The Muse In Miniature, is available on Amazon.com and Cyberwit.net. She has four Best of the Net nominations.

Gene McParland

If I Have Sorrow

If I have sorrow,
let it be for things undone;
not for things I have done.

If I have sorrow,
let it be for things unattempted,
not for things I have tried,
and tried, again.

If I have sorrow,
let it be for adventures unlived,
not for those journeys
I had the courage to go on.

If I have sorrow,
let it be for all the todays
that I wasted worrying about
some vague unrealized tomorrow.

If I have sorrow,
let it be for dreams unrealized
because I lacked the courage
to believe in myself.

If I have sorrow,
let it be for love un-attained,
not for those loves that I have known,
however briefly.

If I have sorrow,
let it be for time wasted
dwelling on imaginary sorrows of the past.
All were lessons for today.

As long as I have this new day
before me,
let me live in the moment,
follow my dreams,
and not be deterred by the threats
of vague future sorrows.

Gene McParland (North Babylon, NY): is a graduate from Queens College and possesses graduate degrees from other institutions. He has always had a passion for poetry and the messages it can convey. His works have appeared in numerous poetry publications . He is the author of Baby Boomer Ramblings, a collection of essays and poetry. He is also published Adult Without, Child Within, a collection on poetry celebrating the child within. He also acts in local theater, film and videos, and has written several plays.

Rose Miller

For Anne, Malala, and Greta

Slender stems rooted in the marsh
Stretch to the sun and wave with the tides
The song of the reeds is carried by the wind:
“We dwell at the union of water and land,
Our dowry is built on silted sand.”
They shelter hundreds within their stalks
Cut them down and they will rise again
Immeasurable souls touched by the divine

Rose Miller lives in Malverne, Long Island. When not writing, she is a member of the Malverne Historical Society and the Women's Club of Malverne..

Joan Molloy

Family

Sparrow's wing has broken
But sorrow has no place
Wind blusters joyfully
Helping Sparrow from tree to brook
Robin Red Breast gathers insects
A picnic-perfect for two

Rabbits act out stories
Deer sing gleefully in a chorus
Ducks dance skillfully
On Sparrows favorite pond
Putting on show after show
Lifting Sparrows spirits
With dance and song

Sparrows wing is healing
Full flight it will not be long
Sitting atop his favorite tree branch
Heart bursting
He acknowledges his forest family
Sparrow sings a song of gratitude
A song of love

Joan Molloy co-owner of Raven Heart Artist Studio's has been writing poetry & short stories since childhood. She enjoys working with other local artists and currently has a collaborative piece published in the upcoming Twitter Art Exhibit 2020. She lives in Northern New Jersey with her two teenage children.

Michelle Nielsen

Zoom In Zoom Out

Seems like everyone has signed on
I think we can begin.
Go check your inbox
The agenda's there within.

Bob, Sharon, Roger Kim
Let's hear about your sales.
Tricia, Mark, Sarah, Tim
What's your plan entail?

We need to talk budget,
Work through all the numbers,
Hash out your big ideas
To keep from going under.

If you can't see our faces,
Try using gallery view.
Bob, we can't hear you.
You must still be on mute.

Sharon, you're in darkness.
Please turn on a light.
Roger, it's just a blue screen.
Why can't we get this right??

Tricia turn your video on.
Mark, please lose the cat.
Kim, your kids are naked!
Good God! Can we just chat?

No, no! Sarah, please come back!
We can see you on the bowl!
It's only been five minutes.
Have you no self-control?

Everyone try to focus now,
So we can please get started.
I need you all to settle in.
What? Is Tim now in his garden?

Conference calls were hard enough
Without technology.
Somehow you have no idea
That what you do, we all see!

You know you're all still working
Even though you're in your home.
We've got to get this meeting done
Before you all can roam.

Are you all now on board?
Are all distractions gone?
Now wait, is that my door?
Oh yes! It's Amazon!

Michelle L. Nielsen, originally from Schenectady, NY, has lived on LI for over 25 years and now considers herself a transplanted native. She has been writing for as long as she can remember but has only in recent years begun to explore her writing more seriously. She recently self-published her first collection of poetry called Poetry of Me, 2014 (available on Amazon).

Nancy Noell

Spring Survives

All winter, I wait.
Patience turned inward.
I walk outside when I can,
And dream of spring to come.
As snow begins to melt,
I wonder how daffodils know when to send their sprouts
Through the dark, black earth to break ground.
Each day, I retrieve the paper,
I pass the flower bed next to the driveway,
And look for signs.
One late February morning, there they are.
A miracle underneath a dusting of snow.
Ready to grow.
As March sun warms, the daffodils rise.
As April comes, buds of yellow appear.
By Easter, early flowers bloom.
I bring in a few, arrange in a vase and place on the dining
room table.
A brighten Easter Sunday with new color, new life.
But April is fickle. Today it snows.
I walk out to bring in the paper.
Under white flakes, yellow buds bow their heads.
Some flowers and their green leaves lie on the ground.
I tell them how sorry I am. Did they bloom too soon?

They couldn't have known about more snow.
On the way back to my front door, I strengthen.
In the flower bed in front of the house,
Tulip stems and leaves stand tall and strong thorough
the white cold carpet.
The tulips will bloom.
The promise of spring survives.
My heart rises

Nancy is an avid gardener who writes poems with a focus on nature and her surroundings. She has taught writing as an adjunct professor at Southern Connecticut State University. Now retired, she lives with her husband in Litchfield County.

Cristina M. R. Norcross

River Source of Strength

Knowing eyes
contain the warmth of
summer's sun-kissed rays
and the patience of endless days.
This was my grandmother's all-embracing grace,
bestowed with each,
gentle cradle of my palm.
Stories of family
emerged on her tongue,
as she held my hand.
History passed from skin to skin this way.
She spoke of the island of her ancestors,
goats clinging to cliffs,
and the persistence of the people
who made a life there.
She brought this steadfast devotion
with her to the mainland.
It followed her every movement,
like a feather of smoke—
from the job she earned
based on her ability to sew a special button,
to her brave first steps

after having a stroke.

To find courage at every new beginning
is the great river source of strength.

Cristina M. R. Norcross was the editor of the online poetry journal, *Blue Heron Review* (2013-2020) and is the author of 8 poetry collections. Her latest books include *Beauty in the Broken Places* (Kelsay Books, 2019) and *Amnesia and Awakenings* (Local Gems Press, 2016). Cristina's poems have been published in numerous anthologies, as well as: *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Visual Verse*, *Red Cedar*, *Your Daily Poem*, and *Pirene's Fountain*, among others. Cristina is the co-founder of Random Acts of Poetry and Art Day. Find out more: www.cristinanorcross.com

Michelle Oram

Like A Tree

I am internally grounded
Deep in the earth's crust
My branches nurture

 All who come to rest

I bend to the winds
Never disconnected
My core values

 Rooted deep within my heart

I stand tall
Able to withstand
Life's deterrents

 Knowing I am enough

Join me in the gift
Of a new day
Awakening the soul

 Secured in the promise

Of a new spring
The rainbow blossoms
Of a bountiful summer

 Dismiss all who stand in our way

As we pursue
Our dreams
In the wintry mix

 Of a confident tomorrow

Michelle Oram is a published author; her book *Songs of the Woods* encourages children to begin and end each day with a song from the heart. Her new book *The Healing Powers of Nature & Music* to be published this year will help adults explore ways nature and music can heal, balance and empower their own uniqueness. She recently just finished a book of poems titled *NATURESCAPES paths less travelled* which she hopes will be published by the end of 2020. When not writing Michelle is singing with her jazz band **...and All That Jazz** and performing her Jazz Poetry. Checkout her website: michelleoram.com and blog- findingyourvoicesite.wordpress.com

Bonnie Papenfuss

Covid 19

I talk more on the phone
or convene on the Zoom

sit for hours at the keyboard
in the stillness of my room.

I've dusted and cleaned
floors worn by the broom

my pantry's well-stocked
so too much I'll consume.

But when I feel challenged
by dire feelings of doom

I get out, take a walk
enjoy the desert bloom.

The scent of orange blossoms
such sweet, sweet perfume

eases my angst
and lifts my gloom.

Yes, I just need to be patient
as awaiting life from the womb

for this crisis will pass
and my life will resume.

Bonnie and her husband moved from Minnesota to Arizona sixteen years ago to enjoy their leisure years in the warmth of the desert. She is the author of a recent memoir titled From the Window of God's Waiting Room: A Memoir of Playful Prose and Pleasant Poetry which is a heartfelt and humorous romp through her first fifteen years of retirement "bliss." She's had poetry accepted for several various anthologies and keeps extra busy writing monthly book reviews for her local newspaper.

Tom Pawlowski

Missing Mary

I see her magic
Radiating from their eyes
Legacy of love

Beacon

Dark and lonely night
One bright star breaks through the clouds
Bringing with it hope

Return

A vindication
Daffodil sprouts through dead leaves
Spring eager to spring

Tom Pawlowski (tomp) is a life-long resident of South Jersey. In 2012 he made a New Year's resolution to write a haiku everyday, and he hasn't stopped yet. He has previously been published in "*NJ Bards South Poetry Review*" and "*Bards Against Hunger - New Jersey*" in 2019 and participated in "*Pitman Poems on Parade*" from 2015 through 2018.

Joseph S. Pete

Region

A Region tattered but tough,
rusting but resilient,
soldiers on every workaday day.

The stalwart clock-puncher in a fading
Union Proud T-shirt always shows up on time
as those raging blast furnaces burn eternally
against that endless churning lakefront.

Refinery effluvium and open hearth miasma
sometimes yield to redolent ethnic aromas
escaping through open windows:
cevapi, halupki, ciorba, mici, menudo.

Baking hot asphalt and chain basketball nets
dominate the landscape of brick and grit and grime,
hastily slapped-up tags and plexiglass barriers.

Century-old mason-mortared buildings succumb
to the inevitable rot of time's relentless onslaught.
Plywood boards occlude gaping gaps
as neighborhood property values plunge.

Lots sit vacant and weed-ridden,
but even on the most barren patch of urban frontier
a wild prairie flower can bloom brightly.

Joseph S. Pete is an award-winning journalist, the author of *Lost Hammond, Indiana*, an Iraq War veteran, an Indiana University graduate, a book reviewer, and a frequent guest on Lakeshore Public Radio. He is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee who was named the poet laureate of Chicago BaconFest, a feat that Geoffrey Chaucer chump never accomplished. His literary work and photography have appeared in *Stoneboat*, *The High Window*, *Synesthesia Literary Journal*, *Steep Street Journal*, *Beautiful Losers*, *New Pop Lit*, *The Grief Diaries*, *Gravel*, *The Offbeat*, *Oddball Magazine*, *The Perch Magazine*, *Rising Phoenix Review*, *Chicago Literati*, *Bull Men's Fiction*, *shufPoetry*, *The Roaring Muse*, *Prairie Winds*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Lumpen*, *The Rat's Ass Review*, *The Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Euphemism*, *Jenny Magazine*, *Vending Machine Press* and elsewhere.

Margret Marie Powell

Affected

I have asthma and a heart condition.
I too am locked in apart
From family and friends, no fiction!
I have hypertension that's controlled.
Just being alive day to day is a blessing.
My life is filled with strife; love is my goal.
Why? Well, I won't lie or even deny
Or pretend; the big issue is the elephant
In the heart- room of this country!
I'm not a politician, I won't rave or rant,
I am a senior black woman! Retired RN,
And Senior Pastor, mom, and grandma
I've lived through blends
Of fake and/or unrealistic relationship trends.
I have seen and experienced how race
Has affected generational health and wealth.
I pressed my way through educational systems,
Achieved Master Degree, experienced house
Ownership and homelessness, and times when
I experienced grief; buried my parents and spouse!
I'm alive, and even if the virus enters my space,
I will not be infected by the GERM of hate.
Generous, honest love can disinfect it with grace

Because, The Invisible God of all creation,
Imparts wisdom and kindness with colorless affection!

Margret Marie Powell is a widow, mother of three, and grandma of seven. Retired RN, Chaplain, Interim Seminary Pastor, and Elder/Sr. Pastor, she is currently pursuing the call of “Life Coach” and Author. One of her poems is included in Delaware Bards Poetry Review Anthology.

Kathleen Powers-Vermaelen

Amaryllis

Your gift box claimed
delicacy, advised spreading
wispy roots in feathery
soil, to keep flimsy, tropical
you away from windows
providing needed sun but
also harsh chill. *Too*
high maintenance, I
thought, thrusting you into a
corner for later, when I could
better attend such ridiculous
daintiness.

One month passed before
I remembered. By then,
dust coated your box, like
the gleaming blizzard snow
blanketing my lawn. You were
dead, I was certain, neglected,
abandoned as you were.
Yet the opened box
revealed one hardy little fucker
who had birthed two wilting

pastel blooms, curled
into fetal positions against
her pale stalk, clinging still

to life. What inspired your
stretch for slivers of daylight
at cardboard's edge, assured
of nothing, yet so determined
to survive? When
next I am boxed in,
denied all hope, may I be
as resolved as you, Amaryllis,
persisting against reason,
reaching toward light.

Kathleen Powers-Vermaelen holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing & Literature from Stony Brook Southampton. Her work has appeared in *The Bangalore Review*, *The Write Launch*, *Bards Annual*, and other publications. She teaches literature and writing at Suffolk County Community College.

Deborah Purdy

A New World

Pierced and patched
we're all orbiting through
the same obstacle course —

We're under the spell of
an unidentifiable axis,
navigating through the fire

of fever and unfamiliar
topography. Let's disbelieve
the doubts and plant our trees —

Something to hold onto
wherever we land
in the new world.

Deborah Purdy lives outside Philadelphia where she writes poetry and creates fiber art. Her work has appeared in Gravel Literary Magazine, Cleaver Magazine, The American Poetry Journal, and other publications.

Allie Rieger

Cosmic Oceans

We are all planets, housing life inside
birthing, growing, dying, repeating
an ebb and flow of blood
a wax and wane of love.

We are all solar systems inside
hidden right behind our eyes
neurons and vessels
swirling like galaxies.

We are all oceans inside,
deep, seemingly endless
Hidden treasure troves
Desperately hoping to be searched.

Nestled in our cosmic oceans
we found more than perfect gold.
The human need to persevere,
to come together in choppy
uncharted territories.

Allie Rieger is a lifelong resident of Suffolk County. She has a deep love for any and all art forms. She began to write poetry many years ago but only recently started sharing. She has one previous published poem in “Suffolk County Poetry Review 2019.

Sarah Ritter

Adjustments

I wanted to climb up tall mountains
But I fell to the bottom of a cliff
So I found the scenic path
That meandered along the rolling hills

I wanted to see the lupines at peak bloom
But when I arrived the season had passed
So I built a flower garden in my yard and
Planted my own lupines of every color I could find

I wanted to swim with the fish of the deep ocean
But I could not swim deeper than the coral reef
So I built a large fish tank in my house and
Spent hours watching the beautiful fish swim

Sarah Ritter is a poet from Connecticut, who published her first poetry collection “Inspirations, Transformations and Revelations: A Poetic Expression of My Personal Journey” in 2019. Her poems have been featured in several anthologies and online publications including the “We Are Beat Anthology” and “Brave and Reckless.”

Jeannie E. Roberts

When Eagles Reach Safety

Near staghorn sumac
between alder
and bur oak
two Canadian geese
encircled by goslings
waddle beside pond
and beyond the chain link fence
atop electrical tower
a nest
charged with osprey
resounds
and past the weeping willow
above the canoe
where cattails rise
and red-winged blackbirds call
bald eagles travel toward home
and as they fly
crows' gang together
chase tail feathers
until white pine is spotted:

shalom.

Jeannie E. Roberts has authored six books, including *The Wingspan of Things* (Dancing Girl Press, 2017), *Romp and Ceremony* (Finishing Line Press, 2017), *Beyond Bulrush* (Lit Fest Press, 2015), *Nature of it All* (Finishing Line Press, 2013), and *Rhyme the Roost! A Collection of Poems and Paintings for Children* (Daffydowndilly Press, an imprint of Kelsay Books, 2019). Her work appears in North American and international online magazines, print journals, and anthologies. She is poetry editor of the online literary magazine *Halfway Down the Stairs*. When she's not reading, writing, or editing, you can find her drawing and painting, or outdoors photographing her natural surroundings.

Marc Rosen

A Morning at the FEMA DRC

A woman comes into the FEMA site
Speaks with the staffers,
Then comes into the room I'm in, to the left

A screening room, with comfy seats, the local news on TV,
And most importantly, a giant pile of clothes,
All over the stage up at the front!

We exchange words, and she asks:
“What's all this clothing for?”

A Red Cross volunteer asks if she needs anything
In these times, with a nor'easter approaching,
And the woman herself underdressed for the temperatures,
Warm clothing for her and her daughter is clearly called for

The young mother hesitates, stubborn pride telling her to balk.
She's fine! Save the clothing for someone who really needs it!
Her protests fall on the deaf ears of her new-found personal shoppers

Red Cross and FEMA ask about what she'd like,
Tell her how great she'll look in this coat,
Help her fill a giant storage bag

With the yield of her free shopping spree

Tears of joy stream down her eyes

After enduring silence and indifference from agencies, her daughter's school, doctors,

She finally laughs; She finally smiles

Clothes damaged in the rains, replaced with new

Needs neglected for lack of shelter and warmth, met

For this family, it won't be as cold a winter as it seemed

Marc Rosen is the editor of *CHAOS: The Poetry Vortex*, *Stonewall's Legacy*, and the *Perspectives* series. He survives despite the world's best efforts, just to have another chance to mock it. He idolizes Dorothy Parker for everything except her doggerel.

Sara Sarna

Genesis

*The world offers itself to your imagination,**

~ "Wild Geese" by Mary Oliver

a slow down, step back, breathe deeply world.

You are closer now to magic

that you have ever been,

will be again.

Be still and listen

to the whisper of the earth.

She will tell you

what she needs,

what can be let go.

Spare no more than a fleeting moment

mourning yesterday. The past

does not mourn for you.

This is the Genesis

and you are the hand of God.

Sara Sarna is a wife, mother, poet and actor in southeastern Wisconsin. To support her artistic habits she works in healthcare. Her work has appeared in print, online and onstage.

Patricia G. Sassone

Got a Light

One city dweller
hidden in 14N.
Surrounded by
the towering,
choked with debt,
buried in junk food wrappers,
waiting for
the invisible.

Death comes in the dark.
Tonight she will not
sleep. Obsessed, she counts
every light across the skyline.

Each human spirit
a spark in the dark,
a part of a whole
the light of the earth.

Pat Gallagher Sassone is a poet and a novelist. Her YA novel, *HANGING IN THE STARS* has been a hit with junior high school students. Her poetry appeared in *NASTY WOMEN POETS* and *LOCAL GEMS*. Especially during these difficult times, she believes in the healing power of poetry.

Robert Savino

Flowerfields of Dreams

The buildings across the street are dark,
doors shut tight in hope of recovery,
so much unknown.

It will come to us all in time,
time not to leave a moment ignored,
time not predictable as one might want.

Even the evergreen has become neverlasting,
and I, in the circle of us all,
live in its shadow.

A shadow of preparation
turns pages to the obituaries,
so many gone with no time for forgiveness.

My vision has been compromised
by shadows of distraction
in dark corners of shorter days.

The earth's breath
still circulates life inside,
though some have died from it.

In a field of flowers, a bright breeze stirs
silver leaves on the surface as I prepare
to shovel a path into the flesh of creation.

Robert Savino, Suffolk County Poet Laureate 2015-2017 & current Bards Laureate, is a native Long Island poet, Board Member at the Walt Whitman Birthplace and winner of the 2008 Oberon Poetry Prize. Robert is the co-editor of a bilingual collection of Long Island Italian Americans Poets (*No Distance Between Us*). His books include *fireballs of an illuminated scarecrow* and *Inside a Turtle Shell*. As a mentor he enjoys being the key that unlocks doors of creative minds.

Andrew Schiralli

Violinning

A shiny, maple body.

An elegant, elongated neck.

Leading not to an ephemeral head, but to a
(purely decorative) swirling, twirling, spruce scroll.

*How can one resist the traditional beauty
of an old violin?*

A wand-like wooden bow slowly lifts

Its tightly packed hair set upon the strings, perfectly ensconced
between a fragile, straw-colored bridge and a sturdy, opal finger
board.

The bow glides up and down while four utilitarian pegs are
turned, the instrument quickly tuned.

A bony wrist returns to its place, hovering above the neck while a
capricious mind wonders where to begin...

Concertos, dances, partitas, sonatas...Baroque, romantic, classical,
gothic...So many choices, so many styles--*how can one possibly
start with tedious scales?*

.....

.....

“Attention, hut!” says the mind, as it finally knows what it needs.

Elbow up. Fingers ready.

Pressing firmly down on silver strings as the bow effortlessly
dances to a *gavotte*

And the body starts to sway of its own accord.

Andrea is a college admissions coach from Long Island. She loves the color pink, Hello Kitty, and anything that sparkles. Her favorite writers are Maugham, Fitzgerald, and Remarque.

Alisa Schneidman

In the Stillness

So, she sits in a silent room
Not knowing how to be still
Surrounded by false connection
Driven by a stubborn self-will

Give it up, surrender you can't win
She felt her throat constrict
Why couldn't she find the solution
To stop facing life like this

Face the fears she heard
So, she parted curtains one by one
She would strive to peel away layers
Suffer so she would overcome

She was no martyr
She was looking for the hurting to end
It was in every cycle that ceased
Another one seemed to begin

Balance-it was infrequent
Her yearning for peace was too strong
But here sitting in the stillness
She found it all twisted, and wrong

Her moments of peace had come amongst the unfinished
Her ease in her unguarded and incomplete
Not as a paragon of composure, and perfection
There had been no honor in self-righteous defeat

In the stillness she saw her scars
And she contemplated what she had survived
Those wounds held a promise
A secret of how to be fully alive

She traced them with reverence
Holding space for their pain
A moment of unspoken kindness
Easing the sting of the shame

All the years of running
From those lashes she would not face
Trying with each loop
To make the taint be erased

Here now as they were bare
She looked with loving eyes
At all that had torn at her soul
All she had to survive

She had been stripped of her will in the stillness
Her throat released in the stillness
She was now at peace in the stillness
Her own savior in flawed magnificence

Alisa Schneidman is the author of the House of Weird. She is the founder & owner of Serenity Writing Works, LLC a company dedicated to providing safe and healing space for connection through creativity and authentic expression. A lifelong writer, her passion is for writing works that speak to the healing journey. Alisa has two boys she adores, and she loves connecting with her family and friends.

Melissa Seymour

Greenways

Breeze and sunlight providing
a simultaneous bliss.

Butterfly wings and tall wildflowers
wave to passers by.

A distant humming of the water treatment plant;

A reminder that waste
doesn't mean complete loss.

Mistakes can begin to be cleansed by time and walks
by the river.

Overturning stones of truth one by one.

Waters surrounding you, running fast furious
and clouded, can be tamed by skimming those rocks.

Acknowledging them one by one sailing across the water
as one ripple becomes two.

Forgiveness and honesty grows exponentially.

Loss and waste begin to flow down stream,
while you peer along the rivers edge.

Breeze and sunlight providing
a simultaneous bliss.

Melissa Seymour is a 41 year old loving wife and mother. She also enjoys her work as a physical therapist servicing pediatrics and adults in the Charlotte community. Reading and writing poetry is an ever growing passion for her.

Bonnie Shor

Mothers In Arms

Born in the fall
Died in the Spring
My sons death changed my views
About almost everything
Each day I take control
Of my life
With a walk wherever I am
Today I take a newly discovered path
Around Lake Thoreau
There are no clouds
To portend the coming storm
Fresh cut grass of renewal
smells of wet rocks
a hint of decay
Heron in full spread
Just above the water line
A garage door is open
She stood bent
Almost broken
I heard her say
What time did they admit mom
Are you sure you were not allowed
to go in
Children on cue

Spill through the garage door
Happily Noisily
Our eyes lock
We share a sad smile
Wipes away her tears
What is our adventure today
I heard her say
As I walked away
I did not know her
But now I know everything
About her
She is a mother
the definition of resiliency

Published poet. Wife of loving husband. Mother of two wonderful children. At 22, her younger son took his life. She writes to fill the hole in her heart.

Leslie Simon

A Moment in Time

sweet seeds of hope are blooming
reds, blues, yellows
perfume so divine, a bouquet of fragrances

looking out my window...to the unknown
nature still casts its beauty
while I remain sheltered at home

buds forever flower
on cherry blossoms, hydrangeas, forsythia
though I stay quarantined

looking out my window...butterflies flaunt colorful hues
kiss tops of gracious gardens, fly freely and unaware
I am caged, but undamaged by isolation

given pause for self-reflection
I am well suited to hear silence
but for the birds that sing sweet songs for my delight

looking out my window... trees sway to a melody of breezes
assuring us the world still turns
that pinks and oranges of early sunrise will greet us tomorrow

for once the entire world is united in battle
to slay the beast that's reared its head
halting us for a moment in fear

in the wake of difficult times
we discover our spirit
we are resilient, nothing can destroy us

tomorrow we will fly freely

Anthony Smith

In This Moment...

The moon vibrantly glows
The stars in the sky shine brighter
The workload is lighter
Families spend time
Food tastes better
Precious moments are one of a kind

The world seems to spin a little slower
The rat race is on pause
Love is spread for a cause
We value each other
Our earth, our mother
Forgiving our foes, forgetting our flaws

As nature's glory grabs our gaze
The grass smells greener
The sun keeps beaming
The song sounds sweeter
Listen contently
As the birds keep tweeting

We look out for each other
We have time for our friends

Matters of the heart
A simple embrace
Family means more
Life is adored

Our air is breathed deeper
Reflection our teacher
Love our meaning
Its all in a feeling
It begins with a thought
In this moment...

Emmy Sue-Sloane

Balance

Outdoors, a chorus
celebrates the morning light.
Songbirds back from winter havens
begin their springtime preparations.

At least something feels normal
in the silence of halted human activity
as we wait for the Novel virus
to peter out and die,
inflatable dragon punctured
by some invisible lance,
we hope.

The birds don't care
if we are here to notice.
They fetch grass, twigs and debris,
weave homes
tucked in among branches
that will soon provide cover
for their chicks.

They'll feed the hatchlings,
teach them to forage and fly.

The immatures will slowly build up stamina
for long journeys ahead.
Their leaving will be prompted
by dwindling daylight
and nights grown cold.

At least that much is predictable.

Emily-Sue Sloane lives in Huntington Station, NY. Her poetry helps her gain perspective on her life experience, especially while sheltering in place. Her poems have appeared in *Bards Annual 2019*, *Suffolk County Poetry Review*, *Amethyst Review*, *Front Porch Review*, *Avocet/The Weekly Avocet*, *Medicinal Purposes*, and *Literary Review of the Performance Poets Association*.

J R Turek

Embracing Change

Pandemic rules dictate change –
no random shopping trips,
no movie night, no diner stops
at 3am, no gatherings of any number
outside members of your household.
No handshakes, no fist bumps,
no embraces. I miss hugs the most.

Our world tilts like a wild carnival ride
and I don't like change, don't want to
adjust my schedule, my obligations
forcing me to realign to off kilter
on my sanity scale. Calliope music
fills my head. *Stay home, stay safe,*
don't go out, don't risk the embrace
of a virus invading space where we
should be praying together, meeting
and greeting with hugs and kisses.

Midway through this lockdown,
the reason behind the mantra
stay home, stay safe, stay healthy
shatters my negativity. *Stay home,*
stay safe, stay healthy so others

remain healthy. It becomes less obligation, more community service.

Purpose driven, I let my resilience guide me, masked and gloved, we shop for seniors – groceries and pharmaceuticals, errands they can't run and better that we, healthy and staying healthy, shop for them, cautious to keep a safe six foot distance, keep them safe staying home, deliver their necessities with a kiss blown from a gloved hand.

Doubts stuffed in the trash, fears forgotten in errands we relish, helping others becomes our new need, consciously aware, devoted to doing. Pliant, flexible, resilient we embrace these astounding changes.

J R (Judy) Turek, 2019 Walt Whitman LI Poet of the Year, Superintendent of Poetry for the LI Fair, Bards Laureate 2013-2015, 23 years as Moderator of the Farmingdale Creative Writing Group, editor, workshop leader, author of five full-length poetry collections, 'The Purple Poet' lives on Long Island with her soul-mate husband, Paul, her dogs, and her extraordinarily extensive shoe collection. msjevus@optonline.net

James P. Wagner (Ishwa)

My Flight Was Delayed

(Read Down With A Frown)

My flight was delayed
Oh, God
I can't believe it.
A 6 hour delay,
With nothing but books to read!
Now I get to sit here,
I had a very strict schedule
I had non-stop meetings
Delayed by 6 hours now?
Another hustle and bustle
My flight was delayed!

(Read Up With A Smile)

Margarette Wahl

Writing

*“ I write because my mind is like a bad neighborhood,
I should never walk alone in.” Valerie Szarek*

I write because every emotion would stay
bottled up like bugs inside a jar, ready to escape.

I write because friendships and relationships
hold within the folds of my stationary,
licked closed inside my sealed envelopes.
They travel around the globe.

I write because the future seems uncertain,
still promising for me in set plans.
Vested in too many years now
for me to give up.

I write because it's like bleeding
a release of toxins out of my body.
Words and wounds won't kill me.

I write because my heart is pure
my soul youthful.
I carry memories with metaphors.

Allow stanzas to let loved ones
stay alive.

I write because I was shy,
broke outside my shell.
My voice carries volumes,
I use it as a tool to inspire.

I write because I am a poet, a writer.
Failed at violin and singing.
Too truthful to act, too awkward to dance,
and too open to keep quiet.

Margarette Wahl, a Special Ed Teacher Aide and Poet from Long Island is published in a number of Anthologies including Performance Poets Association Literary Review, Bards Initiative, Oberon, and more.

Herb Wahlsteen

Hopeless Perhaps...

Hopeless. Yet is it? Yes. Why?
Shall we go through this again?
Yes. It's my undefiable fate.
But can you fight? No.

Why not?

I'm really ugly, my car is crap,
I'm very poor, I have no skills
other than music and poetry,
and I'm too weak willed to pursue
those two blighted passions as
determinedly as success demands.

Hopeless.

Love? No. Beauty and art?
They can't feed one starved by fate.

Fight!

How?

You can, with whatever small talents and
strength you might possess, and with long,
constant, hard work and suffering,
wrestle a lined-up mob of rugged
days, and if you wrestled each

one tooth and nail for 16 or more
hours across many many years,
perhaps...

Herb Wahlsteen was a finalist in the *Yale Series of Younger Poets* contest, placed 3rd in the *Writer's Digest* 77th Annual Writing Competition: Rhyming Category, and has had poems published in: *Long Island Quarterly*, the *Great South Bay Magazine*, *The Lyric* magazine, *Paumanok Interwoven*, *Suffolk County Poetry Review*, *Bards Annual*, *Form Quarterly*, *Bards Against Hunger*, *13 Days of Halloween*, *Poets to Come*, *The Hands We Hold*, *String Poet* (2 poems translated from the French, 2 poems translated from the Spanish), *Pratik: A Magazine of Contemporary Writing*, and *Measure* magazine.

Lorraine DiPasquale Walkiewicz

A Moment In Time

If I could go back in time,
What day would it be?
Would I re-live a happy moment,
What day is special to me?

Was it the day my child was born,
My first baby?
That day I became a mother.
Well, that is a maybe.

Or perhaps another Birth Date,
That day is special too.
Love is doubled not divided,
Love enough for two.

But, not all days were happy,
Some days were sad.
Could I go back and change things,
So the day would not be so bad?

No, not one of those days.
Those days are past.
A brief moment re-lived,

Would not make the day last.

The future hasn't happen yet
I don't know what will be sent.
So I will live each day in the moment
For each day is a PRESENT.

(Written on Mother's Day 2020)

Lorraine is a Jersey Girl, born and raised. Her education and work experience are in Math and Finance. In her spare time she loves to read and 'visit' exotic places in her mind. Throughout her life she wrote short stories and poems as a way of coping with life's experiences. Encouraged by her recent published poem in "Bards Against Hunger New Jersey", Lorraine has been writing poems and short stories to maintain a positive outlook during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lynne White

A Cup Of Light

I'm giving you a cup of light.

It's dark on the outside

but

the darkness can't penetrate

inside.

Just look how it shines

from the inside out.

Sip from it.

Let it light you up

from the inside out.

I'm giving you a cup of light

to replace the glass of dark.

Glass lets the darkness through

from the inside out

and the outside in,

lets it penetrate.

Let's break your glass of dark

beyond repair

and sip from my cup of light.

Lynn White lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. She was shortlisted in the Theatre Cloud 'War Poetry for Today' competition and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and a Rhysling Award. Find Lynn at:

<https://lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com> and <https://www.facebook.com/Lynn-White-Poetry-1603675983213077/>

Benjamin Wiseman

Plank Position

When I'm in the plank position,
a swarm of mosquitoes closes in.

When I'm in the plank position,
a geriatric is tackled by a professional linebacker.

When I'm in the plank position,
everyone with peanut allergies
has to work in a Reese's Pieces factory.

When I'm in the plank position,
a prisoner climbs a barbed wire fence
and looks up to notice a barbed wire ceiling.

When I'm in the plank position,
a partygoer who wakes up with a hangover
is suddenly in front of an amplifier
at a heavy metal concert.

When I'm in the plank position,
a doctor makes a circular incision
and reaches in to squeeze my intestines
again and again and again and again.

Hope turns to disappointment,
turns to depression, turns to anger, turns to energy,
turns to ability to maintain stability
when inevitably faced with the urge to collapse.

I create the torture to escape the routine,
and it has to make me stronger to some degree,
but how much stronger do I need to be?
And when does the torture become the routine?

It's already been established
that as I try to improve my condition,
put my faith in making progress,
the eventual conclusion is consistent:
I may as well have been complacent.

I have the discipline to resist caving in,
to hold this without motion, without traction
in my personal relations, career and recognition,
and of course, my abdomen,
no more defined than when I began.

Will there ever come a day my strength is revealed,
or will a layer of blubber always cover
any evidence I've been in suspense
for a couple of minutes that turn into eternity
pouring sweat on a quarter-inch-thick yoga mat?

I should be a famous entertainer, a Pulitzer Prize winner,
designer of a line of popular action figures,

something more than single, entry level,
living in a condo
with cobwebs accumulating on the windows.

Jogging is dynamic with multiple variables:
speed, elevation, temperature, terrain, wind resistance,
and maybe I'd feel like I was going somewhere,
but I can't take the strain on my knees,
so I just freeze
and see how long I can hold this position.

Tearing tiny muscle fibers somewhere under the surface,
somewhere to have a purpose,
somewhere outside the gym that absorbs my frustration,
open to the entire condo association,
but I'm the only one here
to see how long I can hold this position.

But I'm not alone when I suppose
there are billions in stagnation,
in contrast to their expectations,
in a room full of suffering, like a life full of suffering,
where all we want to do is collapse,
but we stubbornly strive
and see how long we can hold this position.

Benjamin Wiseman is an engineer. He lives alone in Windsor, Connecticut. He has written and performed poems for the past 15 years. His style is rhythmic, comedic, and provocative.

Scott Woodland

A Soothing Algorithm for Times of Trouble

When we are reminded of our troubles –
It is helpful to do the math:

Consider a stone.
Consider the number of molecules in the stone.
Consider the number of stones on the Earth.

Multiply
the number of stones on the Earth by the number of molecules.
Consider all components of the Earth and sky that are not stone.

Attempt the math.

Do not even deal with the universe here; leave It out completely.

Now consider that all of what you just considered is a tiny slice of
time, from the moment of creation until When?

NOW consider your trouble.

Do the math.

I hope this helped.

Scott Woodland grew up in New Jersey and lives here presently, as well. In between, Woodland has lived and worked in New York City, Los Angeles, Europe and Vermont. Woodland writes in an attempt to capture the singular beauty of this singular Life.

Thomas Zampino

Our Lazarus Moment

Lazarus, like the Phoenix before him, was raised up only to die again.

But where the Phoenix freed himself continually from everything that had existed before, Lazarus walked forward only once – and even then, he remained forever drenched in the knowledge of his own death. A lingering stench that leaves us mindful even today of our own rebelliousness, our own powerlessness, our own death. We have come face to face with yet another Lazarus moment. A moment not unlike all those that have come before. A moment where renewal breaks in, desperate for our attention and clamoring for our help.

And like Lazarus, we can react with force and determination even if we find ourselves unusually broken, unusually flawed, and unusually aware of the limitations that still remain ahead.

We might envy the Phoenix with its unending ability to begin again from nothing unburdened, as it was, by a past finally heaped upon the ashes.

But Lazarus taught us that we can always just start over again. Right from where we are.

Thomas Zampino is an attorney in private practice in New York City. He and his wife have raised two daughters, four cats, two dogs, and various other domesticated creatures over the past three decades. He formerly blogged at *Patheos* and now writes reflections and poetry at *The Catholic Conspiracy*. One of his poems was published in *Bards Annual 2019* and another recently selected for publication in another anthology to be published in several months: *Nassau County Voices in Verse*.

Donna Zephrine

My Strong Tree

I will not allow myself to fall.

My tree is resilient,
strong , healthy.

The branches helps me navigate positively in my community and
my family.

The routes of my tree gives me the confidence to seek help when
I need it

I am a positive force in the life of my family and friends.

My tree also allows me to seek help when I need it.

My tree allows me to be a good role model to others.

Just like A “ Diamond in the Rough I will shine too.

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

About the Editor

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 Poetry 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. He was the Walt Whitman Bicentennial Convention Chairman and teaches poetry workshops at the Walt Whitman Birthplace State Historic Site. James has edited over 60 poetry anthologies and hosted book launch events up and down the East Coast.



Local Gems Poetry Press is a small Long Island, NY based poetry press dedicated to spreading poetry through performance and the written word. Local Gems believes in building local poetry communities through publications and events.

Local Gems has published over 250 titles.

www.localgemspoetrypress.com