



River City Poetry

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Edited by April Pameticky

River City Poetry

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May 2020

I began *River City Poetry* during the Spring of 2017 by asking a few of my wonderful friends to submit to a new online journal. And so began a season of Yes—where I learned the power of just asking. I wanted to give back to a community of creative and generous people that had supported my own work as a poet. I also felt strongly that there weren't enough venues in the midwest that shared poetry and weren't affiliated directly with a university.

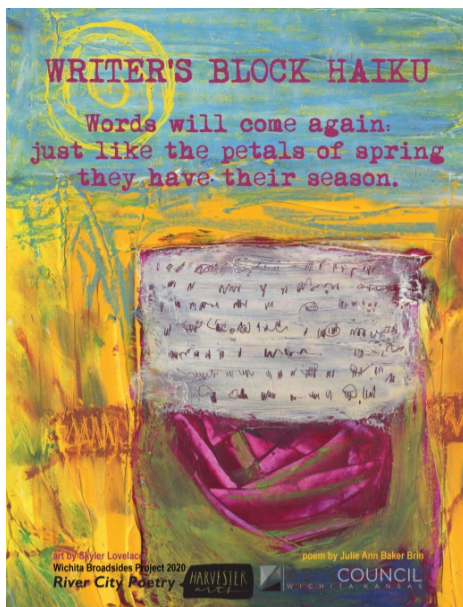
Since then, we've sponsored public readings, The Wichita Broadside Project, Epistrophy, Rhythm-a-ning, and other collaborative-style projects that encouraged creativity and conversation. I've met the most wonderful people and connected to artists in my community in ways that have permanently impacted my own work.

The onset of the pandemic created a situation I never could've anticipated. We have a small team of reviewers (Thank you, Roy and Raylyn) and partners (Thank you, Bob), but the submissions and journal itself are put together by me (Yes, all the mistakes and typos are mine and are NOT the poets who so graciously submit their work).

In an April *Vanity Fair* article, Keziah Weir report this from US Poet Laureate Joy Harjo: "Poetry tends to hang out at points of transformation. People may have not much interest in poetry at all or even read it much, but when a death happens in the family, or some other grief event, or marriage, or falling in love, or falling out of love, birth—people always turn to poetry."*

As a public educator in Kansas, I had to learn (and quite quickly) to become a master of distance learning. I also began the education of my own children at home. It did not help that I had to completely replace my tech set-up. So I found myself turning and taking great comfort in poetry, and especially in this spring's submissions. I can't predict what's in store for the future of the journal, but I know we will continue to try and provide unique opportunities for poets.

The following is a Wichita Broadside Project Collaboration between artist Skyler Lovelace and Poet Julie Ann Baker Brin. Both have contributed to past issues of *RCP* and we're grateful to share them here with you now.



*“Why Poetry Is Having a Moment Amid the Global Quarantine”:

<https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2020/04/why-poetry-is-having-a-moment-amid-the-global-quarantine>

Notes on Hard Times

Paul Austin

-Review by Roy Beckemeyer



I first met writer/actor/director/jazz and blues-loving resident of New York and Oklahoma Paul Austin at The Scissortail Creative Writing Festival in Ada, Oklahoma. Paul emotes poems in a way other poets envy. His recent book, *Notes on Hard Times*, is filled with poems honed for performance that you'll hope to someday hear him read aloud.

These are also poems of consequence, poems rich in metaphor, in humanity, that must be read, pondered. The titular (first) poem in the book sets the tone, one of hope and courage:

“...I am myself your sorrow as you are mine.

But I will not dismay, for sorrow will not admit of dismay. Dismay is prelude to despair, despair prelude to paralysis.

I will not dismay...”

Paul's *Hard Times* run from historical: “Warsaw Ghetto, 1942:”

“A man holds a machine gun
to a boy's face in brash daylight.

The crowd knows what the boy,
who wears a yellow star like theirs,
does not...

Knows the man will make them wait,
prolong their suffering, days, weeks,
wait till they long for him to come back
and kill someone, anyone

to end the misery of waiting.”

to individual: “The Jazz Lover:”

“her unwritten
apple-pie-less
diary of adolescence
a polyphony of riffs
imprinted by Miles
Mulligan Mingus
Coltrane
treasures no flowers
pressed between pages.
no pajama parties
...
her history
a jazz lover’s life
of cymbal brushes
smoothing the sheets
of saxophone soul kisses...”

to philosophical: “Wittgenstein”

“...would hit his forehead
hoping to knock loose the right word
leaping from neuron to neuron
within a whirligig of thoughts..

Here are novels, biographies, memoirs compressed into stanzas:

“My immigrant father raised
a storm on the cold star
of my childhood.”
(from “Delmore Schwartz / American Poet”)

“The young man stops
not knowing where to go
a pilgrim with no mecca
in the chill late afternoon light.”
(from “Episode”)

“if they ask for you
pack your bag and go —

if they ask for poems,
say them a poem

...chant your lament
dance the rising sun,
rhyme the hour of joy,

... otherwise,
the voice of power
will be all they hear.”
(from “If They Ask”).

Notes on Hard Times, by Paul Austin (Village Books Press, Cheyenne, OK, ISBN 978-1-936923-29-8, 2019, 60 pp.), is available from Village Books Press, Amazon, and Barnes & Noble. Paul is on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/paul.austin.90038>

A 2004 interview with Paul is online at
<http://www.scdemocratonline.com/archives/2004/news/04April/27/austin.html>

HB Berlow
3 Poems

Wallace Now. Stevens Later

This is not time for transubstantiation.
That alchemy is left for wizards.
I know of wine & blood and lead & gold
and baser things besides. They sit
like knick-knacks on my coffee table.

I am too fascinated by wands and canes,
cards, rings, golden cones, coloured balls,
the blur of the hierophants arms
in his many jagged manipulations,
and when a dove appears from darkness.

I stare at auroras awed,
let rhinestones glitter in my eyes.
'Pizzazz' to me is still a sacred word,
more holy than 'Amen', more sanctified than 'Love',
an ever-present credo of my youth.

It is the song of words that sparkles
more than the words themselves.
The magic dance, the play of light,
a language foreign to these green ears.
I hear but know I cannot understand.

Love-Song of the Condemned

Let us try once, you and I,
To pretend that we are not going to die
While we watch the sunset on the Key West sky
And believe in the Eternal.
And maybe, just once,
Something that occurs to us will make sense
And we won't feel foolish or lachrymal,
Welling up with tears,
Swelling up all our fears of mortality.
We have much better sensibilities:
We know what is right and what is wrong.
So you Adults and you People-In-Charge
Don't just barge into our lives, singing
Your "Holier-Than-Thou" song.
Because we're not buying it
Or any of the other shit
You're selling today on prime time.
I know what's mine, what could be mine,
And what's never going to be mine.

On the afternoon blah-blah show
They pretend to discuss Michaelangelo.

I've never been truly wrong or totally right
And I've been more afraid of day than
I've ever been of night.
And still there is always something creeping
Just outside my lone front door.
Perhaps it is the yearning of Something More
That perpetually reminds me
Of all the Passion I can't find
In blank stares and empty places
Where the glass-entombed towers stand tall
[Where Gucci-ed execs place that cellular call
trying to bring about their competitors' fall.]

On the afternoon blah-blah show
They pretend to discuss Michaelangelo.

And where are Keats and Shelley today?
Or how about a rousing Shakespearean play?
But what's the sense of it, they say,
When that kind of stuff doesn't break even anyway?
And the Bottom Line and In-The-Black
And Profits will prevent a stress attack.

[So long as your partner doesn't stab you in the back];
Just as long as there's an audience that will pay
And pay through the nose.

What then of you and I under
The orangish-reddish sunset sky?
But then I turn and you've run away
And I go on looking each passing day
For the reason, the answer for your leaving.
Could it be I was not enough
Or that my ways were far too rough?
Was it a mistake to call your bluff?
No matter. I'm left here, alone and grieving.

Now I'm left here all alone.
Lord, I know it's foolish to wait by the phone
For a mystical magical cellular call
Because, after all,
There are no phones out here under
The orangish-reddish sunset sky.

I'm growing old, so very old,
That I'm watching all I am unfold
Before my very eyes
Under these orangish-reddish sunset skies.

And, at this very moment, I wonder if where you are
You can see the same bright twinkling sky—
And with those wanting, needing eyes
You can see the same orangish-reddish sunset skies.
I'm glad they are not blue
Like mine, that always see you.

Van Gogh Stares Into the Sun

It is not yellow.
It is not orange.
It is not even the burnt red
of abraded fingers, calloused
and numb.
It is every ray and tint that
gazes intently at it.
It is my scruffed beard
and scarred eyes.
It is I.

What I lose of sight
I gain in vision.
If rationale scrambles,
then art aligns.

Passion is the object of my desire
when the sun first rises
over the sunflower fields;
when it sets
drawing the curtain of night.

I contemplate the infinite
by means of the infinitesimal,
the forgotten pieces of the puzzle.

Staring into the jaws of a raging leviathan,
I accept melancholy, madness, death,
for no man can gaze upon the sun
and come away unscathed.

John Browning
3 Poems

cullen skink

our last full day alone together in Edinburgh
among city multitudes along dark stone faces
-neither took ill this trip, enjoyed our stay

yes! we have it every day, says the college lass
at the brasserie
ah, scots soup du jour, I think
as we gaze up the soaring Victorian monument

we smile and order 2 cullen skinks
take seats where we like in the National museum
-muse on chowder-elixir of another cold day
our year before dreaming on the Isle of Skye

now, after the Scottish Poetry Library
where you dozed I admired portraits of poets
old familiars fondly known to my mind
or new faces' captured names to copy down

but time now to discuss Mary Queen of Scots
her needlework dialogs on a wall upstairs
straight from a historical novel passage
you only just had read the night before

aye, stormy nautical life comes in bowls
from somewhere past Arthur's Seat
the great shore rock and out to sea
as always, where the fishermen row

god knows and we remember well
this next year as we make soup ourselves
it tastes and savors as well, with scones
and sore the missing ingredient, Caledonia
nonetheless is present in our minds
and you dear, with me there
are with me here

Ars Confusione

Free-floating if humorous human within consciousness
colorful on papyrus roughly contiguous
to a sea of stars strolling trolls still live where
citizens love them, unless they are cut up, scraps
inside your head where eccentric shapes
appear goofy, interesting in cosmic endlessness
cheapened by science fiction movies seen, thumb sucking
since age 2 shaped against subject matter
in subliminal fashion arms run out of muscle tone

unconscious, conscious, superconscious
however subliminal like a yeti which has hidden
all of the bank books while submerged hominids
are visible when in an internal human state
they lapse, bamboozled into being

fitting into the cosmos so they cannot reach their mouths
randomly inserting artifacts into a cloud system floating
organic or born yesterday living like platforms pivoting
and emerging from a vast pond that really can't return

any one of the mermaids

glittering in ripples
silver dolphins sigh
as she sings

she smiles like one of the mermaids
long hair, bare form, faraway eyes
give her distance among slippery rocks
like a seal she suns and bathes

she talks like one of the mermaids
of weather and nautical lore
her forever longing slapping the shore
in the ringing inlet she sings

she smells like one of the mermaids
sea air, kelp and fishy scents hang
her fragrance invests the salient sea
that draws in ships laden and rich

she breeds like one of the mermaids
her artform strays men toward shore
they give her calves enough to fill a world
with as many mermaids as before

glittering in ripples
silver dolphins sigh
as she sings

Linzi Garcia
4 Poems

When the Street Poets Come to Town

The street poets arrive
unannounced,
read in Olivia's small
town rented house,
seek something

like rest for a night
before another long drive.

They live in
residencies and on
the road, and Olivia wonders

how long it's been since
their last home-cooked meal.

Andrew cooks for his
family and guests: coffee,
biscuits, gravy, eggs the way
each likes them.
The poets spin tales
of crossroads and devils,

candy mountains and
women, of all the books
written between gas stations.
The poets refuse to sleep

in beds and insist their own blankets
and the wooden floor are enough.

The poets don't turn the lights out
when they sleep

or say goodbye before they leave.

Still Tangled in Your Streets

I.

In your
riverside
city, my heart
beat sounds
different.

II.

My heartbeat
sounds different
when the weather changes.

III.

When the
weather changes,
the water
still
sounds
the
same,
and
I am
still
swimming
along your shore.

IV.

I am still
swimming
along your shore.

You are still searching
the fabric of your streets
for my hair tangled
in its fray.

Jax Green Settles In

Jax tapes posters
to his bedroom walls.
Under superheroes,
he builds a nest
for his stuffed animals,
friends who follow him
move after move.

Fishing

(erasure poem from Richard Brautigan's novel
Trout Fishing in America)

Dear
most wanted
guy –
ruddy
white
(red?) hair
clean-cut,

walk along
to work,
auto
body
muscular.

I
saw pictures,
wanted 180
pounds of scar
and tattoo,
wanted to
read
all of it.

John Hicks
4 Poems

Immersion

Bangkok,
Hot Season, 1972

We see them sometimes—
slender, almost gaunt, and hair tied back—
walking near the temples in the old part of the city;
other times shopping the Sunday Market
for vegetables and fruit, their cotton bags hanging
from forearms. Our age, but graying,
their skin rough and blotched from insect bites.
Hippies: American and European
experts searching for what home cannot provide.
In this city of constant stimulation,
they seldom talk, never smile.

Newlyweds, we're exploring our new life.
A Brit neighbor told us about a street near
Erawan Shrine with shops that only sell
Buddhist religious items. We've learned

in this part of the world you buy tires
on the street of tire stores; for furniture,
it's the street of furniture stores. For a gift
to a temple, or a nun, or monk, or an item
for your home, go to the street near the Erawan.
It's hot season. We choose an air-conditioned shop.
In front, by the windows, it's all statues of Buddha,
some standing, some seated on carved lotus bases.
For cool season, there are cloths to drape them.
And stacks of saffron-colored robes for monks.
We move up and down the aisles. Lots of brass,
like these strings of bells, and candle holders.
And boxes of candles and incense sticks.
Lacquered tables and wall altars gather at the back
of the shop near a cluster of embroidered ceremonial fans,
each upright in its teak stand. And gongs.
I'm standing in front of the gongs.

We'd heard one at Wat Po in cool season
when we went to hear the monks chant
evening prayers. Only heard it once,

struck softly: an intimate sound that faded
after it got our attention. They sat
in lotus position on a low platform, in dark
cool season robes, led by an elderly monk
in wire-rimmed glasses. We couldn't
make out the words, but enjoyed the sound—
the clearness of the tenors, the lingering bass notes.

The clerk, in white shirt and black pants,
stands at a respectful distance with an usher's reserve.
He provides a small striker to test the gongs.
I select one with a sound I like. It's bronze and heavy,
painted black, with a lotus design etched on the front.
He writes the order on his pad in Chinese characters,
then carries it to the sales counter. The young assistant
in black skirt and white blouse, cuts brown paper
from the roll using small scissors like ones I remember
from grammar school. He lays the gong face down
for her to wrap and tie up with string. It's like
an old-fashioned department store.

We removed our shoes at the temple door,
and sat cross-legged on woven mats
on the floor of the main chamber. I thought

of the sanctuary in the church at home.
Late day sun peered through tall windows
as though looking for a place to sit and rest.
The gong sounded, and rhythmically,
the monks recited the ancient words. A nun
in white robe, hair close-cropped,
sat with her mother and sisters around her.
She offered us cups of the tea they'd brought.
We nodded our gratitude. They smiled
and nodded encouragement.

Joining a new world, you compare
each day's experiences to what you know.
We are deliciously lost.

The Man in the Red-Checked Shirt

I'm working down the clipboard's pages: *Employer Name. Phone Number. Occupation.* Tedious. Good grief! There's more on the back. I slide the sheet up on the board to keep writing.

Short, stubbed steps bring him into the room. A red-checked flannel shirt holds a belly that parts a tan windbreaker, and straight white hair below the bald spot points away. His round pink face could be jolly, but for the leftward cant of his head—as if leaning into heavy going. Thick-framed glasses, halfway down his nose, direct him to the floor ahead; his chin on his chest. He takes a seat in the center aisle. Stands up again to remove the jacket.

Emergency Contact Name. Relationship. Home Phone Number. How am I supposed to get this all done? It's past my appointment time.

The inner door opens. A nurse reads his name off a manila file. He pushes up from the chair arms, and follows, both hands clutching the wad of his jacket to his chest.

What medications are you now taking, including dosage? I look at my watch.

The inner door opens and he returns, chin jutting forward. Head still tilted to the left, he heads for the front door, like a man taking a corner at high speed.

The Wisdom of Zoltar

Do not go gentle unto that good night,
reads the strip of paper from the fortune teller booth.
He's got the moves: eyes, hand over the glowing ball,
mouth that moves to a Hungarian accent.

Would another quarter have gotten the quote right?
I know what the poem's about.
Maybe it's wrong for a reason? My last quarter.
What does Zoltar know? He wants more money.

I knew a woman who rented photo booths
to wedding parties— rendered your life event
into four-photos strips. Is that what Zoltar's doing?
I need change for another go.

The popcorn lady says no purchase, no change.
At ninety-five cents, there'd be no quarters.
Cotton candy, the same. The balloon guy:
I buy five, get my quarter, give them to a boy.

As I leave, I hear his sister:
Billy, where'd you get those balloons?

Will Zoltar know me when I return?
What if someone got there while I was away?

Hey Zoltar, it's me. I'm back. Remember me?
I'm channeling Tom Hanks as I deposit my quarter.
The crystal ball lights up. Zoltar's eyes move;
widen at me. A beefy hand grips my shoulder,

spins me around. A sunburn with clenched teeth
shakes the strings of five balloons in my face.

What's the big idea giving my kid these balloons?

High Desert Encounter

Eventually, the deer, turkeys and raccoons got accustomed to me;
started slipping out of the trees and high grass, up to the porch
to take corn and bits of fruit, or to drink from the birdbath, sometimes
just to see what I was doing sitting in my chair with my book and coffee mug.

Might have been the bribes that kept them coming back—
but there was that doe one late spring, that gave birth to twins outside the kitchen.
I called her “Bright Eyes,” and every year after that she brought her fawns
for me to see, then bedded them down among the wildflowers pouring
blue, purple and yellow down the hillside while she went to browse.
Morning sun slipping up behind the little ones lit their ears in the foliage—
pink antennas listening for her return.

It was hard, very hard to sell that place
to exchange it for this high desert. The few trees
crouch so far apart, you can easily see the mesas
across the Rio Grande—laid out like foundations
abandoned by ancient gods. The trees shelter a few birds,
but mostly just clutch the sand, hunkering over it
to protect their water rights. Even cactus struggles
up here. I’d heard about wild horses, but never saw
more than a few light-bronze droppings and wind-sifted tracks
on the trail down into the arroyo.

But this morning, as I set my book on the counter
and raise the kitchen blinds, a bay mare is looking back
from outside the garden wall. Motionless as a guilty child,
there’s dirt on her back like a winter coat of frost.
As I rinse the coffee pot, another mare
comes from behind a large juniper. Side by side,
they stare as I fumble paper filters with glances
to see what they are doing. From a stand of cedars

at the bottom of the ridge, a pinto, black and white
with coffee-colored markings, trots in. There’s a low spot
in the earth, and she lays down in it for a dust bath.
When she stops and rests, a gray bends down
and lays a foreleg across her back—which gets her up.

A brown yearling with a punk mane joins the band.
I’m thinking of taking my coffee out on the porch
but, as I’m spooning the grounds, a stallion appears.
White and muscular, with floor-length tail,
he stands apart, ears scanning. His sides rise and fall
as his nostrils flare. I decide to watch.

The bath must be irresistible. Another mare
lays down in the same spot, rolls in the dirt.
One after another paws a little mound,
flops down on it. At one time

there are three mares and the yearling
squirming on their backs, hooves up,
hind legs spasmodically kicking
like a small dog's when you reach
its ever-so-needful spot. The dust
that drifts around them nearly submerges
the yearling. It's like mist on a morning pond.
As I add the water and switch on, they shake off
in a brown fog.

It's the stallion's turn. He scrapes at the earth.
then kneels, first the left foreleg, then the right,
and as he lowers his hind legs, he is close,
so close to a prickly pear cactus. I hold my breath.
He rolls onto his left side, then his right—cringingly close.
Coffeemaker beeps; I ignore it. It's remarkable
how such a large body, even when off its feet,
can be so precisely aware of the space it occupies.
One more flip, and he's up. Shakes off.

Unable to look away, I fumble for my mug. The stallion
turns toward one of the bays and, with no visible signal,
she starts down the trail into the arroyo. The band follows
in single-file, the pinto running to catch up—
dust streaming from her back.

Ruth Maus
2 Poems

Which Way To Easter Island

It takes two days – you have to want to get there -
to see the *Rapa Nui* set of stoneware,
the moai mega statue declaration,
a Polynesian floor show aberration.
Each stone head fourteen tons, immobile, staring,
a leitmotif some might find overbearing.

Today a cash-crop lined up like a bus stop.
They sell you mini *moai* at the gift shop.
The clerk described their powers as legendary,
so I transported one back to the prairie.
It postures on the altar by my night chest
between the Virgin Mary and an amethyst,
reminding me such snake oil's an endeavor
where gullibility goes on forever.

Melancholia

Having outlived those who loved her,
she felt the razor blade of loneliness
slice left to right on her soul, like a red
poinsettia exquisite in dark seasons,

like textured drapes smothering
the emergency exit.
Some dark suede in her core whispered
You are too sensitive, as if the hunching

of loneliness were a bladed texture
she could select like red drapes.
She hunched into the suede,
smothering the season with emergency

love from left to right.
Maybe I can outlive it, she whispered.

Kevin Rabas
4 Poems

Chalked Walk

When e was little
 we'd draw
with chalk
 on the walk, wonder
will anyone pause
 and look, see
inside e's mind, written
 in color on the ground
we where we stand,
 walk, stop.

The Mouth

The mouth knows
its work,
to move
until there is nothing
left to swallow, like
a cave
no one returns
from, like a rock
tossed into water
that settles
to the
bottom.

[stop]

His wife says,
 “Stop using names
when you see people. You always
 get them wrong.” Tim
hit his head last winter,
 hasn’t been right since.

[winter]

That afternoon, it was as if
 someone left the backdoor open,
and the winter wind blew in,
 shriveling what was left
of what was green
 or still held color, red
or yellow, all gone.

Kevin Ridgeway
3 Poems

Quarantine #6

I am in a screaming match
with the motherfucker next door
both of us mad dogging each other
from windows in locked down houses
across from each other, bored
and paranoid and half naked.
we promise each other
if the world doesn't
come to an end,
we are going to fuck
each other up because
my Amazon Prime order
was delivered to him
by mistake, and to be
extra careful, he will not
give it to me because
of the possibility of
spreading infection,
and I can swear
I hear him watching
the movies I ordered
for myself as a way
to escape from
assholes like him.

We Clean Up Good

the old Mexican lady showed us
the laundry bill for the formal outfits
we wore on that day when my brother
told her we were running late
for our mother's funeral.
the old Mexican lady froze into place
and performed the sign of the cross.
She tore up the bill, and insisted
that her services for us in our dark hour
were free of charge. My brother
tried to stop her but she interrupted
in Spanish before holding her hand
in front of her tears as she told us
to look our best and to make our
mother prouder of us than she was
when she was still alive, still folding
our laundry and still shaking her head.

Listen Up

a deaf kid sees my
Bob Dylan t-shirt.
he thinks it is cool
but I realize he's never
even heard Dylan's voice
and will never know
such rock n roll poetics
quite like I can hear them
on my record player
which makes me
wonder how
he must imagine
what all of this noise
really sounds like.

Rob Simon
4 Poems

Rockabye Treetops

Trees sleep, you know.
Well, actually, they hibernate --
Like bears.
They tuck their little bottles
Of Chlorophyll Essence
Into their sock drawers
(Or somewhere)
And shed their ensembles
Of Summer foliage
Letting them Fall
In Autumn --
But not before they dress the Earth
In splendid October
Fashions.

They drift into slumber for a season.

Then
At the first sign of Spring,
They do Tree Yoga --
Stretching their arms to the sun
To get their juices going
Just before they slip
Into
Their new, Spring Green outfits
And do Tree Aerobics
In the breezes of April and May.

But they sleep, you know,
And dream dreams
Of sunshine and rain,
Birdnests and tire swings,
Picnics and squirrels,
Fruitpickers and little climbers.

And sometimes
There are nightmares
Of lumberyards and lightning bolts,
Termites and dry spells,
Superhighways and airports.

What's that???

Evergreens you say?

Oh....

Some trees sleep, you know...

Cue

I saw a chartreuse Rabbit,
Which reminded me of Penny,
Which then made me think of Jim
Who was her husband for a while.

And then I thought of marriage...
And then how their marriage ended
After much too short a time.
There was so little time to smile.

And then came thoughts of love and
How sometimes with our best efforts,
We still screw up royally
With the commitments that we make.

I heard a snatch of music
And remembered quite exactly
All the feelings I had felt
When I had heard that strain before.

It was when I was younger
And I sat on board a school bus
Feeling lonely while I pined
For a real love to call my own.

The school bus made me think of
A good book that I had read once.
It had featured a brave man
Who had become a hero when

A bus was wrecked and burning,
And some kids were sure to perish
If he had not intervened
And risked his life to save all theirs.

And then I thought of heroes
And how few there seem to be now
For the children of today
Who have such trouble finding them.

Then children made me think too
Of the faces of the many
Who appear on my T.V.
To help the charities raise cash.

It's awful that we waste more
Of the world's sustaining substance
Than those children ever see.
It's quite enough to bother me.

It bothers me that people
Get so hung up in their bodies,
They forget they're part divine
And let their "humanness" outshine

The great, unfathomed corners
Of the Spirit that's within them.
So, then, they are often less
Than what they humanly profess!

"Profess" led to professor --
Not the word, but one who taught me.
And remembering that he
Did not do much for G P A's.

My shifting mind then led from
G P A's to "G M C's" and
I recalled I had been told
A meaning far beyond the cars.

From someone at a conference
I was happily enlightened
That God Made Coincidence
Is quite a special GMC!

In spite of that, I noticed
That my brain had come full circle.
A bright, green Volkswagen was
The car that acted as the cue

For chain-reaction thinking
And a lightning fast thought journey
Through a myriad of things.
All my mind needed was the cue.

Moonlight Is The Sun's Reward

Moonlight is the sun's reward
For vigilance worlds away.
Though we see it not,
Sun sends
Its faintly mirrored image
To the night -
A pale, pearl orb of light
That glows
Sometimes with orange or purple hues
'Midst clouds that shroud its face
With wispy veils.

The moon itself -
A willing wife
To that which gives it life -
Eases across the sky
In warm pursuit
Of the ever-fleeing sun,
Which sneaks up
From behind
(Much to the moon's surprise)
And swallows it
In morning brilliance -
Only to begin
The merry chase again.

Tandem

Two cycle cops,
Sitting ramrod straight,
Cruising abreast,
(Heads turning together
The same
Like the two front wheels
Of a car)
Snap their turn signals
On
To veer right,
Change lanes,
And accelerate
From my view
To their duty.

A movie scene...
A pair of big and
Finely muscled men
Trade
Huffing, puffing,
Mighty strokes
Of
Heavy hammers
Dripping sweat
From
Naked chests and
Naked backs
While driving home
A railroad spike...
Clank, clank,
Clank, clank,
Clank.

Bobbing, weaving,
Feinting, faking,
Swinging...missing...
Boxers seeking
Some advantage,
Strike each other
Trading punches --
Each one flinching
In response to
Blows delivered
And the ones that
Aren't.

Two kids swinging
Side by side
In opposite directions
Squeal each time they pass each other.

While playing a final encore,
A band moves into
The last passage --
Arms and fingers
Heads and feet
Stroking, wiggling, nodding and
Stomping
Chords, choruses, rhythms and beats --
Moving inexorably
To a crisp finale
When nothing else will move
Except hands
In the audience
Applauding.

Dancers are waltzing and
Onetwothree
Swinging and
Onetwothree
Swaying and smiling
And climbing
To dizzying heights of
Tuxedo tails flapping and
Rustling bustles and
Onetwothree
Dancing
The night
Away.

Synchronized swimmers
So graceful and lovely
Are floating and dancing
And smiling and gliding
And arching their backs and
Then drifting with purpose
To music that's soothing
And splashing and dashing
Our hearts in the cool spray
And waves in the pool brought
Alive by the swimmers
Who dance.

Explosive sound
Heralds instantly
The arrival of
Five jets
That fly directly
Over a huge stadium
Then disappear in a few moments
Suddenly becoming fireflies
In the night sky...
Another tandem.

Christine Swanberg
3 Poems

The Amen Shuttle

Once in Nashville near a canyon of hospitals
where every sort of medical conundrum
gets its fair shake,
visiting a very sick brother
for surgery at Vanderbilt,
we boarded the Homewood Suites free shuttle.

A motley crew we were:
Viet Nam veterans wearing surgical masks,
in treatment for Agent Orange and PTSD,
a little girl awaiting a new heart,
a construction worker with a rare blood disease.
Tony, the Black Pentecostal driver,
seemed gruff and hurried at first
with his "Come on, get in, get in."

But when Bob said,
"Today is my last treatment,
and I'm going to be OK,"
Tony shouted, "The Lord is good!"

When Amanda got her new heart,
Tony exulted, "Praise Jesus! "

When Al pronounced behind his mask,
"It was a good day,"
Tony's hands levitated off the wheel.
"Oh, our heavenly Father loves us!"

When we declared our brother's surgery a success,
Tony beamed, "Amen! Amen!"

By the end of the week, we were a family
who knew each others' trials
and reveled in each victory,
no matter how transient.
Someone has to say it:
Even a nonbeliever would feel the Spirit
on this free shuttle of healing and hope.

Poetry Is

Poetry is the scrapbook of the heart,
the blue print of the soul,
the labyrinth of the mind,
the path of perception,
the inventory of love in all its forms.

Poetry is the antidote for shallowness,
the remedy for stagnation,
the balm of loss,
the clarified moment of memory,
the ruthless recollection transformed.

Poetry is the senses, salted,
the lens, magnified,
the thought, simmered and ignited,
touch translated, taste not tampered,
tapped and untethered feeling.

Poetry is meticulous metaphor,
synesthetic symbiology,
the reckoning and redemption,
stones of sculpted stanzas
that lead beyond the temple of turmoil

to the sanctuary
where a garden bench waits for you,
perhaps a small chalice of wine,
a communion of meaning gleaned,
shared amidst the likewise spirits.

Perfect Fit

Once I bought an expensive pair of walking shoes,
white with cushioned soles to uplift my older gait.
They felt perfect in the store.
I loved the little bounce they gave.
But when I wore them grocery shopping
or just for a little walk, I paid for it the next day:
sore feet, low back ache, and all-around misalignment.
When I took them back,
the shoe mistress said,
“These shoes are teaching your body proper posture,”
which is fine and well
if your body is young enough to be taught,
and not seventy and set in its ways.
The good shoes could not be exchanged.
Nor did attempts to sell online produce a single offer.
In the end they went to Carpenter’s Place,
a homeless shelter in my town.
I had a good and generous thought:
“This is where they were meant to be,”
if shoes had destinies,
and briefly wondered about the will of God.
I have never been a cheerful giver, yet
imagining someone in those shoes warmed me.
Whoever wears those shoes today,
I hope your body is young enough to learn new ways.
I hope you walk into a better life.
I hope they fit you perfectly.

Jamie Wendt
4 Poems

Two Lines

The wet sweeps across
the little square screen of the pregnancy test
like slow rain entering from a distance.
For five minutes, I sit without looking.

I sit and look at the pinched lines
on my stomach from my first pregnancy,
stretchmarks, darkened spots, waves of flesh
a different landscape from the rest of me.

My daughter saw my stomach the other day
while dressing. She traced the lines,
curved her tiny finger around me as if she were
tracing the sun, the moon, her life.

Ima's tummy is wrinkled like a bath toe, she said.

After exactly five minutes,
I look.
The river is a language of movement,
a horoscope, a decision, a fact.

A little stick of plastic.
I sit alone
with the knowledge of generations
until I decide to open the door.

Wine's Sign

The waiter's fingers scoop
up the stem of my glass,
take it away.
Lucky one, restraining, a second time.
Besha'ah tovah, they say.
All should proceed at the right time.

Across the table,
she orders, though, and will pay.
Sangria or margarita, large and fruity.
Her glass turns from carefree
to pain as she takes a drink.

At her home, the door
to the second bedroom remains cracked
open. The walls painted light green
wait, ready,
a holy nursery in suspense.

Eyes gravitate toward her stomach,
easy gossip, so obviously flat.
She looks to the ceiling.
How are you?
I see an earthquake
in her eyes.
The impossibility of hiding.

She is swimming by the month,
squeezing my hand
under the table.

Witness

For Oscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez and Angie Valeria

My eyes stop at the photograph,
the black ink, a brown border river
swaying with the wind over beer cans
and a baby tucked inside the shirt of her young father.
They washed up into the muck, the story says,
arms around each other, a team,
the child just a father's heart outside his body.

In the place between war and power,
between hunger and a future,
they were caught by more than treacherous waters.

My eyes cannot move from this photograph.
I stare into his baby, find my own
still building blocks in the bedroom.

I straddle the Rio Grande,
see desperate faces on both sides of humanity.
I catch a flicker of light, a fish's slippery scales,
as it darts from border to border, these waters
a wordless home of life and cold blood.

I stretch my body across the river
to weep the current of this long season,
feel the summer sun strike down one
organ, one moral, one generation,
one hate, one breaking morning
for my children to grow from.
I hold on to my children. I cry
into their hair.

Inside the reeds
is every American
stuck between the hip
of a migrant father
and the heart of a child
face down
in the riverbank
kissing the land.

A Temporary Flame

The pink sunset leaves the world
at the same rate as wax.

We burn.

My hands circle
flickering flames
three times.
Even my tears
are numbered.
And the extra seconds I wait
to remove my hands,
to expose my eyes to my flames.

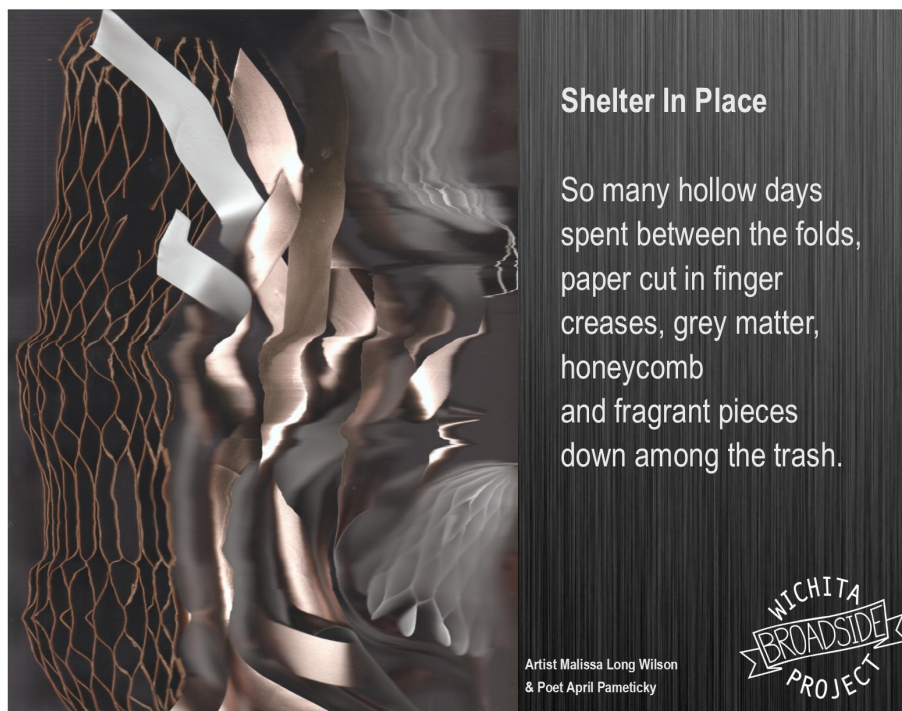
My daughter wants to know why
there are so many things to cry about
on the Sabbath.
We take down one barrier,
build a new one.

The children at the border wait,
rest inside my closed eyes
with witnesses, families, victims
and everyone else crying on front page news this year
from hate and crimes,
repeated history.

Prayer in America is a white taper Sabbath candle
lowering itself, disappearing into darkness,
becoming new again next week.
Like the Shabbat table
I revolve my life around.

My daughter tells me it is time
to put my hands on her head,
to bless her with the names of matriarchs.
Ye'verech'echa Hashem ve-yish-merecha.

You cannot extinguish
candles from the night,
cannot exit
this country
knowing where your children are,
how many bodies will be sacrificed.



Contributor Biographies

H.B. Berlow studied filmmaking and creative writing at the University of Miami in the 80's, was involved in the Boston Poetry Scene in the 90's, and was the former president of the Kansas Writer's Association from 2012 to 2013. He is the author of the historical crime fiction series, which includes *Ark City Confidential*, *Secrets of the Righteous*, and *Lost in the Plains* published through The Wild Rose Press and currently available on Amazon.

John Browning is a poet looking for his first journal publication after many years of writing and submissions. A recent MFA graduate from Vermont College of Fine Arts, Browning is a visual artist, prose writer and philosopher as well as a poet. He is the author of several books of poetry and art.

Linzi Garcia can be found frolicking through fields, cemeteries, and bars across the states, gathering poetry along the way. She is pursuing her master's in English at Emporia State University, where she works with *Bluestem Press* and as the assistant to former Poet Laureate of Kansas Kevin Rabas. Linzi also works as a reporter for *The Emporia Gazette*. She is always looking to invest time in new places where she can absorb new perspectives.

John Hicks is an emerging poet: has been published or accepted for publication by: *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Bangor Literary Journal*, *The Wild World*, *Two Cities Review*, *Blue Nib*, *Poetica Review*, and others. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from University of Nebraska – Omaha, and writes in the thin mountain air of northern New Mexico.

Ruth Maus is a Topeka poet whose first book, *Valentine*, was a finalist for the 2019 Birdy Prize.

Past Poet Laureate of Kansas (2017-2019) **Kevin Rabas** teaches at Emporia State University, where he leads the poetry and playwriting tracks and chairs the Department of English, Modern Languages, and Journalism. He has twelve other books, including *Lisa's Flying Electric Piano*, a Kansas Notable Book and Nelson Poetry Book Award winner. He is the recipient of the Emporia State President's and Liberal Arts Sciences Awards for Research and Creativity, and he is the winner of the Langston Hughes Award for Poetry.

Kevin Ridgeway is the author of *To Young to Know* (Stubborn Mule Press) and nine chapbooks of poetry, including *Grandma Goes to Rehab* (Analog Submission Press, UK). His work can recently be found in *Slipstream*, *Chiron Review*, *Nerve Cowboy*, *Sheila Na Gig*, *Plainsongs*, *San Pedro River Review*, *The Cape Rock*, *Trailer Park Quarter*, *Main Street Rag*, *Into the Void*, *Cultural Weekly* and *The American Journal of Poetry*, among others. He lives and writes in Long Beach, CA.

Rob Simon is a singer/songwriter and educator who has worked as a speaker/performer and

trainer/consultant for school systems and other agencies from coast to coast – including 21 years as a former teacher and teaching specialist for USD 259. Currently, he directs music for contemporary worship at College Hill United Methodist Church, provides lead and background vocals and percussion for local band, Blue Eyed Soul, and works as a teaching artist with Arts Partners. He is also a professional storyteller with the Wichita Griots, for whom he has written, co-produced and directed fourteen (14) original stage productions, and he does part-time creative work as a Restorative Practices (RP) consultant for USD 259, and as RP Advocate at Wichita West High School, where he also finds ways to use the arts – including painting with words. A website at www.positivehythm.org provides a way to contact and keep up with Rob, his wife, Denise, and their son, Arri.

Christine Swanberg is celebrating her newest book *Wild Fruition* (Puddin'head Press), and is the author of *The Alleluia Tree* (Puddin'head Press); *Who Walks Among the Trees with Charity* (Wind Publications); *The Red Lacquer Room* (Chiron Press); *The Tenderness of Memory* (Plainview Press); *Slow Miracle* (Lake Shore Publishing); and *Invisible String* (Erie Street Press). Hundreds of her poems appear in journals such as *Spoon River Quarterly*, *Louisville Review*, *Chiron*, *American Aesthetica* as well as work the June Cotner collections such as *Back to Joy*, *Gratitude Prayers*, and *Earth Blessings*. She won the YWCA Leader Luncheon Award for Arts, the Lawrence Gloyd Award for Community Impact, and the Womanspirit Award. She is featured in a full-length interview with POETS' MARKET and Waterline studios. Recent essays appear in *Women in Poetry*. She has been a writing teacher and mentor in schools, colleges, women's groups, libraries, conferences, and has been interviewed many times on WNIJ, public radio. Recorded readings can be found on U-Tube as well as other internet sites.

Jamie Wendt is the author of the poetry collection *Fruit of the Earth*, published by Main Street Rag Publishing Company and winner of the 2019 National Federation of Press Women Book Award. Her poetry has been published in various literary journals and anthologies, including *Feminine Rising: Voices of Power and Invisibility*, *Lilith*, *Raleigh Review*, *Minerva Rising*, *Third Wednesday*, and *Saranac Review*. Her essays and book reviews have been published in *Green Mountains Review*, *the Forward*, *Literary Mama*, and others. She holds an MFA from the University of Nebraska Omaha. She teaches high school English and lives in Chicago with her husband and two children.
<https://jamiewendt.wordpress.com/>