

A photograph of a forest floor featuring a large, gnarled tree trunk in the foreground. The trunk is heavily textured with deep grooves and knots, showing a mix of brown and reddish tones. In the background, several tall, thin evergreen trees stand against a soft, overcast sky. The ground is covered with fallen leaves, twigs, and some moss. The word "History" is written in a large, white, serif font across the upper middle of the image.

History

Paddler Press Volume 8

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Volume 8 - *History*



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Paddler Press

Peterborough/Nogojivanong, Ontario

paddler@canoeideas.ca paddlerpress.ca @paddlerpress

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by Deryck N. Robertson

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Foreword

A couple of weekends ago I took two of my children to an event at a church in Mississauga. In the lobby, there were boxes and boxes full of books available for a small donation. Well, now. Being somewhat of an addict when it comes to books old and new (whether I actually read them or not), I made my contribution and was able to find a few great titles to bring home, available shelf space notwithstanding. Gregory Clark, WWI veteran and journalist, wrote for the *Toronto Star* for decades. As a young reader, I found his humourous outdoor stories captivating. To find two “new” books of his writing was exciting. These short vignettes of daily life, while written almost fifty years ago, express many of the same thoughts and feelings people experience today including challenges with technology, culture, racism, and poverty. The inscription inside notes that these were given as Christmas gifts to someone's father in 1981. (A new name has now been added for someone else to discover years from now.)

History is both communal and personal, serious and humourous. Our history is war (Denehan's *Two Hundred and Sixty-Eight*) but also the minutiae of every day life (Wade's *The Truths of History*) and funny when children learn about it (Hostovsky's *Chamber Pot*). History is *Where I'm from* (La Couvée), those moments that mold us as we grow, and it's the story of those that helped mold us (Mehas' *In 1920*) and the memories that are passed to future generations (Lavin's *My Grandmother Works Her Stories*). I hope you enjoy reading the work presented here as much as I do. And, like Wilda Morris and Gregory Clark, I hope that we learn from history and stop making the same mistakes (*American History*).

Thank you to this issue's contributors for your continued support and trust in Paddler Press with your creations as we share them with the world.

Happy Paddling,

Deryck N. Robertson
EIC, Paddler Press

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Cover Photo: *Cascade Falls Giant*
by Deryck N. Robertson

Go to Your Local Lumber Yard

Robert King

And pick out a 2" x 4" that's 8 feet long, standard size, & a piece of sandpaper, any grit. With purchase, you get 1 free cut, so find a Kyle in an apron & kindly ask him to buzz it into a 2-foot length & a 6-foot length, which should allow your planks to fit in any car, & don't worry, you're giving this tree a good afterlife. In your unclean, relatively dimly lit garage, place the 6-foot piece on that dusty old kitchen table you've been meaning to refinish, so the end of the 2" x 4" hangs well off the table's edge. Now sand the board's butt end. For 15 seconds—just 15 seconds. Time is relative, but stop. Just stop. That's enough. Look at the ground. See that sawdust puddle you just created? That represents the length of time human beings have been on this planet. Still in your left hand remains lumber, almost all 6 feet of it & that represents how long the planet has been here without you, me, all of us ever. If you next grab a handsaw & can eyeball it, cut off about 8 inches of the remaining board. That's how long clams—yes clams—have been here, 8-inches, comparatively short

when compared to the remaining
5+ feet, but forever-long when compared
to the sawdust, & those clams might
be able to teach us something about—
because they're diligent stenographers—
geology & existence & meaning that daily
we only pretend to know, our 2 brain
halves limited by a single thick shell
whose lips can't be slightly parted
to filter only the wholesome nutrients.
Anchored to the reef, movement limited,
then shucked. Shell midden masquerading
as sacred cemeteries. Heaps of mental
muscles & molecular mollusks. Archeology
is a mix of garbology & speculation—yes
advanced study of garbage is actually
possible: as if we're all back in 7th grade
dissecting our first owl pellet, really digging
inside that ball, using the vole skeleton
& other compressed trash to make
broad inferences about an entire society
of owls. Who who who. Now imagine
fusing the 8 inches back onto the longer
2" x 4" & (re)attaching the sawdust now
sprinkled on your steel toes floating
above the pavement's inkblot oil stains.
You're again back to the original 6 feet
of iron-core existence. By chance, do you
still have, perhaps in the castoffs scraps
bin, that other piece of 2" x 4" just about
2 feet long? That 2 feet? That's how long
white-coated-pencil-pushing experts
expect this ball of dirt & metal & ocean

has left until this all goes kaput, until
our glowing orb of hydrogen & helium
fries what remains: roughly 1.5 billion
years. Do the math. 2 feet in the 1 hand.
Just shy of 6 feet in the other. Sandpaper
& saws. Bivalves. Instructional owl orbs
& deforestation & carbon footprints.
Garbage dumps as monuments to our
collectively discarded culture. And yet
there you are, trying to make sure the part
in your hair is just perfectly perfect,
maximum hold aerosol, trying too hard
to be the sharpest person in the room,
instead of just being a decent person
in the world. Worrying about everything
too far beyond your control, trying
so damn hard to be significant. Please
know this, & this is perhaps just 1 reason
for their modest 500-million-year endurance:
1 clam never turns & asks of another clam,
Does this outfit really look okay on me?
before walking to the car in the garage
for his long commute, loafer sole slipping
on the few particles of unswept sawdust
inexplicably still falling. Zipping through
shafts of light like tiny comets, streaking
& dusty flames hurtling toward impact,
bursting with meaning at the speed of light.

+ Inspired by *The Secret Life of Clams* by Anthony Fredericks (2014), *The Accidental Universe* by Alan Lightman (2014), *Einstein's Dice and Schrodinger's Cat* by Paul Halpern (2015), & "*Vegetable Wisdom*" by Mark Halliday (1992).

The Fading Garden

Ali Ashhar

Daffodils and tulips in the garden
bloom with the essence of pride
yielded with sprinkles of sacrifice and blood
stemmed from the courage
of withstanding the storms and harsh weathers
cherished and nurtured
by the breeze of fraternity around.

One day, some people walk in
with a dream of dominating
the dominion
one of them makes his way
toward the flowers of the garden
and ask about the identity of blood
from which they were yielded
while others label them by different names
one of them yells the yellow daffodils bloom the most
while others chant the name of red tulips.

Serenity of the garden is in a mess
as the caretakers get in a brawl
some associate themselves with daffodils
while others with tulips
soon, the flowers begin to fade
mellifluous melodies of birds in the garden
turns into dissenting dissonance
as they watch their
caretakers getting entrapped in chaos.

Guide to North American Birds

Claire Gunner

*The haters will say the bird you see
above is simply a spoonbill, but
they're just trying to bring you down, man.
— Ariel Francisco, "Baton Bleu"*

My parents have a ritual.
The ritual looks like it belongs to my father,
because he was the first birdwatcher.
The ritual looks like a common loon on the water,
it looks like an eider, a diving cormorant.
It looks like my mother watching birds—
she points and asks, is that a tern? An albatross?
My father replies, that's a seagull.
They go on like this all weekend, counting seagulls.
The indifferent birds pass by overhead
almost too quickly to notice, to name.

January

Claire Gunner

The brown anole and I are basking together in the morning sun.
I do, and I do not, see the fan at his throat that opens and
closes, alternating as he breathes.

A monarch on a palm frond, the wings not just orange, veined
with black, bordered with white spots.

The stand of thick, flat, rounded, waxy leaves branching wildly
at the fence is not
an autograph tree, it is several small leaf clusias, or a pitch apple.

This is Florida January, which, for all its promise, seems to hold
no new beginnings.

I could still scratch my name across its many surfaces,
a small leaf oath, another wound, like the one this subdivision
made.

Coincidence

Claire Gunner

We both wrote poems about exes' offerings of fruit.
Yours were bruised apples, mine blackberries,
the wrong season for both.
We ate of that bitter fruit, we inverse Eves,
and were depleted, without knowing.
Emerging years later, we are experienced but creaky dancers,
awaiting instruction in the dance studio,
lit like the interior of a subway car,
with a sense of déjà vu—
the tension, the tendon, the mirror, the end.

Bombed Out

Samantha Carr

Drive past the police station whose cells hold all types on a Saturday night. At the roundabout there's a bombed-out church. When we were kids, mum would drive past and there'd just be this remnant from the past there in the middle of the road. Why anyone decided to put a church there, we wondered between squabbles. The scars from the sky left echoes on the city – stray explosives sit under the ruins of superstores, waiting to be recognised. Its real name is Charles Church, relevant again as the new King takes his throne.

Sawdust

Jeff Burt

Near Wolf River I found a burlap bag of sawdust,
splinters and shavings in an envelope of clay
dated from the last quarter of the 19th century
after a flood near an old mill site
threw off trimmed logs and rafts of timber downstream.
Grayed, wet, but without decay,
the sawdust did not twinkle or rise
in the wafts of a wind, but clumped
and fell swiftly to the ground,
as if more millet than pixie, the bag
still twined but more like lace
that fell apart in my fingers
as thin ice will do on the top
of a pond in late October.

I searched the sawdust, found nothing
but a damaged cork used to top a whiskey bottle
sold to a sawyer at a company store
that made more money on liquor than food
and kept the sawyers indebted into servitude.
The bag had been stuffed and stolen
to earn a nickel at a town,
might have hung from a tether
below rocks by the river to keep out of sight
of the foremen, a recompense by theft
for the high tax of the whiskey,
and forgotten in the flood.
I spread the sawdust on the ground
to let it decompose, but kept the cork.

They Called It Mother's Bend

Jeff Burt

Downhill from the lime quarry, the San Lorenzo River turns a
right angle,
maidenhair fern on the crest like ringlets from another century,

boulders carved with cracks and wrinkles describing cheeks
wizened with age, bay laurel root-loosened from a flood

hung over the shoulders of a dress like embroidery.

It was a nineteenth-century sawyer's den for gambling and whiskey,

woolen fantasies, hangovers, lunchbreaks, knife-jousts,
all the cuss words poured out like water from a bucket.

The sawyers worked in the dark forest near the coast of California
and went a desperate summer without seeing more than saws, logs,

and whiskey. Above a roaring aqueduct of winter's water,
felled redwoods torqued down the suspension at a pace both quick

and measured to prevent a log from overriding the rails,
rising red timbers anchored in rock and floodwater sand

despite the biblical prophecies all the men whispered.

The bend was home, refuge. The river was Mother.

Once, when a log had leaped the rail and fallen and grabbed a man
with it, the boulders had bounced the log but cradled the man

in the pile of moss and decaying debris that had grown
into the crevice in the center, a baby's cradle the sawyers said,

the one thing of kindness offered in the dark plunge at the bottom
of the river where they worked at the end of the world.

In 1920

Mona Mehas

The census over one hundred million
Our nation adopted the one-drop rule
Eighteenth Amendment brought prohibition
The League of Women's Voters was founded
Negro baseball played in Indiana
In 1920, my mother was born.

A law against sending kids parcel post
Two national forests were established
Civil Liberties Union established
Three black men were lynched in Minnesota
In 1920, my mother was born
When coal was low in late January.

Tornadoes, earthquakes, ravaged our land
First female president of the US
Edith Wilson protected her husband
In 1920, my mother was born
Fifth of seven, her siblings all hungry
She grew up fast, the only way she could.

Wilson awarded the Nobel Peace Prize
Though against suffrage and integration
In 1920, my mother was born
Her eldest and youngest siblings passed on
Her father rode the rails, was rarely home
Mom loved to sing to her brother's guitar.

Whites killed blacks trying to vote in Ocee
In 1920, my mother was born
She loved to play baseball and dance with friends
She picked greens with her mom, cleaned and cooked them
Mom never dreamed of better things in life
Then she met him, the man she later wed.

In 1920, my mother was born
To a poor white family in the South
She met a man of a different religion
Her dad sent her to a girl's reform school
On weekends, Mom met the man in secret
Her dad shot himself in '37.

The young couple married and had three girls
But heartache and violence filled their household
Grandpa suspected my dad's potential
Had he been around, he may have stopped it
In 1998, my mother died
Heart attack, her life had been one long war.

War Games - 1950

Sarah Das Gupta

Beneath the trees in a pool of green light
Gas-masked, they re-enact forgotten nightmares
long ago.

Children, voices muffled, sinister, search
the enemy in a phoney war.

Sitting on grass

beaded with stitchwort and blue bells

Masks abandoned,

Half-eaten sandwiches, lemonade bottles, torn wrappers
lie littering

the wounded grass.

A green breeze gently wafts along the trenches

Beyond is mud

Deep, bottomless

Reaching beyond earth's bowels,

World's end.

Drowned, the 'Glorious Dead'- skeletons, corpses, single
rat-ravaged arm.

Gas masks snatched from hooks on clammy trench walls.

In lines, the Blind,

clutching, groping, gasping,

stumble, unmasked, uninvited, into Art and History.

In bright, summer sunlight,

they sit on the manicured lawn.

Old ration books clutched in small, chubby hands.

Girls in shining rainbow dresses,

anointed, sun-washed, blessed, unreal –

On a garden table, brown eggs nestle in baskets,
Plates of sugar slowly melt, brash bottles of orange juice,
glowering cod liver oil.

The blonde shopkeeper eyes her wares
But now old ration books sanctify a magical
Midsummer feast.

Deep in jungles, impenetrable, steaming
skeletal men, transparent skin thinly stretched over bones and
guts,

lay the lines of the Railway of Death.

Pale ghosts of dead comrades emerge in the twilight
always pleading, pleading ...

Set breakfast – Auschwitz-Birkenau - coffee grain in boiling water
Jews, Soviets, Poles, gypsies, mask-like faces,
squatting in yellow morning fog.

Stone breaking, body burning – grinding labour, mid-day heat.

Half litre sickening soup:

Potatoes, Swede, Rye Flour, Avo Extract.

Loading lorries, welding weapons, searching corpses,

Starvation sickness: cannibalised bodies feasting on their fat
and muscle mass.

ears ringing, naked

with rat chewed feet, they waddle forward.

Doors shut.

Frantic screams,

frenzied fighting.

Gas! Gas! sinuous, curious, licking into every corner.

Silence –

Final. Irredeemable.

Excited shrieks from deep underground,
Young voices, echo, magnified by empty space
long abandoned.
Steps, now bramble covered, once led down.
In the dark, damp room below
Faded graffiti - hearts, kisses - celebrate dead, forgotten lovers
doomed to be erased by next winter's storms.
A place of memory, loss, shelter, now re- baptised
through children's laughter.

In East London streets, a siren, wailing warning
A March evening, dinners half-eaten, baths unrun,
Hundreds scurrying – for labyrinthine warrens –
Bank, Whitechapel, Stepney, Mile End
BETHNEL GREEN –
Steep steps leading perilously down, down
Below, another world, subterranean, mythic.
Sudden hell! Treacherous, deadly,
 One false step
A mother, baby drowning in a well of deepest darkness.
Following - mums, aunties, nans, grans, kids, dads, uncles,
 cousins, friends, lovers, strangers
Falling, all surfing the black wave of Death.

In our field, rising and falling restlessly,
a modern Prometheus struggling to be free
half-hidden in the mist.
Horses calmly graze, oblivious to the chained monster.
With sticks we probe this giant balloon
grey lump of blubber, stranded whale in a sea of grass.
Like a trapped Phoenix
captive killer.
Laughing at the frustrated monster's vastness
we run through dawn-wet grass.

Blitzkrieg, the Blitz, tottering ruins, lost cathedrals,
The purring drone of Messerschmitts,
in the shocking beauty of a blood red sky.
In the East End flames flare
tenements glow, like orange castles in the hot air.
Barrage balloons quickly let slip into darkness and battle-filled skies.
The Luftwaffe flying high, like ravens starting the long trip home.
But huge grey monsters reaching skyward,
Obstruct, catch, prevent, destroy.

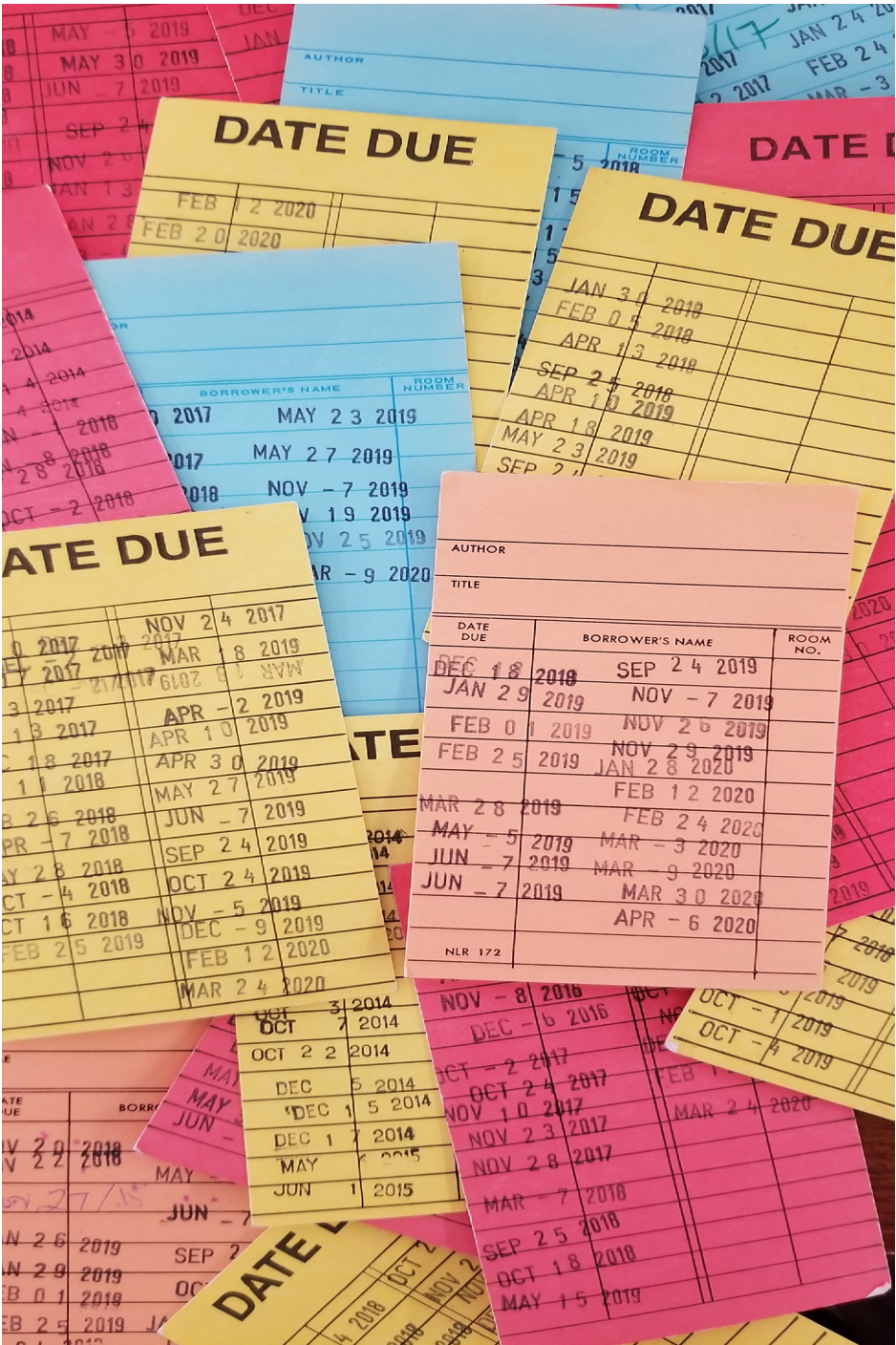
November 11

Mihan Han

Remembrance Day
boxes bursting with poppies
as we forget



Poppy by Annie Robertson
Watercolour, 4" x 7"



Overdue by Deryck N. Robertson

She's a living history book

Nolcha Fox

that you can't open,
but you can read her life
inside and out:

The weight of every passing year
bends her spine to breaking,
Dancing shoes grow dust under the bed.

Arthritis swells and mangles
the hands that once baked pastries,
the hands that tended now-abandoned roses.

Her glasses can't slide down her nose
that's puffed and stuffed and crooked
from falling from a tree when she was young.

She's a living history book
that hides forgotten in the library,
a book no one will miss when she is gone.

That Time Isthmus Zapotec Hastily Withdrew His Amphitheatric E's

Colin James

I expect the children of Hydra's teeth
will be popping over after lunch.
We can stroll up to the Temple of Poseidon.
The air is cooler there, what with
plenty of light sea breezes and the
fanatic fans of Harryhausen's harpies,
our love should simmer some.



Abandoned Slate Mine Railway (c1690-1960)

by Scott Grigsby-Lehmann

The Old Man of Conistone Fell Trail, Lake District, England.

It's All Clutter to Those Left Behind

David Mihalyov

Across the street, down near the bay, someone must have died.
Two men – son and grandson, perhaps – stand facing a garage.

Boxes cram nearly every inch of space. A life lived
and then what was saved left for survivors to sort,

a dumpster in the driveway reaping the remains.
Who needs dated newspapers celebrating an engagement,

faded photos framing faces no one living knows?
What to do with quilts and vases, recipe books

and Christmas decorations. Good Lord, the decorations.
They said she was losing her mind toward the end,

but maybe it wasn't lost, maybe she was afraid
to extricate one of a life's worth of memories

lest a landslide occur, tumbling in no particular order.
There's no cataloging a mind once the body breathes its last.

The men see disarray, they've lost the context,
and decide it's easier to expunge everything

than spend valuable weekends picking through.
The younger may save a keepsake, a teacup

he gave her for a long-ago birthday, clutter
his future ex-wife will unwittingly donate to Goodwill.

Obsolete

David Mihalyov

Maybe not an ice box,
perhaps more a set of rabbit ears.
Nearing sixty and with two grown kids,
he worries what comes next.

Not as a lamplighter or milkman,
but is there a next act in which he can,
if not star, at least have a bit role?
People look through him

as though he's ephemeral,
is past his expiration date.
A typewriter, a rotary phone.
How to feel when your functionality

is no longer needed. Not quite yet
a cassette or eight-track, he passes
on CD-ROMs and considers thumb-drives,
hoping for a few more years in the game.

Unable to fall asleep
he imagines his future.
Too common for a museum
but something to laugh at,

to comment on, to say, I can't
believe they found that useful.
He reads the paper, watches the news,
so he knows what to think.

It's easier that way, then he can get angry
the same as his neighbors.
they can be righteous together.
He tries to remember a time when people

had faith in the government and can't.
He wonders if he should care,
and then picks up the Yellow Pages
to find a cobbler.

Her Job is Not to be His Memory

David Mihalyov

Bent over the crossword, he feels the warmth
from her hand on his neck and leans into it.
He asks for the name of a French Impressionist
that starts with P. Once, he could name
the opening bands for all the concerts he had seen.

He joins his daughters on the couch and scans
photo albums. Certain pictures elicit
events, but the printed versions
don't match the cavities in his mind.

He runs his fingers down the side of her face,
leans in to smell the crook of her neck, hoping
to tuck away a reminder of what he loves.

What We Put in a Jar with No Bottom

David Mihalyov

A strand of hair plucked from the bathroom sink
Stones collected on a vacation beach
A dollop of honey
The yips your dog makes when dreaming
A quarter found in the parking lot near the pizza shop
The missing blue dress sock
A loose-leaf tea bag, used just once
The shell of a roasted peanut
Dirt excavated while planting flowers
A business card someone placed under your car's wiper blade
Your mother's Christmas cookie recipes
The unbroken skin from a perfectly peeled apple
Your daughter's first lost tooth
The bad moods that hover just below the surface
An acorn found under a Northern Red Oak
The first piece of chocolate broken from a bar
A feather from a blue jay
The cork from a celebratory bottle of wine
Rainwater collected from the base of a planter
The ticket stub from last week's baseball game
A photo deleted from your phone
The last thing you said to me

Lost and Found

Betty Naegele Gundred

The dirt road
rutted and rough
dead ends
at Sinking Creek . . .
just beyond, a highway now,
in the distance, a Walmart.

Land record in hand
I have found Grandpa's farm
or where it used to be –

*the white clapboard house,
its sprawling porch,
the coveted swing,
the dusty barn, the root cellar . . .
the scents of cedar rising
from Grandma's stove,
while we clinked piano keys
with all our "Heart and Soul"–*

my childhood summers.

Now dense growth
strangles the past,
a jungle only a machete can tame.
I can see no trace
find no relics, only a pitted driveway remains . . .

yet

a bobwhite whistles
from the old hay field . . .
in the thicket
a wood thrush trills,

and I am grateful

for this new wild land.

Ambushed

Betty Naegele Gundred

Freeway landscapes blur
as I listen to old tunes on the radio,
Gordon Lightfoot, James Taylor, America . . .
My eyes focus on the road ahead,
but I have no control
over my mind's meanderings.

Memories snag, get caught on the words . . .
taking me back,
a gulp, a swell of tears, a yearning
for a time gone by.
The melody continues, and I linger
with the longing, the losing, the lost . . .
the song ends, the moment over.
I take a deep breath.
Drive on.

Echoes

Betty Naegele Gundred

The moaning in the bedroom –
is it my mother's ghost?
come back to remind me
that her pain was real,
unrelenting,
a daily trial.

I scoffed at its severity.
Could it really be that bad? I thought,
Mom tended to exaggerate.

But I was young, preoccupied
with family and career.
I listened to her complaints
with one ear,
dismissed them with the other,
how could I know . . .
until now, that is.
Like a sudden strangle,
I too am gripped
with crippling pain,
crushing aches,
that wake me from a fitful sleep.

The moaning in the bedroom . . .
no ghost.

Decades too late,
I understand my mother's pain –

now that it is my own.

Late Aughts Body Loss

Thomas Mixon

The swings are nothing special. At least no more than monkey bars, which fail to swift my palms across the rungs. My son's sliding alone, a new thing I won't interfere with, the first time in five years he's found his way up the stairs, around the curve, wanting me close by, but mostly gone. I sit and lift my feet and pump like I was taught, the way I tried to teach my son. I'm throwing up less than a minute later. I lost my body somewhere and sometime in the late aughts. I swam and hiked, but mostly looked for jobs, applying to companies that never called me, drinking coffee. My body left while I bookmarked age-old hacks to improve my résumé. I lie down on the woodchips and wonder where my body is, the marriage and the birth and my net worth I've been party to without the balance that came so easily, before. I've still had to cut my nails, but I don't know these fingers, if that is what they really are. I'm pretty sure my cell phone rang exactly when '09 gave way to twenty ten. It wasn't smart, neither was I, and my body, on the other line, never got the chance to tell me where it went, to say goodbye.

The Play

Aysha Mahmood

Act 1: High School

I'm just getting into character.

The costume is tight, but I'm optimistic.

The dialogue is

filled with compliments to undeserving boys

and self-deprecating talk to beautiful girls,

but I like being paid in praise.

Act 2: College

The costume is trendier, but I no longer have paint on my face.

The dialogue is

rich, deep, vulnerable, and free,

but there's too many convoluted conflicts,

too many surprise plot lines

that I didn't rehearse for.

I constantly miss my mark.

Only my family applauds.

Act 3: Adulthood

I no longer have a costume,

but the dialogue is

rigid, dark, and terse.

I teeter off script,

but I'm thrown dirty looks by a cast who is

less optimistic, less altruistic,

and encourages me to wear a mask

if I want to be paid.

The Final Act:

The audience stands at the end
praising my performance.
I don't take the mask off.
I leave the stage,
hearing them whisper
I was better than I actually was.

Crazy

Aysha Mahmood

When I was in high school, my elderly philosophy teacher told us that whilst he worked his first job, he would routinely frolic into the woods of his backyard naked.

The class laughed. My classmate Jamie called him
crazy.

A week later he was fired because Jamie's mom complained.

It wasn't until I started working my first real adult job that I understood. I, too, wanted to leap out of my home office window into the woods. I wanted the grass to tickle my thigh, I wanted to swim in the muddy grime, I wanted leaves to stain my skin; I wanted to climb up a hill, lay my ear against its bosom and feel the heartbeat of the earth.

I wanted to be
crazy.

The only difference between me and my professor is that I never had the guts to.

History with a Smile

Paul Hostovsky

Rachael Ray has a beautiful smile,
I think to myself in the checkout line.
People have been smiling since Cro-Magnon,
I think to myself a little farther on
in the checkout line. It's hard to imagine
the bad teeth of the poor and the hungry and the miserable
throughout history with Rachael Ray smiling at you in the
checkout line.

But I think I would have liked history a lot more
if Mr. Fortunato, on the first day in the 8th grade,
had smiled a little like Rachael Ray,
simply panned the room with a shiny
timeless smile and said, "You know, children,
people have been smiling since Cro-Magnon."
I think that would have made a big impression on me.
I think the first assignment should have been
to smile, to look around the classroom at each other
smiling, and choose one smile
like a project or a special topic—divide up into pairs
and try to imagine that smile occurring in a different century,
a hundred or a thousand or a hundred thousand
years ago, in a cave in France, say, or in Pompeii
or Jerusalem or Egypt or Virginia. A line of sight, like a ray
beaming out from another time and place,
one person's smile shedding light
on everything. I think that would have gone a long way
toward our enlightenment. And maybe Bethany
Beauregard in the desk next to mine
with her aristocratic nose and prominent gums

and pointy eye-teeth flaring out next to her impacted premolars would have made the French Revolution come alive for me in a way it never did, because Mr. Fortunato never smiled, and the first assignment wasn't any more or less than the first three chapters in a used world history book with only the occasional gray engraving of someone or other in a long line of dead people not smiling.

Chamber Pot

Paul Hostovsky

When first they learned about Paul Revere in their 6th grade classroom--his famous ride, the advancing British troops, the Longfellow poem ("One, if by land, two, if by sea") they were unimpressed. And now on the field trip to Boston's North End, crowded together inside the tiny 300-year-old Paul Revere House, the docent pointing out the original hearth, wainscot, beams and ceiling joists, they are still unimpressed. Then out of nowhere, a chamber pot changes everything: One of the children notices it under the four-poster, raises his hand and asks what it is. "A chamber pot," says the docent. "For pooping and peeing." Titters, gasps, giggles and groans go up, and up go the hands, the follow-up questions buzzing around the master bedroom of Paul and Sarah Revere, the children more interested now than they ever were for any part of the patriot's story, or the country's. "Didn't they have bathrooms?" "What about

toilet paper?” “What about privacy?” “What about the smell?” “Where did they empty it?” The class is all ears now, and the docent is hitting her stride because this is interesting stuff, this is important historical stuff: “Bathrooms were invented much later,” she says, “in the 19th century. Here it was either the chamber pot or a long cold walk to the outhouse in the middle of the night. They emptied them in the street--everyone did. They didn’t know about hygiene. They didn’t yet know about germ theory. The smell was hideous. People got sick. They died young. Paul Revere had sixteen children, but only nine survived.” And now the class is learning. They’re rapt. Engaged. Impressed! And all because poops and pees are basic. The stuff of life, of history. The stuff of poetry.

Ötzi the Iceman

Beatriz Seelaender

Ötzi the iceman was lactose intolerant
he had brown hair and eyes and was only
a little bit taller than me
He wore waterproof shoes and
carried a natural antibiotic in his pockets
a shattered meniscus, arthritis, and his teeth were rotten
At 40 years of age, he's older than Egypt and younger than Lucy
a natural mummy buried in ice, who was uncovered
by long-winded sands from the Sahara,
plus German hikers who didn't realize they had crossed the border
Autopsy results say it was murder, nobody contaminated the crime
scene
until the 1990s, when presumably the culprit had already expired,
having assured that Ötzi survived forever
like that strange package in your freezer
Guaranteeing that his victim would be famous and remembered
simply for being himself without decomposing
Oh, how easy does Ötzi the iceman have it! He needs not write
poetry or
make a discovery or govern a province – he's a celebrity of
pre-historic proportions
so tall and so crafty and such a survivor even in death
and a team of scientists to make sure his story never expires

Elegy for Walt Whitman's Brain

Beatriz Seelaender

Walt Whitman donated his brain to science / so that they might understand / the mystery that stands / what makes humanity tick / so that they may possess the origin of genius / and isolate the soul in a jar / perhaps in those trappings it might finally be contained

Whitman's brain / on a silver plate / dropped on the floor of the lab by some undergrad / cracked and scrambled as eggs / collapsing outward / splattered mass departing / a labyrinth scraped and swept / deposited in the trash / the puzzle is a map of his synapses / atlas of his thoughts / the map is a puzzle, irreversible / scattered / bequeathed to dirt / returned to dust / a brain in vain / in one splash

He wonders where they got this token / Did he negligently drop it? / Or was it on purpose that the brain leapt from its jar? / Slippery it speeds from the hands / to loaf on the ground / ever-expanding in flesh / happily fetching mortality / a deadly and happy secret spilt / but we were too weak to learn

Yet it is clear what he says / that we must search for him somewhere else / the instances are plenty / it's in vain that / we read poetry in vain

Salt Spring

Upper Canada, 1810

Adrienne Stevenson

I trudge along the wilderness creek
that leads to a location long secret
where salty water bubbles from the ground
riches await the one who draws it forth

the pump is rusty, so I find some grease
in my knapsack beside my food and tools
its action should be quiet, not disturb
the neighbours nor the wildlife – this I've learned

too painfully when bears in search of food
came crashing through the branches at my feet
knocked down my simple shelter in their haste
but finding nothing left me to my repairs

I pump the water into the boiling pans
stoke the fire with charcoal and hard wood
for many hours I must toil and watch
lest bandits come and steal white gold from me

I harvest salt to ease my neighbours' purses
other sources too dear to fit their means
I profit, yes, but so do all of them
salt meat for winter on our dinner plates

Letters from the front

Adrienne Stevenson

He left one day in March, when the wind
blew his words past her ears
so she missed his last goodbye
as the train rumbled from the station
steam belching from the stack
coal dust scattered on her coat.

The first letter came from the camp
where they were put up in tents
and woken by blaring trumpets
long before the first birds peeped
to stab straw targets into submission.
It snowed well into April.

The food on the boat sounded worse
than boarding-house fare, the hammocks
swung so close the men could touch
outstretched hands if they had wanted
but most retched in the tin can's hold
from the North Atlantic pitch and roll.

Months crawled past, then years
news of friends, combat comrades
grateful for new socks and scarves.
She avoided mention of home-front shortages
loneliness that she read in his words
tearing at her already broken heart.

The last letter came from the captain
standard phrases culled from a manual
“Fought gallantly”, “Killed instantly”.
She read between the lines
that he drowned in trench mud
years of wait and worry at an end.

Beached

after Indian War Canoe, by Emily Carr, 1912

Adrienne Stevenson

Here I lie, painted carvings still bright,
my proud frame destined to end its days
in the shade of my tree’s grandchild.

It will never attain that height or girth
never feel the bite of stone or metal
that fells it, to be hollowed and shaped
by respectful hands, nor crest chilly waves
transporting warriors on their watery path.

Yet, before I rot, before my fibres return
to the soil of their origin, the artist
will set down the memory of what I was
and I will not be forgotten.

recession

Bryan Vale

two thousand nine
and my gas tank
is nearly dry.

the front tire
consumes the
dashed lines
of the interstate.

i'm running
from the place
where i can't
find work,

where i'm
slowly failing.

running to you.

redding

Bryan Vale

glowing redding
like a coal,
cousin of shasta,
eye five spies you
behind your motel signs.

though i know
there's more to you,

your jefferson soul
finds no rest
in the kingdom of the left,
the kingdom of the west.

but i hope for redding
peace, a soul change,
a northern cal calling
and a golden beginning.

no schism for you redding —
i have found rest in you,
motel dreams in you,
coming down the
shasta mountains
on a midnight trip.

ukiah

Bryan Vale

101ing long and lean,
we scoot through concrete
paths and '50s diners
in ukiah.

russian river, you're not
clear, but you curl
like an eel
in ukiah.

mendocino sprawl
in all directions,
the county
takes its seat here,
in ukiah.

no trespassing signs
on the fence wire
just off the main drag
in ukiah.

exposed to drought
and sun, delicate
gorgeous machine
of dope and endeavor
under a norcal sky —
ukiah.

gold rush stagecoach
restaurant blues
resound
in ukiah.

hardcore bands
strike chords
in garages
in ukiah.

in fact —
phoenix theater trips
and a fire inside
burning silver and cold
out of ukiah.

(although —
ripped away from pomo,
years and cries of
dispossessed echo
in ukiah.)

(spanish grants
anglicized to new
sounds and hands
in ukiah.)

(but remaining
sixteen thousand
small town strong —
yet have inhabited
ukiah.)

101 heat from south
to north with no
relief as we scurry
across ukiah —

returning years later
north to south
to find only again
ukiah.

By Way of the Bay of Fundy, Washed Ashore

Jennifer Clark

Everyone along Digby Neck got something that summer:
blankets, flour, ham, barrels of rum, tables and chairs.
Men and boys covered whiskey bottles in seaweed.
Later, they'd return to the cove and sink their hands
into green nests and swallow the ocean's gift of fire.

Refugees of the American Rebellion, we had no blazing
cannons or pirates to blame. Our Connecticut homes
had gone up in flames and we fled to Long Island, then sailed
to Nova Scotia, where our reef of memories ran aground;
some of us drowned in grief, most survived.

For years people talked about the time the piano
quivered towards shore. No one could save it.
As waves hammered the strings in the key of sea,
its body dashed across the rocks, spilling unfinished
song into the water. We were wrecks that season.

Then Winter arrived; its long white fingers pressed
upon rocks and cliffs, blue breath frosted with stars
dampened our bones. We refrained from speaking
of the country and all we left behind. There were no
grace notes. Not even the whiskey could warm us.

The Truths Of History

Anthony Wade

History does not live alone
in the pages of history books,
among the musings prompted by
the philosophies of historians,
but lies in the records of life,
in the minutes of meetings,
in wills and transfers and court records,
in bills of sale and charter parties,
in the registers of births and deaths,
the prices of foods and of housing,
in the memories and comings and goings
of people who live in a time and a place
that is not yet history.

These facts hold truths that
are clearer with distance,
viewed from another time
when the passions of then have cooled
and the then and the now can be seen
not as the same country
but as different places,
peopled with other inhabitants
busy on the wheel of daily concerns,
but when the politics of today
are employed to gloss the past
the truth of then can be obscured
by the smoke of the passions of now.

“I Support Putin in Everything” *

Mike Wilson

I see future’s ghost shooting unarmed civilians
reflected in department store windows in Moscow
if I dare to look

I hear the whisper of mortar fire
in the rise of cream to the top of Pravda, Tsars
in Gucci shoes, in the rustle of stolen rubles being
laundered, but cover my ears

Tanks rumble through
subways in St. Petersburg’s dreams but I numb the
tremor

and count a quarter million Chechens killed
in a Russian state the size of New Hampshire

know
it could’ve been me, the only protection for us is
never be them, remember

the Bear is always there

**quote from interview of a Russian woman who refused to view photos of
destruction in Ukraine, reported by Radio Free Europe 3/12/22*

Two Hundred and Sixty-Eight

Steve Denehan

I had intended to start this poem
with a list
a list of all recorded wars
from the last one hundred years
there were too many
far, far too many

conflict from places I had never heard
the deaths of thousands
hundreds of thousands
of people that I never knew existed
until now

I narrowed my window to fifty years
still too many
thirty years
still too many

it led me to this statistic
of the three thousand
four hundred years
of recorded history
we have been at war
for three thousand
one hundred and thirty-two years

though I suspect
that in the two hundred and sixty-eight years
of peace
there was not much peace at all

we separate the conflict, the death
by name, by cause, by length
into palatable pieces, but
it is a self-deception
allowing us to pretend
that there are wars, plural
when really there is only war, singular

the perpetual war
of human beings
killing human beings
for the want of it, the need of it, the love of it

a never-ending ebbing flowing war
of human beings
killing human beings, only
because they can

American History

Wilda Morris

When she told me John Wilkes Booth
wrote “The Star Spangled Banner,”
I learned how little a high school senior
might know of U.S. history.
When I said, No! she said, Oh, yeah,
he killed JFK, didn’t he?

What is it they say happens to those
who don’t remember the past?



Antique cars and old theater are still in use in Savannah, GA

by Jill Kalter

Digital Image, 2014 x 1511 pixels

Where I'm from

Janis La Couvée

I'm a child of the west coast
and the 60s

where I'm from
we understand protest,
non-conformity,
and sixty mile an hour gales

where I'm from
pizza wasn't invented
and haute cuisine
meant Chinese food or chips with gravy
at Alfie's up the street

where I'm from
Saturday morning shopping
was a 3 hour trip
scaling fog-swathed mountains
curve by curve—drop suddenly
to sulphur-filled valley below

where I'm from
we wear Stanfield grey,
rubber boots
and Dickies

and
Friday night entertainment is
“throw another log on the fire” at Big Beach

crackle, hiss, sigh
lean in for warm caress
turn and toast again

lapping water, longing
pass the bottle
hard snort
head rush

My Grandmother Works Her Stories

Maud Lavin

My grandmother could tell a good story. She was born in the 1890s in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago, and lived in the same 4-block square area her entire 94 years. Most of her adult life she lived with my grandfather and their children in a railroad-style apartment on the first floor of a tall-windowed Hyde Park apartment building. For some years, Al Capone's brother lived next door.

One day, the FBI knocked. They were going door-to-door in the building to find out if anyone had witnessed anything suspicious in the goings on next door at the Capone house. She couldn't recall right away, she told the FBI, but go ahead and knock on the other doors and come back to her when they were finished. She'd think about it in the meantime. They did as she suggested and came back to her at the end. She didn't have anything, she told them, but could they give her a ride downtown if they were headed that way. They did.

That story I'm pretty sure is true, she was persuasive and good at surviving, and people tended to do what she told them to. She, Blanch, was the oldest of four sisters, the others were Myrtle, Selma, and Lillian. To me, they sounded like silent-film names--aspirational. They were Hungarian Jews, their parents the immigrants, all four girls born here, in Chicago. Their father co-owned and co-managed a corner grocery store. When their mother, Fanny, died in her 50s, Blanch watched out for the younger girls. She told me they were all quite pretty and had a lot of dates. The Bloom girls, she was proud to be one of them. Listening to her, I thought Hungarian Jews were like some kind of

royalty, somehow a higher status than other Jews. I imagined she had only married my grandfather, a German Jew, because it was a love match. It wasn't til I was older and living on the East Coast that I found out the snob hierarchy within the Jewish community was German Jews on top, then Russian and others, and pretty much no one talked about the Hungarian Jews at all. This came as a surprise.

Her kitchen in that apartment was in the back, with a wooden fire escape outside. It wasn't large but I loved hanging out there, at the kitchen table, when I got to visit from Ohio. She made butter cookies, a sheet of them, cut on the diagonal with chopped nuts on top. Meat dishes with paprika. Her juice glasses were, I later learned, a blue called cobalt, jewel toned, full of light. Even today if I pass a yard sale with glasses that color, I'll stop to buy some. It became my favorite color.

She lived much longer than my grandfather, 24 years longer. I'd visit her from college. At that time, I wanted to hear what her 20s had been like, what she'd done before she got married and had kids. She had stories. She worked downtown for a Mr. Smith, writing advertising jingles. Mr. Smith was a gentile, not Jewish. She told me how he kept a gun in the top drawer of his desk. One time when he was out, she took all the bullets out of the gun. I understood that was for his own protection. Just recently I was recalling that story, and I thought wait a minute. I doubt Grandma Blanch knew anything about guns, or had ever handled a gun, or knew how to take bullets out of a gun. My guess was that she had thought of taking the bullets out, not approving at all of Mr. Smith keeping a loaded gun in his desk, and that over time the story in her mind became that she'd done it. She wasn't senile, but I could see that a story where she did the brave thing, saving that gentile man from himself, would appeal to her.

She also divulged that once she had to drop some papers off at Mr. Smith's house. Mrs. Smith answered the door dressed in her negligee! This, my grandma found to be eyebrow raising, truly shocking. I think maybe it was something like a peignoir outfit, a matching robe and nightgown of chiffon or like material, not a nightie. Certainly, it was a glimpse for her into another world.

My grandma was judgmental, but not a prude. When I got divorced at age 29, she was the only older adult in the family who took it in stride. She told me her sister Lillian in her 20s had left her husband, then dated a number of men, eventually getting back with her husband. My grandma herself had had a long, constant, and loving marriage with my wonderful, funny, kind grandfather. Not a wild life, but she had come of age in the Roaring Twenties, if at an ethnic distance from much of it, and was wise to (some of) the ways of the world.

Another time I visited her when she was very old, she told me the night before she'd had a dream about my grandfather. He looked so handsome and had his World War I uniform on. They were on a train and he had the bunk above her. She told it with a faraway look on her face.

Her stories served her, and me, well.



A PASSING ON OF SHELLS

50 Fifty-word Poems

BY
SIMON LAMB

Poet, performer and storyteller, with a background in teaching, Simon Lamb lives in Ayrshire, Scotland. In 2022 he became Writer-in-residence at the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum.



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Contributor Biographies

Ali Ashhar is a poet, short story writer and columnist. He is the author of poetry collection, *Mirror of Emotions*. His works appear in *Indian Review*, *The Raven Review*, *Bosphorus Review of Books*, among others.

Jeff Burt grew up in Wisconsin, was tempered in Texas and Nebraska, and found a home in California, though landscapes of the Midwest still populate much of his writing. He has work in *Willow Journal*, *Red Wolf Journal*, *Rabid Oak*, and won the 2017 *Cold Mountain Review Poetry Prize*.

Jennifer Clark is the author of a children's book and three full-length poetry collections. Her latest book, *Kissing the World Goodbye (Unsolicited Press)*, ventures into the world of memoir, braiding family tales with recipes. She lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan. You can find her at jenniferclarkzoo.com and @jenniferclark-books on Instagram.

Samantha Carr is based in Plymouth, UK where she completed an MA in Creative Writing in 2019. Her poetry has been published in *Acumen*, *Causley International* and *The Storms Journal*. In her spare time she writes micro fiction on Twitter as @Sam Carr

Steve Denehan lives in Kildare, Ireland with his wife Eimear and daughter Robin. He is the author of two chapbooks and four poetry collections. Winner of the *Anthony Cronin Poetry Award* and twice winner of *Irish Times' New Irish Writing*, his numerous publication credits include *Poetry Ireland Review* and *Westerly*.

Nolcha Fox's poems have been published in *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Alien Buddha Zine*, *Medusa's Kitchen*, and others. Her poetry books are available on Amazon. Nominee for 2023 *Best of The Net*. Editor for *Open Arts Forum*. Accidental interviewer/reviewer. Faker of fake news. Website: <https://bit.ly/3bT9tYu> Twitter: @NolchaF Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/nolcha.fox/>

Scott Grigsby-Lehmann has been coaxing words to play together creatively for decades. His favourite forms of creative expression are photography, playing the piano and guitar, journalling and writing poetry, especially Japanese Haiku. Scott is a passionate outdoors person and with his wife and adventure partner, Mary and their Golden-Doodle Luna continues to explore Wonder-Full and Inspiringly diverse places locally and globally from their home in Fergus, Ontario. His love of astronomy continues to hinder a regular sleeping pattern. (scott.grigsby-lehmann@gmail.com)

Claire Gunner is an attorney at a legal services nonprofit. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband and two cats. Her work is forthcoming in *The Cardiff Review*.

Sarah Das Gupta is an English teacher who has lived and taught in UK, India and Tanzania. She currently lives near Cambridge and has had poetry published in *Literary Reviews*. Her main interests include equestrian sports and the countryside.

Mihan Han is a burned-out frontline healthcare worker retraining to be a high school teacher. He is an unabashed nerd/gamer and an abashed amateur writer/musician with a small handful of publications in print and online. He lives in Toronto, Ontario.

Paul Hostovsky's poems have won *Pushcart Prize*, two *Best of the Net Awards*, the *FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize*, and have been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, and *The Writer's Almanac*. He makes his living in Boston as a sign language interpreter. Website: paulhostovsky.com

Colin James has a couple of chapbooks of poetry published. *Dreams Of The Really Annoying* (*Writing Knights Press*) and *A Thoroughness Not Deprived of Absurdity* (*Piski's Porch Press*) and a book of poems, *Resisting Probability* (*Sagging Meniscus Press*).

After spending 30 years in the hustle-bustle of Los Angeles, **Jill Kalter** escaped to the Applegate Valley in Southern Oregon. She now lives on a small "hobby farm" with her husband/photography collaborator, two border collies, one black cat, and six sheep.

Bob King is an Associate Professor of English at Kent State University at Stark. His work is also forthcoming from *The Daily Drunk*, *Curio Cabinet Magazine*, *Olney Magazine*, *Bullshit Lit*, *Moot Point Magazine*, *The Gorko Gazette*, *Drunk Monkeys*, and *Aóthen Magazine*. He lives on the outskirts of Cleveland, Ohio, with his wife & daughters.

Janis La Couvée (she/her) is a writer and poet with a love of wild green spaces. She resides in Campbell River, Vancouver Island, British Columbia on the territory of the Wei Wai Kum, We Wai Kai and Kwiakah First Nations and is dedicated to conservation efforts and exploring the great outdoors. Her work is upcoming or published by *New York Writers Coalition*, *Pure Slush*, *Feral Poetry* and *Van Isle Poetry Collective*. Find her at: janislacouvee.com Twitter: @lacouvee Facebook: JanisLaCouvéeOnline

A *Pushcart Prize* nominee, **Maud Lavin** has published recently in *JAKE*, *Roi Faineant*, *Red Ogre Review*, and *Heimat Review*, and earlier in the *Nation*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and elsewhere. One of her books, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife*, was named a *New York Times* Notable Book. She lives in Chicago where she works as an editor, writes, and runs the *READINGS* series at *Printers Row Wine* in the South Loop neighborhood.

Aysha Mahmood is a half-Pakistani and half-Dominican writer based in Connecticut. She is currently the editor of a nonprofit organization and her prose has been published or is scheduled to be published in *Leon Literary Review*, *Troublemaker Firestarter*, and *Unstamatic*. When she's not writing, Aysha can be found binge-watching terrible lifetime movies, starting another DIY project, or eating an unhealthy amount of chocolate.

Mona Mehas (she/her) writes about growing up poor, accumulating grief, and climate change. A retired, disabled teacher in Indiana, USA, she spends most days at her laptop with two old cats as chaperones. Previously, Mona used the pseudonym Patience Young. She's published in *Sad Goose Coop*, *Musing Publications*, *Exist Otherwise*, and others. Mona is a Trekkie and watches the *Star Trek* shows and movies in chronological order. Follow on Twitter @Patience77732097 and linktr.ee/monaiv.

David Mihalyov lives near Lake Ontario in Webster, NY, with his wife, two daughters, and beagle. His poems and short fiction have appeared in the *Dunes Review*, *Free State Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, and other journals. His first collection, *A Safe Distance*, was published by *Main Street Rag Press* in 2022.

Thomas Mixon has been nominated for multiple *Pushcart* prizes, and was part of Massachusetts *Poetry's Under 35* series (which he's since aged out of...). He has fiction, poetry, and nonfiction in or forthcoming from *Sundog Lit*, *Radon Journal*, *The Opal*, and elsewhere. You can find him on Twitter @truckescaperamp.

Wilda Morris, Workshop Chair, Poets and Patrons of Chicago and past President, *Illinois State Poetry Society*, has published numerous poems in anthologies, webzines, and print publications. She has won awards for formal and free verse and haiku. Her second poetry book, *Pequod Poems: Gammig with Moby-Dick* was published in 2019. *At Goat Hollow and Other Poems* is due out this spring. Her blog at wildamorris.blogspot.com features a monthly contest for poets.

Betty Naegele Gundred has enjoyed writing since high school when she was editor of her school's literary magazine, though she taught middle school science for twenty years. She received her B.S. from Cornell University and her M.S.

from Michigan State. Her work has appeared in publications such as *Frogpond*, *Last Leaves*, *Orchards Poetry Journal*, and *Open Door Magazine*. Her chapbook, *Aper-ture*, was published by *Kelsay Books* in January 2023. Betty lives with her husband in the Sierra Foothills of Northern California where she enjoys reading, hiking, and photography. Website: bettynaegelegundred.com

Annie Robertson is an emerging artist from Peterborough, Ontario, who works with acrylics and watercolours. Her favourite subjects to paint are landscapes, inspired by her love of the outdoors. She is currently studying Biology and Environmental Science at Trent University. In her spare time she enjoys making music, baking, canoeing, camping, hiking, and sharing her passions with others.

Beatriz Seelaender is a Brazilian writer living in Rome. Her work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Sledgehammer*, *Maudlin House*, and *The Hyacinth Review*. You can follow her [@biaseelaender](https://twitter.com/biaseelaender) on Twitter for updates and bad takes.

Adrienne Stevenson lives in Ottawa, Canada. A retired forensic scientist, she writes poetry and prose. Her poetry has appeared in over forty print and online journals and anthologies in Canada, USA, UK, and Australia. When not writing, Adrienne tends a large garden, reads voraciously, and procrastinates playing several musical instruments.

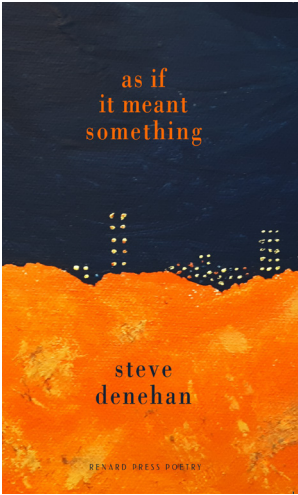
Bryan Vale is a writer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. He writes fiction, poetry, and educational articles about technology. His work has appeared in several journals, including *Loft*, *Trash to Treasure Lit*, *Moving Force Journal*, and *Unstamatic Magazine*. Learn more at bryanvalewriter.com, or follow Bryan on Twitter and Instagram: [@bryanvalewriter](https://twitter.com/bryanvalewriter)

Anthony Wade is an England-trained graduate lawyer with a Masters Degree who worked mainly in The Netherlands before developing a severe medical disability. Since returning to Ireland he has published in poetry journals across Ireland and Britain, India and the US, in print and digital. An active member of the local writers' group, now a *Forward Prize* nominee, he lives by the sea only ten miles from where he spent his childhood summers. Twitter [@anthonywadepoet](https://twitter.com/anthonywadepoet).

Mike Wilson's work has appeared in magazines including *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Mud Season Review*, *The Pettigru Review*, *Still: The Journal*, *The Coachella Review*, and in his book, *Arranging Deck Chairs on the Titanic* (Rabbit House Press, 2020), political poetry for a post-truth world. He resides in Lexington, Kentucky, and can be found at mikewilsonwriter.com



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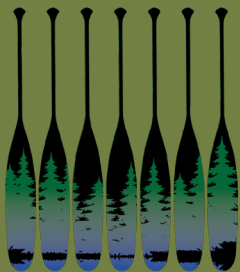
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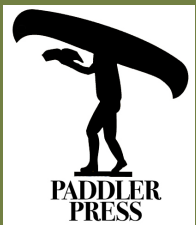
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