

APRIL GIFTS

2009

Created by: Susan F. Glassmeyer
Cincinnati, Ohio, 2009

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As the world returns to green, I turn to the color red to begin this procession of poems for April, 2009. Today's poem is written by a writer trained in the sciences, not in literature or poetry.

Red: The Color that Advances

When you try to make a point, they always say
who are we to judge? as if it weren't
a question but a fact that everything in the world's
of equal value. But the brain is built to compare
and can't see red unless there's a green nearby,
can't know comfort without some painful contrast.
Cezanne intuitively knew how the brain sees red,
knew the eye was his touch extended,
that a green cloth and blue salver made
the apple red, that it takes two colors
to make a parade or procession.
In a bowl of painted fruit,
red is the color that advances.

To make your portrait, some painter gloved
and masked must grind pigments
or buy poisons: the arsenic sulfide that apes
cinnabar and smells like almonds in your hair
or boil quicklime and sulfur
in an alembic glass. He will ask me
if your cheeks are cherry red
like carbon monoxide, and I will answer,
there's no red without risk, thinking of
the coal tar in your carmined lips, feeling it
own the heat of its making, just like love:
in a bowl of painted fruit,
red is the color that advances.

—by *Michael Salcman*



POET NOTES

Michael Salcman, author of *The Color that Advances*, is a physician, brain scientist and essayist on the visual arts. Born in Czechoslovakia in 1946, he came to the United States in 1948. After a combined program in liberal arts and medicine at Boston University, he studied neurophysiology at the National Institutes of Health and neurosurgery at Columbia University. He was chairman of neurosurgery at the University of Maryland and is president of the Contemporary Museum in Baltimore. He was named a Distinguished alumnus of Columbia's Neurological Institute in 1985 and of Boston University's School of Medicine in 2001. In addition to on-line art reviews and artist catalogs, he has published a number of articles on the relationship between the arts and sciences, and on the visual arts and the brain. He is the author of more than 190 scientific papers and six textbooks.

He has been writing poetry for almost forty years and has spent the past six summers at Sarah Lawrence College doing workshops with Thomas Lux, Deborah Digges, Stephen Dobyns and Stuart Dischell. His poems have appeared in such literary journals as *Atlanta Review*, *Raritan*, *Harvard Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Smartish Pace*, *Poet Lore*, *Barrow Street* and the *Wisconsin Review*. He is the author of *Plow Into Winter*, a chapbook, from Pudding House press, Johnstown, Ohio (2003). He lives in Baltimore with his wife and a cat.

POEM NOTES

Cinnabar:

cin·na·bar n

1. a reddish-brown mineral that is the principal source of mercury and is found near areas of volcanic activity
2. a bright red color tinged with orange

Carmine:

car·mine n

1. a deep red color tinged with purple
2. a bright red pigment made from ***cochineal***

Cochineal:

coch·i·neal n

a red dye obtained from the pulverized dried bodies of female cochineal insects (yes, really) used to color food and drinks and to dye fabrics

Salver:

sal·ver n

a tray (usually silver) for serving food or drinks (from Spanish *salva* tray from which the king's taster sampled food to detect poison)

Alembic:

a·lem·bic n

an alembic is an alchemical still and has taken on a metaphorical meaning— anything that refines or transmutes as if by distillation. The word alembic, as most alchemical terminology, comes from the Arabic language

The Laughter Of Women

The laughter of women sets fire
to the Halls of Injustice
and the false evidence burns
to a beautiful white lightness

It rattles the Chambers of Congress
and forces the windows wide open
so the fatuous speeches can fly out

The laughter of women wipes the mist
from the spectacles of the old;
it infects them with a happy flu
and they laugh as if they were young again

Prisoners held in underground cells
imagine that they see daylight
when they remember the laughter of women

It runs across water that divides,
and reconciles two unfriendly shores
like flares that signal the news to each other

What a language it is, the laughter of women,
high-flying and subversive.
Long before law and scripture
we heard the laughter, we understood freedom.

—by *Lisel Mueller*



POET NOTES

Lisel Mueller, born in 1924 in Hamburg, Germany, had her 84th birthday earlier this year. Her father, Fritz Neumann, was a German intellectual whose opposition to Hitler forced the family to flee to America in 1939 when Lisel was only 15 years old. Out of necessity, English became her second language which she mastered beautifully. She studied the accessible language of Carl Sandburg's poems and had a start/stop/start relationship with writing poetry, putting it aside for nearly a decade at one point, and beginning again after her mother died at a relatively young age.

Ms. Mueller won the **Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for "Alive Together,"** a collection representing 35 years of her work. She graduated from the University of Evansville in 1944 and has taught at the University of Chicago, Elmhurst College in Illinois, and Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont. She and her husband, Paul Mueller built a home in Lake Forest, Illinois in the 1960s, where they raised two daughters and lived for many years. Ms. Mueller currently resides in a retirement community in Chicago.

Ms. Mueller's poems, although accessible, are at the same time complex and layered. Often there is an embedded sadness in her poems. Today's piece is an example.

Lisel offers us this insight:

"When I am asked how I began writing poems, I talk about the indifference of nature. It was soon after my mother died, a brilliant June day, everything blooming, I sat on a gray stone bench in a lovingly-planted garden, but the day lilies were as deaf as the ears of drunken sleepers, and the roses curved inward. Nothing was black or broken, and not a leaf fell. And the sun blared endless commercials for summer holidays. I sat on a gray stone bench ringed with the ingenu faces of pink and white impatiens, and placed my grief in the mouth of language, the only thing that would grieve with me."

In preparing today's piece I learned that Ms. Mueller enjoys hearing from readers who have taken an interest in her poems. She often responds in longhand to those who write to her.

She may be contacted at:

Ms. Lisel Mueller

c/o The Poetry Center of Chicago

37 S. Wabash Avenue

Chicago, IL 60603

And The Men

want back in:
all the Dougs and the Michaels, the Darnells, the Erics and Josés,
they're standing by the off-ramp of the interstate
holding up cardboard signs that say WILL WORK FOR RELATIONSHIP.

Their love-mobiles are rusty.
Their Shaggin' Wagons are up on cinderblocks.
They're reading self-help books and practicing abstinence,
taking out Personals ads that say
 "Good listener would like to meet lesbian ladies,
 for purposes of friendship only."

In short, they've changed their minds, the men:
they want another shot at the collaborative enterprise.
Want to do fifty-fifty housework and childcare;
They want commitment renewal weekends and couples therapy.

Because being a man was finally too sad—
In spite of the perks, the lifetime membership benefits.
And it got old,
telling the joke about the hooker and the priest

at the company barbeque, praising the vintage of the beer and
 punching the shoulders of a bud
 in a little overflow of homosocial bonhomie—
Always holding the fear inside
 like a tipsy glass of water—

Now they're ready to talk, really talk about their feelings,
in fact they're ready to make you sick with revelations of
 their vulnerability—
A pool of testosterone is spreading from around their feet,
it's draining out of them like radiator fluid,
like history, like an experiment that failed.

So here they come on their hands and knees, the men:
Here they come. They're really beaten. No tricks this time.
 No fine print.
Please, they're begging you. Look out.

—by *Tony Hoagland*

POET NOTES

Tony Hoagland: Born November, 19, 1953, Fort Bragg, North Carolina

Slim Profile: Grew up in white middle-class American suburbia. Lots of money and monumental emotional upheavals within family. —My father (an Army doctor) intentionally ruined his own marriage and then died of a heart attack a short time later. At seventeen, the young poet lost his mother to cancer.

Education: Attended and dropped out of several colleges, picked apples and cherries in the Northwest, lived in communes, followed The Grateful Dead. Eventually received MFA from University of Arizona.

Currently: Teaches in the graduate writing program of the University of Houston and in the Warren Wilson MFA program.

Publications:

What Narcissism Means To Me (Graywolf Press, 2003)

Donkey Gospel (Graywolf Press, 1998)

Sweet Ruin (University of Wisconsin Press, 1992)

Self-placement on aesthetic graph: equidistant between Sharon Olds & Frank O'Hara

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Tony Hoagland

*I want the creature and the angel to both be in the poem, you know. I don't want to write poetry of angels that doesn't have the beast in it, and I don't want to write a bestial kind of violent, craving, raging poetry that doesn't have some kind of possibility of transcendence in it. ... Another way to say it is **I believe that a poem is a body, and should have a body. There are poets who don't have body—I'm using that word sort of metaphorically—don't have body in their poems.** I don't know. There's room for everybody, but I like a lot of body in the poem..... My poetry has a loyalty to experience. It has a loyalty to poetry which grows out of suffering, and which attempts to name the sources and architecture of suffering as an act of empathy and analysis.*



**Poem Incorporating A Phrase From A Poem By Tom Lux Beginning With
A Random Phrase From Coleridge**

The light is right, greenish and the water's
rising nicely for a disaster.
Somebody says we're all in this together

and we board the lifeboats
in this order: afraid, sad, angry . . . oh we're going to
have to do this over. Some of the children

are not scared, some of the women are as mad as
some of the children and some of the men.
And some of the men are no gentlemen, they're shoving

or rubbing, a few would like
to do what they do with children, with pictures
and so on, some would surprise you. Everyone

has preferences. Even the dying: the bleeding
hearts among us ask that we remember
the worst-off, they were with us a minute ago . . .

their breathing was hard labor
to listen to . . . ah yes, we are the better
for suffering. Some philosopher says if

you're that good at it you want it; everyone has needs
and abilities. So: are the wretched refuse still here?
How about the despised and rejected? The poets, is that

them? getting rid of the wine
so they can use the empties to send messages, so far
one at least as drunk as a lord, rhyming

etcetera at the end of a line.
Are you a political? Am I with the women or writers?
and if not maybe between charybdis

and chasm. It's getting rough, the water's
ready and the light is dark enough
to be difficult. It's perfect

for last words
for going down and for going to make it: which way
to the utopia? After us and the music to row by

who's who? where are the nobodies, where's the crazy
who says we're all in this together?
There are two possibilities.

—by *Helen Chasin*

POET NOTES

Helen Chasin: was born in 1938 and grew up in Brooklyn, New York. She attended Radcliffe College and was quite a well known poet in the sixties (a Yale Younger Poet in 1967) who taught at Emerson College in Boston.

Chasin Themes: A focus on the turmoil in the 1960's, including the Vietnam War, sex, shopping centers, and the counter culture. Often tied societal concerns to a personal perspective, showing how the public and private worlds reflect one another.

Publications:

Coming Close, and Other Poems (Yale University Press, 1968)
Casting Stones (Little, Brown & Co., 1975)

GLOSSARY NOTE:

charybdis

ka·rib'·dis

A whirlpool; a ship-devouring monster in classical mythology, identified with a whirlpool off the coast of Sicily.

MY FINDS:

I re-discovered today's poem while going through my old copies of *Poetry*. Chasin's poem appears on page 90 of the May 1978 issue. Immediately preceding her poem in the same issue is Thomas Lux's debut poem in *Poetry* — "*Poem Beginning With A Random Phrase From Coleridge*." After some digging around I discovered that Chasin was Lux's first poetry instructor when he was her student at Emerson College in the late sixties. If you want to read the poem by Thomas Lux that inspired Chasin's poem, write to me and I will email it to you.

COMMENTS BY POET THOMAS LUX:

I was in (Helen Chasin's) class for two years and it changed my life. She was a tough but generous teacher. I'd been trying to write poetry since high school but never had instruction. Helen's class was a whole new ballgame: there were rules to be learned before one broke them. The rules were the rules of the craft: attention to music, line breaks, distillation, syntax, metrics, clarity, received forms, etc. Her own style was noted for its grace, provocative inventiveness, and direct delivery. She was the teacher who disabused me and everybody else in the class who had all the stereotypical notions about poetry. She made us avoid sentimentality, made us avoid abstractions. She was a perfect teacher for me at the time.

ADDENDUM

Poem Beginning With A Random Phrase From Coleridge

*If there were anything
in the superiority of lord
to gentlemen,*

of gentleman to dog
of dog to ort, of ort
to mote, of mote to . . .

Why always these assignments
of wrong names to wrong profiles?
Why's everything beside, divided?

Why one obsession, two obsession,
three, four, why always going back
and wanting more?

Somebody says: We're all in this together
and we board the lifeboats
in this order: first children, then poets,

then men and women fighting
it out—all our hearts stunned
and pinned like targets
over the hearts of all

men, women, every extant mammal,
moanworthies, all . . .

—by *Thomas Lux*

Love Dogs

One night a man was crying:
"Allah! Allah!"

His lips grew sweet with the praising,
until a cynic said, "So!
I have heard you calling out,
but have you ever gotten any response?"

The man had no answer for that.

He quit praying and fell into a confused sleep,
where he dreamed he saw Khidr, the guide of souls
in a thick, green foliage.

"Why did you stop praising?"
"Because I never heard anything back."

This longing you express
is the return message.

The grief you cry out from
draws you toward union.

Your pure sadness that wants help
is the secret cup.

Listen to the moan of a dog for its master.
That whining is the connection.

Listen to the moan of a dog for its master.
That whining is the connection.

There are love dogs
no one knows the names of.

Give your life
to be one of them.

One night a man was crying.
One night a woman was crying—
"Allah! Allah! Allah!"

—by *Jelaluddin Rumi*, Translated by Coleman Barks



POET NOTES

Jelaluddin Rumi was a thirteenth-century Persian poet and Sufi mystic. Born in what is now Afghanistan, Rumi was the descendent of a long line of Islamic theologians and mystics. One of the most popular poets in the world today, Rumi was unknown in the West except to scholars until the mid-20th century.

When Rumi met his beloved teacher, Shams, he and Shams became inseparable. Rumi's son wrote of the transformation of his father: *"After meeting Shams, my father danced all day and sang all night. He had been a scholar--he became a poet. He had been an ascetic--he became drunk with love."* After the mysterious disappearance of Shams (he was rumored to have been murdered by jealous students) Rumi became distraught by his absence. To symbolize his anguished search for his beloved Shams, Rumi invented a whirling dance—the origins of the "whirling dervish." As the dance may signify, alongside Rumi's sadness came an eventual exhilaration. Rumi's ecstatic poems began in grief. Yet they ended in love, a triumph of the spirit.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

Coleman Barks, born and raised in Chattanooga, Tennessee, went to school at the University of North Carolina and the University of California, Berkeley. He taught poetry and creative writing at the University of Georgia for thirty years. The father of two grown children and grandfather of three, he is now retired in Athens, Georgia. His first publication of the Rumi work, *Open Secret: Versions of Rumi*, was awarded the Pushcart Writer's Choice Award by William Stafford. Barks wrote that he *"had never even heard Rumi's name until 1976, when Robert Bly handed me a copy of A.J. Arberry's translations, saying, 'These poems need to be released from their cages.'"* Barks *"felt drawn immediately to the spaciousness and longing in Rumi's poetry,"* and *"began to explore this new world...."*

TREAT YOURSELF

To hear Coleman Barks read poetry is (in my world) an ecstatic experience. His southern drawl can liquefy the listener, especially when he is reading Rumi. Treat yourself to Coleman Barks reading his translation of today's poem, *Love Dogs*. You can find him on stage with Robert Bly at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF4_KZfIfVI

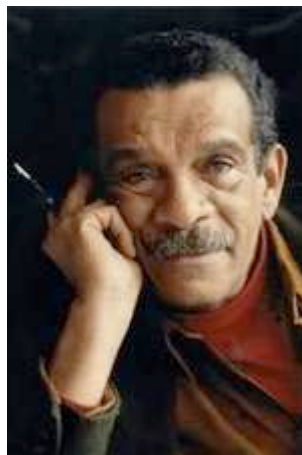
After Barak Obama was elected, a friend sent me a news photo of our new president carrying a copy of Nobel-Prize-winner **Derek Walcott's** *Collected Poems 1948-1984*, perhaps received by Obama (who had written some poetry as a student) as a gift upon his victory. Political leanings aside, it seems a safe bet that many of us are encouraged, if not relieved, that our new president is quite literary. In fact, it's been said that Obama is likely the most literary president since Abraham Lincoln.

Soon after the election, Derek Walcott wrote the poem, *Forty Acres*, in honor of President-elect Obama. The poem was published in *The Times Online Election 2008* supplement.

Forty Acres

Out of the turmoil emerges one emblem, an engraving—
a young Negro at dawn in straw hat and overalls,
an emblem of impossible prophecy, a crowd
dividing like the furrow which a mule has ploughed,
parting for their president: a field of snow-flecked
cotton
forty acres wide, of crows with predictable omens
that the young ploughman ignores for his unforgotten
cotton-haired ancestors, while lined on one branch, is
a tense
court of bespectacled owls and, on the field's
receding rim —
a gesticulating scarecrow stamping with rage at him.
The small plough continues on this lined page
beyond the moaning ground, the lynching tree, the tornado's
black vengeance,
and the young ploughman feels the change in his veins,
heart, muscles, tendons,
till the land lies open like a flag as dawn's sure
light streaks the field and furrows wait for the sower.

—by *Derek Walcott*



POET NOTES

Derek Walcott is a poet, essayist, theatre director and playwright. He is often described as the West Indies' greatest writer and intellectual. Born in 1930 at Castries, St Lucia, an isolated Caribbean island in the West Indies, Walcott is the biracial descendent of two white grandfathers and two black grandmothers. His father was a Bohemian artist who died when Walcott was very young; his mother was a teacher who taught her children to love poetry. There is English, Dutch, Creole and African all represented within two generations of Walcott's lineage. He was brought up in a British colony as an English-speaking Methodist, but St Lucia was mostly a Creole-speaking Catholic island. In social terms Walcott was from an intellectual elite, while economically his family was extremely poor. Walcott studied the conflict between the heritage of European and West Indian culture, the long way from slavery to independence, and his own role as a nomad between cultures. His poetry is filled with images of painful departures and guilty homecomings. Walcott retired from teaching poetry and drama in the Creative Writing Department at Boston University in 2007. He continues to give readings and lectures throughout the world, and currently divides his time between his home in St. Lucia and New York City.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

** If you know what you are going to write when you're writing a poem, it's going to be average.*

** **Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole.***

** The English language is nobody's special property. It is the property of the imagination: it is the property of the language itself.*

WALCOTT READING WALCOTT

You can find Derek Walcott reading Forty Acres at:

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/us_elections/article5088429.ece

OFF ON A TANGENT

While preparing today's piece, I strayed into the land of Abraham Lincoln. As we all know, Lincoln had almost no formal education. However, he read and studied incessantly, beginning in his youth with the Bible and Shakespeare. During his single term in the House of Representatives, Lincoln's colleagues found it humorous that he spent his spare time poring over books in the Library of Congress. The result of this stunning commitment to self-education was the intellectual power revealed in Lincoln's writings and speeches. Here's a little gem that opened my eyes— at <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jala/28.2/bray.html> you will find an evaluative and annotated list of what Abraham Lincoln read— Fiction, Non-Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Biography, History, Religion, Humor, Sociology, Philosophy, Textbooks, etc. It is 25 pages long!

A Calling

Over my desk Georgia O'Keefe says
I have no theories to offer and then
 takes refuge in the disembodied
 third person singular: *One works*
I suppose because it is the most
interesting thing one knows to do.
 O Georgia! Sashaying between
 first base and shortstop as it were
 drawing up a list of all the things
 one imagines one has to do . . .
You get the garden planted. You
take the dog to the vet. You
certainly have to do the shopping.

Syntax, like sex, is intimate.
 One doesn't lightly leap from person
 to person. *The painting*, you said,
is like a thread that runs
through all the reasons for all the other
things that make one's life.
 O awkward invisible third person,
 come out, stand up, be heard!
 Poetry is like farming. It's
 a calling, it needs constancy,
 the deep woods drumming of the grouse,
 and long life, like Georgia's, who
 is talking to one, talking to me,
 talking to you.

—by Maxine Kumin

THE MAVEN MAXINE

Maxine Kumin is making an appearance again this April. Two out of three hits— making the cut in both '08 & now here in '09. She's earned her place in the lineup. She can pitch, field and knock it out of the park. And, she always seems to know when to break for second. Okay, I'll give it a rest, but she started it in the first stanza.

Maxine Kumin was born Maxine Winokur in Germantown, Philadelphia June 6, 1925. Her mother was a conservatory-trained pianist (a Bach specialist) but the poet says her mother's hopes for a career as a professional musician were crushed by her authoritarian father, just as young Maxine, an outstanding swimmer, found her own aspirations (to join the Aquacade) blocked by *her* father, who told her she "*would come to nothing.*" Maxine turned to writing verse, but when she entered Radcliffe at age seventeen, she discovered an atmosphere hostile to creative writing. After one professor told her she had no talent and "*would be better advised to say it with flowers*", Maxine did not write again for nearly a decade. She married, had three children, and entered a life typical of many women in that era after WWII. In an interview in 1980 she said: *It was just after the war, and this is what everyone was desperately doing: the*

tribe was seen as the saving centrality in a world that had gone totally awry. And I came to poetry as a way of saving myself because I was so wretchedly discontented. It just wasn't enough to be a housewife and a mother. It didn't gratify great chunks of me.

I tell you these things because Maxine Kumin is a fighter. She began writing again, "in the closet", and by the late fifties met Anne Sexton at a poetry workshop at the Boston Center for Adult Education. Maxine and Ann began an 18 year friendship which included almost daily phone calls to critique one another's poetry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are so many books of poetry written by Maxine Kumin (as well as novels and children's books), but today I'd like to highlight something a little different. Kumin's fierce dedication to writing always shores up my own. If you want or need inspiration—and the guts to write—read her memoir *Halo and Beyond: The Anatomy of a Recovery* (2000). In *To Make a Prairie, Essays on Poets, Poetry, and Country Living* you will find interviews, juicy lecture notes, reviews, and insightful stories about Maxine Kumin's life working and living in the country.



War and propaganda generalize. Love and poetry specify. —Gloria Steinem

Ben Richey is a 33 year-old Green Beret (U.S. Army Special Forces) who has served two tours of duty in Iraq because, he will tell you, "it was the right thing to do". His mother, Frances Richey, who has adamantly opposed the war from the beginning, is a poet. As a single mother, she raised Ben (her only child) early on in Wisconsin and then New Jersey, seeing him through childhood to manhood, until a close relationship reached a rift over the U.S. involvement in Iraq. Richey refused to lose touch with her warrior son and so began writing poems as a means to deal with her sorrow and his absence in her life. An amazing thing occurred when she began sharing her poems with him.

To My Son In Iraq

There's a new space show
at the Rose Center.
It's all about collisions,
how one little particle, or
cosmic rock thrown
off course, can make
a moon, or tilt a planet
into life. And though
I felt comforted among
the stars you love,
I'm beginning to accept
we're never safe,
the universe always
in motion, even when
we sleep, particles
making and re-making
our bodies, the world
between us a fire
that burns away
the planks of the heart.
I don't know how
they calibrated those
holographic comets and
asteroids with the
thunder of impact,
each explosion just
bearable. I tensed up
anyway, as I do
when cars and trucks
blow up on the news.
I almost closed my eyes,
but I could feel you
in the empty seat
beside me, shake
your head, and say

You're too timid,
the way you did when
you were twelve
and I was afraid to open
the door I'd forgotten
to lock. You
went in ahead of me.

—by *Frances Richey*



POET NOTES

Frances Richey was born in the heart of the coal fields in Williamson, West Virginia, in 1950. After graduating from the University of Kentucky, she worked for twenty years in the business industry and raised her only child by herself. When her son was in high school Richey pursued more meaningful work to fill the void that would surely come when her son left home for college. She trained to become a yoga instructor, worked at a hospice, and pursued her writing.

Currently: Frances Richey is now the poetry editor with *Bellevue Literary Review*, a journal of humanity and human experience within the department of medicine at NYU medical center. During this month of April, Richey will be reading her poems at West Point and Fort Bragg.

Publications:

The Burning Bush (White Pine Press 2004)

The Warrior: a mother's story of a son at war (Viking 2008) —a memoir of 28 poems dedicated to the poet's son while he was deployed in Iraq.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Frances Richey

Being a single mother was fraught with moments of self doubt and feelings of guilt. I was often the only woman at business conferences and meetings, and the only single mom at football banquets and school functions. Weekends were a mad rush of errands and athletic events. I watched Ben grow up on the ballfields of Finch Park, and grew to love baseball. I went to all his football games because I told myself that if I was there he wouldn't get hurt.

*No steady paycheck or company sponsored health insurance. I lived on my savings while I built my yoga practice (and wrote). There was no longer a need for heels or expensive suits. It was strange, enormously scary and invigorating. I think it was **Elizabeth Kubler Ross who said,***

“You have to be willing to give up everything that isn’t you to live an authentic life.”

I didn't realize that these poems (from The Warrior) would be a bridge back to Ben. It seemed to me that as we discussed the poems, we were both more willing to see each other's point of view, and accept each other's differences. I didn't realize that these poems would be a bridge back to Ben. It seemed to me that as we discussed the poems, we were both more willing to see each other's point of view, and accept each other's differences.

FRANCES RICHEY WEBSITE

Frances Richey's website has much to offer, including an invitation to families with military personnel in Iraq, Afghanistan (and elsewhere) to tell their stories alongside her own.
<http://francesrichey.com/content/index.asp>

Today, another soldier poem. This one, from the Viet Nam era, told from a male perspective. War, with its effects on all of us, is a painful but worthy subject to explore, particularly in poetry where the constraint of “art” may better allow a deeper kind of listening— by “both sides”. Most of us will never be deployed to a foreign land to fight for or against anything or anyone. Yet every day we find ourselves “in the trenches” so to speak, faced with situations that can, with words and attitude, unify or divide us.

Brother In Arms —for Charles H. Johnson

Everyone feared Mr. Stenner, even the coarse
fork-truck drivers, Vietnam Vets, resentful of me,
a war protester and English major with a deferment,
only working there for the summer.
Peace marches and draft-card burnings were insults
to their time in ‘Nam, to their buddies
who hadn’t come home. They had families to support,
and Mr. Stenner held over their heads applications
from other family men also desperate for a paycheck.
Time cards disappeared if you picked a wrong order
or were late getting back from lunch.
The vets, who had faced bombs and grenades
on the other side of the world, would not look
Mr. Stenner in the eye. It was “Yes, Mr. Stenner.
Right away, Mr. Stenner,” for they remembered Tony,
who’d complained about loading a sweltering boxcar
and the next day found his locker empty.

One day Mr. Stenner barged in at lunch and
slapped my table with an invoice, screaming I had copied
An 8 instead of a 3 in the shipment code, calling me
“asshole” and “fucking idiot” until a voice said,
“Leave the kid alone.” It was Max, six months back
from Saigon. Mr. Stenner walked slowly to Max’s table
and stared at him. Max clenched his thermos
and stared back. No one said a word.
Everyone knew Max’s wife was expecting a baby.
Then Mr. Stenner stormed out to the shipping floor.
After lunch Max returned to his fork truck to find
his work order had been changed: He’d be loading
a boxcar all afternoon, the inside of it probably
a steaming 115 degrees.

At the five-o’clock whistle Max came into the locker
room, U.S. flag tattoo glistening on his arm, face blazing
with exhaustion. I tried to shake his hand and offer
my thanks, but he walked past me, punched
his card, and went to his car. I drove out behind him
and his red, white, and blue bumper sticker that read,
SUPPORT OUR TROOPS, THEY’RE FIGHTING FOR YOU.

—by Edwin Romond



POET NOTES

Before retiring in 2003, **Edwin Romond** was a public school English teacher for 32 years in Wisconsin and New Jersey. He's received the Princeton University "Distinguished Secondary School Teaching Award, and his poems have been featured on NPR, in anthologies, college texts, and in journals such as *The Sun*, *The Rockhurst Review*, *Tiferet*, *Barrow Street*, and *Poet Lore*. He has been awarded poetry fellowships from both the New Jersey and Pennsylvania State Arts Councils, as well as a \$20,000 prize from the National Endowment for the Arts. A native of Woodbridge, NJ, he now lives in Wind Gap, Pennsylvania with his wife and son.

Publications

Blue Mountain Time: New and Selected Poems about Baseball (Grayson Books 2002)

Dream Teaching (Grayson Books, 2005)

A Family Life and *Robin Hood* (books, music, and lyrics for two musical plays)

Today's poem was published in *The Sun*, issue 390 June 2008.

LIKE WANDERING GHOSTS

I found Romon's poem, *Brother In Arms*, in the June 2008 issue of *The Sun*, along with an interview with **Edward Tick, director of *Soldier's Heart***—

(<http://www.soldiersheart.net/index.shtml>) a nonprofit initiative to promote “community-based efforts to heal the effects of war.” Tick discusses the profound alienation between our warrior class and our civilian class. Since moral and spiritual trauma is at the core of the warrior's experience, many veterans “*hate the PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) label and prefer other terms, like the Civil War-era expression “soldier's heart,” because it is symbolic rather than medical.*”

Edward Tick reminds us that “*traditional societies understood that warriorhood is not soldiering but a path through life — a “warrior’s path,” not a “warpath.”*” I learned that in some indigenous cultures after the warrior comes back from his first experience of combat, there is a weeks-long ceremony of return to treat the “invisible wounds” of the soldier. Elders and medicine people administer purification techniques that make use of storytelling and dream healing (an ancient tradition in many cultures in which the dreamer receives a visit from an archetypal power or presence) to help the returning warrior.

Edward Tick, a practicing psychotherapist, tells us there is a growing energy toward helping veterans. You can read his enlightening article ***Like Wandering Ghosts*** at:
http://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/390/like_wandering_ghosts.

Good Friday Kiss

The choir door left open, we slithered in.
Moving through the musky stacks
of bibles and unlaundered cassocks
we lay down behind the altar—
our bodies an awkward tangle on polished wood,
a snake with clothes on,
when he pulled me close, whispering his love.
Still, it wasn't the airless sanctuary
or the dead I could hear humming
inside the church's empty pews.
No, it was Adam's hands that made me cringe
the first time his lips touched mine—
twelve years old and asthma sickly,
the dry, scabbed flesh and little cloth gloves
he wore to cover pink ointments
that oozed in a line down his wrists.
I looked up and saw the cross floating overhead,
draped in black chiffon for today's Good Friday
like a negligee or widow's grieving veil,
and suddenly revolted by the cotton-coated touch
of his fingers brushing my cheek,
I rolled away from him, forever.
What did I know of suffering? The flesh
pulled taut and stapled, the human canvas
rubbed to transparency?
How my taunts would come to crucify this boy,
my young heart shifting in gusts
so fast from like to loathe—
the art of betrayal I was already learning to perfect.

—by *Michelle Bitting*

(Winner of the 2005 *Rock & Sling Virginia Brendemuehl Poetry Award*)



POET NOTES

Michelle Bitting grew up in Los Angeles near the ocean. A fourth generation Angeleno, she wrote poems in college at U.C. Berkeley where she studied theatre. She will graduate with an MFA in 2009 from Pacific University, Oregon. Formerly a dancer and a chef, she devotes part of her time to outreach work in Los Angeles where she lives with her husband, an actor, and their two children. In 2001 she began writing and publishing in earnest often scribbling poems in parking lots while she waited for her eldest to finish school, her youngest asleep in the backseat.

Awards: Michelle Bitting won the Glimmer Train Poetry Open (2003), the Poets on Parnassus (2004), and Rock and Sling's Virginia Brendemuehl (2005), poetry competitions. Individual poems have been finalists for numerous national poetry contests as has her full length book *Good Friday Kiss*.

Publications—

Blue Laws (Chapbook from Finishing Line Press 2007)

Good Friday Kiss (C&R Press 2008)

Major Influences—

Poets and Writers: Dylan Thomas, Anne Sexton, Sharon Olds, Dorianne Laux, Kim Addonizio, Kevin Young, Tony Hoagland, Lisa Glatt, David Hernandez

Music: Joni Mitchell, Patti Smith, Tom Waits, Prince, Johnny Cash, Johann Sebastian Bach

ABOUT GOOD FRIDAY KISS (published by C&R Press 2008)

These are poems of the sister reflecting on her brother's suicide, of the mother squirting meds into her autistic son's cran-apple juice and nursing her daughter in a vampiric pre-dawn delirium, the uniformed schoolgirl in a tryst with her married teacher, the wife offering her body like bread to her husband before his long journey, the middle-aged left-coast mom facing cancer, plastic surgery, and taking up the guitar again.

MICHELLE BITTING ONLINE

Read some of Michelle Bitting's other poems at her website: <http://www.michellebitting.com/>

See and hear her read The Sacrifice and Water at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uF4mdBHxrfA>

LITTLE POCKET POETRY NOTES

Michelle Bitting is unflinchingly observant. Her daring poems about the mundane will broaden your ability to "see" differently. Her language is precise and I find her narratives to be astonishingly honest, unsentimental, and filled with the wisdom that comes from conscious suffering. **Little Pocket Poetry** featured a poem by Michelle Bitting (The Sacrifice) at one of last year's Gibbous Moon Poetry Bees. When I contacted Michelle directly, she was enthusiastic about our offerings and, of course, was delighted that we wanted to study one of her poems. She was very approachable and encouraging.

Jerusalem

Let's be the same wound if we must bleed. Let's fight side by side, even if the enemy is ourselves: I am yours, you are mine. —Tommy Olofsson, Sweden

I'm not interested in
Who suffered the most.
I'm interested in
People getting over it.

Once when my father was a boy
A stone hit him on the head.
Hair would never grow there.
Our fingers found the tender spot
and its riddle: the boy who has fallen
stands up. A bucket of pears
in his mother's doorway welcomes him home.
The pears are not crying.
Later his friend who threw the stone
says he was aiming at a bird.
And my father starts growing wings.

Each carries a tender spot:
something our lives forgot to give us.
A man builds a house and says,
"I am native now."
A woman speaks to a tree in place
of her son. And olives come.
A child's poem says,
"I don't like wars,
they end up with monuments."
He's painting a bird with wings
wide enough to cover two roofs at once.

Why are we so monumentally slow?
Soldiers stalk a pharmacy:
big guns, little pills.
If you tilt your head just slightly
it's ridiculous.

There's a place in my brain
Where hate won't grow.
I touch its riddle: wind, and seeds.
Something pokes us as we sleep.

It's late but everything comes next.

—by Naomi Shihab Nye



POET NOTES

Naomi Shihab Nye who characterizes herself as a "wandering poet", was born on March 12, 1952, in St. Louis, Missouri to an American mother and a Palestinian father. She published her first poem at age seven, and at age 14, her family moved to Jerusalem, where she attended a year of high school. Her family then moved to San Antonio, Texas, where she lives today with her husband and son. She has spent 33 years traveling the country and the world to lead writing workshops and inspiring students of all ages. Drawing on her culturally diverse background, Shihab-Nye uses her writing to attest to our shared humanity.

Education & Awards

After getting her B.A. from Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas in 1974, Naomi Shihab Nye began her career as a freelance writer, editor, and speaker. She has earned numerous awards for her writing, including four Pushcart Prizes, and many notable book and best book citations from the American Library Association.

Publications

My favorites:

Words Under The Words (The Eighth Mountain Press, 1994)

Fuel (BOA Editions Ltd., 1998)

What Have You Lost, an anthology (Green Willow Books, 1999)

I Feel A Little Jumpy Around You, an anthology of Her poems & His poems collected in pairs (Simon Pulse, 1999)

Naomi has also written children's books, essays & translations of poetry.

Thanks Mom

When Naomi's son was an infant and all through his boyhood she read him poems as he was falling asleep at night. When he was a teenager, she read him poems to wake him up in the morning!

LETTER FROM NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

"TO ANY WOULD-BE TERRORISTS" (AN EXCERPT)

Because I feel a little closer to you than many Americans could possibly feel, or ever want to feel, I insist that you listen to me. Sit down and listen. I know what kinds of foods you like. I would feed them to you if you were right here, because it is very very important that you listen. I am humble in my country's pain and I am furious.

For the complete letter go to: <http://poetry.about.com/library/weekly/aa100901a.htm>

Drink, My Love, and Deeply

The alakazam surprise in this world:
Love's miracle never dies in this world.

Amphibious mortals straddle earth and sky:
Origins we improvise in this world.

Alchemy succeeds at pouring light from stone,
Creates fantasy without lies in this world.

Rainbows at your temples lead me to willing
Splendor in your eyes: my prize in this world.

Fingers on your shoulders easing out the wings
Coax your drowsing dream to arise in this world.

When it's clear a simple kiss will change your life
Trust the liquid sunrise in this world.

In sublime seductive cadence, strangers
Harmonize a little reprise in this world.

—by *Barbara Little*

POET NOTES

I can find almost nothing about **Barbara Little** who wrote this poem.

There is a brief bio in the back of the book in which this poem is published (see below).

It states: *Barbara Little lives in Frederick, Maryland. She finds essential similarities between archaeology and poetry, making her living at the former and sustaining it with the latter. Her work has appeared in The MacGuffin, The Plastic Tower, and local publications.*

I am curious to locate this poet, because both her poem and partial bio indicate she has some knowledge of alchemy, a great tool for writing good poetry (in my humble O – as my friend A.S. would say). If you know anything about Barbara Little, or how to reach her (I've tried), please let me hear from you. I'm sure there's a savvy cyber sleuth out there who could brighten my day.

ABOUT THE GHAZAL

If you are interested in the *authentic* poetic form, the Ghazal, you may want to sit down with ***Ravishing DisUnities, Real Ghazals in English***, Edited by Agha Shahid Ali (Wesleyan/University Press of New England, 2000). The editor was a well-known Kashmir-American poet who died at age 51, a year after the book was published. A colorful introduction offers a brief history of the ghazal, and there are clear instructions on how to compose a ghazal. An afterword discusses the larger issues of cultural translation and authenticity inherent in writing in a “borrowed” form.

Pronunciation: Ghazal is pronounced “ghuzzle”.

This was news to me, as I have never heard the word spoken.

Secretly, I prefer the way I was pronouncing it inside my own tiny head.

Nuts & Bolts of the Ghazal

* A ghazal is a poem of five to twelve couplets. Each couplet stands by itself as its own poem. Enjambments between couplets is forbidden!

* What links the couplet is a strict formal scheme (the original form was shaped by the Persians in probably the 11th century). The entire ghazal employs the SAME rhyme plus a refrain. THE RHYME MUST IMMEDIATELY PRECEDE THE REFRAIN.

* The scheme of rhyme and refrain occurs in BOTH lines in the first couplet and then ONLY in the second line of every succeeding couplet.

* Each line must be the same length. Pick one, metrical or syllabic. DO NOT WAVER!

* *There is an epigrammatic terseness in the ghazal, but with immense lyricism, evocation, sorrow, heartbreak, wit. What defines the ghazal is a constant longing* (so says the book's editor).

If your eyes are crossing at this point just back up and re-read the lovely poem and forget about everything else!

The Size of Spokane

The baby isn't cute. In fact he's
a homely little pale and headlong
stumbler. Still, he's one
of us— the human beings
stuck on flight 295 (Chicago to Spokane);
and when he passes my seat twice
at full tilt this then that direction,
I look down from Lethal Weapon 3 to see
just why. He's

running back and forth
across a sunblazed circle on
the carpet-something brilliant, fallen
from a porthole. So! it's light
amazing him, it's only light, despite
some three and one
half hundred
people, propped in rows
for him to wonder at; it's light
he can't get over, light he can't
investigate enough, however many
zones he runs across it,
flickering himself.

The umpteenth time
I see him coming, I've had
just about enough; but then
he notices me noticing and stops—
one fat hand on my armrest-to
inspect the oddities of me.

*

Some people cannot hear.
Some people cannot walk.
But everyone was
sunstruck once, and set adrift.
Have we forgotten how
astonishing this is? so practiced all our senses
we cannot imagine them? foreseen instead of seeing
all the all there is? Each spectral port,
each human eye

is shot through with a hole, and everything we know
goes in there, where it feeds a blaze. In a flash

the baby's old; Mel Gibson's hundredth comeback seems
less clever; all his chases and embraces

narrow down, while we
fly on (in our
plain radiance of vehicle)

toward what cannot stay small forever.

— by Heather McHugh



POET NOTES

Heather McHugh was born in California in 1948 and raised in rural Virginia. She entered Harvard University at the age of 16, where she took a seminar with Robert Lowell and had her first poem published in *The New Yorker*. *"My whole work is to catch the word by surprise, sneaking up on language, sneaking up on the world as it lurks in words,"* McHugh said. *"I love the recesses of reason. That's a great place to set my mind at rest."* McHugh is a Northerner at heart. Born in Canada and still maintaining dual citizenship, she lives in Washington state and Maine, *"literally overlooking the Canadian border whenever I'm in either of my annual stretches, West or East."*

POET BIO

- McHugh began writing poetry at age five and claims to have become an expert *"eavesdropper"* by the age of twelve. Self described in her childhood as *"extremely shy."*
- Her primary education included parochial school, where she *"loved the nuns"* and credits Sister Cletus's emphasis on grammar as an early influence in her writing.
- McHugh might owe some of her early successes to her initial defiance against mediocrity in high school in Arlington, Virginia. There, one of her teachers advised McHugh against applying to Radcliffe making her even more determined to get in as soon as she could.
- She entered Radcliffe at age sixteen and graduated with honors. McHugh's received her B.A. from Harvard in 1970.
- Entered graduate school at the University of Denver in 1970 .
- Received her first (of three) National Endowment for the Arts grants in poetry during 1974.
- She has taught here (in 1992 was the Elliston Poet at University of Cincinnati), there, and everywhere.

Publications

Her accomplishments include several books of poetry including *Eyeshot* (Wesleyan University Press, 2004), which was shortlisted for the Pulitzer Prize and *Hinge & Sign: Poems 1968-1993* (1994) in which I found today's poem. She is also the author of literary essays and three books of translation poems of Paul Celan, Blaga Dimitrova, and Jean Follain. Her honors are just too numerous to list. I would be up all night (many actually) trying to do the woman justice. Google the daylights out of her and you will get an idea of the volume of information available on this poet.

ABOUT MCHUGH'S POETRY

Her poems are intelligent but not (necessarily) "warm". Obsessive word play? Yes. Bold and brash? Often. Full of wit, keen observation, and love of language? Absolutely. Puns, rhymes, and syntactical twists almost to excess. Despite a sort of manic intensity, there is also an ongoing inquiry into the ways language can either aid or interfere with participation in life. McHugh says: *"I write because I want to find out what is bothering me."*

A review published in January, 2000, states: *"If McHugh is serious, she is anything but grim; with all her punning, bantering and mock scolding of herself . . . she brightens the shadowy corners of her world with verbal pyrotechnics. . . . McHugh's ability to contain emotion within intellectuality has prompted critics to call her a modernist and to describe her as extremely cerebral. . . . Phrases like "Lip-picked syllables" and "scattershot suns" contain the distinctive flavor of a McHugh poem's alliteration, internal rhymes, and even some of the emotional distancing."* Heather McHugh is more likely to give a reading from her laptop than from the printed page, but *"she is also an old-fashioned woman of letters, deeply interested in the world around her, quick to discuss McDonald's (where she often writes) and etymology, orgasms and Epictetus."* McHugh prefers to remain at her computer and to communicate using the rapid convenience of e-mail rather than personally giving poetry readings, which she does to pay bills.

A TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED POET

Heather McHugh has her own Web page (www.spondee.com) on which, in addition to some hysterical quotes and anagrams that delight her, she has an "epoem" that she wrote and arranged herself. What's the difference between an "epoem" and a regular poem? Well, this one moves, and as it moves, the meaning (or experience of the meaning) of the words changes. McHugh is pleased that *"you need the scroll function for that poem to work."* Check it out for a moment of great fun!

The Shrinking Lonesome Sestina

Somewhere in everyone's head something points toward home,
a dashboard's floating compass, turning all the time
to keep from turning. It doesn't matter how we come
to be wherever we are, someplace where nothing goes
the way it went once, where nothing holds fast
to where it belongs, or what you've risen or fallen to.

What the bubble always points to,
whether we notice it or not, is home.
It may be true that if you move fast
everything fades away, that given time
and noise enough, every memory goes
into the blackness, and if new ones come—

small, mole-like memories that come
to live in the furry dark— they, too,
curl up and die. But Carol goes
to high school now. John works at home
what days he can to spend some time
with Sue and the kids. He drives too fast.

Ellen won't eat her breakfast.
Your sister was going to come
but didn't have the time.
Some mornings at one or two
or three I want you home
a lot, but then it goes.

It all goes.
Hold on fast
to thoughts of home
when they come.
They're going to
less with time.

Time
goes
too
fast.
Come
home.

Forgive me that. One time it wasn't fast.
A myth goes that when the years come
then you will, too. Me, I'll still be home.

—by *Miller Williams*

IT'S HARD TO KEEP A GOOD POET DOWN

When he was a freshman in college in 1947, **Miller Williams** was told he had no future as a writer— *"Mr. Williams, your aptitude tests show that you have absolutely no aptitude in the handling of words. And if you don't want to embarrass your parents, you need to change your major to the hard sciences immediately."* Brought up to respect his elders, he switched majors, attended the first two years of Ole Miss med school, and taught science on the college level for twelve years. But, his publications were still in poetry, short stories and criticism— almost exclusively.

POET NOTES

Miller Williams (born April 8, 1930) is now one of the most respected poets of his generation. In addition to his many volumes of poetry, he's earned numerous literary awards and prizes, and is also recognized as a translator and editor. Williams spent 32 years at the University of Arkansas, retiring in 2003 as University Professor of English and Foreign Languages. He is perhaps best known for reading his poem— *Of History and Hope* —at President Clinton's 1997 inauguration. This site includes the poem and a photo of Williams on that day: <http://www.australianpolitics.com/usa/clinton/speeches/miller.shtml>

ABOUT MILLER'S POEMS

A critic once wrote that Miller Williams was the Hank Williams of American poetry— high praise for Miller who revered Hank. Stylistically, his poems range from clever formal poems to prosaic and colloquial free verse, including dramatic monologues. It's been said that while William's poetry is taught at Princeton and Harvard, it's read and understood by squirrel hunters and taxi drivers.

Williams is the father of singer/songwriter Lucinda Williams (highly recommended by this writer), a three-time Grammy Award winning country music, folk, and rock singer, named "America's best songwriter" by TIME magazine in 2002.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—William Miller

When someone says, *"I don't know, I just don't understand poetry, I don't have the ear for it,"* Miller Williams says: *"Bah! Humbug!" "There are little pieces of poetry all around us, and we do respond to them; things, that is, which we understand with the same part of us that understands poetry. Let me offer some examples"—*

- *I have a friend who has been teaching English for forty-three years, and for all of them he has drawn strength from a misspelling that appeared in the first group of themes he ever assigned: "Life is so short," it said, "that we must make the most of every minuet."*
- *In the rolling credits after a movie about Moses I read this disturbing line: "The voice of the burning bush was prerecorded."*
- *A loan company in New Orleans recently announced across the glass of its window: "Now you can borrow enough money to get completely out of debt."*
- *In the registration line at the University of Arkansas recently I heard a young woman ask, "Does anyone know who's taking care of Western Civilization?"*

*They are, of course, not art, not poems. But they have about them something of what is important in a poem. The impulse to make poetry and the power to understand it — is not something exotic, something foreign to our minds. . . . **It comes to me sometimes that the real problem students have in coming to poetry is this: they are unable to accept something that deliberately raises questions it doesn't answer or for which there is no answer.** . . . They tell you that poetry is for kids and old folks, that it's for schoolteachers, that it's silly stuff and doesn't make sense— and then they go off to a football game and stand up, flag in one hand and beer in the other, yelling: Bo Bo Skee-watn-datn / I beneetn-doe! /Skiddy-bee, skiddy-bo / Hey, team, let's go!*

THE SESTINA, EVER SO BRIEFLY

Today's poem, *The Shrinking Lonesome Sestina*, displays the exact and complicated pattern of the Sestina beautifully. Follow the pattern of the six words at the end of each line in Williams' poem— *HOME, TIME, COME, GOES, FAST, TO*. Study where and how those six words keep appearing in the poem and you can figure out the pattern of the Sestina for yourself.

Or, go to the Academy of American Poets website for details:

<http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5792>



For Jane Myers

Sap rises from the sodden ditch
and glues two green ears to the dead
birch twig. Perilous beauty—
and already Jane is digging out
her colored tennis shoes,

one mauve, one yellow, like large crocuses.
And by the laundromat
the Bartletts in their tidy yard—
as though it were not
wearying, wearying

to hear in the bushes
the mild harping of the breeze,
the daffodils flocking and honking—
Look how the bluet falls apart, mud
pockets the seed.

Months, years, then the dull blade of the wind.
It is spring! We are going to die!
And now April raises up her plaque of flowers
and the heart
expands to admit its adversary.

—by *Louise Gluck*



POET NOTES

Louise Elisabeth Glück (pronounced “Glick”) was born April 22, 1943 in New York City and grew up on Long Island. She attended Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York, and Columbia University, New York City. Glück won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1993 for her collection *The Wild Iris* whose poems were inspired by reading and studying the White Flower Farms Catalog. Glück is the recipient of the National Book Critics Circle Award (Triumph of Achilles), the Academy of American Poets Prize (Firstborn), as well as numerous Guggenheim fellowships. She was married, has a grown son, and lives alone in Cambridge, Massachusetts and was previously a Senior Lecturer in English at Williams College in Williamstown, MA. Currently, Glück is teaching at Yale.

CHILDHOOD

Louise Glück was a lonely child. Her interactions with the world as a social being were unnatural, forced, performances, and she was happiest reading. It wasn’t all that sublime—

I watched a lot of television and ate a lot of food, too. But, when I read, I felt that—especially when I read poems—I felt that the voices on the page, William Blake and T. S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats, were my companions. I felt that they were my—not just my teachers—I felt, these are the people I would be able to talk to. They’re talking to me. My early writing was an attempt at communication with them, a response to them.

POET LAUREATE (2003-2004)

Glück was the Library of Congress's twelfth Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry. She said what she enjoyed most about holding the title of Poet Laureate was the opportunity to bestow gifts of \$10,000 to two young, rising poets. *You find some manuscript that seems radiant and alive; it pleases me profoundly to help such a book into print.*

WHAT OTHERS SAY

Louise Glück is a poet of strong and haunting presence. Her poems, published in a series of memorable books over the last twenty years, have achieved the unusual distinction of being neither "confessional" nor "intellectual" in the usual senses of those words. — critic Helen Vendler

She is the bravest poet I know, and she stops at nothing; she strips veils off, and she lets the chips fall where they may. But because she believes in story, she has a safety net. And it is probably what entitles her to go on. —Grace Cavalieri

IN HER OWN WORDS—Louis Glück

I read a lot of detective fictions. I stare at a lot of walls. There's a lot of unused, wasted time, but I think there's some importance in that.

Glück, who battled severe anorexia in her youth, said her illness has influenced, but not dominated, her writing. *The impulses that produced anorexia as a symptom are evident in my work. Do I write about anorexia? Rarely and only once directly.* Glück said while growing up, she never imagined making her living as a poet. But she knew she would continue writing, even through the hard times. *I try to teach my students the kind of patience that will help them survive periods of silence and stretches of bad work.*

I am endlessly irritated by the reading of my poems as autobiography. I draw on the materials my life has given me, but what interests me isn't that they happen to me, what interests me is that they seem, as I look around, paradigmatic. We're all born mortal. We have to contend with the idea of mortality. We all, at some point, love, with the risks involved, the vulnerabilities involved, the disappointments and great thrills of passion. This is common human experience, so what you use is the self as a laboratory, in which to practice, master, what seem to you central human dilemmas.

It's astonishing to me the degree to which the human ego can feel slighted, even when it's being praised, if somebody gets something a little bit wrong, and I don't want to be distracted by my response. My power ends when I get the poem on the page, and after that it belongs not to me, but to someone else, and I can't control what's made of it, and I do not want to travel around America telling people how to read my poems. I hope that they will find readers who will read them with perception. I hope that they will be worthy of perception, which is even more crucial.

So You Want to Be a Teaching Assistant in English

Rent a tiny room half a mile from campus.
It will be winter, and all winter long
your radiator will be a cold slab of ribs.
Worse, it's Wichita, or somewhere
not much better, and you were dealt
a 7 a.m. class.

On the sidewalk you move
in your monstrous coat like a moonwalker.
You follow the bouncing full moon
of your flashlight, like the dim beam
on a miner's helmet, leading you
to English 101, Fiske Hall. Shivering
in their coats, the 28 students hate you
because it's your fault the afternoon classes
were full. They hate you because it's Wichita
and their hair is frozen to their heads.
And they really hate this first assignment—
Write about your most intense personal experience—
because their most intense personal experiences
were lips-stuck-to-frozen-lampposts
kinds of things, or, worse, they're still waiting
for an intense moment to occur to them,
some razory lightning bolt of experience
to rearrange their bland circuitry.

And you—you're only a few years older
than them anyway and still don't understand
the difference between a restrictive
and nonrestrictive clause so who are you—
unzippering your briefcase like their father
home from work—to dispense these nuggets
of wisdom you've pirated from Strunk
and White . . .

You return
double-spaced confessions to Kathys
and Karens and Jims who are simply
hoping to have something come back
without much blood spilled on it,
something that maybe you've even pronounced
“Good!” or “Shows some potential.”

But now you see Julie
in the corner staring at the circled D+, her rambling
rendition of the unhappy tryst between her dachshund
and a Mack truck, and she begins to cry, audibly,

because she'd poured her heart out and—OK—
there were fragments and run-ons and she just can't get
the difference between there and their and they're,
but her dog Fritz was, after all, an A+ kind of dog,
which should count for something, right? Why, her tears
seem to be asking, did I have to get a teacher who hates dogs
so much? And she leaves the classroom, shutting the door
gently, before you can think what to do. Perhaps
she'll go hang herself or, worse, report you,
and you know you've got nothing the next hour
but a drill on dangling modifiers and ice
is etching little flowers on the windows
and now you've got to pee, and when it gets dead
quiet in the room and you're standing there
with your tongue puddling in your mouth,
and half the students are eyeing the door Julie
escaped through, you realize, finally,
what it's like to be in charge.

—by Jeff Worley

POET NOTES

Born in Wichita, Kansas, **Jeff Worley** enrolled at Wichita State University in 1965. *"Because I changed majors seven times as an undergraduate (finally settling on an English major), and because I wanted to retain my II-S draft status (during the Viet Nam War years) and so took only 7-8 credit hours some semesters, it took me 5 1/2 years to complete my B.A.,"* he says. When Wichita State University initiated a Master's of Fine Arts program in creative writing in 1972, Worley was accepted into the program and became the second M.F.A. graduate of the program in 1975.

Jeff Worley has worked as an offset pressman, cab driver, folk singer, and university professor. He lives with his wife, Linda, a German professor at the University of Kentucky (Lexington), and six cats. His interests and hobbies include reading widely, traveling to warm places, snorkeling, and playing folk-blues guitar.

Publications

I read somewhere that Jeff Worley's poems have appeared in nearly 400 (!) literary magazines and journals. I was wondering if that was a typo considering how hard it is for most of us to get published at all! But let's please be happy for him; it's Spring and the birds are chirping, etc. He is the author of three collections of poetry: *The Only Time There Is* (Mid-List Press 1995) *A Simple Human Motion* (Larkspur Press 2000) and *Happy Hour at the Two Keys Tavern* (Mid-List Press 2006), as well as two chapbooks. Worley is also the editor of *Odyssey Magazine*, published by the University of Kentucky, which has won state, regional and national awards in the past 20 years.

A Critic Admirer's Commentary

Whether writing about childhood, the vicissitudes of marriage, or the dangers inherent in everyday life, Jeff Worley builds his poems with unique and telling details. The effect is a presentation of experience that is enriching, that resonates, that is intensely memorable. These are meticulously crafted narrative poems that never settle for mere anecdote, however intrinsically interesting or moving the subject at hand. Although they deal with experiences that

we might deem 'ordinary,' however dire that might be in some cases, Worley's poems are always intensely interested in form, in language.—Michael Van Walleghen

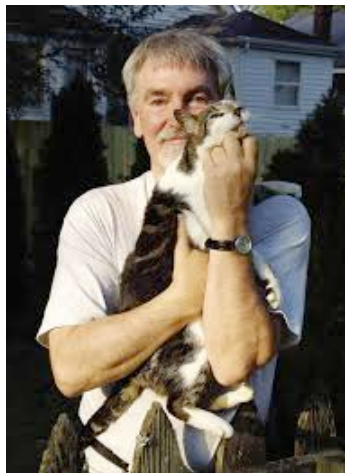
FEEDBACK ABOUT YOUR FEEDBACK

This morning I'm running a little late getting today's poem out. We had a great POETRY BEE last night (Sue Ellen Thompson's *What She Wanted*) that ran later than usual because some lovers-laners, who we thought were actually thievin' pirates in the parking lot, delayed our exit. Ah, L O V E is in the air and it's time to get twitterpated all over again!

I've taken some pleasant flak from a few of you this month who've written to say this or that piece is not a poem, but just a clever piece of prose. I reckon I'll hear from you again on this Jeff Worley piece? I'm up for it. More importantly, I want to say a heartfelt "Thank-You" to all of you who have taken the time to write, even a few words, as well as extended comments about the first 15 poems that have gone out. It is encouraging to receive any response to poetry when most of the world stares blankly at the mere mention of this art! All your opinions and feelings are welcome. I learn something more about you, about poetry, and about myself every time you write.

One of the reasons I send you this poem today is that what appears to be glamorous (teaching English at a college level?) often is not, and what appears to be repugnant at first glance (has anyone seen Susan Boyle, the British ugly duckling darling of song?) may hold some surprising value for us. Dare I say even a prose poem or a rambling narrative has something to offer.

Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle. — Plato



The Gift

To pull the metal splinter from my palm
my father recited a story in a low voice.
I watched his lovely face and not the blade.
Before the story ended, he'd removed
the iron sliver I thought I'd die from.

I can't remember the tale,
but hear his voice still, a well
of dark water, a prayer.
And I recall his hands,
two measures of tenderness
he laid against my face,
the flames of discipline
he raised above my head.

Had you entered that afternoon
you would have thought you saw a man
planting something in a boy's palm,
a silver tear, a tiny flame.
Had you followed that boy
you would have arrived here,
where I bend over my wife's right hand.

Look how I shave her thumbnail down
so carefully she feels no pain.
Watch as I lift the splinter out.
I was seven when my father
took my hand like this,
and I did not hold that shard
between my fingers and think,
Metal that will bury me,
christen it Little Assassin,
Ore Going Deep for My Heart.
And I did not lift up my wound and cry,
Death visited here!
I did what a child does
when he's given something to keep.
I kissed my father.

—by *Li-Young Lee*

POET NOTES—

Li-Young Lee was born in 1957 in Jakarta, Indonesia, to Chinese parents. His father had been a personal physician to Mao Tse-Tung's while in China. In 1959, the Lee family fled the country to escape anti-Chinese sentiment and after a five-year trek through Hong Kong, Macau, and Japan, they settled in the United States in 1964. (It's no wonder that so many of his poems are about searching for an identity.) Li-Young Lee lives in Chicago, Illinois, with his wife, Donna, and their two sons.

Publications & Awards

Lee is the author of four books of poetry and a prose poem memoir. He has won numerous awards, including three Pushcart Prizes, the Lannan Literary Award, and the Poetry Society of America's William Carlos Williams Award for his collection *Book of My Nights* (BOA Editions, 2001). He has lived in Chicago since 1981, and makes a living by teaching and giving readings.

Education

Lee attended the Universities of Pittsburgh and Arizona, and the State University of New York at Brockport. He has taught at several universities, including Northwestern and the University of Iowa. Lee: *I went to the University of Pittsburgh and I was into biochemistry or organic chemistry, or something like that. I walked into a poetry class and the guy teaching was Ed Ochester. He was a great teacher, and I started reading his poems. I was just knocked out. He introduced me to contemporary American poetry. He showed me Gerald Stern and Phil Levine's work. I think I had a double major in biochemistry and English. But I left college because I was having a miserable time. I was daydreaming half of the time and I had a lot of personal problems at home. My father was sick a lot, and I was married young. I felt like a stranger. I wasn't a college student.*



Family Life

Lee comes from a really old-fashioned Chinese family. If his father was napping, Lee was not allowed to cross the line of his head. Or, if his mother or father were sitting in particular ways, Lee could not walk past them or sit with his shoe facing them. He had to be very conscious of their bodies.

Lee's parents were classically educated, which meant that they knew hundreds of Chinese poems, and big passages of the Zhuang-zi and Lao Tze. His father would recite Chinese poems, and sometimes weep after speaking them.

I never really learned how to read, but I kind of darted around that. I remember being in literature classes as an undergrad at Pitt and not understanding what I was reading. I didn't understand the grammar and the vocabulary; you have to understand that all of our language at home was Chinese. My parents forbade us from speaking English. My mother would not answer me unless I answered her in Chinese.

THE EMBODIED POET

Lee's unmistakable voice is soft and mysterious. He speaks words with the same reverence that he writes them, which makes for an unforgettable experience. "We feel very present when we're breathing in. The problem is, that when we're breathing in, we can't speak. So presence and silence have something to do with each other." . . . When I'm reading, I'm reading with my toes, my knees, and the hair on the back of my neck . . . I'm reading with my whole body, my whole person, and my experience is very profound and deep. "My sense is that poetry is the deepest and highest form of yoga that we can practice; the highest form of religion. Because when we're working on a poem, we're connecting, or linking or yoking ourselves to our most complete nature, which is God. So my sense is writing poetry or making art is yogic in that it links us to our complete presence.

The English language is like a lover, and the poem is like a body.

—Li-Young

First Mammogram

Whoever built this machine
couldn't love breasts.

I am between glass plates
and no one has performed the ritual
of asking the body's forgiveness:
For the pain you are about to receive

Instead, it's like the way
we slaughter animals.

When the nurse says they've found
a mass, my knees buckle.
We are strangers beneath bright lights.

Sonogram. Ultrasound. This room is darker
but I'm not convinced it's for me
the lights are dimmed. Then I wait

for another stranger, a man
who has seen inside the soft tissue:
probably a scar in only 1% of such cases
does it turn out to be I am safe for the time
being as I'll ever be unless it changes
in six months we'll see you again

I might have told him
this is where the belt buckle
marked me when I was fourteen

or I know a man is dangerous
when I dream a woman with
a scar on her chest, female Parzival
in a wasteland.

But no one here wants to hear
and I don't remember myself

until later, with my clothes on
when I recall my young breast
with the sear like a brand
my father made
I had not thought so deep.

—by Kathryn Kirkpatrick



POET NOTES

Raised in the nomadic subculture of the U.S. military, poet and teacher **Kathryn Kirkpatrick** was born in Columbia, South Carolina, and grew up in the Philippines, Germany, Texas and the Carolinas. Today she lives with her husband and two shelties in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina where she is Professor of English at Appalachian State University.

Publications

Her poetry collections are *The Body's Horizon* (Signal Books, 1996), *Beyond Reason* (Pecan Grove Press, 2004), and *Out of the Garden* (Mayapple Press, 2007). She is also the author of two chapbooks, *Looking for Ceilidh* (Mill Springs Press, 2004) and *The Master's Wife* (March Street Press, 2004).

Education

Ph.D. Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts, Emory University

M.A. English, UNC at Chapel Hill

B.A. English, Winthrop University

REVIEWERS COMMENT ON K. KIRKPATRICK'S POETRY—

This poet's delicious words do please—the ear, the mind and the heart—as they remind us that out of loss can come release and renewal, in part through the joys of language itself.

—Susan Ludvigson

Lucid, tender, and life-filled, able to face heartache, precise in their evocation of sensuous experience, these are poems to treasure. —Alicia Ostriker

In language that is never coy or self-indulgent, she plunges into a world that is always shapeshifting, both seducing and humbling her; and brings her to her knees in sheer sensual awareness of its pulsing vitality. —Kathryn Stripling Byer

HAPPY FOOTNOTE

During the course of the month I've tried to track down the poet directly, to ask permission, a question, a clarification, or to sing a little praise. A response from Poet Professor Kirkpatrick was a high point! She wrote back— *I'd be delighted for you to use "First Mammogram" for your April poetry effort! It's always so encouraging when someone finds a poem, in Seamus Heaney's words, "strong enough to help.*

IN HER OWN WORDS—Kathryn Kirkpatrick

I'm a big advocate of local, organic food— if I'm not planning, planting, weeding, or harvesting our garden, I'm learning new ways to prepare slow food. I enjoy hiking with our two Shetland sheepdogs, and I drive a diesel Mercedes fueled with biofuel. I'm convinced that in this historical era one of the greatest powers we have as individuals is the power to consume sustainably by boycotting polluting, unethical companies and spending on organic, Fair Trade products.

Letter After the Diagnosis

This is the window I love best. It looks down
on roses, ferns, ivy the deer come to eat
once the rains have gone. Earlier I watched
a deer take a Peace rose in one nip. He held it

in his mouth, head dipping and lifting, the flutter
of petals like foam at his wide lips. Just when
I thought the sweet smell had made him drunk,
he swallowed. Then he nipped another. The same

intoxicated dance, head and forelegs lifting,
falling, in slow syncopation. After the fifth rose,
the bushtop stripped, I opened the window
to yell Hey! Enough! The deer looked up

then strolled off through high grass. I tell you this
because I need some deer insouciance
to offer you against your fear. I did not
think of you at all while I watched the deer

eat the roses. But now I know if you had been
beside me, you would have put out your hand
to stop me from raising the window, you would have
done all you could to grant him abundance.

—by *Lynne Knight*

GLOSSARY

in·*sou*·ci·ance n
cheerful lack of anxiety or concern

POET NOTES

Lynne Knight was born in Philadelphia but grew up in Cornwall-on-Hudson, New York. After graduating from the University of Michigan, where she won two Hopwood awards, and from Syracuse University, where she was a fellow in poetry, she lived for a time in Canada, where her daughter was born. She taught high school English for many years in Upstate New York and now lives in Berkeley, where she teaches writing at two Bay Area community colleges.

Publications

Lynne Knight takes a risk to speak and write about fear and loss with incredible courage, finding light even in the midst darkness. She has published three full-length collections, *Dissolving Borders* (1996), *The Book of Common Betrayals* (2002) and *Night in the Shape of a Mirror* (2006), and two chapbooks, *Snow Effects* (2000) and *Deer in Berkeley* (2003). Her work has appeared in a number of journals, including *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Kenyon Review*, *New England Review*, *Ontario Review*, *Poetry*, and *Southern Review*.

IN HER OWN WORDS— Lynne Knight

*I heard Tobias Wolff (author and teacher) say once that writing isn't therapy; writing's a lot harder than therapy, and I agree with him—but sometimes it comes close to therapy. It kept me from going under. My mother was ill for eight years. I was exhausted much of the time, partly the strain of watching my mother diminish, partly just trying to live my life alongside the diminishment. Writing brought me calm. **Maybe it was closer to meditation than to therapy.***

I write just to be able to feel some sense of control over the uncontrollable. We can know we have no control, and yet—as poets, it's our job to control, if not our experience, then our response to it.

***Art really is necessary for our survival.** We're all mortal, and it's been given to us as poets to help people understand both the terrors and the gifts of mortality. I regard one of those gifts as the ability to recognize and accept that we are mortal. Does the bird know it's going to stop singing? Probably not. But we do, and I think each of us—this is so pervasive a feeling in me that I can't help but think everybody feels it—harbors a secret notion that somehow we'll be the one to escape death. We'll be the one chosen.*



QUOTE TAPED TO LYNNE KNIGHT'S PRINTER

It's silly to suggest the writing of poetry as something ethereal, a sort of soul-crashing emotional experience that wrings you. I have no fancy ideas about poetry. It doesn't come to you on the wings of a dove. It's something you work hard at. I work as hard as I can. I feel incredibly lucky to have the time to be doing work I love. —Louise Bogan

The Alchemist

I burned my life, that I might find
A passion wholly of the mind,
Thought divorced from eye and bone,
Ecstasy come to breath alone.
I broke my life, to seek relief
From the flawed light of love and grief.

With mounting beat the utter fire
Charred existence and desire.
It died low, ceased its sudden thresh.
I had found unmysterious flesh—
Not the mind's avid substance— still
Passionate beyond the will.

—by *Louise Bogan*



POET NOTES

Louis Marie Bogan was born in Livermore Falls, Maine, in 1897 and died at age 72 in 1970. She was reclusive and disliked talking about herself, and for that reason details are scarce regarding her private life. For most of her writing life she felt invisible in the literary world.

Early Years

Bogan grew up in various (paper) mill towns in the Northeast (where her father was employed), moving often with her parents and brother. Until Louise was seven, her family often lived in rooms in working-class hotels and somewhat seedy boardinghouses. She was both bitter and proud about her lower-middle-class Irish background and a limited formal education. Although Bogan attended Boston University for only one year in 1915-1916, her early education at Boston Girls' Latin School gave her a rigorous foundation.

Later Years

She married Curt Alexander in 1916, but the marriage was not a happy one; separated and widowed she was left with a child (Mathilde) to raise alone. Bogan married again in 1925, to the writer Raymond Holden. This marriage, like the first, was troubled and did not last. Despite the personal turmoil, the 1920s and 1930s were Bogan's most productive poetic years.

Her Poetry

Louise Bogan was published in the *New Republic*, *The Nation*, *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, *Scribner's* and *Atlantic Monthly*. Her lyrics were brief, limited in theme (*love and grief*), and highly formal. Many reviewers found her poems to be obscure. . . During her writing years she was seeing a psychiatrist to help her battle the depressions that relentlessly plagued her and occasionally hospitalized her. Her life and her lyrics are intimately intertwined, although Bogan would be the last person to elucidate the connection. She was intensely private; for years many of her friends did not know she had a daughter.

ARTISTIC DIFFERENCES

While modernism in literature and the arts was gaining in momentum and shape, Bogan was quietly mastering metrics and defining her style. She wrote passionately about her artistic awakening, describing "design and contrast" as being at the heart of her formal poetry; a style she crafted early which did not vary much throughout her later years. During the 1930s, when many of her writer friends turned to the left, Bogan fought a lonely battle for literary purity. She found the confessional poetry of Robert Lowell and John Berryman distasteful and self-indulgent.

BOGAN AS CRITIC

During her life Louise Bogan was probably best known as a critic. For thirty-eight years, she reviewed poetry for *The New Yorker*. The English poet W. H. Auden thought Louise Bogan was the best critic of poetry in America, and wondered whether her "disgraceful neglect" by colleagues diminished her reputation as one of America's finest poets.

POST SCRIPT

Interest from feminist circles in the hidden lives of women writers has prompted new assessments of Bogan. The "mosaic" of her autobiographical pieces, *Journey Around My Room* (1980), and the Pulitzer Prize-winning biography by Elizabeth Frank, *Louise Bogan: A Portrait* (1985), have introduced her to the general public. Her work is particularly important in light of her place in the company of modernists. In a time of experimentation, of a general loosening of structures and subjects, she held the line for formal poetry and for the precise blend of emotion and intellect to enliven that poetry.

A big bow to three dear readers who helped me track down phantom poet, Barbara Little, whose poem, *Drink, My Love, and Deeply* was sent to you on April 12th. My sister Donata, my neighbor Kathy, and friend Christine who lives in NYC, all had good leads pointing in the same direction.

It turns out that the ghazal-writing Barbara Little is also Barbara Little, Ph.D., archaeologist and editor of CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship (<http://www.crmjournal.cr.nps.gov>) which is published by the National Park Service. She wrote back to me just a few days ago:

*Hello Ms Glassmeyer,
your message is the last I'd expect to receive in this mailbox! Yes,
that's me. I've very glad that you like the poem; thanks for tracking me
down. You've made my day.
Are you a fan of ghazals in particular?
Enjoy,
Barbara*

I mention this to share some of the pleasure of the April poetry project, and to make a new request for sleuthing . . . I am now in search of information about today's poet, Ioanna-Veronika Warwick. But first, her lovely poem:

My Mother Is Prepared

She comes for a weekend
with bulging bags:
sweater, long underwear, a scarf,
a Thermos, a roll of bandage.
When we go hiking on granite crests,
she takes along her "documents."
There's paper and pen in her purse
should she again need to toss
a message from the window of a train
deporting her to an unknown station.

Once, at a party, someone asked,
"What would you take
if World War III began,
and you headed for the hills?"
Incurable intellectuals,
instantly we named
favorite books, except for one
psychology professor who sighed,
"Some quick, painless means
to commit suicide."
My mother said, "First,
you need a warm blanket."

All fell silent.
Then we chatted as before
about movies and vacations.
Certainly nobody mentioned
the railroad platform in Krakow,
the last chance to be bribed out
before the exit to Auschwitz.
Rain turning to fine snow.
"They don't understand
anything," she whispered
to me in Polish, saying good-bye.

—by *Ioanna-Veronika Warwick*
(Volume 180, September 2002, Poetry)

POET NOTES

This is all I have on our poet of the day...

Ioanna-Veronika Warwick was born in Poland and came to this country when she was 17. She has been published in *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, *Best American Poetry* 1992, *The Iowa Review*, *New Letters*, *Nimrod*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Quarterly West* (First Prize, 1990 Writers-at-Work Fellowship Competition), *The Prairie Schooner*, and other magazines. She is a freelance science writer and lives in San Diego.

I suppose I could write to *Poetry* or any of these other publications, but I'll check with you sleuths out there first. Thanks, and keep me posted.

I dedicate today's poem, with love, to my friend and writing colleague, **Valerie Chronis Bickett**, whose mother, **Ann Chronis**, died one year ago today, April 22, 2008. I know of at least 3 other readers who have also lost their mothers in recent months and would like to suggest Sue Ellen Thomson's book *The Golden Hour* as a source of comfort when the time is right. A series of poems about her mother's final months and days were written with eyes wide open. The raw and meaningful work of attending a loved one who is dying is tenderly addressed by this author.

Sex On A Plate

Is how one of the dinner guests, who's having an affair
with our hostess, describes her flourless chocolate cake.
Too dry, she protests, conjuring a lake
of raspberry sauce and prompting him to empty his liqueur
glass over it, their eyes conjoining shamelessly
as smoke from a faulty damper insinuates the room.
Sparks like these no longer move
me to envy, or to recall my own erotic history.

This is my desire: To see my mother one
last time in her buttery-yellow slacks and top;
to feel her small, age-softened body reach
for mine—knowing she has only months
to live—and the tensions love has sparked between us stop
pulling at us. To hear her call me *Peach*.

—by Sue Ellen Thompson



POET NOTES

Sue Ellen Thompson is the author of *This Body of Silk*, which won the 1986 Samuel French Morse Prize, *The Wedding Boat* (Owl Creek Press), as well as *The Leaving: New and Selected Poems* and *The Golden Hour*, both published by Autumn House. She has been a Robert Frost Fellow at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, Visiting Writer at Central Connecticut State University, and Poet-in-Residence at SUNY Binghamton and at the Frost place in Franconia, New Hampshire. Thompson's poems have reached a large national audience through Garrison Keillor's radio show *Writer's Almanac* and Ted Kooser's newspaper column *American Life in Poetry*.

Sue Ellen Thompson explains in an interview that the poems about her mother in *The Golden Hour* were written quite quickly— unusual for a poet who typically spends months working on just one poem. You can hear her own words at:

www.mysterylovescompany.com/media/SueEllenThompson051407.mp3

LITTLE POCKET POETRY—

LPP studied another Sue Ellen Thompson “mother” poem, *What She Wanted*, at our last Poetry Bee. You can read that poem at: http://www.littlepocketpoetry.org/poetry_bee

WHAT OTHER POETS SAY

Sue Ellen Thompson's poems explore the passions of everyday life. From teenage love to the uncertain gamble of marriage to the angst of raising a teenage daughter, the poems follow the inevitable cycle of domestic life. Thompson's craft is impeccable, her ear for the music of language faultless -- she is a formalist whose fierce emotions are honed to a dangerous edge. Her work is full of humor, full of tender precision. A single poem can meticulously and vividly contain the collapse of a marital or family history, or recreate a long desire. Her work is a delight. —Michael Ondaatje

Sue Ellen Thompson, while delineating the personal, never forgets that it's arrangement, pacing, attention to sonics, that makes a poem a poem. Thus we are as engaged by the interplay of her language as we are by what it conveys. —Stephen Dunn

What I Know

These fields go father than you think they do.
That darkness is my father walking away.
It is my shadow that I tell this to.

This stillness is not real. The cloud that grew
Into an old man's face didn't stay.
These fields go farther than you think they do.

The sun loves shattered things, and loves what's new.
I love you so much more than I can say.
It is my shadow that I tell this to.

He is not sleeping, that bird the bugs crawl through.
Don't touch. Don't cry. Think good things. Pray.
These fields go farther than you think they do.

Some darkneses breathe, look back at you.
Under the porch a pair of eyes waits all day.
It is my shadow that I tell this to.

The things my father told me must be true:
There are some places that you cannot play.
These fields go farther than you think they do.
It is my shadow that I tell this to.

—by *Christian Wiman*



POET NOTES

Christian Wiman, who grew up in west Texas, is the author of two books of poetry, *The Long Home* (Story Line Press, 1998), which won the **Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize**, and most recently, *Hard Night* (Copper Canyon Press, 2005). His poems, criticisms, and personal essays appear widely, in such magazines as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, *The New York Times Book Review*, and *Slate*. He is the editor of **Poetry** magazine. Wiman received a B.A. in English from Washington and Lee University (Lexington, Virginia), and lives with his wife in Chicago.

FORMAL VS CONFESSIONAL

Christian Wiman, who is a passionate formalist, has been openly critical of "confessional poetry" (a school of poetry where the poet may expose personal, taboo, difficult things about themselves) and what he calls "the generic, self-obsessed free-verse poetry of the seventies and eighties". Ironically, he wrote a confessional essay for *The American Scholar* titled "*Gazing Into The Abyss*" describing his personal suffering and a return to his religious faith. You can read the revealing essay at: <http://www.theamericanscholar.org/gazing-into-the-abyss/>

Despite his devout and strict Baptist upbringing— "*charismatic evangelicals*" is how we defined ourselves—**Christian Wiman** was not at all at ease with himself in this world— "*or with God*". In the previously mentioned essay, written in 2007, Wiman describes a course of events that occurred during an intense period in his life. His poetry writing dried up completely after a twenty-year prolific career. He was exhausted. At the same time, he became editor of the prestigious Poetry magazine, but felt absolutely no excitement for it. He fell madly and blissfully in love, becoming completely consumed by the relationship. Married less than a year, Wiman was diagnosed (on his 39th birthday) with a rare and incurable blood cancer. He began writing poetry again, and has returned to his religious faith.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Christian Wiman

I think that poetry is how religious feeling has survived in me. What kind of language is more refined and transcendent than poetry? I hope the poems I'm writing now, and am trying to write, are more filled with presence. I don't just mean the presence of God; I mean just simply being present in the world.

POETRY MAGAZINE

Christian Wiman is the editor of Poetry magazine which received a \$100 million bequest from pharmaceutical heiress Ruth Lilly in 2002. Since Wiman took over editorship, and partly thanks to direct-mail campaigns, the magazine's circulation has grown from 11,000 to almost 30,000. The look of the magazine was redesigned in 2005.

NICHOLAS ROERICH POETRY PRIZE

Today's poem is taken from Christian Wiman's book, *The Long Home*, which won the **Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize** in 1998. **Nicholas Roerich** was a Russian-born theosophist, philosopher and artist who traveled extensively to the far east and who had a committed interest in occult mysticism. **The Nicholas Roerich Museum**, which houses the artist's beautiful and mysterious paintings, is located in a brownstone at 319 West 107th Street on Manhattan's Upper West Side. If any reader has been there (Christine?) I would love to hear from you!

I chose today's poem by poet **Linda Gregg** more than a month ago. I have long admired her poetry, and when Garrison Keillor read "Asking For Directions" on his Writer's Almanac radio program in January, I knew it belonged in this year's top 30. Just a few days ago, Linda Gregg won the third annual Jackson Poetry Prize, a \$50,000 (!) award given to an author who has written at least one book of "recognized literary merit," but has yet to receive wide attention. Gregg, 66, is the author of several books, including *All of It Singing* and *Things and Flesh*. The award is sponsored by Poets & Writers, Inc., a nonprofit literary organization that announced the prize Tuesday.

Linda Gregg's poems are packed tightly and elegantly like a well edited art film. Her depictions of grief and loss, desire and longing, are layered in such a subtle yet determined way, the impact is a ghostly wallop. Ms. Gregg's poems have staying power, and I find myself feeling compassion for the human "messiness" of life going on in her poems.

Asking for Directions

We could have been mistaken for a married couple
riding on the train from Manhattan to Chicago
that last time we were together. I remember
looking out the window and praising the beauty
of the ordinary: the in-between places, the world
with its back turned to us, the small neglected
stations of our history. I slept across your
chest and stomach without asking permission
because they were the last hours. There was
a smell to the sheepskin lining of your new
Chinese vest that I didn't recognize. I felt
it deliberately. I woke early and asked you
to come with me for coffee. You said, sleep more,
and I said we only had one hour and you came.
We didn't say much after that. In the station,
you took your things and handed me the vest,
then left as we had planned. So you would have
ten minutes to meet your family and leave.
I stood by the seat dazed by exhaustion
and the absoluteness of the end, so still I was
aware of myself breathing. I put on the vest
and my coat, got my bag and, turning, saw you
through the dirty window standing outside looking
up at me. We looked at each other without any
expression at all. Invisible, unnoticed, still.
That moment is what I will tell of as proof
that you loved me permanently. After that I was
a woman alone carrying her bag, asking a worker
which direction to walk to find a taxi.

— by Linda Gregg



POET NOTES

Although born in 1942 just miles northwest of New York City, **Linda Gregg** grew up (with a twin sister) on the other side of the country, in Marin County, California. She received both her Bachelor of Arts, in 1967, and her Master of Arts, in 1972, from San Francisco State College. Her most recent publication is *In the Middle Distance* (Graywolf Press, 2006). Her poems have also appeared in numerous literary magazines, including *Ploughshares*, *The New Yorker*, the *Paris Review*, the *Kenyon Review*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*.

She began teaching poetry at schools like Indian Valley College, University of Tucson, Napa State, and Louisiana State University. She has since taught at the University of Iowa, Columbia University, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Houston, and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. As of 2006, she was living in New York City and teaching as a Lecturer in the Creative Writing Program in the University Center for the Creative and Performing Arts at Princeton University.

mini greek footnote:

Linda Gregg lived for five years in the Greek Islands with poet Jack Gilbert.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Linda Gregg

(an excerpt from an essay)

*I believe that poetry at its best is found rather than written. Traditionally, and for many people even today, poems have been admired chiefly for their craftsmanship and musicality, the handsomeness of language and the abundance of similes, along with the patterning and rhymes. I respect and enjoy all that, but **I would not have worked so hard and so long at my poetry if it were primarily the production of well-made objects, just as I would not have sacrificed so much for love if love were mostly about pleasure.** What matters to me even more than the shapeliness and the dance of language is what the poem discovers deeper down than gracefulness and pleasures in figures of speech. I respond most to what is found out about the heart and spirit, what we can hear through the language. Best of all, of course, is when the language and other means of poetry combine with the meaning to make us experience what we understand. **We are most likely to find this union by starting with the insides of the poem rather than with its surface, with the content rather than with the packaging. Too often in workshops and classrooms there is a concentration on the poem's garments instead of its life's blood.**" . . . Certainly one can make good poems without feeling much or discovering anything new. You can produce fine poems without believing anything, but it corrodes the spirit and eventually rots the seed-corn of the heart.*

(To read the rest of Linda Gregg's insightful essay, you can find it at:
<http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/19260>)

In February I begin culling 30 poems from hundreds of ones I love, preparing the work that finally arrives each day on this page in April. I gather my community of thirty and arrange them “at the table”, seating them next to and in-between their other “friends” where they might do the best good. Each April there are surprises. I “drop” a poem and replace it with another via forces and energies bigger than my little preferences. There is one poem I have wanted to use for three years, for example, that has not yet made the final cut. This year, there are two poems I had to let go of in favor of ones more pressing. Today is such a case.

My friend Kate introduced me to the poetry of **Deborah Digges** and told me about her untimely death earlier this month on Friday (Good Friday) April 10th. Whether we leave this realm more or less prepared, in a comfortable deathbed surrounded by the prayerful hum of loved-ones going up to the edge with us, or go completely alone and self-directed, flung off the edge of a concrete sports facility into the evening air, the fact is we will be “gone”. And if all goes well, perhaps our goodness will shine on.

Author **Deborah Digges** was born (in 1950) and raised on an apple orchard in Central Missouri. She was one of ten children. Well educated and acknowledged for her literary gifts, she was a revered poet, teacher and mentor, a professor of English at Tufts University. Deborah Digges bravely loved her family and went through hell with one of her children, telling about it in a memoir titled *The Stardust Lounge: Stories from a Boy's Adolescence*. She loved her dogs and her cats and was a volunteer at an animal shelter in Amherst, Massachusetts where she lived. She also frequently traveled to East Africa where she worked with children at the Tumaini Orphanage at the foot of Mount Kenya.

Deborah Digges' third husband was Dr. Frank Loew, a former dean of the veterinary schools at Tufts and Cornell Universities. He died of a rare cancer in 2003 and Deborah's collection of poems, titled *Trapeze*, touches on the illness and loss of this man she loved.

Seersucker Suit

To the curator of the museum, to the exhibition of fathers,
to the next room from this closet of trousers
and trousers, full sail the walnut hangers of shirts,
O the great ghost ships of his shoes.
Through the racks and the riggings,
belt buckles ringing and coins in coat pockets
and moths that fly up from the black woolen remnants,
his smell like a kiss blown through hallways of cedar,
the shape of him locked in his burial clothes,
his voice tucked deep in his name,
his keys and the bells to his heart,
I am passing his light blue seersucker suit
with one grass-stained knee,
and a white shirt, clean boxers, clean socks, a handkerchief.

—by Deborah Digges



Deborah Digges

Many years ago during a weeklong Psychosynthesis international seminar, the director of the program invited us to seek out someone in the group of participants who was "off-putting" or "discomfiting" to us in some way; a person we felt sure we did not want to spend any time with at all! We were asked to make a subtle gesture to interact with this person, invite them for lunch, take a walk with them, stretch our social comfort zone. The lessons learned from that "experiment" have never been forgotten. When I read **Robert Morgan's** poem Honey, it evoked those memories of just how much can be learned from giving up the knee-jerk reaction to an unsavory person or situation. Besides, the poem (in my opinion) is so well written, that is reason enough to present it here today!

Honey

Only calmness will reassure
 the bees to let you rob their hoard.
 Any sweat of fear provokes them.
 Approach with confidence, and from
 the side, not shading their entrance.
 And hush smoke gently from the spout
 of the pot of rags, for sparks will
 anger them. If you go near bees
 every day they will know you.
 And never jerk or turn so quick
 you excite them. If weeds are trimmed
 around the hive they have access
 and feel free. When they taste your smoke
 they fill themselves with honey and
 are laden and lazy as you
 lift the lid to let in daylight.
 No bee full of sweetness wants to
 sting. Resist greed. With the top off
 you touch the fat gold frames, each cell
 a hex perfect as a snowflake,
 a sealed relic of sun and time
 and roots of many acres fixed
 in crystal-tight arrays, in rows
 and lattices of sweeter latin
 from scattered prose of meadow, woods.

—by *Robert Morgan*

POET NOTES

Author **Robert Morgan** was born 1944 in Hendersonville, North Carolina, and grew up on the family farm in the Green River valley of the Blue Ridge Mountains. As a teenager he was interested in composing music as well as in writing poetry and fiction and even thought about entering film school. But he was encouraged to study science during the years after Sputnik was first launched and the cry was— "The Russians are coming! The Russians are coming!". After starting out in engineering and mathematics he graduated from University of North Carolina in 1965 with a B.A. in English, and later with an MFA.

Morgan, also a well know novelist and short story writer, wrote his first short story in the sixth grade, on a day when the rest of the class visited the Biltmore House near Asheville. He didn't have the three dollars for the trip, and rather than let him sit idle all day, his teacher gave him a writing assignment which he delighted in. Years later, novelist Guy Owens read an account of Morgan visiting a great-grandmother in an old house in the mountains, and announced he had wept when he read the story. This was better praise than Morgan had gotten in math classes, and he was hooked on writing!



Robert Morgan soon became caught up in the excitement about poetry in the late 1960s, receiving significant support from the editors of the magazine *Lillabulero* who published many of his poems and brought out his first book, *Zirconia Poems*, in 1969. After coming to Cornell in the early seventies, Morgan wrote only poems for ten years, and published three more books of poems. Morgan has been awarded numerous prizes and grants for his writing.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Robert Morgan

Alchemy is the art of far and near, and I think poetry is alchemy in that way. It's delightful to distort size, to see something that's tiny as though it were vast.

I don't think poetry is something that can be taught. We can encourage young writers, but what you can't teach them is the very essence of poetry.

I love chapbooks. They're in some ways the ideal form in which to publish and read poems. You can read 19 poems in a way you can't sit down and read 60 to 70 pages of poems.

If a poem is not memorable, there's probably something wrong. One of the problems of free verse is that much of the free verse poetry is not memorable.

One of the biggest changes that ever occurred in my life was going from the isolation of working part-time as a house painter in Henderson County, to Cornell, where everybody was a literary person.

No bee full of sweetness wants to sting. (from today's poem)

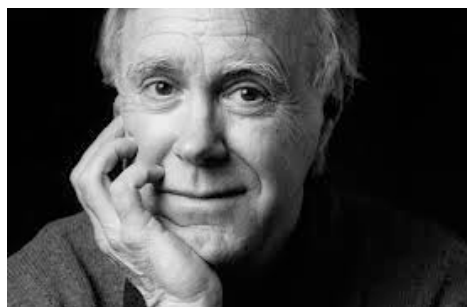
My first influential writing teacher was Sister Thomas Rita— fourth grade, St. Michael's School; Monroe, Michigan, 1958. It's Monday, and time to create a dynamic five-sentence paragraph. Along the chalk ledge of the blackboard, Sister places eight or more "story pictures" pasted to cardboard— sometimes the front covers of the Saturday Evening Post depicting a vibrant Norman Rockwell painting. How is it possible that several children choose the same picture, yet write completely different stories according to what they each "see". Oddly enough, learning to write a well-formed paragraph was a great introduction to writing a poem, the shortest of short stories.

Today's haunting poem by **Robert Hass** is a short prose poem (a single paragraph). Haas says: *I found myself experimenting with discursive and narrative prose inside the limits of the paragraph. I became interested in the idea of the paragraph as a form.*

A Story About the Body

The young composer, working that summer at an artist's colony, had watched her for a week. She was Japanese, a painter, almost sixty, and he thought he was in love with her. He loved her work, and her work was like the way she moved her body, used her hands, looked at him directly when she made amused and considered answers to his questions. One night, walking back from a concert, they came to her door and she turned to him and said, *"I think you would like to have me. I would like that too, but I must tell you I have had a double mastectomy,"* and when he didn't understand, *"I've lost both my breasts."* The radiance that he had carried around in his belly and chest cavity— like music—withered, very quickly, and he made himself look at her when he said, *"I'm sorry. I don't think I could."* He walked back to his own cabin through the pines, and in the morning he found a small blue bowl on the porch outside his door. It looked to be full of rose petals, but he found when he picked it up that the rose petals were on top; the rest of the bowl--she must have swept them from the corners of her studio—was full of dead bees.

— by Robert Hass



POET NOTES

Robert Hass was born in San Francisco on March 1, 1941. He attended St. Mary's College in Moraga, California and received both an MA and Ph.D. in English from Stanford University. Hass served as Poet Laureate of the United States from 1995 to 1997. In a self-described "act of citizenship, Hass criss-crossed the country lecturing in places as diverse as corporate boardrooms and for civic groups, or as he has says, "*places where poets don't go.*" He lives in California with his wife, poet Brenda Hillman, and teaches at the University of California, Berkeley.

His books of poetry include *Time and Materials* which won the 2007 National Book Award, and *Field Guide* (1973), which was selected by Stanley Kunitz for the Yale Younger Poets Series. About Hass's work, Kunitz wrote, "*Reading a poem by Robert Hass is like stepping into the ocean when the temperature of the water is not much different from that of the air. You scarcely know, until you feel the undertow tug at you, that you have entered into another element.*"

Both in his writing and in his speaking there is an unwillingness to generalize. One thing that characterizes his work is his curiosity and attention to details, no matter what the subject. Hass has written poems that are very closely linked to or drawn from his personal life and history, often about nature, as well as political issues such as war and human rights abuses. Hass is also known for his work as a critic, editor, teacher, and translator (most notably of the Polish-Lithuanian Nobel-winner Czeslaw Milosz).

ROBERT HASS, ON JUGGLING THE WRITING LIFE WITH ALL ELSE—

It is, of course, difficult to juggle family life and writing. So, to be a writer in America, one needs to work hard at two jobs. You can have art and love in your life, or art and friendship, but you can't really have all three. . . . One really needs an orderly, bourgeois life to get work done. As an older writer, I find that the demands of family life are now less, but the demands of community life and work life and social life greater, so the problem never really goes away. A work ethic as an artist seems the nearest thing to a solution. . . . The connection between art and the soul's loneliness--each soul's separate task--the part of the self that isn't absorbed by other people's needs or answered entirely by love of another--is the reason why there is a need to juggle family life and writing. Anyway, it's difficult for me. I've never figured it out.

I studied poet **Edwin Arlington Robinson** in high school— for about one week. I remember *Miniver Cheevy* and *Richard Cory*, thinking the poet was a brave soul to name names in his poems, not understanding the universality of the "outcast", how the poet was speaking for himself, for me, for all of us, who fall through the cracks from time to time, and for those who fall through more frequently, or completely and irrevocably. I was encouraged to revisit the work of E.A.R. by my poetry mentor (now dear friend) Ann Stapleton who lives in the Hocking Hills area of Ohio. Her understanding of and respect for formal poetry increased my knowledge, and improved my own writing along the way.

A personal thanks to Ann Stapleton of Hocking Hills for her contribution to today's offering!

Despite certain tragedies in Robinson's life, there was faith and an ability to find goodness and light in the darkest of places. Ann Stapleton says: *"Robinson's obsessive theme is that the individual's often deluded yet indomitable response to the world is more real and lasting than any illusory notion of the collective."* — — *"He loves his characters, exults in them without condition, and believes that it is precisely within their clumsy, doomed attempts to somehow live in the world as it is that life's preciousness is realized."*

I found a friend in Edwin **Arlington Robinson** when today's poem appeared seemingly out of nowhere during one of my earlier searches on this poet. It amused me to find this particular poem, since I had recently been patted on the head (so to speak) and literally told *"good for you and your little poetry hobby."* Well, I think Edwin's response speaks volumes.

Dear Friends

Dear Friends, reproach me not for what I do,
Nor counsel me, nor pity me; nor say
That I am wearing half my life away
For bubble-work that only fools pursue.
And if my bubbles be too small for you,
Blow bigger than your own: the games we play
To fill the frittered minutes of a day,
Good glasses are to read the spirit through.

And whoso reads may get him some shrewd skill;
And some unprofitable scorn resign,
To praise the very thing that he deplores;
So, friends (dear friends), remember, if you will,
The shame I win for singing is all mine,
The gold I miss for dreaming is all yours.

—by *Edwin Arlington Robinson*



POET NOTES

Edwin Arlington Robinson (December 22, 1869 – April 6, 1935) was born in Maine. He described his childhood as "stark and unhappy". After his father died, Robinson became the head of a failing household. His mother died of black diphtheria, a disease so horribly contagious, even the doctor avoided contact. One brother died of a drug overdose, and another brother of alcoholism. By 1908, Robinson's birth family was gone.

Education

In the fall of 1891, at the age of 21, Edwin entered Harvard University as a special student. He took classes in English, French, and Shakespeare. After his first year at Harvard, he was called home because his father was dying.

Publications

In 1896 Edwin Arlington Robinson self-published his first book, *"The Torrent and the Night Before,"* paying 100 dollars for 500 copies. It was meant to be a surprise for his mother, but days before the copies arrived, Mary Palmer Robinson died. His second volume, *"The Children of the Night,"* was recommended to President Franklin Roosevelt, who, impressed with the poems and knowing the poet was in dire straits, secured a writing job for Robinson at the New York Customs Office. Robinson won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for the years 1922, 1925 and 1928.

A POET'S POET

Edwin Arlington Robinson has been praised by other writers and poets, among them James Dickey, Robert Mezey, and Donald Hall who said we must bring Robinson "back", and Robert Frost who said: *"Robinson was a prince of heartachers amid countless achers of another part. The sincerity he wrought in was all sad. He asserted the sacred right of poetry to lean its breast to a thorn and sing its dolefullest."*

HOW THE POET GOT HIS NAME

In Ann Stapleton's article, *Our Comfort is the Song: Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869-1935)* she writes: *The poet Robert Mezey has speculated that Robinson's propensity for giving highly individualized names to the characters who populate his poems (John Evereldown, Fleming Helphenstine, Bewick Finzer) might well have originated from the circumstances of his own naming. Already the parents of two boys, his mother and father had been desperately hoping for a girl. When in December of 1869 their third child was born a boy, they were so disappointed that they didn't bother to name him until the following summer, and then only at the insistence of a guest at a lawn party, where his name was chosen randomly from entries put into a hat. Arlington, which sounds like a family name handed down over generations, refers to Arlington, Massachusetts, the hometown of the guest who offered up the winning name, which Robinson always disliked, saying it sounded like someone kicking a can down the stairs. Though his family called him Win, he was known to his friends as E.A.R., a serendipitous set of initials for a poet with such a gifted ear for the deep privacies of the English language.*

Advice to Myself

Leave the dishes.
Let the celery rot in the bottom drawer of the refrigerator
and an earthen scum harden on the kitchen floor.
Leave the black crumbs in the bottom of the toaster.
Throw the cracked bowl out and don't patch the cup.
Don't patch anything. Don't mend. Buy safety pins.
Don't even sew on a button.
Let the wind have its way, then the earth
that invades as dust and then the dead
foaming up in gray rolls underneath the couch.
Talk to them. Tell them they are welcome.
Don't keep all the pieces of the puzzles
or the doll's tiny shoes in pairs, don't worry
who uses whose toothbrush or if anything
matches, at all.
Except one word to another. Or a thought.
Pursue the authentic—decide first
what is authentic,
then go after it with all your heart.
Your heart, that place
you don't even think of cleaning out.
That closet stuffed with savage mementos.
Don't sort the paper clips from screws from saved baby teeth
or worry if we're all eating cereal for dinner
again. Don't answer the telephone, ever,
or weep over anything at all that breaks.
Pink molds will grow within those sealed cartons
in the refrigerator. Accept new forms of life
and talk to the dead
who drift in through the screened windows, who collect
patiently on the tops of food jars and books.
Recycle the mail, don't read it, don't read anything
except what destroys
the insulation between yourself and your experience
or what pulls down or what strikes at or what shatters
this ruse you call necessity.

—by Louise Erdrich

POET NOTES

Karen Louise Erdrich was born on July 6, 1954, in Little Falls, Minnesota. One of seven children, Erdrich and her family later lived in Wahpeton, North Dakota, close to the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation. Her parents both taught at the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school. Erdrich's mother was born on the reservation, and Erdrich's grandfather, Patrick Gourneau, served as tribal chairman. Erdrich thinks highly of her grandfather, who keeps the old traditions alive within the context of modern culture and is respected in both cultures.

Education

Louis Erdrich entered Dartmouth College in 1972 when it went co-ed. That same year, Dartmouth established its Native American Studies department. Anthropologist Michael Dorris, Erdrich's future husband, chaired the department. As a student in his classes, Erdrich began to explore her Native American heritage. At the same time, one of her other teachers encouraged her poetry writing.

Colorful Work History

Feeling validated as a poet, Erdrich worked after graduation for the State Arts Council of North Dakota, teaching poetry in schools, prisons, and rehabilitation centers. In addition to being a poetry teacher, Erdrich worked various jobs that have provided her with experiences she uses in her writing: as a waitress & short order cook, on a farm hoeing beets, as a lifeguard, construction flag signler, and she once weighed trucks on the interstate. In recent years, Louise and two of her sisters who are also writers, host annual writers workshops at Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in North Dakota. Erdrich now lives in Minnesota with her children, who help her run a small independent bookstore in Minneapolis called **Birchbark Books** billed as "*Not a chain*."

Not A Box. Not an ordinary destination". Charming website at: <http://www.birchbarkbooks.com>



IN HER OWN WORDS—Louise Erdrich

I got well by talking. Death could not get a word in edgewise, grew discouraged, and traveled on.

To be of mixed blood is a great gift for a writer. I have one foot on tribal lands and one foot in middle-class life.

Tomorrow is the first day of May, and these "**April Gifts**" will come to a close for 2009. Thank you for receiving them when your mailboxes are already so full, and for responding to them as you did. Your correspondence throughout the month was a sweet and unexpected surprise. I've appreciated your kind and helpful remarks, and especially learning which poems touched you deeply and inspired your writing, thinking, and "being" in the world. Maybe we will meet here again on the electronic page next year.

A special thanks to the dozens of folks who attended Tuesday night's Poetry in the Garden at the Public Library. We (Kate Fadick, Valerie Chronis Bickett and I) read our poems to family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, students, writing colleagues and the "accidental" library visitors. David Siders of the Public Library was our generous and kind host. **Little Pocket Poetry** has grown because of your interest. We hope to see you at a future event.

Fondly, Susan Glassmeyer

Today's poem is by poet **A.R. Ammons**. The poem will have the last word to close out the month.

POET NOTES

Archie Randolph Ammons was born outside Whiteville, North Carolina on February 18, 1926, and grew up on a tobacco farm. He started writing poetry aboard a U.S. Navy destroyer escort in the South Pacific. After completing service in WWII, he attended Wake Forest University and the University of California at Berkeley. He went on to work as an elementary school principal, a real estate salesman, an editor, and an executive in a glass company before he began teaching at Cornell University in 1964. He lived in Ithaca, New York, where he was Goldwin Smith Professor of Poetry at Cornell until his retirement in 1998. Ammons died on February 25, 2001.

Publications & Writing Style

A.R. Ammons published nearly thirty collections of poetry, and was the recipient of many honors and prizes. Ammons often wrote in two-line or three-line stanzas. His lines are strongly enjambed. Some of his poems are extremely short, while others are hundreds of lines long. His National Book Award winning volume *Garbage* was typed out on a roll of adding machine tape and consists of a single extended sentence, divided into eighteen sections, arranged in couplets.

Ammons was known for his maverick writing style and for his idiosyncratic approach to punctuation. Instead of periods, some of his poems end with an ellipsis (. . .) while other poems have no terminal punctuation at all. The colon is an Ammons "signature"; he uses it "as an all-purpose punctuation, mark." The colon gave Ammons permission to stress the linkage between clauses and to postpone closure indefinitely.

NATURE POET

A nature poet, with a highly developed scientific acumen that sets him off from his contemporaries, Ammons seems intent on "making the consciousness of the poet the secret or real subject of the poem." Critic Harold Bloom calls Ammons a transcendentalist, saying: "Like Frost, Ammons loves nature too deeply to sentimentalize it or flinch in the face of its cruelties. But he is warmer; where Frost is a poet of terror, Ammons would convert fear into praise."

IN HIS OWN WORDS—A.R. Ammons

Poetry leads us to the unstructured source of our beings, to the unknown, and returns us to our rational, structured selves refreshed. . . . You have your identity when you find out, not what you can keep your mind on, but what you can't keep your mind off."

Even if you walk exactly the same route each time— as with a sonnet —the events along the route cannot be imagined to be the same from day to day, as the poet's health, sight, his anticipations, moods, fears, thoughts cannot be the same.

I can't tell you where a poem comes from, what it is, or what it is for: nor can any other man. The reason I can't tell you is that the purpose of the poem is to go past telling, to be recognized by burning.

Eyesight

It was May before my
attention came
to spring and

my word I said
to the southern slopes
I've

missed it, it
came and went before
I got right to see:

don't worry, said the mountain,
try the later northern slopes
or if

you can climb, climb
into spring: but
said the mountain

it's not that way
with all things, some
that go are gone

—by A.R. Ammons

