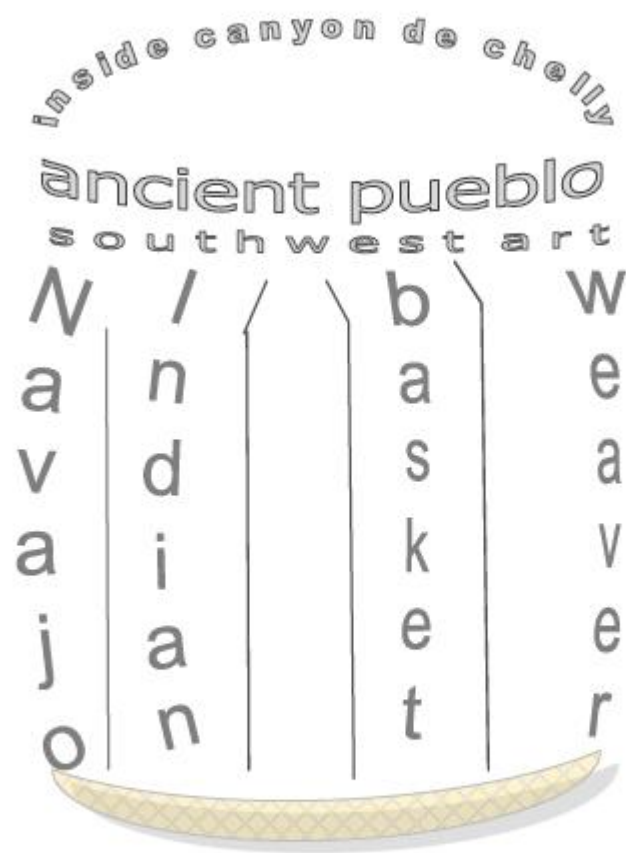


A Haiga – by Jan Benson



Cliff Palace



woven stalks and grasses

ancestral roots revealed

My Car has Square Wheels

© Jan Benson

There are wild onions in my yard,
a garage full of boxes
and no room for vehicles

My neighbor's sidewinder
chooses our drive to slide on
at a hard-driven slush of rain

My watch has 3 hands
my children, two tones
and my mind, no balance

So, if there's a pizza on my roof and
my car has square wheels
what matter to anyone ...

that this poem does not rhyme

Sentence Endless

© Jan Benson

If our space is lonely yellow
our tensions green and halos blue
will we find each other hollow
goals unseen, hearts untrue?

If our thoughts run sentence endless
muted lips and empty tongue
will our heart-lines shadow toneless
graded dips and valleys long?

If we are offered twin-horizons
draped in dark and soft blue haze
will there be dual destinations
cutting wheat-fields and splitting maze?

If our journey yields no hovel
no comfort to revive
could we survive this saffron novel
support rejoined within our tribe?

If our track is crossed with venom
our wide eyes dead to dream
perhaps we should remain alone
esteem adventure for the keen

But, if you seize the now of me
and trust the hope of this orange day
come walk towards our destiny
run full-face into today

Christine H. Boldt

The War Mother (1939)

Umlauf Museum and Sculpture Garden

The Mother

Her gaunt, squatting body makes it easy
to think the War Mother seventy-four,
as noted on the tag beside the path,
but the starving child at her breast tells us
a different story. Cast in gray stone
the pair are the first of sculptor Umlauf's
creatures met when entering his garden.
Why did he honor them with pride of
place?
Their numbed and awful agony is set,
life-sized, on a block of pinkish granite.
A tendril from a nearby bush has
stretched
across her shoulder. Her face, turned
away,
from both this green shoot and her
wizened boy,
is half-hid by her monumental hand
that strains, it seems, to cover all her woe.
Her unshielded profile, planed with pain,
quarrels with the quiet of this lovely
space.

Her Child

The mother's other hand, work-knotted joints,
rests against the body of her child.
The spidery fingers of his left hand
lie in the crease between her sagging breasts --
a touch that every mother knows too well,
consoling and entreating both at once.
His nakedness is stretched on bony frame.
Just imagine, if you can, stone starving.
The child is a boy, of course,
and should he live, might only feed another war.
His body's fixed in the parabola
of simple cloth draped over mother's knees.
I was certain his eyes were on her face
until, faltering, I approached the work,
found his gaze pouring into the distance.
Hungering for another mother? Me?
But how to comfort still and staring stone?

The Sculptor

“If I could say in words, I would not have done this,” he declared about his works
in a film I viewed in the gazebo,
before I ventured out into the yard.
Then he spoke about the roundness of his art:
“Painters work with only half a person;
the sculptor needs to think of front and back
simultaneously, if he would have a hope of conning their humanity.”
Umlauf’s filmed persona offers challenge to those who have come here to learn to see:
“I believe in spirituality,
not in the people who preach about it,
but in the people who believe in it,
those who are doing something about it.”
What *he* did was gouge and smooth this suffering
from his medium, lay it on the world.

The Viewer

Why is it, when I'm brought to wonder
by one artist's stunning craft, my first thought
is how much he echoes so-and-so?
This time it's prints by Kaethe Kollwitz
in which I find a corresponding note:
“Seed corn must not be ground,” she warned us
all.
Women she sketched were fierce in their defense
of children, sheltered them against each storm,
had nothing like the wrung out grief seen here.
Yet thinking only goes so far in art.
I must open heartward to *this* piece.
If I'm to have a hope of truly making
a *lectio divina* of the stone:
What first jumps out at me? Their hands.
What do I feel when staring at this image?
An ache to be an answer their want.
What would the maker ask I do just now?
And I respond by knotting my own hands.

Donna Bowling

Polar Bear Crossing

Donna Bowling

I suppose she too came for a vacation,
a time away from the routine
of hunting and fishing.

The polar bear crossing sign
sits between a house and the beach.
Maybe it's a time share,

a respite for polar bears who come south
to flee the northern expanses,
like the snow birds from Michigan,

who populate the beach towns in winter.
I did not see her cross the road with her cubs.
She must have panted heavily,

draped in that white fur coat,
weighed down by the damp heat
of the beach in summer.

Of course the cubs would have dashed ahead,
anxious to body surf and dig in the sand,
filling their buckets with shell souvenirs
for the trip home.
I imagine she watches them play
with the same fierce protectiveness

I once felt for my small sons.
No chance for her to doze in the shade
of the beach umbrella

as I can now that my cubs
are grown, with cubs of their own
to watch over at the beach.

Does she feel out of her body
too, away from normal routine
and obligations, a tourist

in a place known only from vacations,
a northerner as out of her element
as a polar bear at the beach,

loving every minute
of this strangely beautiful place;
in no hurry to return home.

The Labyrinth

Donna Bowling

A brick path, cushioned with rocks and shells,
white, gray, red and black,
wanders to a stone block
beneath the elms and oaks
of a neighboring Episcopal church.

I walk slowly in the August heat,
while the sun blazes above the trees
that shield me from its fire,
Starbucks frappe in hand,
ice and fire on this birthday.

Each step brings me closer
to the center stone,
where I will leave the burdens
that weigh me down
and breathe freely once more.

Ancient pathway into the heart of God,
lead me into the depths of my soul
to find light and peace in God's presence,
bread for the journey back into the world,
strength to carry me into the future.

Cassy Burleson

Christmas Eve Epiphany

@ Cassy Burleson Bell, Jordan, Key, and back to Burleson again, Dec. 24, 2006

(Just in case someone looks at my grave beside my brother and thinks I died an Old Maid ...)

Henry David Thoreau said solitude is the only perfect companion for working or thinking. Of course, Thoreau left out drinking, which was notable, considering all things Thoreau. So far, Christmas 2006 alone, has been so ... all alone, as no other loneliness has ever been. Because understatedly, in disciplined breath, Christmas ... isn't quite the same this year.

No tinsel, no 19 children laughing. No lighted tree. But another ex husband. And no such thing as "The perfect one." Yet my philosopher mind knows one has always been an imperfect number ... By itself, always seeking to be two or three or four or anything else more voluminous, Perhaps more voluptuous - anything more than just this lonely, understated, isolated one.

When in truth, as Thoreau pointed out, one may be the only perfect number. Overall. One must be broken down to fractions in reflections to be whole again. Like me, perhaps ... Broken down - but not yet broken. Broken down to pieces of a whole, all of us parts of One and not perfect yet, but perfectly solitary tonight, nevertheless. One is a vortex number.

One alone out here alone in emptiness is a black hole that draws all things quietly to it. All memories of Christmases past softly whirring in a whirlpool of thoughtfulness and Isolation while it rains outside tonight across the bridge. So quiet that the clock ticks and the Wind blows in the cold night air at the rate at one epiphany per hour. I sit. Waiting, still ...

And sitting still, I notice, has its own rewards. But next Christmas, I'll be sitting somewhere Else, somewhere, anywhere else but here, with more than ones or twos to celebrate the night, A better plan put forward, knowing quiet clearly now that neither ones nor twos are really bad Numbers, by themselves, given the beauty and alternatives of the still ... and still too silent ...

Silent One. The Steadfast Me ... the me who thought I could think my way out of sadness, Think past the live oak tree I tried so hard to be ... but never was. And that makes all the Difference in these sad and lonely, and oh so reflective, introspective nights. Christmas Eve. Christmas Day. My brother's birthday tomorrow, either way, and life that's other-wise for me.

My brother is so long gone now, but tomorrow, I'll take some flowers to his grave for company.

Hope

By Cassy Burleson

July 2007

If I'd have known during menopause I'd have been so un-hot afterward, I might have enjoyed those years before more enthusiastically. In every respect ...
And let's not leave out sex here in this one-sided dialogue,
Although that's all I'm going to say about that. For now.

I'm older and less hot, perhaps, but lots wiser now. But give me stupid instead, any day. I have experience with stupid. Didn't know about the true value of one's retirement until my "Retirement specialist" husband wanted half of mine. Paid for a home on the glorious Texas Gulf Coast I never lollygagged around in because I always had the second and third jobs.

Excuse me. I digress to anger. Didn't know about the girlfriend. Didn't know about many things. And me with a Ph (period) D. So much for the protection of getting that good Education. I should have been a plumber, I've seen so much ... of all that ... stuff ... that happens in life. I'm well-educated but obviously only smart on an intermittent basis. Once each decade or so.

My only consolation is all the really humble people I know have been divorced at least once. We're disenchanted, but most of us love our children more than life itself. And I did get the Consolation prize: his new ex-wife left him in less than three months. Or perhaps that proved I was stupid to have stayed so long, trusted so blindly and given so much to "our" marriage.

But life's a good thing. Even when it's bad Most people my age are so "in the middle."
Our parents are getting older. We have middle-aged angst while our children become more and more the angels in our lives. Isn't that a nice surprise? God is the smartest one. Those big hands holding-you-in-the-palm-of-them—but sometimes palms down, perhaps?

Imagine that. I couldn't have imagined this outcome when my daughter, as perfect as she would become was in her teens. I forget what year. That's a message of hope right there. That part. There's hope after that part where you think there isn't hope ... even when you get an email out of the blue asking for a divorce or the bad news about the cancer ... 50/50 chance and all that.

Hope is when God says, "Hey, 50/50. That's a pretty good chance for happily ever after."
Either way, everyone I know has been very good, under the circumstances life threw us.
So there. Sorry I brought that up again, God. You already knew it. So all I can say is, I don't have Plan B, and God, I hope you're listening, since inspiring us to greater good's your specialty.

My enduring hope is to become better than I am now and inspire others to do the same.

Just Sayin' by Cassy Burleson Feb. 16, 2013

In the world we women who went to the first NOW conference grew up in,
Having a child was the ultimate luxury because being a professional meant that, for one thing,
We never took time off from work for family, and we didn't NOT go to a meeting because our
Child was sick or having a school play or playing soccer or just needing some extra "Mommy" time.

That would have been career suicide in our pre-NOW world, where men didn't do that, either ...
So in couples, it always was a "career survival" negotiation. Women usually lost, and then there was that
"Glass ceiling," where we knew, no matter how effective, efficient, caring or creatively brilliant we were,
We'd need to move faster, jump higher, swallow all lumps and give all the credit to some manly man.

Some "he" was your boss, everywhere, at work and at home. Repeat that, infinitesimally ...
And that might be one reason for my shocking divorce rate. Maybe other issues ... just sayin' ...
But I can tell you without reservation my daughter and her husband saying they don't want children
Might have something to do with my mistakes ... and that makes me infinitesimally, eternally sad.

Overall, just sad ... just sayin' ... because the best thing I ever did was have a baby, and it was Jasa
And she is so "wow," in every aspect, and I respect their decision. But I'd really love to hug their baby.
And not having a child like her wasn't what I was fighting for all these years. Indeed, quite the opposite.
Just sayin' ... I'd really like to hug that baby girl and that woman I was fighting for all those years.

FOUR HAIKU

**Wings all a flutter
daring to challenge the wind
Springtime's butterfly

**Tiny and mighty
jetting hither and yonder
Summer's hummingbird

**Rat a tat a tat
hammering for bugs to eat
Autumn's woodpecker

**Flashing red and brown
bathing in winter's raindrops
Northern cardinal

C. W. (Wally) Christian

From "A Clutch of Old Man's Song."

Weltschmerz

Let the sky sheep come and swath the moon in shadows
And we will huddle in its coolness
As if we were not heavy with spent hours,
As if the blood of youth still flamed our hopes,
And the passion of our days had not been squandered
On going and coming and being there
And nurturing and rising and sleeping,
And laughing aloud and sobbing.
Your cheek was smooth as polished stones,
Warm like apricot-fruit at dewbreak.
I remember.
Arcturus long since has left the sky
And Vega blinks in gray morning mists.
Venus shimmers dimly in the eastern dawn
And weary we are of waking
And caring and loving, and long to sleep.

Three poems from "Beasties"

Beasties

Thank God for beasties, feathered. scaled or furred,
Leopard, lizard, beaver, bass and bird,
Creatures of the wet and of the dry.
Things that run or wriggle, flit or fly,
Things that peer above the waving grass
And fix their eyes upon me as I pass,
Curious of this strange, bipedal thing
That strides their April meadows like a king,
For creatures frigid, temperate or tropic,
Vast as Leviathan or microscopic,
For things that live and love and swarm and teem
And--Who can say?-- perhaps like me, can dream.
How tedious to live our days alone
With lifeless, stolid dust and silent stone,
Never to know the throbbing world before us
Nor waken to the woodland's morning chorus.

The Crepusculars

The nighthawk beeps above the canopy
And creatures of the demi-monde
Stir in the gloaming, a thousand eyes
That see but by us daylings are unseen,
Jealous possessors of the witching hour
Between the setting of the sun,
The lengthening of shadows and the
time
Of darkness, moonlight, predators and
dreams.
Dim twilight things they are who wake
to hoard
The last remaining residue of day,
To feed and breed and be and then to
die.
These are the crepusculars, beasties of
the gloom,
Whose realm is the between,
Between the day and night, the warm
and chill,
The knowing, feeling and the
nothingness.

A Puzzlement

Twenty grackles on a wire
Like an a capella choir,
Twenty beaks in perfect order
Pointing to the southern border.
In unison they show the way
To Panama or Paraguay,
No one opposite, no one other
Than his glossy grackle brother.

Twenty grackles, slim and sleek,
Gold of eye and black of beak,
Pointing without grudge or malice
To aurora borealis.
Twenty birds in full rapport
Now designate some arctic shore.
Alike they are in shade and nuance,
Pointing north in clear congruence.

Quod erat demonstrandum!

(“Logic is logic! That’s all I say.” OWH)

From "*A Clutch of Old Man's Songs*"

The Minstrels

Where have all the minstrels gone
Who sang when I was young,
So young I believed that rainbows were real,
Like the rocks and trees around us?
Where have all the minstrels gone?
We welcomed them as they came over the hill
In their colorful tights and their piebald jackets
And their lutes inlaid with rosewood and ivory.
They had bells on their caps and their sandals
And their songs were warm and full of laughter.
They weren't afraid to be foolish
And they weren't afraid to be tender
And to sing of honest lovers
Who did not change when the west wind turned
And the north wind blew through the valleys.
Where now have the minstrels gone?
Oh yes, there are singers of songs
But their eyes are hard
And their songs are hard
And the children who follow them are so old,
And the children know, O, they know
That lovers love only 'til daybreak
And that rainbows are mere refractions.

From "*Songs for Advent & Christmastide*"

Hodie

Hodie Christus natus est,
The stars of night fade in the west,
Hope and life are newly born
Upon this pristine Christmas morn;
Hodie! Hodie!
This day embracing every day
This mote in time enfolding every hour,
Purging our stygian dark at last away,
 Bringing the snows of human grief to flower
 Breathing upon us heaven's thawing breath,
 Banishing in birth the pain of death.
 Herein is life's bitter heart made sweet,
Herein is creation made complete,
Herein are earth and heaven wholly blest,
Hodie!
Hodie Christus natus est.

Thinking Speech

Words are
the intimate language
of the soul
Linking an
unbroken chain
with speech
Thinking before speaking
should not
be taken lightly
For once
They come alive
through tongue
Their powerful force
is permanently etched
On the soul
of another
Forever
©2009

Sing!

Sing, Diva, Sing!
Stand and deliver that song
from your very essence
Talk in that universal language
which entwines souls
throughout the ages
Sparking in spheres known only
to you and God
From sweet operatic to growling bass
claim it all yours
as you
Sing, Diva, Sing!

©2009

Quiet Femininity

Behind the alluring veil

lies soft strength

in feminine form

sensuous hips and

precision footsteps

shout out

for everyone to hear

Graceful hand flick

question marks

and exclamation points

Sly smiles

an elegant tilt of the head,

Goddess woman dancer

bares her soul

with captivating music

Smoldering eyes

a silent story begins

rolling torsos

as her Muse

Sharing special talents

not meant

to be silenced

by worldly ignorance

Leaving the audience

to appreciate and seek

a higher self

the Goddess

exposed to all.

©2009

Lee Elsesser

A Brief Age

The church my great grandfather
helped to build
a hundred years ago
still stands on the last street
on the west side of town.

He and all the other builders,
they called themselves Volga Germans,
lived out their lives in a brief age when
the church's bell still called
the faithful to Sunday worship
and on funeral days tolled
the ages of the congregation's dead;
a short span of decades when
the sugar beets they were brought
to tend from half a world away
still grew in nearby fields,
while the neighborhood still rang
with Martin Luther's hymn's
sung in Martin Luther's tongue;
a time when factory smoke streamed
across the fall and winter skies
as Germanic invention turned
beet juice into American sugar crystals,
when noontime Sunday tables steamed
with aromas of kraut and wurst and brot,
the German accent familiar on any street
and polkas danced on prairie winds
for every fräulein's wedding night.

The smokestack from the factory remains,
a lonely relic above the town's north side.
The empty bell tower of the church nearby
artfully evolves from cube to shingled spire
above the steep pitch of the roof.
The bell, if it tolls at all, rings somewhere
in another state as a unique antique,
and the church my great grandfather
helped to build a hundred years ago
Is now a cafe called Christine's.

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Backyards Back Then

by
Lee Elsesser

A mulberry tree grew on the north side
of the first backyard I can recall.
I was four. I know because the Army
had not taken Daddy for the war
And my baby sister wasn't born.

If you looked out from the step
outside our kitchen door, that tree
was on the left just past the pen
my folks built to keep the goat
after the doctor said I was anemic
from having whooping cough
and German measles so close together
and needed goat's milk everyday,

The tree stood next to the neighbor's fence
directly across a green rectangle
of Kentucky Bluegrass lawn
from the long side of the garage,
painted yellow like the house,
and just in front of the chicken coop,
where we kept three hens for eggs
and a few White Leghorns for special dinners,
and which itself was at the left front corner
of our vegetable garden straight across
from the rabbit hutch that was tacked on
out of sight to the back of the garage
Next to the wash tubs in front of the clothesline.

I was not allowed to eat mulberries,
Mother said they might carry polio,
and I knew I'd get the spanking of my life
if I even touched that rusty hatchet.
The one with its sharp blade buried
in the blood-stained stump
that sat there on the lawn
at the garden's edge.

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Now I Am Here

by
Lee Elsesser

For Bonnie McClellan-Broussard

When I was there,
at that last edge of the great plain
where the Rocky Mountains rise,
it was as much of time as place,
as much of clock and calendar
as family farms and small town city limit signs.

Between the wars, the seasons crept
one to the next, the work, the same
one year as the last. All new days
brought chores to do, always
daily chores to do and each tomorrow
seemed to be just another yesterday.

The imaginary lines I crossed
to leave,
kept nothing out that
wanted in,
and in departing I took the best
of what had been,
while what came in brought
what would be.

When I returned to say
my last goodbye,
the land alone remained unchanged;
the purpled ranges,
beneath the high proscenium of sky
still a constant backdrop
for a short-grass prairie stage where
the past had played.

Now I am here
at another edge of that same long plain,
and in the shapes of Texas clouds that line a far horizon
I sometimes
see my Colorado mountains.

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Fort Worth, Texas 2013

Gate Crashing

Cora Mae LuEllen has
designs on breezing through
the Pearly Gates despite
her dishwater history of
bullet hole confessions and
broken glass revelings without invitation--
spoken or engraved.

None of her other departed partners-in-vice can name
heaven as their permanent address, but with
a knowing spritz of Chanel No. 5 and
an unholy sense of entitlement, Cora
leans over and whispers to dear ol' St. Peter that
she could really use a change of scenery,
leaving "Heavenly Cherry" lipstick on his ear.

Abandoned Issue

Uncertainty
handed me my bathrobe this morning
and
insisted on planning my day,
so
I
took Uncertainty with me to the mall,
left her at the food court,
and
didn't bother to report her as missing
so
that
no milk cartons would be defaced
in the writing of this poem.

Thunderstorm

Over and
over again,
lightning hurls itself
at my windows, and
over and over again,
I am disgusted
by its
lack of ambition.

(c)Lynn Lewis

Appearances

It can happen to anyone.
As the guest of honor,
you arrive on time.
Things go well enough
during introductions:
your smile, a perfect greeting
card for the occasion;
their handshakes,
paneled invitations
to join the club.
Then just as you begin
to answer cocktail questions
about your recent successes,
casually laying over
one cuff-linked arm, the sash
of your imitation cashmere
life (graciously accepting
compliments on its lovely design),
you see something slip
from the open pocket
of your coat: the past,
that tattered scrap
of penciled paper,
its edges worn soft
from nervous folding
and refolding...
your past—
that insistent history—
flutters onto the marble floor
and falls open at the feet
of a platinum woman,
who, with stilted aplomb,
lifts it into the champagne air
and asks in mock surprise,
Oh, my dear,
could this possibly be yours?

Escape Velocity

Escape is easy,
they told us in physics,
once you believe men
with numbered names
like Newton, Planck and Bohr,
visionary human calculators
who used equations to prove
what we needed so desperately
to know. As if writing to me,
a girl considering her future,
Sir Francis said that
when all the signs converge
like compass points drawn north,
when spinning finds sufficient speed,
when there is finally enough
directional ambition,
an object in motion,
a ball on a string,
a rocket circling Earth,
a boy with his books,
a car on a stretch of highway,
a young woman desperately in love,
can suddenly escape
the circumferential curve
of gravitational orbit
and be slung outward,
tangentially launched,
no longer held
by the familiar force
of well-meaning parents
or fixed by the reassuring routine
of things coming around again.
In a trick of rotational nature,
all at once, an arc can straighten,
so that a rock, a person, a life
can be suddenly propelled
in a single new direction:
away.

Patrick Marshall

Balloon Man

Step right up, you will be glad! Clever things can be had,
Give me a little money... and a brief amount of time.
A king's crown for you, a princess' tiara for sister Sue!
Take a dog, swan, or a swash buckling sailor's hat or sword
I sing, dance, and twist balloons into whatever; just give the word.
But as you turn and walk away, recall the smile seen on my face,
You'll never know the years and tears that brought me to this place.
I dearly love to make the children laugh and grin; their parents smile
Reminding me of those loves ones, I held in life, for just a little while.

Reminiscent Resemblance

In a store where he walked, by a mirror he passed.
An old man caught his eye, he looked back aghast!
From nowhere he came, certainly curious to see
That wrinkled resemblance reminiscent of me.
When did this happen? What could it mean?
A bent weathered old man one He'd never seen.
His reflection in the mirror as he shaved on that day
Revealed he looked good, in his own way.
Hair thinning and gray, no "Dandy" but not ugly
Looking OK he thought just a tad smugly.
Blue eyes still shine, after a good rest.
For a toothless smile, one of the best.
A few laugh lines on his face looking swell
Well, maybe a bunch, with old eyes, hard to tell.
Somehow, days and years slipped by so fast
Recognized in that mirror this might be him, at the last.
He grinned at the old man, not a word did he say.
Straightened shoulders and back, lifted his head, walked away.
Not bad for an old man he thought; if the truth be told.
Thinking, I hope I look that good when I get that old.

Too Soon You Are Gone From Me

Too soon you are gone from me.
It is not how I expected it to be.
There were many more things to do,
Everyone one of them included you.

For short times we may have been apart
But those times never hurt my heart.
This parting is a wrenching strain.
It will be long and filled with pain.

Friends and family came to bid "Adieu."
In laughter and tears we remember you.
In time, they say the pain will leave,
And I will gain some blessed reprieve.

Right now the only thing I feel or see.
Is all too soon, you are gone from me.

I know you knew our love was strong
It did not break or bend.
You were my rock, my love, my life
And my most trusted friend.

I will take some comfort, every time
Your spirit touches...so gently.
I know, you knew, that I loved you,
And I know that you loved me.

Right now the only thing I feel or see.
Is all too soon you, are gone from me.

DistilLate

Please catch again for me an instant filled
with rain cascading down amid brief light,
reminding me of great Black Forest rilled,
while half a world away, my heart takes flight.
These stroboscopic movies that they make
have launched themselves into my night's seclusion;
upon a stage that's now and then opaque,
tonight's magicians coordinate illusion.
To feel again such feelings as I might,
I've longed to slip away from daytime boredom;
by seeking winds of change, my mind's a kite
that's learned of windy nights and how to hoard them.
The jagged trace of images in light;
distilled for me, the swallowtude of night.

Masterpieces

The greatest paintings ever done on earth
were painted by a single artist's brush;
if they were wrought to show some grief or mirth,
with either mood, one's heart will feel a rush.
The finest sculptures ever to be cast,
conceived within one mind and guided hands,
move feelings over time and distance vast,
transforming hearts like waves upon the sands.
The truest words to yet be written down
were authored by a solitary soul;
not spoken by a man without a crown,
His loving word may help to make man whole.
The building of the stairways to the stars
is done by those alone, with all their scars.

Reading

What I read
is read with eyes
you do not use,
for I read
with my heart,
from pages that remain
scattered and layered
around the edges of
the Grand Canyons
in my mind,
still scoured by
the winds of work
and the rains
of resolve,
still scored by
deepening rivers
of reflection.

Fireplace

Once or twice a year I'd stand upon
a distant piece of land some call a plot;
I'd think about the loving home that's gone
and of those to whom it once had meant a lot.

When I'd go I'd start out in good weather,
but I'd stay, often longer than a while;
when I came back, I smelled somewhat like heather;
it's the fragrance of those times that makes me smile.

I'd step around a trace of that old house
and stand beside a burned-out flooring joist;
occasionally I came upon a quiet mouse
or growing toadstools when the ground was moist.

I tracked a trek out there one winter day
and traced again my footsteps all around;
in the wind, snow-laden boughs and branches sway;
a cold-sewn whitework quilt lay on the ground.

That old rock chimney stood in stark contrast
to the level land deep within the wood;
it often served me as a ship's main mast;
I've sailed with her as often as I could.

The busy highway now pays its respects
to the solemn stone that marks where a home had dwelled;
I remember the hearth and its warm aspects;
faint visions flood my eyes before they're welled.

Jessica Ray

After Thoughts

Gentle breezes sing to tall pampas grass,
weeping, rejoicing
as my frail fingers reach outward, upward.
“I’m confused ...
I don’t belong here.”

Outside my window
a tiny yew tree*
drops its leaves
as I leave . . .
My last journey.

The sun is sinking;
its glowing rays whisper to me
in hues of glory,
promising a new day -
a new life.

Then night falls . . . darkness.
Black, starless skies -
only the sound of silence
as stillness, quiet, overshadows
all light
while birth pangs gift me
with new life.

Morning breaks ...
Wind chimes sing a celestial song,
reaching up, caressing clouds
of heavenly blue,
ushering in a new day.

Last night . . .
You took my hand ...
and led me . . .
to Paradise

*The yew in ancient Europe was thought to help souls find the afterlife.

Transformed

Bits and pieces and shards arrive
instead of the long awaited
exquisite, French columned mirrors
planned for completing the Middle Eastern palace.*

After taking in the devastation,
examining the broken pieces,
the artist says,
“Wait, don’t throw them away.
Break them, crush them even more . . .
We will make it into a mosaic.”

And it happens - this unexpected masterpiece -
this miracle of a shimmering diamond of multi-color reflections .
The ceiling and walls become a silv’ry, glowing
mosaic of unmatched beauty.
Through its brokenness . . .
it becomes a true work of art.

and so . . .

Is it possible for a child
designed in perfection and beauty
to come to believe
its brokenness is hopeless,
unworthy of the design,
worthy only of being thrown away . . .

But then, a friend,
the Master artist finds him
and taking the child up in His arms says,
“Let’s create something better . . . something unique
and precious.
Let’s put the pieces back together - the brokenness will make its
beauty even greater, as it becomes
a mosaic of great meaning and perfection .
Together . . .
let’s create . . .
a work of art.”

* Golestan Royal Palace, Tehran,
completed, 1865

Jeannette Strother

How Strong the Sand and Weak the Glass

My heart beats as strong as grains
of sand tossed by the sea.
Hard and firm is the glass
blown from melded silica and sand.

Unstable glass slips to ground
to shatters in shards.
My malleable heart
breaks to circumstance.

One cannot blow broken shards
to reform and rebuild.
Yet strength of mind
binds my heart...whole again.

Bad Trip

I went to Egypt to stay awhile
and got bitten by a crocodile.
I pondered on a thought
about the tickets bought
I should have gone to the Emerald Isle

64 Silent Reasons

*No one asks and I do not tell,
why I cover arms and legs, year-long.
I cut and lash at my poor skin
while hiding away in bathroom cell.*

*With hidden hurts and raging mind,
I slash and slice until it wells
My mother is drunk; my father is gone;
I weigh too much and my teachers are blind.*

*I slide the knife so precise, an even line
to join just so in the parallel rows.
No words I speak; no tales I tell
about my heart that is maligned.*

Dead Poets Cry

Dry bones crunch and crumble,
rustling in shrouded sheets
as owners roll and grumble.

When modern poets lose their verve
yesterday's pretty language
slips as waste along the curb.

No one writes of splendor skies;
celebrates spring's fertile birth
Nature whips a wicked earth and cries.

Pathos becomes the ruling norm;
tawny falcons refuse their flight.
Dismal days pass as empty storms.

Sun reflects in tiny glass
hooting owls avoid daylight sleep
morning tears lie upon the grass.

The vile and bitter words of scorn
cut like scales of golden carp;
lips and vocal cords are torn.

Emily's sweet and lyric rote,
lost in angst of wartime days,
buried deep beneath the moat.

Ancient poets grumble at the wrongs;
dry bones crumple satin sheets
No one cares to sing the songs.

Miss Georgie

Miss Georgie is
just a little ole bundle
of "honey," hugs & love.
She sees right through
your skin
to who you are within.

She doesn't care which sins you claim,
But cares enough to know your name.
If she knows you're having troubles,
she will whisper scripture in your ear.
She doesn't pry for details
but wants the Lord to hear.

If she knows you're saddled with grief or need,
She will take it to the Lord so He can intercede.

I've wondered if her husband knows and if he would mind
that Clyde at work sings to her whenever he has time.
"Hey there, Georgie girl," Clyde's rough voice chimes.
Then he grins and laughs and goes along his way,
But just the sight of her seems to brighten up his day.
I'm not saying he has a crush; it's the same for all of us.

No matter how imperfect we start our day, she'll demand a hug
and Miss Georgie's friendly hug lets you know that everything's okay.
When Jesus said to love your neighbor, I know he had her in mind-
Someone warm, faithful and caring and a very good friend to find.

Fear of Progress

False prophets accept love from fallen people
Who are no longer whole and cannot afford
True Godly discussions.
Children present themselves as leaders
With a vision to heal, bring fulfillment,
And go forward at unprecedented speed,
But the people replied by cowering
With fear, unable to escape destruction.
The mistrust of the future was too ingrained to accept hope.

What do you Dream?

You were kissing her right in front of me.
The nerve! The audacity!
I think you even knew I was there and carried on like you didn't care!
"Hey!" I shouted in my dream.
You just turned to me and shrugged like it didn't mean a thing.
Furious, I awoke.
There you were sleeping peacefully, faithful by my side.
I punched you in the arm and gave you a kick besides.
"What are you doing?" startled, you awoke.
"You were kissing another woman."
"You were dreaming, I'm right here."
"But you didn't even care that I was standing there."
"I didn't do anything!"
"But in my dream you did."
"Oh, c'mon, I'm sleeping."
"Well, you made me mad."
"I see that, you woke me up."
"I thought you should know how upset I was and I didn't want to be alone.
If you'd do that in my dreams, what would you do in your own?"

Patrick Allen Wright

Epitaph

*J.S.
wife of
J.A. Moore
aged
36 years*

J.A. was a civil war soldier,
fought for the confederacy
with the Texans from Sabinetown.
J.S. was his wife,
and she gave her life to him
at the age of fourteen.
She stayed busy and never complained
about “those darkies floating logs
down the river,” though that is all
J.A. could talk about at supper.
J.A. did not have his own help,
just his son, who had one arm
shriveled up since about five
and was not much help in the field.
J.A. thought that the boy daydreamed
more than anything else.

J.S. loved her boy. She
went on walks down to the river
bank and threw stones out on the
water with him. The boy loved her.
She gave him his education the
best she knew how. The rest he
learned from the preacher. He
spent a lot of time with the
preacher, and every Sunday
the preacher praised J.A.
for having raised a fine son. J.A.
always thanked him, and the three
walked home with J.S. in between.
When J.S. died, the boy helped J.A.
put her in the ground, and he said a
beautiful prayer over her body.

From then on, the boy swept out
the cabin and fixed all the meals.

Phoenix

You allay my cumbered spirit
like a primordial woman
who wakes and walks
for her tribe.

You emerge
the keeper of fire,
entrusted by gods to bear forth
from encampment to encampment
the ember of safety
and warmth.

You carry the kernel of security
in both hands,
direct clearing for the hearth,
minister to the tinder
with sweet breath
and raise a fire—
a shelter from darkness.

Still, the nocturnal needs
of your nomad spirit
migrate with a dying moon,
and the rising sun
draws you easterly
from your gray slumber.

You take calm
your position by the coals,
lay out large green leaves
in a close pattern,
mix water and earth
to a consistency,
mold into that
dry straw, as a nest,

and choose today's ember
for every tomorrow.

Sailing Poesy

All of my wit and skill
with the feminine form
help to navigate
my loving craft
through the straits,
the gulfs, and the seas
of her bountiful waves—
her wild, windblown curls.

Leeward, the winds
push and billow my sails;
my tattered standard
flies proud.

Tides pulled by the moon
swell up and crest,
crashing along my bow.

Yet the stars of Orion
pursuing the Pleiades,
and those stars
of the Great Bear
safe beside her son
the Lesser Bear,
guide me secure—
Polaris fixed firm
on my starboard stern.

Whether with stars
or by sun I pilot,
her waves and curls shall
lift me, gentle or rough,
rock me onward
into her protected sounds.

...just like Elvis....

He came into her life wearing silver shoes,
A guitar slung low on his hips, a snarl on his thin lips,
And totally took our golden child away into his
Imaginary world of fluorescent rock and roll, spinning tales of
Love, fame, wonder....with his fingers on electric strings.

Well, doesn't it always happen this way?
The heart falls, the body fails, the mind wants possession
And we girls give power to the powerless and they
Begin to look like Prince Charmings, green hornets,
The iron men in magic suits, weaving magic from thin air.

It happened just this way with her, she took the leap,
And believed his future, because he told her it would be so,
While her walls of warning bells gave way to promises, lies, vows,
A Pandora's box of magic potions and illusions, a killing brew
Filled with burned mornings and white ashes in a dragon box.

There is, maybe, no Prince Charming and comic book characters
Are, finally, only figments drawn on paper, nothing
To live with, nothing to fill your days and life with, drawn in
Glowing colors by a mad artist who is simply turning tricks.....
Playing games, draining oceans to fill his ink well.

We don't see the hero grown old, using his cape as cover,
In felt slippers worn at the heels, dripping his soup on his chest
And holding his elbows and knees with thinned slow fingers...
The guitar in the closet, the silver shoes back in their box.
We cannot know Elvis as an old man....this might just be a blessing.

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Reporter for Imaginary Happenings...

a reporter for imaginary happenings
met me at the lake this morning but
I was too busy for the interview....
I had my hands full of bread crumbs
for the gulls, ducks, and geese....their
beaks waiting for the rise and fall of
my hands in the air, the swirling crumbs
rarely making it to the waiting water...
the only sound the beating of wings in
the air, strong and constant, for as long
as I had things to give them and then
a quiet, dull and sweet, moving in when
my hands were still. The geese waddled
on to other feeders but one mama duck
gathered her babies to her and to the
safety of the cypress roots at my feet.

The reporters' pen stopped on his notepad
and he looked up to ask me how I came
to be a feeder by the lake, for I was neither
a young child, not a bent and aged woman...
feeding ducks from a shopping bag...one
he would expect to find on a park bench,
not then....not yet, but, here I was, at one with
the open beaks and flapping wings, crumbs
flying, air disturbed, with clacking and chirping,
just as I was most every day, every season.
I wasn't speaking to myself, as I did on most
days, to the imaginary reporter...for this one
seemed so real, and the crumbs that stuck to
my sweating palms seemed just as real.

I told him, that it seemed with water fowl a
loyalty could exist that wasn't tempered by
the vanities that came with humans and that
the silent pact I'd made with them was best...
better than all the loud voices and tempers
that came with other creatures, and too, I
just loved ducks, their swagger and their will
to preen their feathers just so and
to fly away when the weather changed or
the going got tough.

© by June Zaner, March 10, 2013

When I am empty...

“When I am empty
Please dispose of me properly”
This was printed on the container that yesterday
Held my hot peach pie from Whataburger,
In its distinctive orange and white stripe.

I thought, “how very simple”, and decided
This was not a bad slogan for living one’s life.
For at some point we human beings stop
Filling up and begin to empty out, leaving a
Husk, not altogether attractive or mentally sound.

That would be the time, wouldn’t it, to dispose
Of the container properly?

I’ve always fancied ashes being thrown to the
Wind as a school bus rolled down the Gulf Freeway.
There’d be a tape of my favorite songs playing...
Beginning with “Take It to the Limit One More Time”
By the Eagles and ending with Louis Armstrong’s
“It’s a Wonderful World”. In between beginning and
End there’d be some Bobby Darin, a David Cook or two,
And Carly Simon’s “Touched by the Sun”,
And from my outrageous old age, Adam Lambert would
Sing “Mad World” and friends would frolic in the aisles.

Whoever is left to serve refreshments would ladle out
Purple Hi C and there’d be platters of banana bread, Oreos,
And chocolate chip cookies. The banana bread would be an
Absolute necessity because when I first tasted it at seventeen
I thought I’d died and gone to heaven.

My ashes should last all the way to
Galveston...where the last of me would ride
The waves, just as I did when as a small girl
My father carried me on his shoulders until the Gulf lapped
At his chin, [with](#) a salty blue that carried us both away.

© by June Zaner, on turning 75

Richard Zaner

Pattern, Too Elegant

An elegant pattern, carefully rehearsed,
unwinds before my eyes:
as I point then counterpoint the steps
I have so long rehearsed,
Being careful always to measure
The beats between each step.
But old lessons are not easily unlearned
and I am left with only echoes.

When all the rules fail and a trackless ravine yawns, we too often
pitty-pat, too tentative to know how to go from here to there—

While children dance across these footprints, unaware, full of
hope.

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The Scar On My Forehead

right there; as I touch it, a scene from my childhood is evoked but seems as if sequestered from anything else, though I know that it had to have happened at Daddy Bill's (our mother's father) ranch in southeastern Arizona where my older brother and I spent most summers—he about 9 or 10, me just 6 or 7, and too small to help with much, though I was there at that time on my very first summer, out in the desert, his old ranch house close by, he and my brother—me just a tag-along—had set out in his '36 Ford pickup to repair a fence whose barbed wire had been torn loose in one place, probably by cattle trying to get at the patch of grass left in dusty earth just across the barbed fence. To fix it, both ends of the wire had to be loosened, one at the corner post where I was left to play, and the other fixed to an oak post out yonder. They left me to wander about on my own—woeful mistake they soon learned—by the corner post, and later said I had fiddled when I ought not to have fiddled, and managed to loosen another of the several tight strands of wire other than the

one needing to be re-attached, the one I was playing with fixed to the corner post with a long, rusted metal file, twisted so as to wind the wire tight, the wired file then nailed to the post, the line drawn taut and true as Daddy Bill's back, arrow-straight walking or riding, cowboy that he had been since a kid, out of Bosque County, Texas before being moved out West, to Arizona when he was just a tad older than I at that time.

I had fiddled around enough for the wire to loosen, the file too, which abruptly unwound and, whirling, smacked me hard on my forehead, right there, a cut deep and jagged that brought blood and tears, and then the swift, anxious ride to the house in that rickety old Ford pickup—the one my grandfather later let me use when I was old enough to learn to drive—and right into the arms of my grandmother, who promptly did her magic on the cut and, despite my pain and tears made me swear I would never-ever do that again, then turned on Daddy Bill, her sharp question gouging him: 'what were you thinking?' noting in no uncertain terms that I was just not to be let free to do just anything, as he ought to have known. Daddy Bill agreed, my brother smirked.

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Sonnet of a Sort, for Our Times

When to the usual man in the street the lyric
Irony of couches and cars is distant
As the comedy of know and be; the trenchant
Thunder of a field of wheat but satiric
Nonsense of plodding feet; and the tragedy
Of a child's tears but fruit for therapy:

Ah, then's the time for singing's celebration.
When singing's at an end, and mystery's gestation
Seems vanished by the winds of puerile doctrine;
When the workings of a madman are locked in
Keyless phrases and the touches of a lover
But public coin for books behind whose covers

Is the thesis that sex is only groin,
Then singing must capture this in poem,
Leave nothing out, compose for all the folk;
And, grinning, disclose the ancient joke.

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