

Self Reflection



Art by Steven Fegan

Genesis by Marino Leyba

For the moment this pain, I own it,
I'm unable to
control it just like the lottery, but
instead of winning I
make pottery.

So please don't bother me, as I hit
and miss death
comes down with its sweet kiss but
for the moment
let's reminisce of genesis and my
first kiss, the ones I
miss, even my nemesis.

So what's behind that, I sent a
message to the
world, but I get no reply back.

As I sit and I think I ask questions
like will
I sink or will I peak? I wink because I
know
my situation is bleak.

As I'm sitting by the creek, I can hear
them
doublespeak, my physique is weak,
my technique unique
but I feel I haven't slept in a week or
so
I think.

It seems like it, the road I'm on, I
know
my dreams might split, so any
chance for survival

let's hope it, I float with the
omnipotent, anything
you wrote down he already wrote it.

So my advice: let's roll the dice, as
we hit
And miss and watch death come
down with its sweet
kiss but for the moment let's
reminisce,
this is my genesis

Final Thoughts by Sandra D. Brown

I am the sum total of the world
she disguised me in labels,
lies and stereotypes.

I am the one about which
they all have something to say.
As if they really know me.
I am the purest blue
beating at the heart
of burning candles
moving in the stillness.

In the beginning
I reinvented myself.
And the mind was without form
and void.
So I said, "let there be thought,"
and there was thought.

The angel in the house
tried to seduce me
with silence,
like the big, bad Woolf,
I killed her too.

Blank canvas gave birth to words,
birth to lines, birth to verse.
Voice in hand put form to thoughts,
round, living like a full womb.

I am the difference
no one wanted me to make.
Woman, Black Phoenix,
infinite holder of the stars.
I reinvented myself.

I am the one about which
They all still have something to say.
My heart still beats
in the stillness of the night.

My mind labors and gives birth
loudly,
daily,
freely,

and it is good and very good.

Define by Edd Alexander

I am nothing but a word, defined by
those who
know my meaning, and empowered
by all who use
me. Forged by knowledge, and
crafted by wisdom,
I am a builder of many worlds and
destroyer of many nations.
Constantly I have been
underestimated
by the human limitation. I am the
inspirator of dreams
with the power to crown queens and
dethrone kings. All
because I am nothing but a word
whose meaning cannot
be truly defined. I am nothing but a
word that
plagues a clouded mind, and a word
that is crafted
to withstand the test of time.

Hail the King! By Isaac Chavez

I've come to the conclusion
that
I am in fact a bohemian!

I must be
because if not so
then what else
but
a breathing number,
member of the steel
clan
who bow to none other
than
the razor king
brought to life through electric
pulses,
metal ruler
which feeds off of the fear of my past
life.

NO!
I must be a bohemian,
a man, an unconventional
poet,

one who writes every so often
of the king's looming omnipresence,
nothing but a pretender presenting a
conflicting
conscious

CAUTION!

I must warn that I am him,
he who has worn out the warmth
and left a trail of cold shoulders
hopeful sneers, half full beers,
cheerful condemnation,
disgusting sensations
that invoke moments of self
reflection.
Perhaps
I am but a jester sent here to
casually entertain
the most gracious king and his
hierarchy, or
maybe even
an early opponent in a cheap chess
match
that has just lost his queen
to a puny green pawn.

ENOUGH!

I must be a bohemian!
If not then
please send me
to the hangman.

Author's Note: "The idea of seeing
myself as just an inmate haunts me
just as much as the thought that I am
seen as just a prisoner.
I talk about what I think of as living a
double life, when I say "nothing but a
pretender presenting a conflicting
conscious." In one life I'm what might
be perceived as cold, indifferent,
whereas in the other, I'm quite the
opposite; I love and I am loved. Still
in this struggle with myself, I reach a
point where in my desperation to be
more I come to the conclusion that I
must live in this unconventional way
(like a bohemian) and write about it
all, because if I don't, I can't possibly
be more and hope would be lost
'..send me to the hangman.'"

Gypsy Wind Stirs my Soul by C.S. Bagwell

This blessed life is all I know.
What thought can I think, that I
haven't muttered before?
All I have, do I yearn for more?
Sometimes, gypsy wind stirs my
soul.
Whispering for permission
to be unleashed against the world,
Abandoning the complacent
existence
I've labored to shape and mold
into love so dependent upon me
a reciprocal responsibility.
Love that acts the host
when like a parasite I feed.
Still, these daydreams I entertain
setting my conscience unleashed to
roam
though not un-chaperoned.
Because such emotions will never
entirely go.
Inevitably, from time to time
still, gypsy wind stirs my soul.
Always intriguing and enticing,
The epitome of exciting
until I muse upon this blessed life
God's made.
One day I'll leave an amazing legacy
subtly the itch of passion starts to
fade.
Dreams are fun to wander errantly,
but could never outweigh the
significance of me.
The beautiful lives I've created,
selflessly touched and raised
to no less continue to rely on me
I wouldn't have it any other way.
No lingering doubts about the
decisions that I've made,
the foundation that's become me
the vein through which my family
bleeds
like an essential artery
the love transporting roots of a
windblown tree
in a sweet gently tempting breeze.
Even though I have the will to not let
go
still, gypsy wind stirs my soul.

My Heart Beats by Blair Blanchette

My heart beats
Deep inside a river
Keeps love free
To be delivered--
With the force of a wave
It flays the knave's shield;
Consider the brave feat--
This quest to steal away
my unconcealed heart's seat
Contains; unchains...

Ascertain well
The might entailed
To restrain this rabid beast
Surging against its chains;
Peace oft retains a paradox
Replete with its unique legend
Drained from a quintessence
Of mystical impressions--
And she alone holds the
key!

Refrain, only to watch her wither;
Blue lips quiver, renewing their hold
--memories...
Rampant in my soul
Who knows the answer?
God help us all if we lie!
Too bold to be denied
Truth seeks its own demise--
That it might live
when put to the test.
The eternal flame burns deep in my
chest
Emblazoned--emboldened love
Forever asleep to risk.

The waves...golden, crestfallen
troughs
Ravage battered shores;
Times greatest secret
Ravaged like a whore
In the hands of this savage garden;
Priming lavish minefields
In time-filled pretensions.
Passionately chiming dissensions--
Intertwining admissions;
In for finding suspense in
Abhorred intentions;
Binding our hearts
As one.

Its streets cloaked in shadows
Blacker than coal, lead
To sable reelings of fabled feelings
We've forgotten somewhere along
this road;
Flooding this keeling heart;
Dousing its vital spark;
 Brilliant stars
 Swimming in sapphire skies
 Bridal eyes,
Blind--at the mention of her name...
All loves are not the same...
My heart beats
Deep inside a river
Set a flame!

Ember's burst,
Cascading showers of ochre flowers-
-
Parading towers of pastel hues;
Flashes of protestant red's
Intense whites
Blinding common sense between
Blue's wrongs and pink's rights
As I fight to contain
This incensed flame of purified pain-
filled anger
Each teardrop an ocean filled with
danger
Making strangers of intimate mates;
A thin line exists between love and
hate
scintillating--
My feet through wet sands tracing
The chasing tides
Lost somewhere between good-bye,
 Her thighs
 And too late...

Palpitations, beatings
Desperate pleadings:
Where the hell is it all leading
Is my sacrifice worthy
Or self-defeating?
Urgently seeking Susan
--needing!
The soft embrace of violet laced
bleedings;
Contusions...
Greeting our placed faith with the
confusion
 Of a trusting heart
 That beats
 To the beat

Of yours...
Sending the waving tides
Which hides
Sorrow filled tears
Defacing blind eyes
As I
Patiently await the pasty embrace
Of the shores tender kiss;
There is nothing more sensual than
this
Fiery glow
That flows in the midst
Of shadows,
Cast by a past of pain as
Purple raindrops soak each grain
And the tender tears of angels
Fain fall;
Forming a river
Sending shivers up my spine;
As the bind breaks
Creating the chord in which
Lives a beat
That keeps
Me alive...
My heart beats deep inside a river.

**Fire in the Attic of my Soul by
Gary Winslow II**

Through the circle within the triangle
flows the glory of a full moon.
As the flame consumes the debris
there sits a young prince;
his fingerprints upon a ribbon
that screams-- SECOND PLACE!
As illumination proceeds
he feels the anger swiftly, erased.
The dark clouds infringe
and eagerly begin to singe
a surreal portrait of a fallen hero.
Zero time to waste, the youth
makes haste to plunge through the
circle;
not very far to fall, for
standing strong and tall
with outstretched arms,
is his redeemer...

And then he speaks to the child:

Fret not, sweet innocent
of a beneficent nature;
to the evanescent be reconciled and
know that I am with you;
truth of our union is essential.

And when tribulation impedes
angels fall from heaven quickly,
embrace;
grace, from the talons of a phoenix;
let serenity be your rapture.
As you dance amidst the waves of
chaos,
upon that turbulence in the mind
where the armies of heaven and hell
collide,
let love be your muse.
Understand that you are me,
And I am you.

Author's Note: "Let me tell you that I
was a poor kid from a broken home
in New Orleans, Louisiana. My dad
wasn't always there, which took a toll
on my development. I've dealt with
my past well though. I am now in
prison, having abandoned my son,
Trajan. I am thankful to be able to
see and talk to him."

**Journeys by Gregory John
Bartholomew**

Let us find beauty in life's mysteries.
The hard emotions that stiffen the
soul.
To have some doubts as we grow
old.
About the philosophies of life told.

We are taught at times not to be
taught!
Not to question the Divine things of
passage.
Rather to wait and sigh in one's own
anger
Of why did it have to be me.

We have words that are yet not
spoken.
Dreams left unheralded as tokens.
Smiles because it is better than a
cry.
For this world has lost its caring eye.

Things that we wish could honestly
be.
Each day's journey accepted and
seen.
But still it lingers deep in the soul.

Life's unspoken mysteries that
created this mold.

Should I just inch along this trail of
brokenness.
To finally come into that place of no
regret.
And becoming angelica in spirit of
hormonal spheres.
Of all the silent thought twisted
ideas.

Here. Bold enough to say that I can
and cannot.
No longer afraid of being lost.
Maybe it is better not to be found.
For every king must break his crown.

Author's Note: "It was the
sweltering summer of 1973 when I
first met Debbie. She moved in next
door and we had quickly become the
best of friends. We had become
inseparable and in the course of time
had discovered that this friendship
had turned into love. She had
convinced me that I needed to keep
a journal of all my poetry and
thoughts. When Debbie disappeared
in April of 1982, I was frantic,
searching day and night, for I knew
she would never just abandon all she
loved, especially her two younger
sisters. The day I received the news
that they had found her (and other
women) brutally murdered, that was
the day my soul became covered
with a blanket of doubt about life,
love and faith. This is a poem of self
discovery in the midst of self hate, it
reaches to the very core of our
shattered beliefs and the poisonous
injustices of life. This poem is the
extension of many others that is
written with honor and respect for life
and death."

**Poet-Tree by "Sarah" Julie
Spencer**

Why do I write thee?
To give these thoughts a home,
In my poetry constructions
Where I'm writing all alone.

Cause if these thoughts are
homeless,
Forever will they roam,
Exposed to the cold--
Undernourished, and untold.

Shut-up, confined,
But now my thoughts are free,
Blossoming into
This poetry tree.

Harnessing some imagery
I gain a bit of dignity,
Contained and yet unleashed,
Subjugated into the form of a poetry
feast.

But first, they must face
Endless contemplations
Frequent or infrequent
Mini contemplations,

To avoid the spiral
Of my anger escalations.
And my otherwise infamous
Dictorical orations.

Sometimes I write
To teach someone a lesson.
But ultimately, here is
My innermost confession:

I write and I write
Because I love it so.
It makes me so happy
From my head to my big toe.

Healing Power by Craig Shipley

Each time I press my pen to the
paper I feel relief.
Just letting my thoughts be released
eases the pressure of life behind the
curtains.
Most days are not that bad,
I even enjoy myself at times.
My writing is a bandage for my soul,
a staunch to keep me from "eternal"
bleeding.
Some may see this as the nadir of
my life,
yet I believe it to be just the start.
Poetry is in the making every single
day,
lessons on how to live intrepidly.

This may be the saving grace I've
longed for,
my cornucopia of unabashed
remedies.

**(Till King-don' Come) by A.M.
Spaulding**

It was a bloody Sunday.
I walked through a bloody field.
Bought with 30 pieces of sil'
Or righteous souls that got plucked
by a 9 mil'

Every direction the king turns is
chaos.
A monstrous vitriol.

They spit at him;
God they throwing shit at him.
Him?
He came in peace.
Not eye for an eye,
He turned the other cheek.
Squashing beefs in miraculous
fashion.
He tamed some hooded dragons,
Made me imagine how I could mimic
him
With mimetic and applied sciences.
Applied the blueprint to my social
Dispensation and create new social
constructs.

In touch with my higher-self
Not my liar-self.

See. Even. Lions. Make.
Arrangements.
(Selma)

I'm crossing the narrow bridge
Of earth's natural dormitory
To eternal life's mansion.

Legacy!

They gon' talk about me,
Like they talk about him;

Forever!
Till King Don' Come



Art by dominic Marac

Miaki Woman by Geneva Phillips

Pounded flat turned
 folded
 Pounded flat turned
 folded
 Pounded flat turned
 folded
 Pounded flat
 Pounded flat a thousand times

 This is how a sword is made
 This is how a warrior is
 made
 This is how a woman is
 made

Author's Note: "The poem is inspired by the art of ancient Japanese sword making where a single blade was folded one thousand times. It is heated, pounded flat and folded a thousand times. Instead of breaking, the metal is some of the strongest ever produced. In the same way (metaphorically) warriors are produced and in my own experience, strong women. Survivors who endure all that the world and life relentlessly mete out, pounding them flat over and over again. Yet instead of breaking they get back up, stronger than before."

Paid in Fool by Ryan Morrison

I was,
 another tragic tale of wasted youth. A
 mad child that
 ran wild until I produced...the skeletal
 wreck of a man

that stands before you. Yet I
 implore you not to judge
 too fast, lest you be abashed by
 your own hypocrisy.
 Just listen,
 I had too many mothers that
 coddled and crippled my
 conscience with clichés, platitudes
 and nonsense,
 until I believed myself "special,"
 which then meant
 "better than," not unique.
 I had understood as a child
 probably because I had no fathers,
 the only male figures
 I knew of were on cents and dollars.
 Plus, those, too, were practically
 non-existent within
 my home.
 So I sought outward, and what I saw
 was a whole
 other world, one where with a stiff
 upper lip and a
 jaw on clench you could seize
 whatever you wished
 without earning your way.
 Or so I thought then.
 I was late to see
 that in the end
 you always have to pay.

Shattered Reflection by Heath Stocks

We visit, he and I.
 His youth, so fragile. His limits, the
 sky.
 Comfort, I give. Assurance, he
 needs.
 I can't stop time; it simply proceeds.

There are answers, today I know,
 It's tough, telling that to him though.
 A mind so cloudy, a heart so bruised,
 How do you explain love to a child,
 abused?

Distorted; his view, perceptions; so
 wrong.
 His abuser lies, but he'll sing his
 song.
 I know the tune, a melody I repeat,
 My life's theme song; "lullaby of
 defeat."

"Stand up, be strong!"
 "The things he does to you are
 wrong!"
 I try to whisper truth; scream it when
 I can,
 It was so long ago when it all began.

I bear the scars, he feels my pain.
 All ears are deaf when he tries to
 complain.
 He's so scared and I am too;
 The future is clear, but not from his
 view.

The one he fears, his name is Joe.
 An unshaken fear he'll never
 outgrow.
 To another he's given; I know that
 man.
 Doing right by Joe was never his
 plan.

Joe had a boy, he wanted a man
 Why was that so hard to
 understand?
 Harsh words and beatings, they did
 no good,
 So he sent that boy to someone who
 could.

A scout's honor, he took the oath,
 And swore to a life of character
 growth.
 He was set on path; a course to
 disaster.
 Welcome to the Boy Scouts! Walls,
 you Scoutmaster.

The rumors and the gossip, so many
 knew.
 Allegations; yet to some it was true.
 Never would they forget the day,
 A predator took their innocence
 away.

Walls; the scouts just called him
 "Jack,"
 To the town, the name went way
 back,
 The son of a judge and "Man of the
 Year,"
 It was a name so many did fear.

Jack had money, politics and power,

He'd save your son in the 11th hour
"Give them to me, I'll make 'em a man."
The parents became his biggest fans.

Jack had guns he would let them use,
Then given his pick of whom to abuse.
Books-dirty, alcohol--so pure,
Neither worth what they'd endure.

Meetings they had; campouts the best
Allegiance to Jack would be the test.
Fondle that, just touch him there,
"It's our secret, only we can share."

Disguised as love, support, and praise,
That boy would learn all of Jack's ways.
Manipulations a many, and sexual abuse,
Still it was Jack that he would choose.

I watch him carry, I remember the weight;
An innocent heart that grew to hate.
None could reach him, his soul was lost,
He could never know the ultimate cost.

"It's our secret; only we can share."
He told that secret; he no longer could bear.
The one who loved him was who he betrayed,
It was Jack's forgiveness for which he prayed.

He created a problem Jack said he must fix;
A solution with which his heart conflicts.
All Jack's lies, like a seed took root
Jack would win, there was no dispute.

A secret was safe but that boy's family gone,

And I continued to help Jack sing his song.
I had no hope and all lies became truth,
So I mourned my future, along with my youth.

We still visit, he and I.
His youth, so fragile. Our limits, the sky.
We tell this story; help others understand
For I am that boy and, he, this man.

High School Graduation by Conor McBride

That day,
I did not graduate,
though I finished school.
A barefoot rebel
I wore no gown or mortarboard.
The valedictorian, a laughing gull,
squawked about life:
salty breeze,
sun kissed shore,
empty sandwich wrappers.
I swapped ceremony for seaside,
tradition for love,
and walked across a stage of sand
with crashing waves playing "pomp and circumstance."
And on a wooden picnic table,
witnessed only by
the setting sun and an old fisherman,
I danced with my love
longing for a hat to toss in the air.

Author's Note: "I actually wrote the poem for a poetry class I was taking though Ohio University. This poem is one of my favorite products of that class. (I may be a bit biased.) The reason it is my favorite is because it is based on a fond memory. Rather than attend a long, boring graduation ceremony, my girlfriend and I went down to St. George Island. A day at the beach is way better than sitting in a hot auditorium for four hours. So we bought sub sandwiches and spent the whole day relaxing in the sand, playing in the ocean and soaking up sunshine. At dusk, about the time we would have walked

across the stage, my girlfriend and I danced together on top of a picnic table. I tried to make the contrast of high school and seaside as clear as possible. Hence the valedictorian laughing gull, the stage of sand and the waves crashing pomp and circumstance. It was fond memory but the last line is tinged with regret. I committed my crime a little less than a year after that day so I never graduated college. I've never even been to a graduation, ever thrown a mortarboard into the air. I was never able to participate in that symbolic act of completion.

Undone by William Andrews

Far flung be the gossip's tongue...
Rumors spread from a two faced head.
Fun house mirrors are the liars eyes.
Trusted friends become double spies.

Twisting fact into fairytale.
Rinsing the truth until it's sickly pale.
The deck is stacked against my fate.
Shuffled and scattered until it's too late.

They trip and tangle all honest plans.
Just to grease their selfish hands.
Making sport of misery dealt.
Not caring about the pain felt

so heed trust put into another
be it foe, friend or brother
nothing is sure in this world you see
illusions curtain can smother thee.

Til breath is short and nerves a twist,
holding back a tightened fist
now the cloud is dark which hides the sun,
alone again...I'm coming undone.

Author's note: "At the time of writing "Undone," I was an ADSEG inmate, locked in my cell 23/7 and allowed little sunshine, which led to mostly cynical attitude. The sense that all have forsaken you can create paranoia as well, and I was in a room

alone long enough to dissect the recent past and find that all was not as I was allowing myself to believe it was. I feel that I have matured much since that writing and I kind of use my poems as a barometer to measure emotional growth.”

Decisions Made by Beast

I think of all the pain I've wrought
The destruction that my actions brought
Decisions made
I look into the mirror that is my mind
and ask myself where did I go wrong
Decisions made
I need to clear my mind
to understand how my life has come to this
can someone help to pull me from this pain that I have caused
Decisions made
Was it my insecurities lurking that put me on this path
Was it the drugs that made me act that way
Or was it my heroes that molded me
To be something I longed to be.

Mother May I by Sarah Gray

Mother may I
Have a replay I
Messed up my turn
Cause I wasn't concerned about where I'd end up
After all I thought I was tough
There's so much stuff I would change
And save myself lots of pain
If only I'd listened
I probably would not be sitting in prison,
Missing my life
Wouldn't it be nice?
If we got to try twice
I'd have done things so different with matters of the heart
If I could go back, where would I start?
Where it all began
Would I make a mess all over again?
Mother may I be honest with this pen
Some days I think this will never end
I'm all alone trapped in this pen

So mother may I please try again?

Who's to Blame by Ellis Hyatt

It's not my fault, so who is there to blame?
My father who beat me and sent me to school in shame.
My mother whom I love, yet she let him treat me that way,
but he treated her the same, so who am I to say.
“I love you,” were words never spoken in our house,
Most days I trembled in fear and was quiet as a mouse.
Maybe it was my teacher, who didn't take time for me;
If she could've looked inside would there have been anything to see?

What about my coach who thought I was just okay,
but it was me on the bench when it came time to play.
Was it that drill sergeant, who swore he'd make me a man,
I've never been a child so do the best that you can.
Was it my boss, who said I did really good work;
I know he was lying and he was really a jerk.

I can blame it on the drugs, they really screwed up my life.
No, I'll blame all the women, especially my ex-wife.
I think it was the prison guards, the way they treated me,
always locking the doors, then showing me the key.

It's the parole board; they're the ones to blame.
Year after year, their answer is always the same.
I really want to blame Jesus but I know he's not the one.
He shed his blood for me and spoke the words, “It's done.”
So who is there to blame, let me look deep inside and see,

it's time I finally admitted it, the only one to blame is me.

Man in the Mirror by Jose “Tony” Herrera

As I look at the reflection of the man in the mirror, my mind starts to race
as an image appears.

This person that I see, how can this be! Was the image of a man who resembled a junky.
He wears his long sleeves in the heat of the day, hiding the tracks that ran every which way.
He wears the same clothes for days at a time, scraping up enough money just to get by.
As he washes a few windows and begs for your change, that was his only hustle, this man had no shame.

He was so afraid of getting busted and then getting so sick, he was a real life addict that just couldn't quit.

The image of the man with his rolled up sleeves fixing in the bathroom brought me to my knees.

The image that I saw was a vision of me, I was this man...

...how could this be?

Author's Note: “I have never taken any kind of poetry writing class; I'm pretty much self-taught. The funny thing is, it took getting hit on the head and left for dead and overcoming brain damage way back in 2007 to realize I had a gift of expressing myself with words. This was something I just couldn't do before. So you can say they knocked a screw or two into place. This poem is about me and the addiction that I fight with daily. “Man in the Mirror,” was me at one point in my life. Today I don't see myself as that same junky. Today I see a man with a dream.”

“My Name Is...” by Greg Shattuck

I thought it was a game
Really, no big deal
Reached out to touch the flame
Then the pain became all too real
A game no more. I realize
I've been playing with fire
I try to run, try to hide
But trapped by my desire
A game no more, I realize
I'm fighting for my life
Can feel it biting into me
Each tooth feels like a knife
And as I die, out loud I cry
“What is this affliction?!”
Death just smiles, looks me in the
eye,
And whispers
“My name is addiction”

Like a Stone by Jacob Baladez

The only angels I
Know...
Have lost their halos
Long ago...
I reach out to god,
With woulds of time..
Only to hear,
I don't heal that kind...
The only angels I know,
have fallen long ago...
I cry out to god,
Only to hear..
She don't heal my
Kind...

So I sit here alone, like a stone
Like the only angels I know
Cracked and weathered, broken,
Of stone and alone

Author's Note: I used to hang out in cemeteries, me and my friends would hang there at night since one of my best friend's mom was buried there. We used to go there at night and just sit and talk and think! I can see the angels standing over us just waiting, watching over us. Old cracked and weathered and broken angels just like us!

Lucid Eyes by Jeremy Brown

I can feel my heart beating, the blood
moving through my veins.
I feel the cells moving, they are
regenerating and dying all the time.
I see the information processing
through my neurons faster than I
know.
I, the knower and doer think of the
potential, yet I'm almost there
I need to break the cell's nucleus to
get past the boundaries and
obstacles.
I remember as a child drinking my
mother's milk, the taste of nutrients
fulfilling me.
I remember seeing my family before I
chose them, like on a virtual screen. I
saw them
Past lives, past memories, flickering
through me, downloading my life's
information, back in my body I sense
impressions of others' thoughts. I
feel, I think, I know, I hear them,
Whispers on the unseen strings of
energy, coalescing into a myriad of
musical notes.
The false ego's peeling away from
self. I am one with Earth.
I know what it is like now to have
hurt.
They are draining me of blood black
oil, my life current,
The gold in my caves, mountains in
which I sense, send out messages
Is no longer there. Secretly these
parasites fear me.
I need to show them my anger, what
it is like to be forgotten,
Yet we are all entwined in the webs
of life.
Only this, this burst of my love will
bring us into harmony.
Everything gone, am I dead, all I see
is nothing, blackness very thick
Light, rebirth, past the stage of soul
purification, again I am.
Yet deep inside, I know this can't be
it.
Where is the infinite, why am I here
yet again?
I no longer feel attached change
happening so fast, I stop trying to
hold on

I let go into my own enormous flow,
should I want the ultimate?
No more sense, desires, needs or
wants, let me be, leave me alone,
No more gratification, I am
ascended, transcendental oneness,
unity, wait rebirth?
Damn!

**On Reaching Thirty by Derrick
Lynn Bratcher**

Former obscure years
Sever
A violent
Melee
Along a mask of swollen
Scars and in a cage
Wired with party razors
And locked with contented desire.
While thirty
With the celebrated
Cool of a jazz
Quartet (playing
Without pay;
Working the nightshift)
Passes a brandy and cigar to the
Rookie guard of midlife
And makes duties of his memories.

Unless you have the acquired
Ignorance
And clumsiness
And are unlucky enough
To die at
Twenty-nine.

Author's Note: “I’m not the “fan-type.” I could never get sucked into the rooting-for-a-team, falling-out-when-you-meet-someone-famous kind of thing. Not to say I don’t have my fair share of “idols” strewn across my mental mantle. Be they spiritual gurus, financial experts, literacy legends, master musicians, cinema stars, world class athletes and on and on, the shrines stretch. Yet to this day one figure towers above them all in my heart: Dr. Maya Angelou.
It was her poem “On Reaching Forty,” which she recited for Oprah’s 40th birthday that inspired me to write “On Reaching Thirty” to

commemorate my own thirtieth birthday. The structure of my poem is a trope to her's while the content is exclusively autobiographical. Stark contrast defines the different treatment Dr. Angelou and I give our commemorated year. She had been "acquainted" (familiar) with her turbulent childhood, teenage motherhood, trying to find her place in the world, and eventually landing on stages the world over. My youth however, was very much obscure to me at the time of "thirty's" writing. A "violent melee" of events was my confused struggle that left me with a "mask of swollen scars" covering whatever image of myself lay dormant beneath it."

The Edge by Stephen LaValle

When I come to the edge of all the light
I know, I am about to step off into the darkness of the unknown. Faith is knowing
one of two things will happen: either there
will be something solid to stand on,
or I
will be taught how to fly.

Virginia by Cee Vagante

"What is the thing
That lies
Beneath the semblance
Of the thing?"

Did coat pockets
For warming fingers
Instead stuffed
With cold creek stones

Forever sink the answer
With you?
Or does the answer still
Live with us

In purling ripples
Ever
Continuing to flow
Unbroken

Babbling

Like our infancy
Babbling
Like our senility

Toward the weltering waves
As the sea beckons
Our thoughts downstream
With you; seaward

Was the question carried
In the current?
Was the answer settled
In the sands?

Is there clarity
That lies
Beneath the surface
Of the stream?

Author's Note: Like Woolf, I have, from early childhood and throughout life, suffered from severe depression and anxiety, including many instances of self-harm and suicide attempts. One of the former, leaving me wheelchair bound and many of the latter not successful (by large quantities of pills) in defiance of all medical expectation--by what undeserved miracles I lack sufficient spirituality to fully fathom. Empathizing with Ms. Woolf on many fronts, I not only understand the weight of depression, with the lure of peaceful quietude which may reside in that undiscovered country but I also share (as many do) her indefatigable love of reading for which she was renown; and I too have literary aspirations (if lacking the requisite talents). Unlike Woolf, I've not achieved that suicidal end. That end, her end, and my speculations on it constitute the rest of my poem.

Living Death by Jesse Clasby

No one lay me down to sleep,
Or prayed my soul to keep.
They just stuck me in this shallow grave,
Next to a blunt, and rusted glaive.
My pillow is a pile of rigged stones,

A blanket of musty earth and dog bones.
The roots have cracked my chest,
And made me, a rattlers nest.
The worms and maggots ate my eyes,
At least they didn't fill my head with lies.
Crawling ants are like a torture rack,
They find every crevice and tiny crack.
The birds squawk and shit on me,
Just like in life, this must be.
Except my old worn boots,
Next to clawed up roots.
There's no mark of where I lay,
Nonetheless this is where I stay.
I expect no one will come and mourn,
For most, never knew I was born.
My only friends are past crimes,
And the iron bracelet chimes.
My ashes won't get scattered
For what did I do that mattered.
I leave behind no love or widow,
No money, no house, and kids ditto.
I never had or wanted any fame
Or at least that I'll now claim.
Little in life did I get right,
No more chances, gone is my light.
Nothing else around the next bend,
With all life there's an end!

Back into the Ocean by Lou Tompkins

Sitting cross-legged on the beach,
facing the ocean and watching
the waves roll in, I feel
the rhythm of eternity rolling
through me, though my presence
in this body lasts an eye blink
and is gone.

I am unnoticed by the waves,
by the ocean, by the tides
and the moon pulling the tides.
I am less substantial
than the grains of sand beneath me
that were here long before
I was born into this life
and will be here long after
my bones become grains of sand
and rejoin them.

Author's Note: When I wrote this poem, I was remembering trips I've made to the Texas Gulf Coast. I imagined this particular scenario as a way of talking about the small role that humans as a species fill in the great infinite universe, with individual humans being even less important. In geologic time, we are Johnny-come-latelys. I wanted the reader to feel the wonder of forces that flow through us even when we don't completely understand them.

Lazarus by Derrick Bratcher

If anything happens, please try to find me. Please

-Hooligan Sparrow

Scattered abroad
we spackle history
Globe-strewn citizens of the world
We are
 $e=mc^2$ in Manhattan's projects
Saharan samurai
Nuzzling maroon geisha
We are leviathan buried
And deforming
Our ancestral selves
And dispersing
Like clouded-leopard eve

Rain in the jungle

Elephant
Antelope
Buffalo
Crocodile
Gorilla
At the waterhole clearing
Drifting into torpor
Fading into hibernation
Resting long
Dreaming longer
Our ash encrusted family
Beneath a pain
Both old and phenomenal
Can these dry bones live
Like a snowcapped mountain
Towering over vice
Fabuleme

Emerging in the distance
The salmon challenge
The might of brother river

An immortal war
To replenish them-
Selves

In a modest hewn tomb
bones are rattling
The spark of fresh marrow
Knitting sinew and fiber
Of a rendered heart
Mending
Mending
Mending
The first tomtom
Low...slow
Slow...low
Stirring blood
Into decayed veins

Awaken! Every organ
Envelop! Glorious flesh

Our new lungs await
Our new brain eyes tongue
In-the-beginning body
Wrapped in layer
upon layer
Upon layer
Of dehumanizing
Drug infested
Self-hating
Grave clothes
All
At the calling
Of our name

Stumbling from tomb
Struggling for air
We the miracle
In all our splendor

Bound
Buried
Waiting to be loosed.

Prison Life

The Problem with Prisoners by Chad Frank

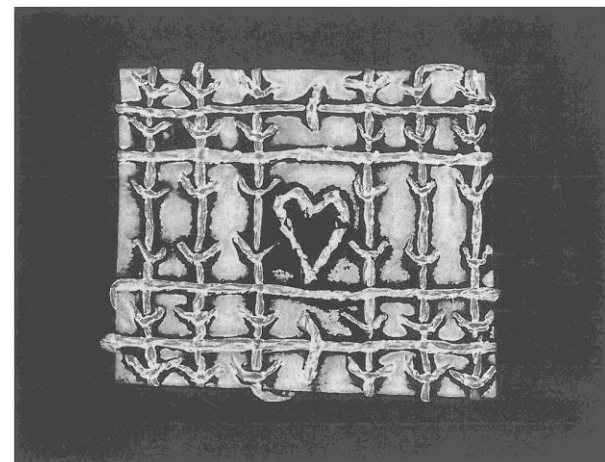
The problem with prisoners is that they too often lack the imagination required to envision life beyond prison.

They're much too busy
living up to stereotypes,
villains straight out of central casting:
shady drug dealers.
Anonymous thugs and gangbangers.
Greedy embezzlers.
Creepy child molesters.
Fill in the blank; they're all here
playing out the drama
like the reruns of *Law and Order*
they watch over and over.

A sad reality--especially
for somebody like me
who wants to transcend labels
and become known for more
than my failures.

What Prison Teaches You by A. Richardson

It's lonely at night
Waiting for letters no one writes
It's depending on family and friends
Waiting on pictures no one sends
It's sitting around with nothing to do
Figuring out who's really who
It's finding out hearts are made of
stone
Realizing you're truly alone
It's wondering how time can move so
slow
Prayers that are answered "no"
It's learning friendship is dying
They say you're family, but they are
lying
It's waiting for the day when I'm free
I'll remember who has forsaken me.



Art by Catherine LaFleur

Karma Calling by Philip Grigsby

Power nap in my cell
Tap, tap, tap
Inmate sounds commonplace to me
Tap, tap, tap
I curse as my nap fades to memory
Bolting to me feet angry now
A movement from my barred window
catches my eye
Tap, tap, tap
A pigeon stares at me while pecking
at a spot on the glass
Tap, tap, tap
Childhood memories of zoos and
aquariums
A child tapping the glass to annoy
the captive animals
Tap, tap, tap
The bird cocks its head, winks an
opal eye, then flies away
Over the fence, where freedom lives,
the bird gently glides
My anger fades
Karma has many faces
Sadly we awake to this at the wrong
time

A Day in my Life by Chad Frank

Wake up on steel bunk
Surrounded by concrete, bars, razor
wire, and enemies.
Write crazy ramblings
And bad poetry.
Watch TV.
Eat.
Shit.
Shower.
Jack off the illicit fantasies.
Fight with my boyfriend.
Get counted like sheep.
Sleep.
Repeat the miserable cycle.

Mailman Passed my Cell by Miguel Ruiz

How wonderful it would be
to know someone cared,
to be valued, loved and
have my feelings shared.
Maybe today, with a little luck
and a lot of hope, I'll get
a letter, a card or at least

a note--here he comes now.
Oh please let it come true,
I just need to hear I'm loved,
I don't care from whom.

I don't believe it, this just
can't be. He passed my cell
like he had nothing for me.
It must be a mistake, something is
wrong.
I should have gotten a letter,
it's been too long.

It looks as if the darkness
of my world will overcome
and prevail since like all the
days before, again, I got no
mail. The mailman passed
my cell for there was no mail
for me.

**Sittin' on the Steps of the Tier by
"Kit" Cathleen Roth**

Sittin' under fluorescent lights
I'll be sittin' when the evening count
comes,
watching inmates roll in,
and then I'll watch 'em out again.

I'm sittin' on the steps of the tier
watching the cops lock us away.
Oh, I'm just sitting on the steps of the
tier,
wasting time.

I left my home in 'Burque
headed for CCA
I had it all to live for
but I threw it all away.
Now I'm sitting on the steps of the
tier
wasting time.

Looks like everything about to
change
but it all still remains the same.
I can't do what ten C.O.'s tell me
so I'll just do nothing at all.

Sittin' here restin' my mind
but this mind knows no rest
it's up and down these halls I roam
just to call this tier my home.

Now I'm just gonna sit on the steps
of the tier,
watch as inmates roll on out
I'm sittin' on the steps of the tier
wasting time.

Do do do do do twiddling my
thumbs...dum dum da
Da da do do do do...hey there,
what's up... da da da da...

Author's Note: I have a 37.5 year
sentence and in the years I have
been incarcerated, I have seen many
women come in, leave and come
back. I'm from Albuquerque, New
Mexico, informally known as 'Burque
and upon conviction went to a
Corrections Corporation of America
(CCA) facility, NMWCF in Grants,
NM. In the fourth stanza I refer to the
great move from CCA to two
separate state facilities. Although it
was a big transition, nothing really
changed. Same uncomfortable
uniforms, same asshole officers,
same locked doors. I'm a diagnosed
bi-polar so my mind is constantly
moving. And face it, all I really do in
prison is waste time."

Dungeons in Paradise by Ken More

Embraced by my loneliness
So still is the night.
I masquerade as one
Exposed, just out of sight.
Pleased with my madness
Phantoms become dear.
No soothing melodies
Darkness is all I hear.
Wonder escapes my window
Atop the candle's flame.
Sweet anguish, and felicity
To me, it's all the same.
Peals of humble laughter
Resound in gilded sorrow.
Ancients sigh in portents
Hence, memories might follow,
Where the light cannot reach
My shadow lies in wait.
There's dungeons in paradise
Where gleeful wails resonate,
These doors are never locked

I'm captured by freewill.
I thank phantasmic reality
And welcome the night so still.

Author's Note: "This particular poem I wrote from the title down: just putting in what I felt fit. It also fit the type of prisoner that because he feels he can't do all his time, succumbs to the beast--the walls closing in on him. Some will level out and actually become passive to much of what the environment throws at him, captured by free will--some go stark-raving mad. Me--I love life; I count my blessings and hope for the best. I've got the best sister on the planet--she's been with me since day one. And although I feel I should have been paroled 16 years ago, I'm not going to let hope go. I've written comical short stories, country and western songs, rock lyrics, a passel of love poems, philosophical poems etc. I work by myself (except for two cats) in one of the prison's boiler rooms--my solitude. Mostly, I try to bring a smile to the reader's face."

Ghost by Daniel Montano

With all these years in prison I
believe I've
come to feel what a ghost must feel,
forced to be
spectators in a world where we've
been long forgotten,
neither here nor there as life goes on
around us.
Some have forgotten that they were
ever part
of that world, they go around hating
the world
and the people in it. Others
remember too well;
they long to be part of that world
again, to be seen,
to be heard, to be relevant.

Every once in awhile, for however
brief it may be someone sees them,
really sees

them. Not for what they are told to
see, a ghost,
but for what lies beneath. For those
who haven't
and do not want to forget, who still
cherish and hang
on to their humanity, it means the
world to them.

So yes, behind these four walls I've
most
definitely come to feel what a ghost
must feel,
your friendly ghost.

...And Haunting by Matthew Fox

One week and haunting
To think my existence now
Is four walls deep.

One week and haunting
Finding the time to wake
But not to rise
Somehow the sleep is easy
The apathy is the surprise

Two weeks and haunting
To dine on dreams
And feast on one belief:
Nothing's as bad as it seems.

One month and haunting
Time nudges truth
And everything changes
When it comes loose.

Six months and haunting
Pain actualized
Earns its embrace.
Memories become poison
Thought was the knife
All used in
The warping of one's mind.

One year and haunting
You move everywhere
But loneliness and despair
--this stunted growth--
You carry them both.

Two years and haunting
Where was I
When time disappeared?

Three years and haunting
Six months and adding
Years like pages flicked
Spines broken and thickened.

I've lived 1,000 years
In one day.
And that day
Repeats.

Five years and haunting
Nothing brings me back now
The choice they've taken
Birthed what I allow.

Ten years and haunting
I seldom think of
Tiny parts that once
Were the only things I loved.

Twenty years and haunting
Inside so resounding
The crowd of emptiness unrelenting.

Twenty-five years and haunting
To kill is too kind
The punishment is to be alive
When I should have died.

Where Dreams are not Welcome by Taj Mahan-Haft

Most folks presume encompassing
razor wire,
topping countless layers of barrier
(metaphorical wedding cake of steel
and demarcation),
serves primarily to separate
us "criminals" from "normal guys."

Those glinting, shredding doilies do
separate it's true,
but not mainly for keeping in the
deviants.

Rather to keep out every dream,
those delicate tendrils that nourish
hearts,
fragile glimpses of tomorrow,
so readily intimidated by
hopelessness and hate.

The few bubbles of delightful
possibility,
the occasional sneak rogue of
subconscious fantasy

juking past grasps of fences' barbed
and reaching tentacles
squeezing between the corrugated
links,
such morsels stand little chance of
survival or recognition,
More likely snagged and
disemboweled
(even if they make it in alive)
upon shivs, scars, tongues, bigotry,
and other self-sharpened prison
survival tools.

Have you ever seen a dream
disemboweled, heard its silent cry?
Hung up on shiny, sharded coils
dangling ephemeral viscera
leaving empty of humanity the
vessels caged inside.

Author's Note: "Dreams are an
essentially human thing and having
them taken away steals life. This
piece is a subtle shout to Langston
and his many references to dreams
deferred.

I wrote this only a year into prison
when I'd gotten the lay of the land,
was still very depressed and after the
sociologist in me had some time to
analyze. As much of the punishment
as anything is geared towards taking
dreams, the delicate vessels of hope,
away from people."

Condemned by Stephen LaValle

Long in advance the condemned
man knows
that he is going to be killed and that
the only thing
that can save him is a reprieve.
In any case, he cannot intervene,
make a plea,
outside of himself, or convince.
Everything goes
on outside of him.
He is no longer a man but a thing
waiting to be
handled by the executioners. This
explains the
odd submissiveness that is
customary in the
condemned at the moment of their
execution.

I choose to believe a more loving
God withholds
final judgment for each haunted
inhabitant of
America's death row.

Author's Note: I wrote this poem
after spending years on New York's
death row. My appeal abolished the
death penalty in this state on June
24th 2004. Many people don't know
what it feels like to be condemned,
how society perceives you, as you
wait for the most ultimate
punishment to take place.

Shackled by Wilbert Jefferson

Those old rusty chains
dank in cold, seen better days.
Distinct by markings,
drug down aisles, chrome chip and
flake
between the shuffle of feet.

II
Those old rusty chains
firmly hold onto chafed skin.
Cuffs dig into flesh,
cutting off circulation;
while joints swell in agony.

III
Those old rusty chains
chant within the still silence,
as the gray goose sway
transporting human cargo
up interstate 101.

Leaving Incarceration Station on the Freedom Train by Scary Laura Rawx

Click clack, click clack
The pulse of the trains pounds
Through my veins
There is no blood on my hands
Yet, there is, according to "the man"
Sitting, doing time
After losing all that was mine

Click clack, click clack
Alone in my D.I. cell
Their adaptation of hell
The freedom in my brain
Keeps my vacation sane

I can hear, smell, feel and see
All the treasures riding holds for me

Click clack, click clack
The turtle swimming in the stream
By the rails
The farm fields scattered with hay
bales,
Skyscrapers and crowds of people
Deserted towns and broken steeples
From horizon to horizon, winding
Its course
I am a god among kinds on my
Iron horse

Click clack, click clack
Wind in my hair, soot on my cheek
Haven't bathed in ages,
Homeless in how I reek
Imbided with wine, two liters just
To get well
Safe in my steel shell
My dog cuddled in my lap
My man at my side
Truly at peace when I ride

Click clack, click clack
Click clack, click clack

Author's Note: "Before I got
arrested I hopped freight trains for 8
years all over the country--at times
with a dog or a boyfriend and
sometimes both. I spent two and a
half years in county fighting my case
before taking a deal for voluntary
manslaughter--even though my
lawyer could prove I didn't make the
death blow; if I went to trial I could've
ended up with Life instead of 11
years at 80%. During that two and a
half year time frame I spent over a
year in disciplinary isolation (D.I.)
because I didn't care to follow the
rules and actually preferred to be by
myself and would prefer my DI stints
as vacations because I would be
able to get away from all the other
females and the drama they
encompassed.
During my DI vacations I often found
my mind wandering to the memories
of my riding days and all the beauty I
have seen, the freedom I have felt

and the things that I loved. Although I'm approaching three and a half years being incarcerated I can still hear the sound of the steel wheels pounding on the tracks, smell the diesel soot and feel the rocking of the cars as the train buckled in movement. I may still be incarcerated but those memories keep my mind free and hopeful. The poem is based on real experiences I've had and things I have seen."

Chain-Link Fence by Michael Reichert

I'm surrounded by a chain-link fence with razor-wire topping. There's a rabbit in the meadow. I can see him through the fence. People drive along the road, there they go, far beyond its links. The world outside the fence is beautiful despite its obstruction. Did I build this fence? No, but I did cause my placement behind it. Everything I see, it seems, is framed by the chain-link fence. But if I keep my head up, the sky is clear, even on a cloudy day. The fence can't reach that high.

The Scent of Spring by Dennis D. Thomas

The scent of spring
Brings to mind
A time when life was green
Reviving memories
Of a place
Where I sowed as I please
But here I'm teased
By this breeze
Upon which I smell a scent
For it sows
Seeds of discontent
As the seasons pass
(with no relent)
My vigor fades
The new day
Brings no change

A dry stalk that
yields no grain
This barren field
Devoid of growth
Where the truth is buried
So no one can know
My mental vines are bound
No room to bud or flower
No chance of sprouting forth
My shoots are stepped on
Trampled
As if they have no worth
My hope
Grows dormant
While my tears
Come down in torrents
Because I labor to no avail
Spring is a season meant for
new beginnings
But until this sentence
Comes to an ending
Spring is just a scent I smell.

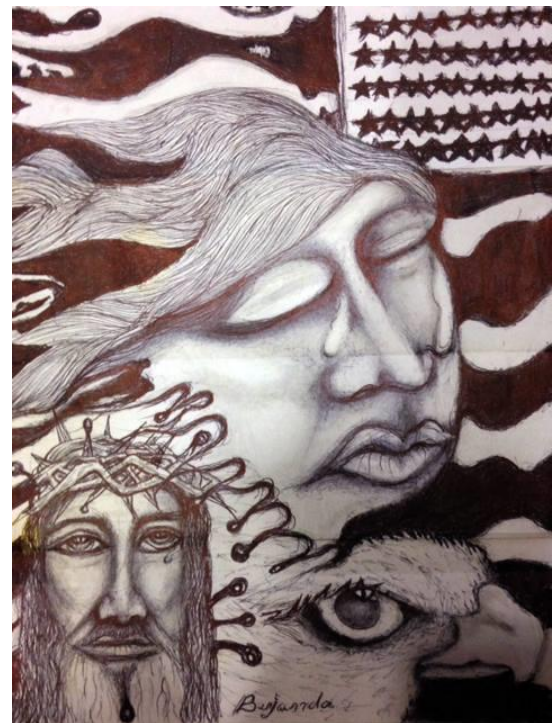
Author's Note: "This poem is an attempt to describe to someone who has never done a bid or what is most commonly known as hard-time. It is very depressing and unnatural and my use of "spring" as a metaphor for freedom and "scent" as a metaphor for hope is obvious to only those who have had the experience. Us prisoners know how we have to put a gloss on our lives behind bars so that we won't grieve our loved ones or cause them to worry too much about us. We constantly tell little white lies like "I'm fine" or "everything is okay," when in reality we're doing all we can to keep it together. For anyone who's done hard time, they remember when they reached that point where s/he felt that s/he had no one to depend upon. Our helplessness is mitigated by the dependability of the seasons. No matter what, fall will always follow summer and spring will always follow winter. Knowing this helps me get through my darkest moments."

Those in Prison by Cliff Smith

To those inside,
even those not inside,

you are so amazing, smart,
beautiful with a heart that shines like
the moon
be strong, keep your head
up, never frown--
Keep a continuous smile to
all those around.
You are of God.
Speak like you mean it, let
your words tell it all.
Broken relationships and things that
should have been.
Close your eyes, listen to my
whisper:
"God loves you and so do I."

Social/Political Issues



Art by Christopher Bujanda

Society by Stephen LaValle

To assert in any case that a man
must
be absolutely cut off from society
because
he is absolutely evil amounts to
saying that
all society is absolutely good and no
one in
their right mind will believe this to be
true.

What Becomes by Jason Williams

What becomes of truth
When the lie appears convincing,
And of those who've based their
entire existence
On the uncertainty of its ending...
What becomes of faith
In times of trial and disappointment,
When beliefs and ideals are tested
for strength
And people abuse what you value,
simply for their enjoyment...
What becomes of peace
When struggle and discontent seem
constant and consistent,
When the mind and spirit are worn
down from the turmoil
And the drive to maintain your
serenity seems less and less
insistent...
What becomes of importance
When you're so fed up that nothing
seems to matter anymore,
When sounds ethics and morals are
abandoned because they're out of
style
And concern for whether you do the
right thing or not has rotted at the
core...
What becomes of trust
When a society becomes corrupt and
deceitful,
When fairness of word and deed are
no longer a must
And the honor of an agreement is
laced with evil...
What becomes of humanity
When the value of life gets cheaper
and cheaper,
At best, we're a dysfunctional family
But we were created as a reflection
of our maker and keeper...
What becomes of us
When we've become complacent
with all that has become,
All that it has become...

Questions of Time by Jeremiah Shubbs

Where do you start...
When lives are torn apart?
How do you maintain love...
With hatred in your heart?

Does someone deserve to be held...
Captive in a cell?
How will they succeed...
If it's designed so they fail?

What happened to rehabilitation...
In freedom's nation?
Why are countless homes broken...
By excessive incarceration?

Is a mistake worth a life...
Or should it cost you your rights?
Do tears lose their significance...
When they're shed in the silence of
night?

How are loved ones left behind...
Lost in vacuums of time?
Why is the government's crime...
Less noticed than mine?

When will the industries be known...
Of those oppressed and alone?
How will decades of mental
imprisonment...
Forever be overthrown?

How will we return amongst peers...
Withholding our fears?
How have the same questions...
Gone unanswered for years?

Sitting in Solidarity by Chad Frank

I sit in solidarity
With Colin Kaepernick
As a man without a country.
Like a Buddhist monk,
I'll continue to sit
Even when the flames engulf me.
I sit against
Police brutality
Poverty
Prejudice
Racism
Homophobia
Hatred
I sit against the abuse and
mistreatment of
Women
children
veterans
Prisoners
You

me
I sit against unjust authority
This is a call for equality
This is a call for unity
Won't you join me?

Silly Boy by Marcus Trevino

Silly boy don't be fooled by that
marine corps hymn.
First to fight you will indeed, but the
glory you seek will only be bleak.
You'll fight for rights and freedom
and to keep your honor clean.
But should you fall...
Your sacrifices will not matter and
the war will never shatter.
That desert is a hole you'll never
escape.
You'll see it, hear it, smell it, and
relive it everyday.
It won't matter if you killed or not.
The deed is done...
Trained for war and left to think it
ever mattered.
So in love with a country that left you
battered.
Despite it all, you'll gain a lot.
Just don't forget it'll cost a lot.

Author's Note: This poem was actually the first I've ever written in my entire life. It was an assignment for a group (PTSD for veterans) here at CSATF/SP in the enhanced outpatient program. I joined the Marine Corps straight out of high school in June 2005. After getting married and having my son, I deployed to Al Anbar Province, Iraq from March 2006 to January 2007. I began experiencing depression and anxiety right after I returned and I self-medicated. It worsened as six friends died in 2007 and 2008 in separate incidents. As the symptoms worsened, it led to domestic violence, alcoholism, DUIs, arrests and divorce until June 2, 2010 with a fatal DUI crash in Bakersfield, CA. This resulted in a person's death and two injured. I was sentenced to 19 years in prison and discharged from the Marine Corps with an "other than honorable" characterization of

service. I wouldn't admit to my mental struggle and it cost an innocent life.

The glory my former self is pursuing will come at a cost greater than I can fathom. All the good I ever did will not matter because my mistake has threatened the Marine Corps' political image. My time in Iraq will haunt me forever in the form of PTSD. My country will turn its cheek with the Marine Corps Times Article "Abandoned by the Corps," a court motion to bar me from wearing my military uniform in trial, and any mention of my service to the jury. I will be left confused and betrayed by a country I love and am willing to die for, but despite it all I'll gain a lot.

Black Tears by Cornell Hurley Jr.

Does my dark brown skin
complexion camouflage my black
tears
Do my cries only reach those with
deaf ears
On my knees late at night, maybe I'm
not praying right
As I cry my black tears
With society's rules and the history of
black people being used and abused
They think it is merely impossible for
us to cry these black tears
Looking at the bible they only see
pictures of white angels
So they think it's impossible for us to
fly
Well I have been traveling down an
unpaved path crying black tears of
tar
So feel free to follow this road
Do not be afraid to let your black
tears be exposed
Because black tears are beautiful,
even without their reasoning being
told

¿Walls? By Juan Rosales

*¿Mami, por que no podemos ir pa'
Texas con Papi?
Porque ellos no nos dejan.
¿Pero quien son ellos pa' decimos?
Los que según se adueñan de la
tierra.*

Mommy, why can't we go to Texas
with Daddy?
Because they do not let us.
But who are they to tell us?
The ones who supposedly own the
land/world.

Why must walls exist?
By what right do you say no?
Do you ban the animals too?
I dare you to tell me so.

These invisible boundaries
often marked by a bridge or a wall
are only for humanity.
Any other species may freely come
or go.

Who made you the ruler of life?
Yet, you give orders to me!
Just because I was born in this land
Must I give up my right to be free?!

Author's Note: "I'm Juan the silent poet whose whispers cannot be held by walls, fences, or bans, let alone bars. This is a poem from my heart written in love and anger. Love for all people and anger at the injustice we all face. These times of controversy inspired it--well to be accurate, cause it to bloom into the beauty of truth. Unbeknownst to me, the growth occurred when as a child I questioned why my family from Mexico could not come visit me here, the U.S of A, when I visited them there. The answer: borders, fences, papers, bans and now, an envisioned wall by the troglodyte who hold the title, President of the United States of America. "Walls" speaks of being shunned by walls and bans. Being born into the chains and cuffs of the law of the land unknowingly was the seed that started it all. It is a shame that a wall came down in Berlin only to be raised in the U.S. That, for me, was the breaking point and the reason my pen whispered "Walls."

Invisible People by Shawn Kunio

I have seen the promised land. But
it's been promised to someone else.
Do you know what it is to be
homeless? Living in a state of
complete aloneness, like a car
That cannot roll, without wheels,
unwhole!
Maybe you find a doorway you can
call your own. But the building's
owned by somebody,
You could never call it home.
Those faceless armies march the
street; I saw then smile; I saw them
perish with every rag and refuse to
cherish.
Hollow, I saw them confer with secret
friends, within the night that never
ends.
A funeral pyre to warm their hands, a
smoke signal to the promised lands.
Lay me down on a bench so hard. I
dream serene of my backyard
Where children play till dusk of night
and sleep in sheets crisp and tight.
Where dreams begin with a mother's
kiss and keep the seal of innocence.
I tried my best to sleep for long but a
night stick cracks, "Time to move
on."
I am in a town where they only rent
to the rich or the statistically
acceptable poor. I smiled at you, you
just turned your head, and went on
through your own door.

Untitled by Sarah Gray

The world rejects them
Life seems to neglect them
Feels like there's no one to protect
them
Welcome to a life lived on the
spectrum
She never really belongs
She's felt alone for so long
This is her story, this is her song
She lays awake at night
She craves the loving touch of
someone like the blind crave sight
Her burden is anything but light
It's an everyday fight to keep it in
It's been the same since her life
began

She cries herself to sleep once again,
Only to wake and face tomorrow
Some days she's overwhelmed by sorrow
A little strength she needed to borrow,
Just enough to get by
The next thing she knew she was living life high
Why didn't she try this years ago
The best part is no one knows her secret
Drugs took it away and she wanted to keep it
Then her world blew up like a grenade
Let me paint you a picture, Thomas Kinkade
Her whole facade was completely shattered
She wound up in jail broken and tattered
She couldn't think for all the clatter
everyone asked her what was the matter
She couldn't find the words to tell
About the life of pain she knew too well
When asked about herself she was basically silent
When her emotions got too strong she became violent
Turns out she's autistic
Which is exactly why no one gets it
It's so obvious how did they miss it
She was misdiagnosed
For 30 years she lived like a ghost
She was doing the most, trying to disappear
She was out of control, trying to steer
Now that her mind is clear
She has to face one of her biggest fears
She wants to live life sober
But she'd travel the world over
To find someone to hold her
That's where the problem lies
That's why late at night she cries
Aside from the fact that she don't look you in the eyes
She can't stand for you to touch her
Physical contact causes her to suffer
if only she were tougher

She wishes she were someone else
She'll have to learn to settle for herself
Will she be like this till the day she dies
Or will she go home, give up and just get high
The day passes by and turns to night
She wonders again is it worth the fight
She only wants to be alright.

Family and Friends



Art by Norris Beebe

A Father by Cedric L. Davis

My father, my father where are you, I need you? I am growing up and I don't know what to do. I have a mom but from what I have learned, parents are supposed to be two.

As I grow up in this world, who will help to shape my view?

From what I am told, it was supposed to be you. Who will teach me to mow the lawn, fix my bike, plant a garden, change the oil, a tire, rake the leaves, to stay and not leave?

Who will teach me how to provide the love and support a family needs? To

show me how to be a man, is that not what my father should do for me?

My father, my father where are you, I need you? I wake up mornings looking for you. My mom does the best she can, but she cannot teach me how to be a man. Things are starting to get out of hand. I'm rebelling against mom, calling myself a man. Why I sit in class and cry daily for a man I never saw, I can't understand.

My father, my father where are you, I need you? Do you even care? Have you ever wondered how I look or wanted to feel the softness of my hair? I have become violent because once my father came, he promised he's come back But I never saw him again.

My father, my father where are you, I need you? Save me from this pain. Come back into my life, be the example of love, show me how to lead, teach me to be a man. If I did something wrong forgive me, but if you can't, at least try to understand. I need a father so that I can become a man.

Author's Note: "I am 41 years old. I have six kids and two grandsons. I've been incarcerated 14 years. That means that my children have gone 14 years without a father in their physical presence. I grew up without my father. I never knew him and I never met him. But had I had my father in my life, my life would have been much different. I would not be in the physical place that I am today. Thus fathers are very important and so I have tried my hardest from inside these prison walls to be the father that I can be and love my children so that they know and never doubt their father's love."

Helping Him Grow by Chris Kline

To look at the world with a child's
point of view
Is sometimes a task, not easy to do.
But try it just once, and you will
agree
A boy's trust and love will grow tall
as a tree.

Encourage a boy to stand tall and
erect
And soon you will see you have
gained his respect.
Be honest and firm, yet bend when
you need:
He'll feel good about himself, since
you've planted the seed.

Let a boy make mistakes, be allowed
more than one.
Be himself, he'll discover it's not too
much fun.
He'll make his own path, he'll make
the right choice--
With patience and love, he'll hear the
right voices.

Teach a boy--he can laugh at
himself--it's okay!
We all have our flaws, we'll outgrow
them one day.
Be kind and patient, but don't ever
ridicule
By himself, you'll discover he's
learned the golden rule.

Teach a boy a set of values, not too
high, not too low
He'll feel good about himself, be a
joy to watch grow.
If you do all these things, I promise
one day
A good many he'll be, for you've
shown him the way.

Mi Maldito Hijo by Francisco Gonzalez

Maldito Frank,
I am in love with you mijo.
You deserve the unconditional love
God
Bestowed upon your beautiful brown
skin.
Love yourself mi maldito hijo,

No matter what the world says to
you.
Give yourself estás palabras de
amor,
And remember to make them last
forever
In your heart of gold.
Heal the wound of forgotten love,
Something so unattainable in the
physical realm
Of this unforgiving universe.
But forgive yourself,
It matters to your inner-being.
A perfect kind loving heart awaits
you with
Open arms,
Ready to embrace your precious
humanity.
Mijo, it is a love so true that if you
Hold your breath until you're blue,
The tears of millions will stream
down
Your brown handsome chiseled face.
To my Nina Sylvia who showered me
With her loving kisses all through
My childhood.
I was her little man ready to love
With a pure heart.
I love you maldito Frank,
Mi amor keep it real firme,
Porque that perfection is near.
Your best friend, your partner, your
lover,
And your ride or die for the
Next three eternities.
Feel that mi vida?!

You are my one and only true object
Of desire with this passionate fire
Burning from within my soul.
You are loved "maldito Frank."
Mijo, you are love...

I'm Here by William Spaulding

I've spent most my life behind bars,
it's been a life filled with pain.
Behind these walls I've looked out,
but seen nothing but rain.
I've lost loved ones too early, my
heart's taken shots way too often
But my heart's built like a soldier, or
I'd already be lying in a coffin.
So much pain lives inside me, most
days I don't want to wake

Because I'm paying with my
freedom, for all of my mistakes.
I've thought about ending it, at times
I've held razors to my wrists
But then I always hear this voice; it
sounds something like this,
"You have so much more to live for,
please don't end it this way.
If you have that strength now, you
will see brighter days.
I've never really left you, even
thought I'm not here in the flesh.
Just look inside you, and I hope that
it helps.
I'll always have your back, I'm your
Guardian Angel
So I know this as a fact. I pray that
what I say saves you.
When you think about me, smile,
please never start to cry.
And when you talk about me don't
look down, I'm up here in the sky.
Be confident I've made it, the Gods
gave me this chance,
So stay strong and be brave and
when you're in need I'll hold your
hand.
If you ever seem to need me, just
look into your heart
Because that's where you'll find me,
and I know that life's hard.
You have so much more to live for,
so please don't end it this way,
Because I'm your mom and I love
you and we'll meet again someday.

Waiting by Jonathan Craig

Another day goes by waiting for your
letter,
As time flies by the chances aren't
looking any better.
It's been so long since I heard from
you,
Wow can't believe our son is already
turning two.
Another birthday dad's not there,
Sorry son I know it's not fair.
I messed up in more ways than one,
My only concerns were about having
fun.
I apologize for the choices and
decisions I made.
I apologize for the foundation I
should have laid

In the future I promise to do better.
As for now I just sit and wait for your letter.

Long Distance Dad by Taj Mahon-Taft

Smirk, snarl, grin, and cackle
I lose my mind in fantasy
Of staying a thread in the primary seam
Of your nature path to manhood
Interwoven with your cloth
Inseparable without fraying.
Will it unravel now that I've been pulled?

To offer verbal antacid
To chase the bile burn
And aid calm digestion
From well-earned embarrassment
The first time state authorities
Ring or bring you home

To cross message within your social circle
Laugh along to slapstick, farts, and balls
And other boyhood antidotes
Against the mortal ailment of growing up
Even as I cast knowing looks
To reel you in at 3am
When splashing in "too loud pond"
With my barbless, subtle glance

To memorize your glisten and verdant breath
Of your sated, hazy, quiet smile
Reflecting halos of hope and endless possibility
In the early, shiny half dark
Of the north west winter night
After your first kiss

To sit helplessly silenced,
Vicariously miasma-ed
Offering hugs and cuddles long outgrown
As you drown your first heartache
In a river of salty tears
And deluge of defiant "never agains"
That silt the delta of bigger romance
Fertilizing future love

To even hear you curse me

Reflection: Them, Me by Janice Funk

Like it or not--and really I don't like it
With every passing year they muscle in,
Inhabit my skin like fingers in a sock,
Shifting my face into a foreign familiarity,
Less me, more them: father, mother, uncle, aunt,
Blunt nose from one, slack cheeks from another,
Her lips, her eyes, and from them all, the wrinkles.

Age bring them home to me in this new way,
And how hard it is to love myself
As I loved them--still do, down to the moles
On the backs of their hands, the tobacco breath,
The bald spot I pray I'd never have.
God
Didn't listen. This morning in the mirror they
are merciless and I stare at my face until

I lift my hand and press it against
My eyes the way one presses down the eyes
Of the dead. But then, in darkness behind
My eyelids, I see what I won't want to forget
When I trace their features on my changing face
They are where I come from, and my age
Brings me home to them.

Family by Kristen Urquiza aka Pocahontas

Our family may not be the baddest,
Or even the best--
It may be broken,
And a fucking mess--
But what matters most is what
Happens behind the scenes--
They type of shit that
Others just don't see--

Having each other's backs and
Not dropping the ball--
J-paying money,
Making sure we can call--
Holding me down
When the way was unclear--
Just saying "I miss you"
When no one else cared
I'm proud to call you family
Without a doubt--
Loyalty, honesty, respect,
Is what a real family, our family,
Is all about--
Bound by years,
Not by blood or by mother--
Our family is tighter
Than most any other.

The List by Rickey Gately

I've been searching for someone
That has always been true
So I made a list of names
Of everyone I ever knew

As I went through that list
One name at a time
And every name on that list
Are still friends of mine

As I went over that list
To see who it would be
The one person that cares the most
For such a man like me

I came up with one name
That I've been looking for
Then I threw the list away
I won't be needing it anymore

Your name stood out the most
More than all the rest
Yours is the only name
That could pass my test

Untitled by John Burmeister
Wanted.
A friend.

No experience necessary.
There's no need to speak,
No need to understand,
No life changing advice
need by given.

Must be willing to give of oneself,
and
Enter into my loneliness and pain.
Must be willing to dry tears should
they fall.
Must be tender and compassionate.

Wanted.
Someone who cares.

Apply in person.

Friends in the Fairy Tales by Daniel Enriquez

Knights behold their princesses,
queens grasp kings hand-in-hand,
As armies march in gathered forces,
trampling homes and fields on land.
Royalties at stake, the grounds still
shake, no end to pointless wars, our
Righteousness, a dying man's last
wish, pleads healing of present
scars.

Incarcerating legal slaves, behind
glass barriers filled with sand, as
Empathetic emotions run deep,
carelessly falling from enemy hands.

Murderers filled with red rum in their
veins, flow through their drunken
minds,
Obliterating, as time's not waste, still
pace the enemy lines.
On forward, the call reigns aloud,
militiamen coated in arms,
Side by side, savaged barbarians
abroad know not the ends nearing
harm.
Elimination comes quickly this day, in
this sudden result, there's no other
way.

Moon rises in the eastern sky, as the
blazing sun sinks in the west,
Imaginations seek victorious battle
cries, to wipeout the king man's best.
Torches burn with crackling sounds
while piercing the darkness black,
Children shrills, their dreamscapes
reveal, no hope to counter the attack.
Henchmen honor to protect and
serve, no glory in giving up,
Encouraged by their holy word, as
their banners are strongly held up.

Legends are written, though this
day's burden, in history stands true,
the
Lessons we've learned, through
scars as they burn, tomorrow brings
a new.

Dedicated to my 3 favorite friends,
the fairy tale never ends.

Love



Art by Santos Carrera

The Message by Gary Field

I've got a message for the man in the
street
Who it appears to me has been
blinded--
Without the woman you'd be
obsolete.
I think it's time that you were
reminded.

She's like a flower trampled under
your feet
Whose sweet scent is wasted on the
air--
You somehow, in your macho
conceit,
It seems to me that you are unaware.

A precious gem in the palm of your
hand
That you treat as if a common stone--
-
Brothers, it's time that you
understand

that she's a queen in need of a
throne.

You see her flesh and ignore her
soul,
With hardened hearts, you can crush
her spirit--
And though you need her to make
you whole,
When she cries out, you can't even
hear it.

I have a message for the man in the
street,
Who it appears need to be reminded--
-
Without the woman you'd be
incomplete.
You'd search for peace and you'd
never find it.

Through God's grace we've been
given a gift
And you can't even see beyond the
wrapping--
The love inside, you just set it adrift
Left with the sound of one hand
clapping.

Like a one-eyed king in the land of
the blind,
You think we've got it all figured out--
But one day you'll awaken to find
That you've been left with the
shadow of doubt.

You won't miss your water til the well
runs dry,
And you're left to suffer in your thirst--
-
Some woman's daughter will just
wave good-bye
To the apology you'd rehearsed.

How long do you think she'll play
your game,
Until her own heart begins to
harden?
Brothers, you'll only have yourselves
to blame
When she begins to tend to her own
garden.

A place where flowers aren't
carelessly plucked,
Where swollen grapes grow upon the
vine--
Her own place where she can
reconstruct
Her sense of self and find peace of
mind.

I've got a message for the man in the
street,
What you've lost, I hope one day to
find it--
And I'd sip that nectar that's oh so
sweet
Just the way that God had designed
it.

I'd be there to wipe the tears from
her eyes,
And let her lay her head upon my
chest--
I'd be there to hear her whispered
sighs,
To satisfy her and to give her rest.

You've held a jewel in the palm of
your hand,
And treated it like a common stone--
One day soon, perhaps you'll
understand,
Why I chose to place her on a
throne.

**Well-Tempered Love by HD
Johnson**

The fires of my loneliness,
once filled my life with much distress;
and constantly they did suppress
my every chance at happiness.

In truth, I lost all zest for life,
and every day was filled with strife;
until, that is, the day you came
into my life and called my name.

With tenderness you gave to me,
the strength to set my spirit free,
and then you showed me lovingly,
how wonderful my life could be.

As our new friendship grew and
grew,
a joyous feeling did ensue.

I know that I was born anew,
when I realized my love for you.

This love has bounds I cannot see,
it is universal poetry;
and with its durability,
it shall continue endlessly.

So future trials will not repress;
Life's tribulations will not suppress
This well-tempered love, which I
possess;
forged in the fires of my loneliness.

Untitled by Lonnie Gavaldon

I envision your body in front of me
Curves stunningly persuasive
My heartbeat similar to when the
bass kicks

That seductive look is trying my
patience
Intense feelings got me in total
devastation

Is there any way we could continue
our relations
Without any sexual exploitations?

The look on her face was utter
amazement
Because of her beauty so radiant
it's hard to stay away from

Only the strength from above
Can help me overcome this lust

Start with a friendship
Then build on trust
No more one night stands

I'm searching for true love
Countless relationships ruined
Amends never being made
Awkward moments
When we come face to face

**En Apesanteur by Shawn
Henderson**

Je suis en apesanteur
Je suis en tête-à-tête avec un ange

Le pierre et le fer nous séparent
Mais parmi votre cologne, je reste.

Tu es ma Venus
Comme mars, je suis tol frontière.

Notre amour, ce trou noire
Me tive jusqu'a ton univers.

Notre amour est sans
comprehensive
Je suis en apesanteur.

Alors, salut mon ange
Seulement toi, propriétaire de mon
amour

Je me rencontrerai avec toi au ciel
Parce que je suis en apesanteur.

The Original by Shawn Henderson

Gravity does not apply to me
I am eye to eye with an angel

Concrete and iron separate us
But through your scent, I abide

You are my Venus
As Mars, I am your divide

Our love, this black hole
Is pulling me in your universe

Our love is beyond understanding
Gravity does not apply to me

So hello my angel
Only you inherit my love

I will meet you in Heaven
Because gravity does not apply to
me

The Willow by Gregor Buck

You are my moon, my stars
the sun, the sea
the very air I breathe.
You are everything to me,
so vast and so deep my desire
through every day
through every lifetime you inspire.
if but once you were mine
I would give you myself
and in your light would I shine...

Touch by Cynthia Quick

To be in touch
I long for such
A caress, here in this prison stress,
I'm a mess,
Under duress
More is less,
9-7 for a casual hug
Because PREA is REAL!"

This aching desire starts to bug me
They might as well drug me
Because this torture is too much to bear...
I feel the weight of your stare
Even from way over there
And I find myself missing
The inexperienced feel of your kiss
On my waiting lips

You look up and smile at me,
Changing gravity with a glance
Even without my physical touch
I never knew before
That it could mean so much
To be in touch.

No Comparison by Barry Taylor

In similitude--the rose, to you
Appears trifling, indubitably pale;
As would the taste afforded
By an unfermented ale.

The scarlet blush upon your cheeks
Conjures visions of ardent passion,
As the petals' texture your skin
aspires
to attain like softness...to
satisfaction.

Your ruby lips outbid the flavor
T'ward which the rose both strive;
As by exuding its fragrant aroma
To best you it doth contrive.

In stature its sole endeavor
To usurp you is once more in vain,
Surely you appear far superior
When all be drenched with rain.

Nay--the rose holds not a candle
Nor prayer of the triumph over you;
Its fleeting beauty expires more each
morning

While you continue unspoiled and
new.

Black Satin Development by Reginold Hoover

It's impossible to camouflage that
genuine appeal,
striking like a viper in rage, creating
an electromagnetic field,
that attracts attention, destined to
elevate the pulse rate,
gifted by nature, so fortunate to bear
what's most precious to the likeness
of mankind...

(Exquisite to the eye of the
superficial) your every single step is
carefully admired by the way you
walk, weighing all options, pros and
cons,
I propose to conjoin as one; I confide
that beauty goes deeper than the
skin,
soulfully seductive to the touch, your
beauty is inevitable as it dwells from
deep within,
causing an eruption of passion-fruit
kisses and honey drops,
to lace the sleek texture of your
Black Satin Development...

Let's go to a place where we can
forget all existence,
until the coming of the sun, dripping
wet, hand in hand, strolling the black
sand,
in the utmost exotic edges of the
cosmos, leaving no spectacle to the
imagination.
(Exquisite to the eye of the
superficial)
Lost in the heat of passion,
competing in a rhythmic flow of
adrenaline
like a barrage of exotic dancers, until
we peak into orbit,
then slowly wind back down to earth,
where peaceful waters flow,
I watch as the moonlight traces the
contour of your sultry,
Black Satin Development.

Amber by Brandon Rushing

My eyes
show me captured,
glazed, frozen by mistake;
inside a prison of sweet sweet
amber.

Author's Note: "For me, "Amber" is
a love poem. Although a reader
might see within its lines the trapping
of some wayward insect that has
been drawn and captured inside the
sun filled resin of tree sap, where it is
bound by the hardening of that sap
into an amber stone. For myself, it
was the picture of how my wife was
able to pull me into her world. How
she allowed her beauty to seduce
me and in that seduction forever
bound us together. It is the story of
great romance and lust simplified
and obscured by the "we," so that
every person that has been prey to
the amber can relate."

Wishing you Understood by Derrick Lynn Bratcher

Need courses through my veins for
you.
I breathe the cucumber-melon of
your skin,
Taste the sour-apple of your tongue;
But long to drink from the deep wells
of your heart,
To savor your thoughts like my last
meal--

Wishing Rosetta could translate
The hieroglyphs of my soul:
My memories of you
Sailing across the Atlantic of life,
Cramped in the quarters of my mind,
Longing for freedom...
For the Sahara's heat,
For the Congo's touch,
For the tom-tom's dancing pulse.

Need courses through my dreams of
you.
I view heaven's vista beneath your
hair,
Feel love in the lava of your
embrace;

But yearn to swim the cinnamon
seas of your eyes,
To rest in your trust like a bed of
clouds--

Wishing hummingbirds could carol
The melodies of my soul:
My memories of you
Moaning my blood-stained spirituals,
Pressed in the fields of my mind,
Yearning for freedom...
For the Canadian chill,
For the midnight train,
For the church bell's enchanting
chime.

Calling as a Fix by Taj Mahon-Haft

Lockdown over, call I must
80-plus stags chase just three does
Prison phone dash, jive, and queue
Clique and double-click avoidance
Like a China white in red light
Amsterdam
Gotta have it, daily shot of love
Mainstream life mainlined, sting then
sigh
Nothing better here, even when the
dope is bunk
I'll give anything, go hungry thrice
For just one hit of your smile voice
ET-junkie, calling home or fading fast
Despite dangers of suited, zooted
gangs

Author's Note: "The chance to call, especially my son and girlfriend, is like a drug that I must have. But it's not that simple here. There are 86 people vying for 3 phones (line 2) which is also a subtle reference to the term "bucking," used have so often to describe any rebellion. Not only are there many people, it is a challenge for this nerdy pacifist to get on because of the cliques and gangs and people who wish to keep calling (double-clicking) even when people are waiting. Those calls are always heavenly, even though (like a needle to a vein) they always sting a bit and sometimes have tough content. The connection to real life keeps us feeling human. Also, it should be noted, they could easily make more

money with more phones, but they choose not to...keeping us fighting and forming factions over phones serves to keep us from uniting for better rights."

Imperfectly Perfect by Nahbeel

Richardson

You question,
As if your mind wanders
In different directions,
As if something did happen
I would not tell you
As if I don't tell you everything

You say
You trust me
You don't believe
I will hurt you
But we are not perfect
And you've been hurt in the past
So what make me different

You say
You believe me
When I tell you
I love you and only you
And that should be enough
Since I don't know
What else to I can do
To prove my love

I understand
Your position
Your sacrifice
Your pain
Your love
Your devotion

But please
Understand this

No I am not perfect
But I am perfect with you
Our love is perfect
I do not look, want, or need
For any other man
Because you are perfect

For me
For us

My Heart Belongs to You by Clinton Kennedy

I burn for you my desire,
yearning for you to set me on fire,
for you I will burn in flames.
Take me away from this world of
darkness and pain.
I will release my soul into you at last,
for it belongs to you, is yours to
have.
Tear out my heart, bleeding in your
hands,
keep it with you always,
take it with you to the grave,
I will be with you until our last days.

Untitled by Brian Fuller

To say goodbye to maybe
To shed a tear for why
I can't give up on crazy
I refuse to even try
Return to me in silence
Your thoughts live always shared
I go again into the place
Where once we used to share
Avarice meanders slowly
Capricious in its lust
I've been lost again in folly
Searching for that misplaced trust
If I ever get to handle
Something precious as before
I'll try hard to respect it
And cherish all the more
So venture once again with me
I'll never be apart from you
My hope, my peace, my joy



Art by Charles Kusiak

Compunctious by Edward Finley Jr.

Yemaja, the mother of all emotion,
deity every human being exudes.
Water within us is a controlled
potion,
the moon's mystic hand dictates our
mood.

Forgive me, I've yet to learn to
escape,
The unknown effects of my condition.
Stay firm, no need to bend out of
shape,
I'll come into, upon my own volition.

Your behavior dictated my retort,
Some may say I relinquished power.
I pray we still have a good rapport,
Please pardon me, my elegant
flower.

Fret not my dear, you'll hear from me
any day,
The depths of my heart is where your
love will stay.

Love Lost by Shand Nash

Where art thou, when I need
You so dearly.
What we used to share was so
Rare;
Tears silently flow down my cheeks
My dear
If I could turn back the hands of time,
I promise to be a better man I swear;
I know I said, "I'll always be there."
The streets took hold of me. Now I
have this burden to bear.
Deep in my heart, I know you still
Care.
I guess when you used to pay your
Bus fare: it hurt so bad, seeing me
looking
Like a caged grizzly bear.
God sees and knows my heart, one
day
I will leave this lair
That each and everyday I feel
despair,
Wishing you were still there.
I reminisce how we were a happy
pair,

Kissing in the rain; people would
always stare.
Did I care?...Nope, cause when I
held you
Near...your heart-beat, I could
always hear.
God, it hurts so much, I wish I could
feed you
Plums and pear.
But....I guess what we had, is no
longer there.

Religion

Soldier's Stand by Thomas Hill

Soldier are you ready?
To take a stand
Soldier are you ready
To show yourself a man?
A man of God who's not afraid
To take a stand in Jesus' name,
Standing firm upon God's word
With the shield of faith
And the spirit's sword.
Soldier are you ready?
Have you taken time to pray?
Asking God to give you strength
To stand your ground today
Cause everyday is a struggle
Every day is a war
You've got to know who's in control
And who you're fighting for.
You're fighting for the one who's lost
And hasn't found the way
Praying he'll see Jesus
In what you do and say
You're standing with the loner
Who has tried to stand alone
You're standing for the hater
Whose life is dark as night
Praying God will change their heart
And they'll find the light
You're standing for your brother or
sister
Who's been caught up in sin
Speaking truth with mercy
So God's love can get back in
Do not be discouraged
You do not stand alone
He will not forsake you
Or leave you on your own
Be strong and full of courage
Do not be ashamed

You change the game when you
claim His name
So lift your voice in praise.
He'll give you wisdom
He'll give you might
He saved you for a purpose
He made you for this fight.
He has you where you are today
You know he has the plan
So let your light shine extra bright
Soldier take your stand
Soldier are you ready
To hear His battle plan?
Love your brother
Love your sister
Love your God,
Soldier rise and stand.

**You're not Alone by Larry
Anthony Harris**

So many people do not believe in
The name Jesus Christ
It is because of all the troubles
That have happened in their life

There are some who believed in Him
Who backslid and turned away
The bad things that happen in this
life
Made them lose their faith to pray

Some speak to me words of defeat
During this storm I'm going through
I then reply with my head up high
That I have faith and you should too

In this life I live I have struggled
I have seen so many rainy days
There's times I would have given up
But instead I cried and prayed

The devil whispers in my ear
There's no way I can go on
Then it appears as I pray in tears
That God has left me and is gone

I felt so convicted and ashamed
For all the sins and wrong I've done
But I have faith that God will finish
The works that He begun

So many people do not believe in
The name of Jesus Christ
Well I am a living witness

That God can change your life

For every problem that I've had in life
God has moved them all away
That is because instead of giving up
I choose to fight and pray

God has never let me down

I Meet a Stranger Every Morning
by Rob Becker

I meet a stranger every morning,
We sit cross-legged with eyes closed
And stare at each other for an hour
or so.
I can't exactly describe this presence
With whom I have a regular
appointment
Before sunrise each day.
Although I discern our intimate
assembly,
I've never really seen him.

I meet a stranger every morning.
He can be prompt or tardy, insistent
or sluggish.
Our non-verbal exchanges are
provocative
And profound beyond words.
Often repetitive and monotonous,
Other times so original and
stimulating
That I fight the urge to jot down
notes.
Yet, I've never heard his voice.

I meet a stranger every morning.
Sometimes he pisses me off.
The shit he slings and the
Dust he stirs up can make me squirm
inside.
I have learned to patiently abide
His tirades, tantrums and
tantalizations.
When I allow these to quiet down,
There is a vacancy in the space of
our meeting.

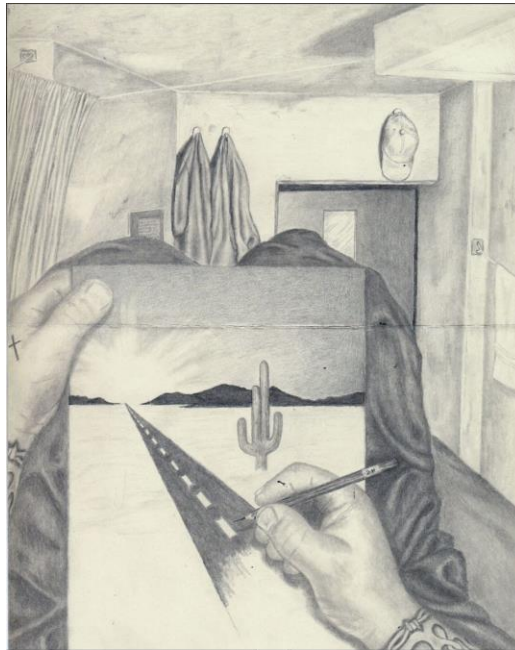
I meet a stranger every morning.
His silent and intuitive presence
Is capable of carrying me
to sensational highs of
Loving connection with all of
creation.

I don't know if he is really a he.
After all, I suspect he is you
Just as much as he is me.

What if by E. Andres Cole

If heaven was only
A mile away
Would I give up
And run that way
Or would I stand here and fight
Just one more day
Would I go there and ask God
To wipe away my tears
Or would I silently continue my
journey
Swallowing my fears
I really don't know
What I'd do
What I'd say
If I were the find that heaven
Real heaven
Was only one mile away

World View



Art by Kelley Fredricksen

A Cynical Elegy for the "Summer of Love" on its 50th Anniversary
by Burl Corbett

I
Morning at the Haight
Street Medical Clinic: Two
Fifteen-year-olds who
Lost their periods and don't

Know where to find them.
The first acid casualty ,
Of the day, a teen-
Age boy, whimpers for Mommy.
Denizens of an
Alternate reality
Have followed him home:
Stray cats that refuse to leave.
Dipping penises,
Shards of glass buried beneath
Layers of dog shit,
Infected splinters:
some of the collateral
Damages of the Summer
Of Love, in the year
Nineteen and sixty-seven,
'Frisco-by-the-bay.

II

The fuzz found "Super Spade" at
The base of a cliff,
Guessed that a drug deal had gone
south, or he tried to
Fly behind some of the bad
Acid goin' 'round.
Old "Chocolate George" T-boned a
Car, and two hundred
Angels lowered his casket,
Pissed on his grave, and
Laid joints among the flowers.
The "Diggers," streetwise
Con artists of ill-repute--
"Big Apple" hustlers--
Brought their game three thousand
miles
To strong-arm the cowed
Local grocers to "donate"
Food, or else: you hip?
Hey man, like dig the free meal
At the Panhandle
Every day at five, on us!

III

Up on "Hippie Hill,"
Junior high is in summer
Session. Charlie Manson
Was voted class president.
Peace and love was his
Mantra: love conquers all, man.
Then he decamped to
L.A., and went off message.
Like, the grooviness
Soon ended, and now
the "Love Street" junkies
And amphetamine monsters
Rule a ravaged sovereignty.

Author's Note: "This poem is based upon my experiences during that legendary summer. With a friend, I drove my 1950 Chevy from Birdsboro Pennsylvania to San Francisco. We arrived in Haight-Ashbury on July 6, and found a \$60 a month furnished (barely--2 sofas) room at the corner of Octavia and Haight Streets. For three months, I sold "underground" hippie newspapers to gullible tourists in Chinatown, picked tomatoes with migrant Mexican workers, and did my part to keep the '60s "swingin'." At the age of 20 I was a veteran of the Greenwich Village hipster scene, a wannabe beatnik who got to New York City too late for the dance, and I had my eyes wide open. But in San Francisco that summer, the streets were clogged with 13 to 17 year old children, most of them high on anything they could scrounge. I ran into Charles Manson in Golden Gate Park when I was on my first and only LSD trip. He caught my eye, offered me a box of cookies but drove me away with his bad vibes. Two years later, I saw his photo on TV and knew why I had fled his evil ambience. Strange, but true!")

The Kite by Jack Dyson

Late at night, while the moon is
High and shining, I fly a kite, the
String pulled taut, to me it is
Whining, "freedom, freedom, please
Set me free," the kite keeps
Moaning, it just won't let me be. It
Continues groaning, til it starts to
Shriek, it's too much; too loud, so I
cut the string and watch it streak,
Destined for the clouds, but fallen
At my feet.

A Morbid Winter's Dream by Cory Lambing

Dwell Upon a bleak December
Shatterings of yore.
I pluck upon a half strung harp
A tainted devil's score.
Thrice I left and thrice I came

Facing such oppression.
She has wept a thousand years
A burden of my obsession.
A broken heart and soulless envy
A morbid winter's dream.
I thought I may relieve some stress
And released a demonic scream.
A raven flew from the dusty knoll
Erecting such a passion.
I doubt that I will ever submit
To another painless ration.
Kudos to you, the girl with the face
That is painted in my third eye.
Truth be told and truth be kept
I much rather wish I'd died
But here I sit beneath the tree
Oh it speaks so many lies
All the trust I put in thee
My broken soul replies.
So I pluck upon this broken harp
My notes lost in the wind,
The raven landed upon a branch
And another life begins.
I dream of days, overcast and dark
And blood rain upon my skin.
A life is lost, a child forgotten
And another life begins.
And another life begins...

Time Machine by Martin Savage

Time flows, seconds atom-sized,
Particulate infinitesimal,
Immeasurable moments of
Joy, pain, sadness, fear,
And hope, and love, and hate,
Coruscate across the portholes
Of this time machine.

On it runs-walks-jumps,
Crawls-tumble-slides,
Scarred out-and-inside
By mistakes of navigation.
It tears, it bleeds, it heals,
It thrums, and shapes exhaust
Into communication.

Destination some time yet to be,
Unthought-of until reached,
yet a pointillist mosaic of all
That it has seen and has recorded
Traveling not through time
But with it, bearing its weight
'Til it can carry no more.

The Life Downstream by Will Van Sant

The river flows, its course unknown
To those who have not yet been
shown
What lies beyond the river's bend.
Past verdant banks oft overgrown

The stream impartial shan't amend
Itself to either foe or friend.
Its rapids rough and waters still
Are random. They will ne'er depend

On wish or whim or force of will
Of those who venture to fulfill
Some vision that they would impose
On how life's waters splash and
spill.

Yet even as the river flows
There have been chapters when I
chose
To drop an anchor and remain
A-wallow in some transient woes

Because I ne'er believed the pain
Was passing and would quickly
wane
If to the current I would yield
And find the joy that I might gain.

For in their time the wounds are
healed
And many secrets are revealed
By lessons life would have us learn.
And by these waters we're annealed

And better able to discern
The glory of each twist and turn
The river offers as it goes
Through waters calm and those that
churn.

The beauty that the trip bestows
Is measured not as I suppose.
For surely life will e'er disclose
Its myst'ries as the river flows.

Whidbey Island by Jason Adkins

Dominated by the Pacific Ocean
Protected by the cascade mountains
Lives a quiet island
Only a ferry boat ride away

From crossing puget on the
Cathulmet
To driving the dangers of deception
pass
you'll find no busy streets
No chain stores, strip malls or cheap
hotels

Bed and breakfast inns are what
you'll find here
With quality family owned
restaurants
And oh, how I miss those
Little island cafes that offer

...warm

welcomes

...free coffee

...and croissants

It was at such a place early one
morning

I happened to see a doe walk slowly
Down the road, no worries
These communities are old you see
...and hold

fast

...to their old

...island ways

There's European-style cobblestone
paths

To help you get around these island
towns

Oh, no need for a car

For all the best places come by feet

To and fro the old cobblestone paths
I take

While exploring an ancient market
place

"Hello," a lady says

A light wind whispers about her face

Forever caught in a seashell, sound
of waves

Briny smell of sea riding in the
breeze

Bringing ocean mist in

Another memorable moment

...in my life

...given by

...the Puget Sound

Not Quite Oz by Michael Griffis

Lions and tigers and bears
Loosed from their cages and lairs

This ain't Dr. Seuss

These beasts on

the loose

The back of my neck standing hairs

It seems that a man quite insane
Did shoot himself once in the brain

But first he set free

The beasts we now

see

Running in street, road and lane

It's now nine-one-one folks are
calling

With stories of fear quite appalling

Cats that are growling

And bears that are

prowling

And monkey who's touching and
mauling

The neighborhood now like a zoo
The chaos like storm simply grew
Confusion then panic

The size quite

titanic

I had to throw in slain and slew

Cause all of the critters were shot
The kitten, the poodle and lot

Pretty it weren't

And nothing was

learnt

A topic that's still rather hot!

Freed Spirits by Francisco

Gonzales

She walked away into the deep
shadows of the night.

The sound of her footsteps echoing
through

The empty halls.

The piercing sounds of a never
ending future,

And a future never ending.

Hallowed shrieks of hell in a
paradise,

Where her cold heart dwells.

Broken hopes, broken dreams,
The cries of dreams never dreamt.
Fury burning, yearning to be heard.
Her calculating look as deadly to the
senses,
As her unforgiving soul never bends.
Unyielding in her path to an end.
A cold blizzard inside her head,
Frozen visions of a place with no
prospects,
As she gasps lives too blind to the
depths of their human souls.
She's frozen to the precious touch of
life,
Her mind failing to reason their very
humanity.
Lonely and hurt,
And unexplained pain with nowhere
to turn.
Something freed,
Something treasured,
Then chained.
Waiting for stone walls to fall,
Let her give way to the freed
Spirits who play...

Dear PE Participants,
We had thousands of poems
submitted, and we read them all and
chose these. We are still collecting
poems and expect to publish Volume
19 in late spring 2018. Please keep
sending in your submissions. We will
leave you with a 3 poignant quotes
from Carl Jung, one of the creators of
modern depth psychology, which
seeks to facilitate a conversation with
the unconscious energies which move
through each of us.

"One does not become enlightened by
imagining figures of light but by making
the darkness conscious."

"I am not what happened to me, I am
what I choose to become."

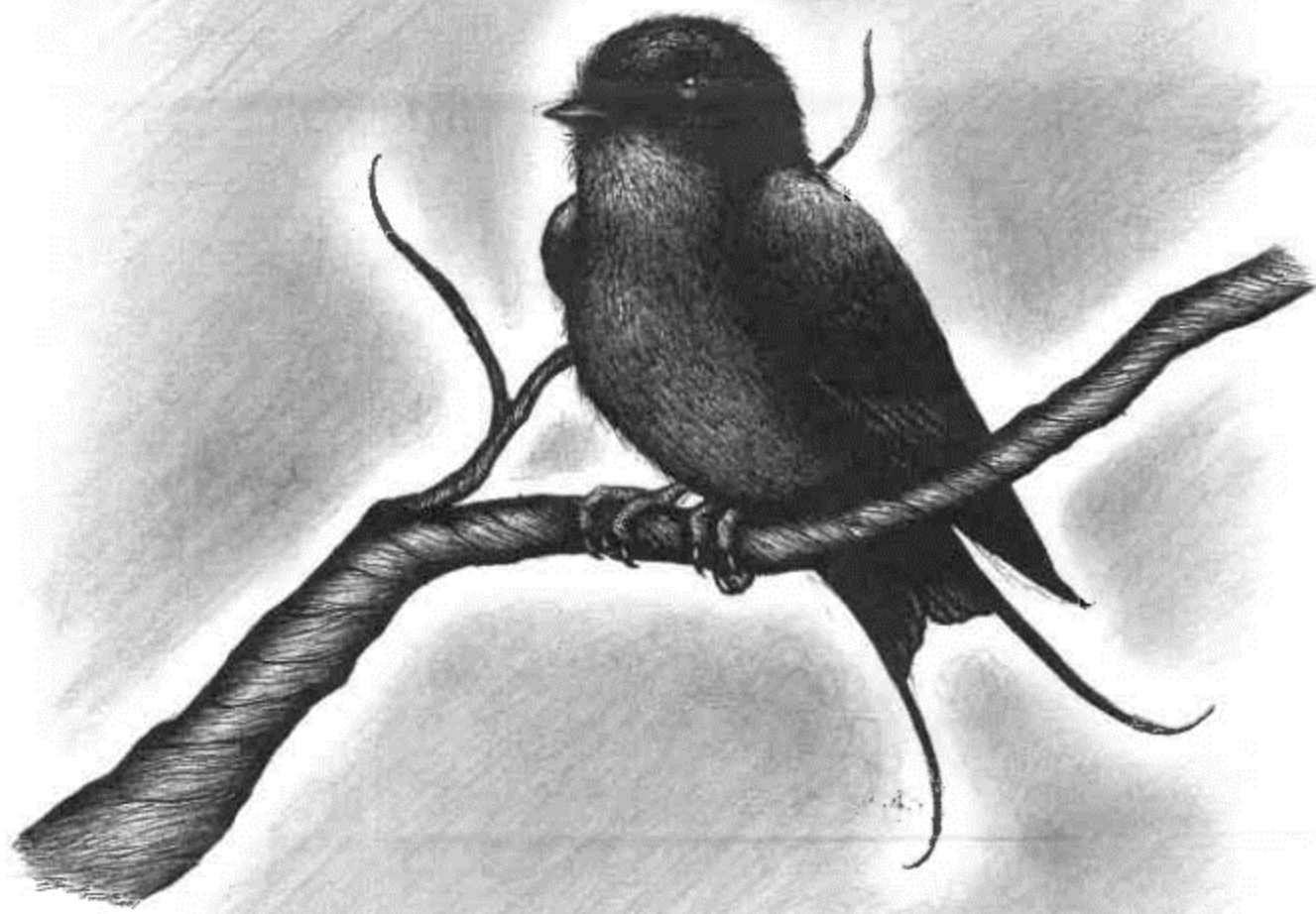
"Your visions will become clear only
when you can look into your own
heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who
looks inside, awakes."

Standing together for a better
tomorrow,--Gary

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