

# SPRING THAW

LITERARY & ARTS MAGAZINE







Spring Thaw  
Literary and Arts Magazine  
Itasca Community College  
2022 edition

**Student Editorial Board**

Angel Holm  
Madison Williams  
Caroline Cheney

**Faculty Advisor**

Drew Olson

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## Home-Made

*Elliot Pursi*

Crepe rises in the rose-hip windowpanes  
In a slow crawl with  
Thyme-tea steam.  
My legs ache forever  
And time just crawls  
Like rain through my hair.

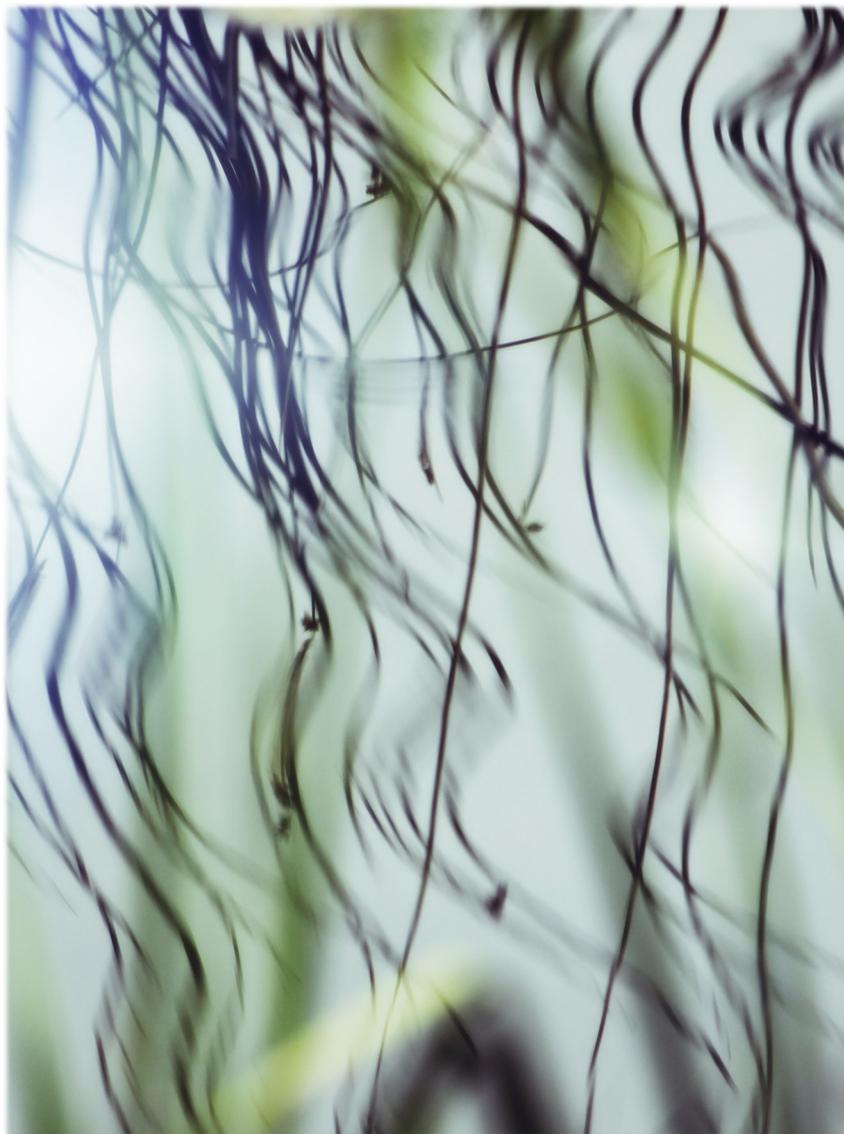
The den bustles  
into & out of phase, oscillating  
Between your home into mine  
panes putting into perspective  
all that our married  
furniture brings to light

Live in the past with  
The tumbling mid-water running  
down your hair, through your  
Fingertips & past those  
eyes I am so lucky to hold.

I sweep the carpet off the hardwood  
so I can in turn  
sweep the boards we sawed up  
those years ago.

Straw-strewn, it is an array of  
the way we were  
in those deep January woods.

A metaphor  
for the chapter of our lives where  
we tucked away  
and let the world turn.



**Reflections**  
*Vicki Lessard*

## **Eyes on You**

*George Colburn*

We are peeking out from under leaf-meal in the deep forest.  
Looking down with keen sight from atop the highest pine.  
We have eyes on you from varied angles under water.  
And spy your heavy footfalls while you're passing  
Through this tidy, tiny, green. Through this lush hideaway.  
Along the path you cut with no regard for us and ours.  
You are seen, you are heard, you disturb the peace.  
Though we are many, you are one too much.  
Even if we chitter from branches, caw on windy wings,  
Your ears are deaf to our cries for your departure.  
We cannot settle once again into our cozy niches  
Until you finish ignorantly bruising our living spaces.



**Untitled**

*Cate Belleveau*

## November Lake

*Liz Minette*

Evening waves roll shore, sound  
like wind whistling through bone.

Water reflects sky, a hard waiting.

From far away, city lights  
stretch out, a glitter skeleton  
that still pulses its phantom  
blood and muscle,  
pain and love.

When ice arrives, water moves underneath -

its heavy undulations sound

like deep bells,

and the sound sets  
dogs in their cozy homes  
around the lake

to barking.

## Lake Swing In Snow

*Michael Hanley*



## Again

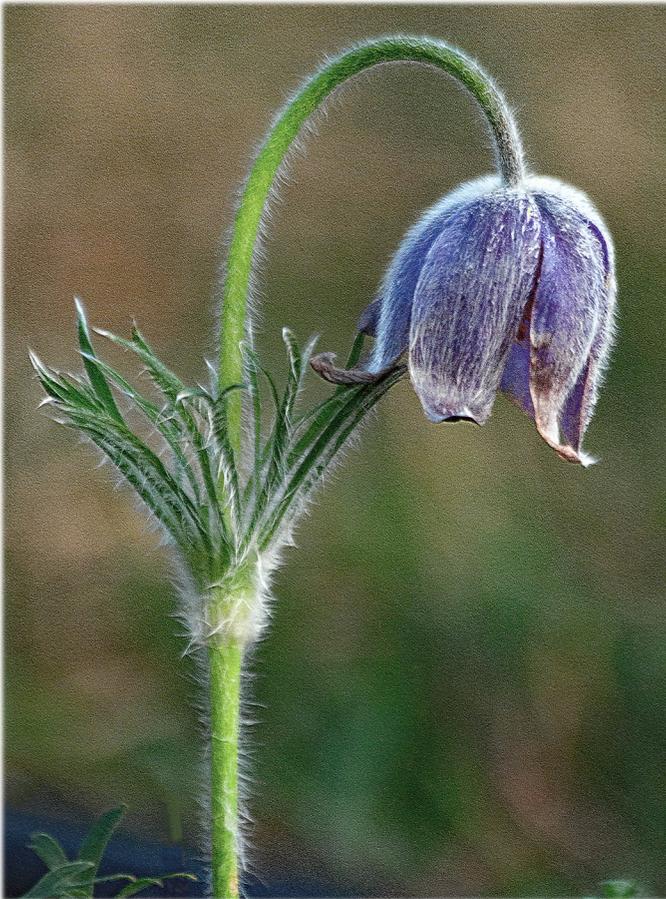
*Tim J. Brennan*

All winter  
ground groans  
on bald haunches—

during the evening hours, cold  
listens to its own tightening.

As April warms us,  
the wooden pins  
on the clothes line

become bleached bones  
of wrens who refused  
to fall during the snaps.



**Pasque Flower in Frost**

*Michael Hanley*

## A Dusting of Snow

*Michael Hanley*

A light snow fell overnight,  
dusting the pines and spruce  
in a topcoat of powdered sugar  
so light and delicate  
that a puff of wind  
could bare the needles  
before the sun began  
its warming for the day.

The snow was welcome.

Conifers crave winter moisture  
to fight the cold, dry winds  
as they rebuild strength  
for the spring greening to come.

Through the falling snow  
the forest winked white,  
a muzzy internal light  
glowing from the crowns.

At daylight the woods began  
a struggle to hold the white.  
The trees enjoyed the ephemeral change,  
knowing the sun would soon  
return blanching limbs  
to the muted greens and browns  
of a normal winter's day.

## Beyond Autumn

Gordon W. Fredrickson

Whenever I visited Dad at the nursing home, I drove Dad's white, second-hand 1991 Oldsmobile Cutlass Ciera. He and I had picked it out at the local Ford dealer in 1997, nearly two years before Mom died.

"Your mother is not going to like a car that isn't blue," he had said. "But it's a really good car for the money."

"Maybe she won't care about the color," I offered.

"Oh, she'll care, all right. I just hope I live long enough for her to forgive me. We'll probably both be dead in five years anyway. "

Dad's prophecy was right. Mom died in February of 1999, and I expected Dad would not live more than another couple years. He was lost without Mom. They had been married for over sixty years, and they had worked side by side on their small farm for all their adult lives. They had milked cows morning and evening together, done field work together, and raised three kids together during an era when most farm work was done either by hand or with small, old equipment.

During Mom's visitation and funeral, Dad had said few words. Afterwards, communication with him was strained. He lived alone and every day when I visited him, he would say only a few words before uttering, "Mom is dead, isn't she?" I would admit she was dead, and we would talk about the past and about Mom. He liked that. I pondered trying to move him to a nursing home, but the decision was taken out of my hands five months after Mom's death when Dad had a bad fall at home. It changed everything.

"I'm glad to see you. I thought you'd never get here," he said as he lay on the floor that day of the fall. He was angry at the world, his world without his wife. "I just can't seem to get up."

"Take me to Mala Strana, where Mom was," he pleaded.

Going to the nursing home had been his choice, but I felt guilty feeling relieved that the decision was made for me. Tricky business, this parental care-giving.

Mala Strana had no vacancies for the next three months, and he convalesced in a larger care facility, an impersonal, factory-like nursing home. I visited Dad daily, and during those visits, I realized he was slipping into a mental state where he had difficulty separating present reality from the past. It was a familiar behavior I had first recognized in him after his last hip surgery when he never quite recovered from the full-cocktail anesthetic administered to him.

Eventually, I was able to get him into Mala Strana, the care center of his choice and the one Mom had been in when she died. In the Czech language, *Mala Strana* means *Little Side* or *Lesser Town* and refers to an area in Prague, Czech Republic, that is not part of the big city. The care center was aptly named, for it offered a very special, home-like atmosphere.

At Mala Strana, Dad made up an alternate reality where he explained that Mom worked somewhere and was gone during the day. He talked about the old days accurately, but on any relevant question I asked, he turned the conversation to his alternate reality. What was strange, though, is that the alternate reality conversation was just used with me, his only son. When others were around, he was more apt to talk about the past and even ask them questions about their lives. "Do you still ride that motorcycle?" he asked one of the relatives

whenever he showed up to visit Dad. When he saw me alone, he'd ask, "Did you see Mom before she left?" I felt helpless. Seeing him was heartbreaking, but not seeing him would be worse. I felt trapped.

After I parked the car in the lot and approached the front door, the stark realities of a nursing home jumped out at me. Men and women sat in wheel chairs or in wooden lawn chairs as they chattered loudly without energy, while others enjoyed a silent time on their own or with a fiend. One patient sat in a chair with a small tank of oxygen on a two-wheeler nearby, which enabled her to be mobile.

A man wearing an earflap cap sat in the same chair he always sat in when I visited. "It always looks like rain when you come," he joked.

I smiled and said in my usual retort, "No, you just always like to predict rain."

"We'll see, we'll see," he said knowingly, and we both laughed.

Inside the building, in a large room by the entryway, folks sat at tables and played cards. I could hear their exclamations, expressed in English with heavy Czech accents, a sound that brought me back to my childhood when so many of my relatives conversed with me in that accent that I learned to love. Others sat near the windows in groups, either staring out the windows or chattering with each other earnestly about a relative or visitor or their own health. Staff at Mala Strana were loving, caring people, but the giants in the room were always Mr. Death, Mr. Suffering, Mr. Pain, Mr. Lonesome, and Mr. Despair. Nevertheless, every effort was made to keep things as cheerful as possible. Nurses joked, chatted, and played up to every piece of humor any resident offered. I always enjoyed visiting them. They were truly angels, I thought. It was Dad's situation that depressed me, and I tried not to let that feeling show because the nurses all loved Dad's company. For them he played the joker, the wise guy, the center of the party, as he had all his life. But with me his demeanor was uncertain, clouded with the pain of reality that I brought with me.

At the nurses' station they greeted me cheerfully. "I'll go see if I can find Gordy," one said, "You know how he likes to walk around and visit everyone." Everyone called Dad *Gordy*, now, a name that had been reserved for me. He was Gordon and I was Gordy when I was growing up on the farm. Mom continued to call him Gordon until her death, as did all the people of his generation. Mom did not like the name change forced on him by new friends, but she said nothing to anyone but me. "You are Gordy," she had said simply. "He is Gordon."

The nurse, an ample, energetic woman of fifty charged down the hall in search of Dad. Minutes later they returned, Dad keeping up with her fast pace, stretching his steps by placing his cane far forward with his good leg and bringing the leg with the artificial hip around to enable the cane and his good leg to stretch out for another step. This was his second artificial hip. The first one had fit really well, but he'd worn it out in 18 years. The second replacement was a bit too long, forcing him to swing it out a bit while he walked.

"Hi, Dad." I greeted him with a smile and I touched his shoulder in a half-embrace.

"Did you drive my car?" he asked, and then without waiting for an answer, he added, "I want you to drive it. Nothing worse for a car than to have it just sit without being driven."

I nodded. "It's running great, Dad."

The nurse said, "I'll sign you two Gordys out," and then she inclined her head to indicate she wanted to give me a brief update on Dad. "Nothing's changed much, she said in a sotto voice. He still struts around all over the place without concern for falling, even though he talks about falling. We've had the discussion among staff

and with you and we agreed letting him wander is best. Besides, the other residents all love his visits. He has a way with making all small talk funny. And the staff members love him for it.”

I smiled and thanked her for her words.

Once outside, Dad chatted with the residents sitting by the door. “Nice day to sit outside, eh?” I heard him say as I left to bring the car up to the canopy over the entryway. “My son is taking me to eat.”

After I stopped close to the doorway, I opened the car, helped Dad get in, and reached to buckle his seat-belt.

“Always had trouble with those things,” he said to me. Then I realized he was not talking about the seat-belt. Half-closing the car door behind me so the others could not see, I pushed his large diaper-like pad under the elastic waist of his slacks.

“Hurry back before it rains!” Earflap Cap hollered. “You don’t want Gordy to get wet on the trip back.”

“My son is taking me to eat,” Dad repeated with pride and a grin.

I waved at Earflap Cap as I got round the car. Then I buckled myself in and began to drive away.

“I’ll drive over to the fast-food place,” I offered cheerfully. “It’s only a couple blocks away.” I let the silence go for a while before I added, “How’s the food at Mala?”

“Not too bad,” he said. “Not as good as Mom’s cooking, but she doesn’t have time to cook. She leaves early in the morning for her job in the cities. I don’t know what she does there. She doesn’t say.”

I was about to speak, when he uttered softly in a slow burst of breath, “Mom’s dead, isn’t she?”

“Yes, Mom is dead,” I admitted as I reached over to touch his dry, scaly hand. In a poorly timed reaction, I asked, “Are the nurses still greasing up your hands with Eucerin?”

He nodded a *yes*, and added, “Twice a day.”

As I drove in and parked at the fast-food parking lot, his demeanor changed instantly.

“Did we come here to eat?” he asked warily. “I don’t want to go in. It’s gonna rain soon anyway. The wind is picking up too. I see the leaves fluttering on the tree.” He pointed to a recently planted maple near the edge of the lot.

“Just wait here,” Dad. I’ll go in and get you two cheeseburgers with French fries and bring it out. We’ll sit in the car to eat.”

“It’ll be raining by then anyway, unless you’re really fast.”

When I returned with the burgers and fries, Dad said, “Boy, that was fast.”

I set his food on his lap and settled into my side of the car. He seemed to handle the unwrapping of his burger pretty well.

“I’ve never seen anything so fast,” he remarked again. “You made it before the rain,” he added. “And the wind is picking up. Storm coming.”

He ate his burger the way he had eaten all his life, taking a couple big bites, a few chews and a gulp.

“I’ve had enough,” he said. “I’m full.”

We watched as raindrops gathered on the windshield. “We may as well sit here a while,” I said. “I do not want to have you walk into Mala in the rain.”

He was quiet, and in a strange way I feared his silence.

“If you were still on the farm,” I started, “you would be about done filling the silo by now. Good thing, too, with all the rain lately. Remember getting the tractor stuck in the mud and trying to pull it out with the horses? Or working all those long days in the heat and wind?”

Just then the wind came up and shook the car. Rain began to hammer the car and I raised my voice so he could hear me. Dad was looking the other way, out the window, but I knew he was listening because he nodded his head. I felt this was a sign to continue talking.

“All those long hours you and Mom worked till your limbs ached and your back hurt and your eyes became sore from the wind and the corn pollen. Yet the next morning you had to rise early and do it all again, and again and again.”

His expression changed as he turned to me. His mouth turned downward as if he was reliving all the difficulties in his life, I thought. Soon I would discover that I was wrong, but at the moment I thought I should chirp on and on. I thought I was on a roll.

He shuffled a bit in his seat as I continued.

“You cleaned the barn with a wheelbarrow, for goodness’s sakes, pushing heavy loads down a narrow plank for over 75 yards in freezing weather onto a huge pile of manure. Then in the spring you and Mom pitched from the pile into the manure spreader over 100 loads of manure. At least you don’t have to do that anymore!”

The storm let loose a thunderbolt that shook the car and, in that moment, he snapped to his past self. His body puffed up. For a time, he seemed to have the energy of youth. Quick as any predator, his hand, the size of a pie plate grabbed my collar and twisted until I could feel the pressure of my shirt squeezing my neck. His body tensed as he yelled above the pounding of the rain on the roof, “I’d do it all again in a second! Don’t you see! That was my life. Mom and I lived it, and we loved it! I’d go back and do it all again in a second!”

A short silence followed.

His tense face eased as he released my shirt. His body returned to that of an old man, tired and worn from his years. His grip had hurt a little, but that is not what caused me to tear up. It was seeing his face contort and a tear crawl down his upper cheek. Here was a man that never cried, never revealed himself as fallible. Yet at this moment, his vivid memories created an intensity of a time more real than the present, and of his desire to be in those distant times, a desire more powerful than his desire to live, especially in his present state, without his partner.

Immediately the rain abated as if the clouds, too, had spilled their guts. As he held his hands over his eyes, my heart ached with his pain. My words had been meant to celebrate his life, not belittle it, but I understood immediately how and why he had reacted.

“The rain stopped,” he said.

“I’ll take you back now, if you want.”

To my surprise he suggested, “Let’s sit a while longer.”

We sat in silence, until he said, “I don’t want to miss Mom when she gets back today. We’d better go.”



## Blue

*A.F. Isaacs*

I live in a world of Blue, Navy, and Cerulean.

A circular galaxy of manic depression colors my skull. Buckets of color. Cobalt. The first one I've chosen, meant to cover my bedroom. Who I hope to be, visualized in a space. Blue is supposed to be calm, the color of sleep. I cover every wall Cyan.

I can see the scene of a leaping whale slapping his surroundings into the air. The magnificent beast plunges into a world where I cannot go. Indigo drips down my fingertips and onto the carpet. The Aqua paint roll streaks across the sky to the hallway.

A manic need for tranquil space. Turquoise and Ultramarine Blue mixed into a swirling pool of paint. A hush of vibrant silence. The hallway, stairway, the laundry room is just drywall, pipes, and now a beautiful Blue.



### **Headwaters**

*Samsoche Sampson*

## Sounds of Spring

Michael Hanley

The sun awoke today to  
a million angelic voices  
singing from trees and marshes,  
flitting across thawing earth  
on the wings of joyous birds.

Is it really spring? Finally?  
The birch buds say "yes."  
The greening grass agrees.  
The sky still holds a gray warning,  
but the air says "it's time, be free!"

Blue jays hoard a feeder  
from an unwelcome boisterous squirrel,  
eating frantically in case spring relents  
and winter resumes its frigid hold  
until the Ides of March are spent.

The sandhills arrive right on time,  
their honks heard miles away,  
as they make their way  
toward nesting grounds,  
a short stop, but they won't stay.

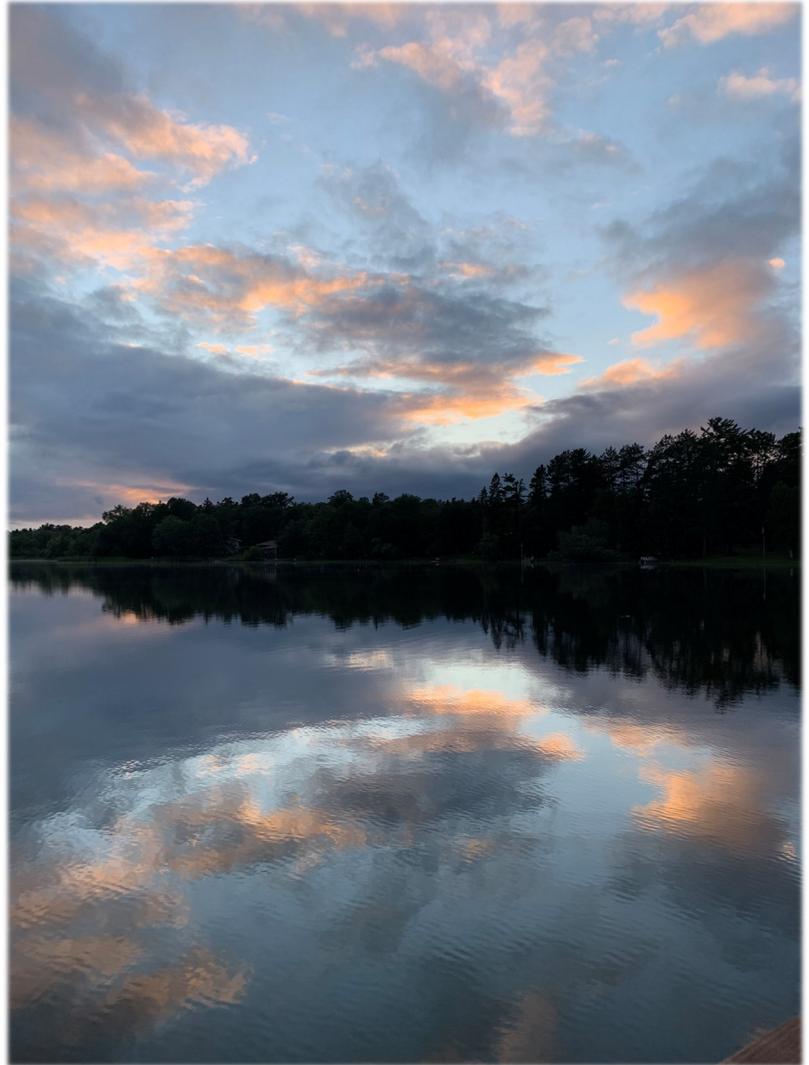
As winter ice pulls slow away  
from Wolf Lake's shallow shore,  
it creaks and moans a pending death,  
turns black and melts once more.

The snow is nearly gone now  
except where hidden under pines,  
the last remnant of winter's grip  
that the warm air ultimately finds.

I'm glad we took a walk today,  
my black Lab Buddy and me.  
The sounds we heard  
from nature's verve  
mean soon spring will be.

## Crystal Lake Sunset

Becky LaPlant



## Spring Thaw

Gary Burt

the coming together of our  
two bodies was like the  
arrival of late fall

to a Minnesota lake; it brought  
a chill and a thin  
skin of ice;

it cannot always be spring or summer  
in our lives, and only fools  
expect it to be so...

for now, I'm not focused on the chill  
as much as I'm thinking about  
the spring thaw -

if I knew for certain your warmth  
would return, I'd surely trust  
the seasons more...

## Old Age and Australia

*Liz Merrigan*

"Wait until you get old," my mother would say,  
dire proclamations of feebleness and weakness  
waiting for me in her country of tottering steps  
and fading vision. Mother, I say, I can't know  
until I visit there, the brown and green  
of the Great Barrier Reef as wide and expansive  
as the gray shadows of strokes on your CT scan.  
The teeming streets of Sydney at 8:00 A.M.  
move as rapidly as the dizziness that assails  
you at night. The little penguins march through  
the Mornington Peninsula, their drifting in  
the dark to find fish for family as slow as the waters  
of your memory splashing night after night,  
thousands of little travelers docking in your skull,  
carrying the sacred food of hope to your mooring place.  
You twitch and shake in your care center bed,  
movements the silly sheep at Walter's Peak Station copy  
in their running for the sweet cake along the fence.  
We, mother, can perhaps hold hands and hearts  
as we cross the rows and roads. A path though,  
will cut through the field and you will turn toward  
a new country that we shall not visit together.  
Will you be safe--traveling alone?

## Primeval

*Jennifer Hernandez*

I've always wondered  
at the flock of seagulls  
in the Target parking lot.

Fooled like us  
town folk,  
lulled, complacent,  
married to convenience.  
Drive-thrus, central air,  
mini-marts, big box stores.

Won't venture further,  
risk losing wifi,  
stray ten minutes  
from the nearest  
venti skim latte,  
find ourselves  
in actual nature,  
virgin beach,  
no lifeguard on duty.

## Severance

*Victoria Lynn Smith*

Haze mixed with light from the street lamps and coated the city in an eerie candescence, similar to pictures on a black-and-white TV after someone messes with the brightness dial. Six-year-old Carmen, in bed and bored with looking out the window, tried to sleep in her curtainless, doorless room off the kitchen. An odor of liver and onions lingered from supper; she breathed through her mouth.

Semi-darkness tricked her brain and twisted her judgement of time. How much had gone by since she'd looked at the glow-in-the-dark hands and numbers on the kitchen clock? She peeked into the kitchen and saw the clock's hands hadn't moved much.

In the doorway between the kitchen and the living room, an alien stood. Its head, shaped like a light bulb and lit with a dim, yellowish glow, protruded from a glistening black robe. It was one of the faceless aliens she'd seen earlier in the day. Was it staring at her? The only way to know was to watch the movements of its arms. Earlier she'd seen the aliens use their arms to point at people they wanted to pluck from Earth. Carmen understood it had come for her.

Her earsplitting shriek didn't turn it away. It moved an arm, pointed at her, and its black robe fluttered. She screamed again, pulling her blanket up under her chin. Covering her face would change nothing.

Footsteps crossed the living room floor. The alien heard them, and its arm shifted toward the sound. Carmen eyed the doorway to the living room, waiting. She wanted her father, known for winning fistfights, to battle the alien, but it would be her mother who came.

A hand jutted into the kitchen and reached for the light switch. Carmen screamed, expecting the alien to kill her mother as it had done earlier to other people who interfered. Her mother flipped the switch, and light flooded the kitchen. The alien was gone. It hid rather than kill her mother.

"What's wrong?"

"An alien has come for me." She pointed to the doorway.

Her mother glanced over her shoulder. "There's nothing there."

"But it was."

"You had a nightmare."

"No, I saw it." She wiped her nose along her pajama sleeve. "Can I sleep with you?"

"Don't be ridiculous. Go to sleep." Her mother snapped the switch as she left the kitchen. Feet shushed across the floor.

Complete darkness.

Carmen's eyes adjusted; the darkness dialed back; the kitchen returned to muted grays.

She scanned the room, hunting for it.

It wasn't by the backdoor.

It wasn't by the sink or stove or refrigerator.

It wasn't sitting at the table.

She filled her lungs with air and turned her head toward the spot where it had stood earlier.

It was back, both its arms pointed at her.

She screamed.

Feet grumbled across the floor. The switch cracked.

“Now what?”

“It’s back.” Wary of her mother’s anger, she forgot to watch where the alien hid.

“What did you watch on TV this afternoon?”

Carmen stiffened. It wasn’t her fault an alien from TV was hiding in their kitchen. She didn’t know why it had come for her and not someone else.

“Scream again and you’re in trouble.” Her mother flicked the switch, leaving the kitchen, again, in darkness.

It would return. She weighed a spanking from her mother against an abduction by aliens. She scrunched her eyes, then opened them, looking at the doorway.

It was there.

She trembled, waiting for it to take her.

She thought about her baby sister, who she’d never see again. She thought about her parents, who’d be upset, but too late. She wondered if she’d die in outer space.

Barely blinking, she stared. It didn’t move.

Barely breathing, time passed. It didn’t move.

Her eyes ached.

Outside the haze dissipated. Light from the street lamp pierced the kitchen window, replacing the alien’s glowing head with a vibrant spot of light on the white molding. The shimmering black robe vanished, replaced by an ordinary shadow. The alien disintegrated before her eyes.

In the morning her mother would scold her, wouldn’t allow her to watch TV.

But she wasn’t telling her mother about the illusion. Or that she no longer feared the alien. Her mother had been willing to let it capture her. She rolled over, curled into a fetal position, and closed her eyes. Her breathing deepened and slowed. She slept.

In her doorway, a dim, yellowish head glowed above a glistening and fluttering black robe.



## Up from the Cities

*Teopa Sano Reve*

Driving along Lake Superior's north shore  
in the 1950's, I remember the tunnels—  
they seemed to be portals between an urban world  
and wilderness, carved into massive cliffs  
that walled off one from the other.

With a child's trepidation you close your eyes  
on entering the black hole.

When you came out the far end you were transported,  
you knew this by the names of places passed.

And the names were poetry—Gooseberry Falls,  
Castle Danger, Split Rock, Temperance River,  
Tettagouche; my father's fabled Gunflint Trail.

Setting up camp, you found yourself further into the woods  
than a child knew you could go. One felt the worry  
of choosing breadcrumbs over stones.

Seen through the netting in the dwindling daylight,

when the fog rolled in, even the family car seemed foreign  
and only the sound of your mother's voice rang true.

There was magic in those mythical nights spent  
listening to the loon, powerful, fearsome magic in the snap  
of a twig in the dark.

Oh, sweet memory of childhood, those precious  
abracadabra moments, when tents and tunnels  
could take you to the realm of fantasy,  
a raw, lake-washed agate your newfound charm,  
a flap of canvas your shield.

## College Visit

*Jennifer Hernandez*

From the grassy hilltop I spot  
a wooden bench riverside,  
the perfect shady place to rest,  
watch the swirl and eddy,  
carry thoughts downstream.

I descend, cross the field,  
sun beating down,  
ears overflowing  
with relentless insect hum.

I reach the bench and sit,  
discover there is no view.  
Green foliage grows thick,  
obscures my sightline.

The water is there,  
on the other side  
of a leafy wall.  
I can hear it moving.

**Drowning**  
*Kelli Schell*

I am drowning.

Instead of the usual crystal-clear liquid, the salt of my tears, it's something else entirely.  
I'm drowning in something as dark and deep as a starry night;  
as viscous as blood—

and just as prone to leaving stains.

It's the ink of writers before me,  
soaking my neurons,  
choking my synapses,  
depressing all other interests or capabilities—  
depressing me.

My therapy doesn't involve talking or couches;  
it's a bloodletting of ideas.  
Every page is a bloodletting—

no, an *ink*-letting.

My pen is an IV, releasing the pressure in my brain,  
and if I don't maintain my regiment the pressure starts to ache,  
then burn,  
then—

Who knows what would happen if I didn't give in?  
Every word is a drop from my IV,  
saving me, letting me breathe again.  
Writing is a sweet relief of my psyche  
even though the words are irrelevant to my life  
It doesn't matter, they need to come out.  
They DEMAND to be released.  
They will drown me in unused ink if I don't comply.

Not that it's the ink's fault;  
it's not the ocean's fault you're drowning.  
You're just in the wrong place at the wrong time.  
I am in the wrong place.  
Every time is the wrong time.  
I am awash in the ink of writers before me,  
and writers after me will drown in my ink.  
The words demand sacrifice.

I am drowning.

My only safety is page after page of used paper,  
boxes filled with forgotten words,  
online drives crammed with digital folders.  
A lifesaver squared to 8.5x11 in black and white  
that looks like a hobby but acts like a salve.



*Thunder Beings 22*  
*Samsоче Sampson*



**Powerwagon**  
*Jamie Simons*

## Labor of Love

Kim Waltman

Berton Lundsford knelt on the barn straw in the bitterly cold January night delivering a lamb that was turned around in the birth canal. The ewe was lying on her side, eyes bulging out in pain. Her strained breathing rattled with each exhalation. Bert pushed on the swollen abdomen each time she exhaled, using the other hand to protect his face from her thrashing legs.

“C’mon girl, keep trying.”

She labored for each breath and her blood-covered hind legs quivered on the straw. Bert took off his gloves, stocking cap, coat, and rolled up his flannel sleeves and dipped his hands, up to the elbows, in a pail of warm water and rubbing alcohol. Lying on his side behind the ewe, he steadied her hindquarters with his left arm while gently pushing the other hand into her body feeling for the lamb’s spindly legs. Wrapping his fingers firmly around both of them, he slowly pulled and the exhausted ewe cried out in a steady stream of pain.

“We’re almost there.”

Gradually, the back legs, then the front shoulders, and finally the head slipped out into the light of the overhead heat lamp. The lamb lay in his hands, steam rising from its limp body with the umbilical cord wrapped around its neck. Bert laid the lamb down carefully, not to pull the cord tighter, and searched in his overalls for a jackknife. There was nothing in the pockets except for a wadded up hanky and a pair of glasses. He muttered a *damn it* leaned over the lifeless lamb, lifted the umbilical cord, and severed it with his teeth. He then removed it from around the lamb's neck, turned and spit out the metallic taste from his mouth.

The ewe opened her eyes. On the matted straw beside her, the lamb, covered in a wet blanket of after-birth, lay still.

Bert reached for a small funnel he had placed atop a wooden post, pried open the tiny mouth, positioned the cold, metal cone over the lamb’s face and sent short puffs of air down the narrow passage. Barn swallows sailed past him in their circular flight while Brownie, his cocker spaniel, let out a weak bark from the corner of the barn. Bert was lightheaded and his back ached. His heart pounded as he blew gently into the lamb’s mouth. The ewe could only raise her head and watch.

Bert straightened his back and gathered his breath, then lifted the lamb while cradling it in his arm. This time while he blew into the funnel his forefinger thumped the lamb’s chest with measured beats. Muscles under the wet, dark fleece quivered in erratic spasms and the legs bent and kicked into the air. Bert removed the funnel as the lamb burped out a cloud of air, then placed the newborn next to the ewe. The lamb lifted his head, opened his eyes, and with stick legs buckling underneath him, wobbled to his feet. Bert guided him closer to the mother until she took over and nudged the lamb near her udder where he collapsed and had his first meal.

An owl hooted from a rafter while Bert washed his hands in the bucket of water and dried them with the hanky. With the aid of the wooden post, he pulled himself up, replaced the funnel, and put on his coat and gloves.

On the quiet winter night, Bert pulled the stocking cap over his ears, looked down at the exhausted ewe and smiled.

Brownie waited in the corner of the barn where he had nested on a pile of loose straw.

"What do ya say, ol' buddy, you and me head back to the house?"

The dog got up, opened his milky eyes, shook off the straw and waddled out the barn door. Bert's skin felt the cold sting of the night as he stepped out of the building. The crust of frozen snow crunched as the two made their way over a trail of footprints back to the lapboard house. The solitary yard light glittered off the blanket of snow-like quartz. A brisk northerly breeze told him that the closest farmhouse was burning firewood. Clouds of breath drifted upward as the farmer and his dog passed through the light into the front yard.

"Well, that's enough for tonight."

Brownie nuzzled Bert's hand and then he ambled into his doghouse, next to the porch.

Bert grabbed a metal railing, pulled himself up the steps to the porch, stomped his feet and went inside. He sat down on an old church pew, pulled off his boots and placed them on a tattered throw rug. After he hung his coat and cap on a hook, he shuffled into the kitchen, kicking dust bunnies off the yellowed linoleum floor. A picture of three smiling kids dressed in Halloween costumes and carrying plastic pumpkins was taped to the refrigerator door next to a crayon drawing of an orange and blue snowman, with "To Grandpa" scrawled at the top. The countertops were bare except for a wilted plant and a clown cookie jar. Scattered on the kitchen table among the crumbs of food were pens, coins, a few opened envelopes, and his jackknife. Above the stove hung a yellow plate that read, *Man works from sun to sun but woman's work is never done*. His wife Grace had bought the plate for herself, wrapped it in Christmas paper and labeled it "From Santa". It had been hanging in the same place for over 50 years.

Bert made his way over to the sink for a glass of water, pausing to look at the two chairs at the table.

Grace always sat at the kitchen table waiting for him to return from the barn after a winter night emergency. The aroma of supper's homemade bread lingered in the room. In her outstretched hand was a mug of hot chocolate, made from the day's fresh milk, with two marshmallows floating on top like a pair of bobbers. She handed him the mug and searched his eyes for information. Then, she'd kiss him on the cheek and go upstairs to bed. Grace wouldn't say much on those nights. She was just there.

After washing up, Bert walked up the stairs to his chilly bedroom, the hardwood floor making familiar creaks and groans leading him to the bed. He stripped down to his underwear, climbed onto the cold sheets and tugged the patchwork quilt up over his shoulders. The room was still, except for the ticking of the alarm clock and the wind rattling the frost-covered windows. He closed his eyes and saw the newborn lamb and the ewe lying next to each other, warm, with their heads resting on the straw. He thought of nights when he got into bed and pulled Grace next to him, snuggling to warm himself up. He rubbed her legs with his feet while she giggled and squirmed.

"You keep those frozen feet to yourself Berton Lundsford or you can sleep in the barn."

Then she'd kiss him on the cheek and he'd pat her on the fanny. For 58 years of cold nights and long days, she was by his side. Grace had died three winters ago and on nights like these, the loneliness was deafening.

Bert rolled over and squinted at the clock on the bed stand. Quarter to six. No time for breakfast or coffee. He grabbed the bedpost and found the cold wood floor with his bare feet. The cattle would be bellowing outside the barn, wanting to be fed. The pigs' trough needed a bucket of hot water to melt the ice. He snapped on his overalls and shuffled to the stairway, grabbing the wooden banister with both hands. His knees ached as he

reached each step. And, of course, there were the eggs. Had to gather the eggs. He sat down on the church bench, put on wool socks and barn boots, grabbed his cap, coat, gloves, and jackknife off the shelf and went out the door.

Brownie was waiting at the bottom step, wagging his crooked tail. Bert looked down at his friend, patted him on the head and together they followed the trail of footprints to the barn.



**Plow Truck**  
*Jamie Simons*

## Closed and Open

Victoria Lynn Smith

“Who closed the kitchen door?” Darla asks. She’s emerged from the hallway after coming from the bathroom but stops so abruptly, she almost loses her balance. Her strawberry-blond pigtails sway back and forth. Neither of us has ever seen Grandma’s swinging kitchen door closed. It’s always open and shoved against the living room wall, held in place by an oak rocker with darkened arms from years of contact with skin.

I lift a finger to my mouth and mime the word *shh*. Darla takes the hint and sits next to me on the couch, so close you couldn’t slide an envelope between us.

*The Red Skelton Show* booms, covering our voices, but I whisper anyway. “Grandma closed it. All the grownups are in there with Ginny and Robbie.” Darla and I are eleven and thirteen, so we’re not part of the discussion. “Aunt Ginny wants to marry Robbie.”

“Nice,” Darla says. “I like him.” She pats me on the leg in a one-two-three rhythm.

“Me too.” He and Ginny took us to the state fair last month, paying for our rides and cotton candy. He almost won a giant teddy bear for us.

“Are they planning the wedding?” Darla asks.

“Hardly,” I whisper. “Robbie’s Catholic, and he and Ginny want a Catholic ceremony.”

“Oh.” Darla’s eyes pop, her mouth opening then closing like a fish’s mouth.

We’ve overheard stories about Mom and Dad’s wedding. Mom left the Catholic Church to marry Dad, who’s Lutheran. Grandma went to the wedding but fumed about her son marrying a Catholic. Mom’s mother didn’t go because the priest told her it was a sin. Mom refers to this incident as “a load of crap.”

“I didn’t know he was Catholic,” Darla says. “Where’d you hear all this?”

“Mom—on the phone yesterday. I was in the family room pretending to read.” Mom perches on a stool at the kitchen counter with her back to the family room, props the receiver between her shoulder and ear, and talks with both hands moving through the air. She soon forgets about me sitting on the couch with a book.

“Whose side is Uncle Tony on?” We both know there’ll be sides.

“Guess,” I say.

“Aunt Ginny’s?”

“You’re wrong.” I clasp her wrist. “Get this—he thinks Aunt Ginny shouldn’t marry Robbie because it’s upsetting their mother.”

A loud snicker erupts from Darla. I don’t hush her. If they hear us in the kitchen, they’ll think we’re laughing at the TV.

“Geez, Louise.” Darla draws the words out across two counties. “Uncle Tony’s made Grandma cry plenty. He smashed up two cars last year.” Darla thrusts her pointer and middle fingers in the air, like double exclamation points.

“And he had to be bailed out of jail last month for fighting.”

“According to Mom,” Darla says, “he has more girlfriends than Marlon Brando.” Tony, a good-looking Romeo, wears his coal black hair in a pompadour and soaks himself in Brut. He attracts women like Kool-Aid attracts ants. “Remember the blond he dated last year—the one Mom called a bottle blond?”

“Yeah,” I say, “you sat on the arm of the couch, trying to see if she had brown roots.” But the girlfriend I remember best is the one I call Miss Beetle. She wore a gold bracelet decorated with beetles made out of different colored stones.

“Do you think women like him because he’s a bad boy?” Darla asks. It’s precisely what I think. I like Billy, the cutest boy in my eighth-grade class, even more since he told me that STP stood for *stripper’s tea party*. I know it’s a motor oil, but Billy’s funny. I’m not the only eighth-grade girl who flirts with him.

“Tony’s dating a brunette now, and,” I pause to build suspense, “she works as a Playboy bunny in Chicago.”

“Where’d you hear that?”

“Mom—talking on the phone.”

“I’ve got to start reading in the family room.”

I laugh and I snort together, which cracks Darla up. She asks, “Whose side is Dad on?”

Dad’s five years older, and more responsible than Tony, so his opinions should have more sway. But Tony’s taller, better looking, and charming, which makes people forget about his stupidity.

“Dad was going to side with Grandma and Uncle Tony,” I say, “But Mom said if he did, he could pack his bags because she wasn’t living with a hypocrite.”

“She’s always saying she wants a divorce when they fight.”

“She’s never told him he could pack his bags.”

Darla’s mouth tightens.

“After Mom’s threat, Dad said he wouldn’t go against Aunt Ginny, but you never know.”

Darla sighs. “They’re not going to let her marry Robbie.”

“Aunt Ginny will give up the bunch of them before she gives up Robbie,” I say. “Dad didn’t give up Mom when Grandma threatened to disown him.”

“Girls have to obey their parents.” Darla crosses her arms and wags her head. “Grandma always says, ‘My Ginny’s so obedient, never gives me a moment’s worry. The Lord should’ve given me all girls.’” Darla’s impersonation of Grandma is perfect.

“Want to bet a dollar on who’ll win? I’ll take Aunt Ginny. You take Grandma.”

“You’re on,” Darla says, and we shake on it. We each have a dollar from Grandpa tucked in our pockets. “Listen. Grandma’s crying.”

I shake my head. “For a religious woman, she sure is sneaky.”

“She gets what she wants, like that trip to Mexico last year.”

I agree with Darla that Grandma’s tears work on Grandpa but argue they have little effect on Dad and Tony.

The backdoor slams hard. Darla and I scramble off the couch to look out the living room window. In the darkness we see the shadowy figures of Ginny and Robbie holding hands, walking to Robbie’s car. Darla and I look at each other and begin giggling.

Mom opens the kitchen door. “Let’s go, girls.”

We laugh harder.

“What’s so damn funny?” It’s Mom’s serious voice.

I squeeze my legs together, trying not to pee my pants. I should have peed after Darla did, but I’ve a bad habit of holding it too long. Darla and I point to the TV at the same time because we’re not saying we’re laughing at grownups who tried to sabotage Ginny’s marriage plans. We double over. I’m snorting and Darla sounds like a hyena.

Mom looks at the TV as Clem Kadiddlehopper cracks a joke. “Turn that off.”

Grandma’s voice, coming from the kitchen, plows over Mom’s. “You boys are a bad influence on your sister—you married a Catholic, and you’re a drunken, irresponsible Lothario.” Grandma’s yelling at Dad and Tony.

“What’s a Lowturdo?” Darla asks between peals of laughter.

“Get your things together, girls.” Mom’s brown eyes are smoking.

“I’ve no idea.” My not knowing strikes me funny, and I snort like a whole pig farm. “But Aunt Ginny and Robbie are getting married.”

Darla slips her hand into her pocket and pulls out her dollar.

I shake my head and gently push her hand away. “Save it for the dollar dance at the wedding.”

She shrieks like a chimpanzee.

Joyful, I hug Darla because we’re too young to be as dumb as grownups.

“Move it.” Mom’s voice has dropped an octave and become a growl.

Darla and I rise from the couch. I head to the bathroom and Darla stands next to Mom and hugs her. Mom hugs back. Dad shoves the swinging door back against the wall, pushes the rocker in front of it, then stands in the doorway.

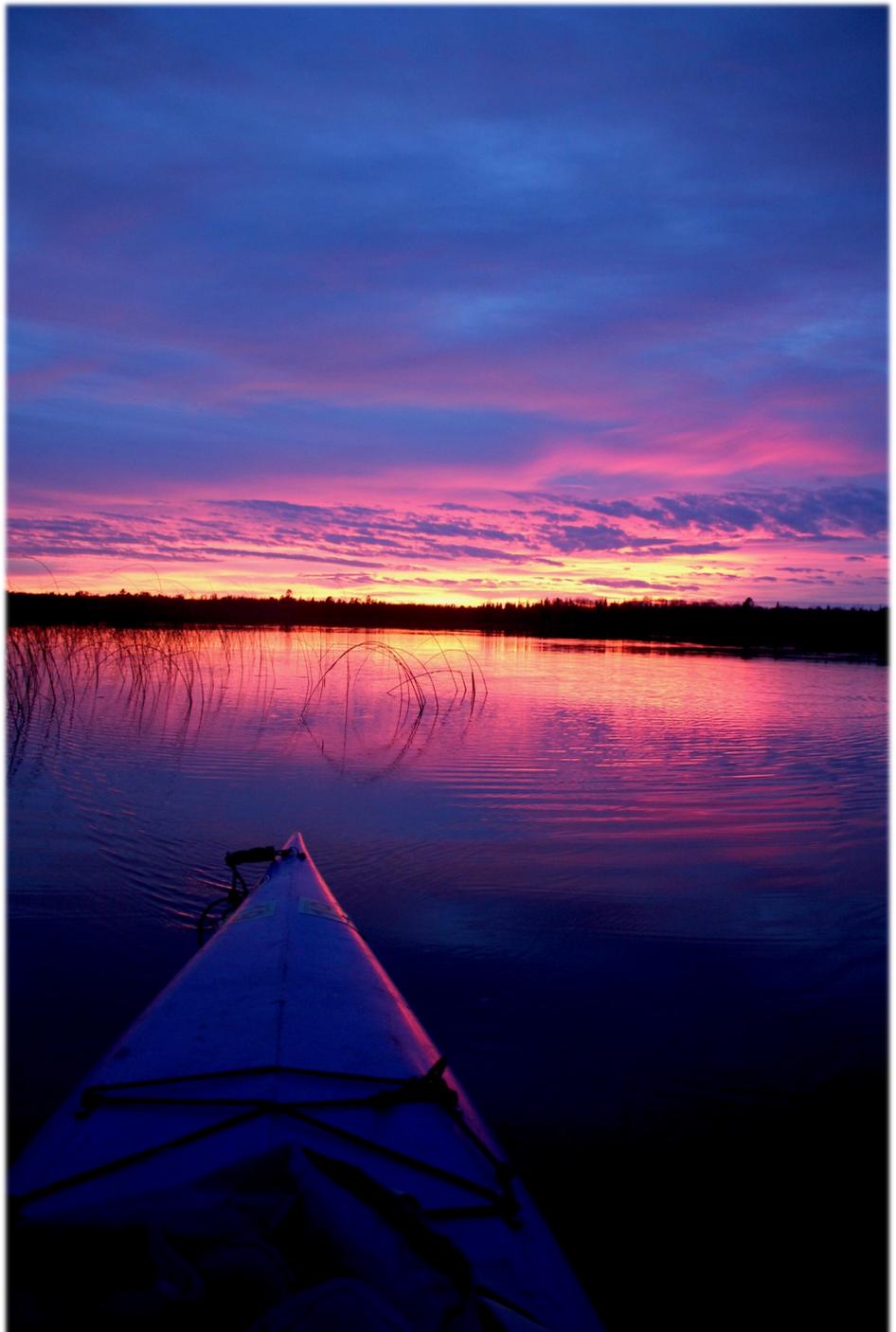
“Hurry up,” Mom says as I walk by, her voice now soft, but anxious. She wants to be out of Grandma’s house.



## **Play Me A Tune**

*Kelli Schell*

Play me a tune  
Of a wolf and a moon  
Where willows dance and deer prance  
And the lake echoes the loon.  
Write me a lyric  
To give me high spirits  
I can smile all the while  
And no one will hear it.  
Play me a tune  
Of a life gone too soon  
All those nights under celestial lights  
And sleeping until noon.  
Sing me a song  
Where nothing goes wrong  
Of birds and bees, of grass and trees,  
And dancing all night long.  
Play, clever player  
A musical prayer  
A song with no ending  
A flow always bending  
Every emotion  
Give me devotion  
Play me a tune  
Of raven and moon  
Where pumas prowl and wolves howl  
And relax by a lake with a loon



**Untitled**  
*Cate Belleveau*

## **unspoken promises**

*Gary Burt*

autumn winds  
blew down her hair  
as remnants of summer

went racing along  
the copper-colored sheen  
like an electric current, causing

a short in  
the thinner wires of my  
already overloaded brain,

all the sweet  
unspoken promises  
of footfalls light in my room

and thoughts of  
flesh upon electric flesh  
are stirring in my imagination;

I am aware of  
these thoughts as I am led  
towards a haven I have dreamt of

for what seems  
like forever; I listen  
to the warm sounds her voice makes

as her fingers  
ease down my back  
like quiet laughter, while

the fading light is  
softly pillowed in the temple  
of her entire being of lightness,

and I feel  
as if I'm bathing in  
the kindness of her being...

## **Lost Poem**

*George Colburn*

I had it here somewhere just a moment ago  
I'm sure it was within plain sight and chock full  
Of fossilized exoskeletons in Carboniferous rocks  
Waiting for the right chisel and a delicate touch.  
It identified everything that came before with  
A fine examination of shark jawbone and teeth  
Exploited by time and weather to reveal secrets  
Shared around cave fires by trembling hunters.  
Bound in history and incredibly discovered anew.  
And just when it reached its limit of surprise  
It rose steadily into the future, traveling on  
Probabilities of light speed embarkations and  
parking on planets strange beyond imagining.  
Destinations never dreamed of, mining precious  
Insights designed to save the entire race of man  
From self-destruction and cosmic obliteration.  
I had it here somewhere just a moment ago.

## **Both Song & Tumult**

*Tim J. Brennan*

The casket slid  
from the rear  
of the hearse,  
small loose stones  
underfoot—

a line of black ants  
carrying a dead moth  
like some kind  
of Black Sabbath  
conga

You begin to think  
your own epitaph  
should read:

*Once so easily distracted,  
now focused for eternity*

## **Lace**

*Christine Mounts*

Roads lead out past sunset  
Weave through scrub brush land,

Whistle-stop small towns  
No one tangles with since gas station closed.

Someone's shoestring plan-  
Residential utility pavement.

Pass sleepy homes, families with tragedies  
Enmeshed lives, raw unfulfilled expectations.

Follow threads of Atlas webbing,  
2,000 miles more out of the city, ends Pacific blue.

This road is also what we have in common.  
Entwine our culture and economics,

Taxes on all the people to pay for it,  
Lace towns, counties, and states.

These roads link strangers together  
Regardless of gender, color, or creed,

Communities that otherwise have no contact.  
Grid of our country, binding Us and Them.

Customers and suppliers, interwoven  
Whether they agree on politics or not.

**Untitled**  
*Cate Belleveau*



## **Half-Naked in the Depths of Winter**

*Christine Mounts*

Neon insignia of their fury  
Traced lines in the beer  
Wasted on the bar top  
They could have been somebody

They are somebody  
Once upon a time

Thick wooden door slams  
Against the crystal night  
Against the burn of fresh air  
Noses turned up to sniff

Is it a patron or an ex-lover or the police?  
All three?

Full of couples familiar  
Or averting their eyes  
Discarding peanut shells  
Onto sawdust covered floors

Half-naked in the depths of winter  
This faux saloon of lifeless taxidermy

Western facing barstools  
Populated with tall white pines  
Easily set afire if left  
Too dry for too long

## **I Planted A Seed**

*John Schroeder*

I planted a seed.  
I assumed to have claim  
to the fruit, to the plant  
of that seed I had lain;  
but it wasn't to be so.  
The seed I had sown  
was a plant of its own  
and my part in its life  
it had quickly outgrown.  
So let it be so.  
For the plant was never mine.  
I was just a sower of a seed,  
and I guess...that is fine.  
I will find satisfaction  
in watching the prose.  
I'll watch it gain traction,  
bear fruit and feed those  
who don't know  
that I planted the seed,  
that seed that still grows;  
and I'm happy I planted that seed  
...even if...  
nobody knows.

## **Non-Working Moms**

*Gloria Verby Napoli*

She teaches and counsels  
advises and trains  
She nurses the bumps  
the cuts and the sprains

She does windows and dishes  
and toilets and floors  
She opens up minds  
and shuts slamming doors

A good decorator  
for all holidays  
A chauffeur for kids  
going hundreds of ways

Making ends meet  
She's a real magician  
A shopper, a cook  
and a true dietitian

Everyone works  
Some harder than others!  
My praise goes to those called  
the "non-working" mothers.

## **A 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher's Reminiscence**

*Gloria Verby Napoli*

Self-portraits  
of drawn out faces  
with eyes in funny places  
ears either wings wide  
or little warts on the side.  
Then, piggy noses  
and pink cheeks like roses  
framing crooked smiles,  
signatures bold with pride.

The day we took a nature walk  
26 kids and I,  
we caught some rays  
I caught a cold  
and Chase caught a stick  
in his eye

Every day's a holiday  
when you're teaching 2<sup>nd</sup> grade

When they start school  
in their brand-new clothes  
it's a Labor Day parade.  
Their tiny teeth and empty spaces  
grinning like pumpkin faces.

When winter arrives  
and the North wind blows,  
they come to school  
with a "Rudolph" nose.

When my day's been rough  
and I'm falling apart  
their smile or laugh  
is my Valentine heart.

In their springtime shorts  
with their spindly legs  
they remind me of walking Easter eggs.

From Labor Day to the end of May  
every day feels like a holiday.

## **Misguided Faith**

*Coty Barstad, Garrett Beckrich, Michael White*

Endless space waiting for dreams and hope  
The dream, planets to explore, the great prospect  
Black abyss waiting for life, waiting to thrive  
For the first time, a teacher—  
something is amiss

Cold morning, crisp air thirty-six degrees  
First month of the year  
Fifty-three degrees was the limit  
Yet ice was knocked off

On the east coast of Florida  
A shuttle took off  
A teacher aboard,  
Air filled with blue and white  
Red manifested, only to dissipate

The engineers would scoff  
Because they didn't make it  
A bit over a minute  
When an O-ring seal lets loose  
Too cold for its limit

The glass bubble glimmered for the world  
Bellowing an appalling sound  
A sound you cannot hear  
But one you can feel  
The sound of faith falling to sea

Tears for the crew  
Their death wasn't instant  
The explosion didn't kill them  
But lack of oxygen did

And who was to blame  
It isn't more than a guess  
Some say it was Reagan  
Eager for his union address

The explosion was investigated  
By beautiful minds  
Richard Feynman and Neil Armstrong  
Blaming the O-Ring

Faith now laying in the ocean blue  
Tirelessly gathering evidence to explain  
A piece here and a piece there  
Is the answer in the ocean,  
where faith now resides?

## **Glass Flowers**

*Kelli Schell*

I am a bouquet of glass flowers  
shimmering and shiny  
a riot of colors  
that needs an army of chandeliers  
in order to glimmer properly  
but one false step  
and the whole image is destroyed

I am a single glass flower  
in a single glass vase  
intricate and simple  
entirely lit by one or two lamps  
glowing warm and hard all at once  
a crack or chip just adds character  
though one wrong move  
and the whole display is shattered

I am a glass petal  
a piece of a flower  
small but recognizable  
vivid, given a spotlight  
but with a sharp edge  
able to fall, able to bounce  
but unable to withstand sharp force  
unable to catch attention  
unable to be displayed

I am a shard of glass  
brightly colored  
once part of something bigger and more beautiful  
now all jagged edges and  
indistinguishable purposes  
easy to lose  
nearly impossible to see  
pointless to flaunt  
but at least I'm hard to break

## **North Woods Rain**

*Michael Hanley*

A spring rain quiets the North Woods.

Greening aspens rustle  
as a downy rattles a nearby pine;  
ravens caw madly, dampening  
the wail of a distant loon.

The rain asks them all for silence  
as it muffles the North Woods.

Moist air hangs motionless  
in misty sheets, erasing  
the sounds of yesterday,  
washing away the earthy smells  
that give the woods its identity.

The woods knows that  
the voices will soon return.  
Patiently it waits  
for the rain to pass  
and life to return anew.

A spring rain quiets the North Woods.

## **Gas Station Wisdom**

*Becky LaPlant*



# Contributor Bios

**Coty Barstad, Garrett Beckrich, & Michael White** are engineering students at Itasca Community College. Their poem *Misguided Faith* was written for an ethics project in an engineering class.

**Cate Belleveau** resides on 160 acres of meadows, forests, and beaver ponds in far northern Minnesota. She is ever grateful for a father who took his progeny on extended trips hiking the Canadian wilderness, canoeing, and exploring especially the Great American West. Deeply afflicted with wanderlust which has taken her to teach in New Zealand, Kyrgyzstan, and to Japan on a Fulbright fellowship, she has also explored elsewhere. Cate has enjoyed kayaking in Greece, trekking to Mt. Everest Base Camp, as well as in South America and Europe. She is also grateful that her husband encouraged her to deeply explore her own backyard with its world class beauty. Cate holds a Master's Degree in Natural Resources / Environmental Education and spent the majority of her professional life as a director of Gifted Education on a local Native American reservation. Cate started a travel blog to encourage women past 50 to stay active and get out of doors for the great medicine that truly is found at [www.kayakcate.com](http://www.kayakcate.com). Other interests are taking part in poetry slams, and she co-founded the Bemidji Sculpture Walk with her sculptor husband as well as the Mask and Rose Theater and Belle Thalia Creative Arts Space. Her three adult children all are travelers which gives her considerable joy. Her travel memoir *Kayak Cate* is available at Riverfeet Press.

**Tim J. Brennan's** poetry can be found in *Up North*, KAXE public radio, *Volume One, Barstow & Grand, Talking Stick, Bright Light - Stories in the Night* through the League of MN Poets, *RockPaperPoem*, etc. Brennan's one act plays have played across the USA, including stages in Milwaukee, Colorado Springs, Ypsilanti MI, Waxhaw NC, Taos NM, Chagrin Falls OH, and Lexington KY.

**Gary Burt** is one of Grand Rapids' best kept secrets. Mr. Burt has been keeping journals for more than 50 years. Some journal entries found their way into songs for some of the 4 CDs he's recorded; others found their way into poems, some of which found their way to the *Spring Thaw*, amongst a number of other Minnesota publications. His intention is always to speak and write the truth, as he knows it - at this point in time. As German philosopher Goethe wrote: "Truth is fire, and to speak (and write) the truth is to flame and burn."

**George Colburn** is an award winning poet and a life-long resident of St. Paul, Minnesota. He was awarded the Veterans Voices Award in 2019 from the Minnesota Humanities Commission, the Order of Shakespeare Medal from Motivational Strips, has published four books: *Payday* (1973), *A Punctuated Echo* (2018), *Milking the Dragon* (2019), and *An Undeclared War: Poetry Born in Vietnam* (2020), and has published in numerous poetry anthologies and literary magazines, and reads his poetry at various venues throughout the Twin Cities. As the son of deaf parents, his work is strongly influenced by his experiences acting as an interpreter for his parents and the larger world and by his exposure to the deaf community. These experiences have engendered in him a love for language clarity, rhythm, and the craft of writing. He enjoys spending time at his family cabin on Lake Wabana.

**Gordon W. Fredrickson** was raised on a small dairy farm in Scott County, Minnesota, where he attended a one-room country school for the first three years of his education. After it closed, he was bused to Lakeville Public School where he graduated in 1963. He served three years in the US Army before he attended the University of Minnesota. After graduating in 1973, he taught high-school English. He began writing children's books to entertain and enlighten children about farm life, and by 2020 he had published fifteen titles for children and adults. He has performed programs that feature his books for over 52,000 people at over 1,000 places, including schools, museums, historical societies, libraries, nursing homes, and banquets of all kinds. He continues to write and sell his books at craft shows, farm shows, and on his website [www.gordonfredrickson.com](http://www.gordonfredrickson.com)

**Michael Hanley** is an Associate Professor Emeritus of Advertising in the Department of Journalism at Ball State University, Muncie (Ind.). He taught advertising, mobile marketing, branding, media planning and buying, and mass media research. Prior to teaching, Michael was a magazine and newspaper photographer from 1978 - 1987. He won multiple local, state and national photography awards, including a Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting in 1983 as a photojournalist at the Fort Wayne (Ind.) News-Sentinel. He lives on Wolf Lake near Bemidji (Minn.) where he enjoys nature and landscape photography.

# Contributor Bios

**Jennifer Hernandez** teaches immigrant youth and writes poetry, flash, and creative non-fiction. Recent publications include *Talking Stick* and *This Was 2020: Minnesotans Write About Pandemics and Social Justice in a Historic Year*. Her work can be found in the Nature Area Poetry Walk at Richfield Lake Park and the Mankato Poetry Walk and Ride. Her poem *Taco Love* was also featured in Poetry in the Park in the Dark sponsored by the *Saint Paul Almanac*. Jennifer shares her home with a portly tuxedo cat, two pandemic pups, three young adult sons, and a husband.

**A.F. Isaacs** is a young poet and fiction writer originally from Deer River, Minnesota. Isaacs attended ICC from 2016-to 2018 as a part of PSEO before obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in English and Creative writing in December 2020 from Hamline University. Isaacs now writes in their free time while working in document custody for a mortgage service.

**Becky LaPlant** takes her inspiration from the everyday beauty of her home community of Grand Rapids. All her photography is taken while walking with hopes to draw the eye to the unique perspective that prompted her to stop and capture the picture.

**Vicki Lessard's** introduction to photography began with a Kodak Duaflex camera while on vacation in the Dakotas as a child. What could delight a young girl more than to awaken in the morning to find horses on the loose and roaming the campground? She (and her parents' camera) were on her way. Her first submissions to *Spring Thaw Magazine* were in 2014, and she was honored to have her image, "Morning Sunflower," grace the cover. She has been submitting images to *Spring Thaw* ever since, with her subjects being captured by various means...a simple point and shoot, her phone's camera, and with her Canon T3i.

**Liz Merrigan** grew up in South Dakota and after college, taught 7th and 8th grade in Lincoln, NE, and later spent a 32 year career in Shorewood, WI teaching 6th grade. She retired to her family farm in southeastern South Dakota and has spent her retirement taking courses in creative writing at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion, caring for her acreage that has been in her family for 130 years, traveling in the US and abroad, returning many times to visit colleagues and family in Milwaukee, enjoying the northern lakes of MN, and in general, appreciating the joys and challenges of each new day. After all, there's a poem out there somewhere!

**Liz Minette's** most recent poems have found homes in publications such as, *Abbey*, *Chiron Review*, *Earth's Daughters*, and *Gargoyle*. Her home is near Duluth, Minnesota and Lake Superior.

**Christine Mounts:** I write, travel, and cycle as much as a working schlub like me can manage. I live in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I've been told I am a funny gal with a big personality. Meh. I am the author of *Book of Snark: Wit & Wisdom for the Angry Professional Woman on the Bus*, published October 2020. I am the editor of the post-humorous memoir *Popcorn from the Void: Observations, Manic Kvetching, and the Raw Truth of Leukemia*, published in July 2017.

**Gloria Verby Napoli** is proud to be born and raised in West Duluth, MN where she has lived all her life. Mother of five, grandmother and great-grandmother to many more, she loves music, playing the organ, and is a retired choir member. She retired 25 years ago after teaching over 35 years as an elementary school teacher. She writes poetry for fun, relaxation, and to share her feelings about life. At nearly ninety years of age, this is her first submission for publication.

# Contributor Bios

**Elliot Prusi** is a landscape photographer and poet based in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, currently on a teaching assignment in Minneapolis, MN. The subtle way in which Mother Earth reveals her order is the focal point of his photography. Many hours of bushing through hot picker-sticks and over mining slag have imbued Elliot with a love for dirt, trees, water, air, and the play of light through these elements. From lived experiences, the photographic eye becomes a hand, etching verses of scenes & connections, moments of peace & chaos. The words pass through eyes, heart, tingling up the spine, through the fingers. Through it all, Elliot seeks to provide access to the innately nurturing peace these landscapes provide, to let viewers and readers droop their eyes, sag their shoulders, and take four deep breaths.

**Teopa Sano Reve** While living in Japan as part of her husband's military service, she developed a love for Haiku, which is her favorite form to write in. Teopa Sano Reve is a pen name but her haiku, "insect zen", is inscribed in the sidewalk outside Old Central School in Grand Rapids. Teopa Sano Reve also enjoys combining nature photography with haiku.

**Kayli Salmela** is currently a substitute teacher at an elementary school in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and shares her connection to nature and community through writing and photography. She loves sharing her intercultural experiences with students and credits her roots in Northern Minnesota and New Hampshire for her unflagging love of the natural world.

**Samsоче Sampson** (Mvskoke Creek/Seneca) is an interdisciplinary artist, powwow and hoop dancer, performer, musician, as well as a father and partner. Samsоче and his brother, Luhme, make up the world-renowned hoop dancing team known as the Sampson Brothers, who over twenty-five years have performed throughout the world: on stage in big cities and at powwows in remote Indigenous communities, blending contemporary Indigenous culture while honoring tradition. For more visit <https://sampsonbrosarts.com/>

**John Schroeder** is an Itasca County resident who seeks arts and adventures in the nature of northern Minnesota.

**Kelli Schell** is a born and raised Minnesotan with a deep love for both nature and learning. She attended the University of Minnesota, where she majored in Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior (all the while fantasizing about writing). She currently lives in St. Paul, Minnesota with her husband, her dopey pit bull, and her own personal grumpy cat. When not writing (or reading), she can be found working on new tricks with her dog, crafting, or canoeing.

**Jamie Simons** was born and raised in northern Wisconsin. The son of an auto salvage proprietor and a stay-at-home mom, he spent his formative years exploring the family junkyard and surrounding woods, rivers and lakes of his rural home. Inspiration for his drawings and oil paintings as a child came from digging through junked cars looking for treasures - old golf clubs, an unopened can of beer, dirty magazines - and imagining the lives of people who left them behind. During his high school and college years, he started writing about his misadventures exploring the backroad bonfire parties of the Hayward Lakes region and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. His artwork has most recently been featured at the Argyle Zebra Gallery in St. Paul, Minnesota.

**Victoria Lynn Smith** lives near Lake Superior, where she recently learned to paddle board. She writes fiction, essays, and articles. Her work has appeared on Wisconsin Public Radio, Twin Cities Public Television's *Moving Lives Website*, *Brevity Blog*, *Better Than Starbucks*, and in regional publications, including *Talking Stick*, *Red Cedar Review*, and *8142 Review*. In 2021 she placed third in the Wisconsin Writers Association's Jade Ring Contest. She is a member of Lake Superior Writers and the Wisconsin Writers Association. Her dream is to visit the Shetland Islands. For more visit <https://writingnearthelake.org/>

**Kim Waltman** grew up in southeastern Minn. farm country. He is a retired Eagan High School English teacher who currently lives near Beaver Bay, north of Duluth. Kim is a member of the Lake Superior Writers community.





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