

# VOICES

de la  
Luna

A QUARTERLY  
LITERATURE & ARTS  
MAGAZINE

**February 2023** Volume 15, Number 2



**Featured Poet: Ken Fontenot**

**Featured Interview: Lisha Garcia**

C.L. "Rooster" Martinez, "Recetas (Salsa Verde)"

Clemonce Heard, "Little Signal"

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**Kalpis Painting of Sappho**

*Sappho Painter (c. 510 BCE), National Museum, Warsaw*

## Cover Page Art

*Corazón de Agave*  
Photograph  
by Joel Salcido Ruiz

Joel Salcido Ruiz grew up along the U.S. and Mexico border. As a staff photographer for the *El Paso Times*, he documented the Tarahumara Indians and covered the 1985 Mexico City earthquake. He also traveled extensively in Latin America for *USA Today*.

In 1991 he resigned as photo editor of the *El Paso Times* and eventually moved to Spain to work on a year-long project entitled “Spain: Millennium Past.”



His fine art photographs are now in the permanent collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the prestigious Harry Ransom Humanities Center at UT Austin, The El Paso Museum of Art, The Austonian, The Wittliff Collections at Texas State University-San Marcos, and the UTSA Art Collection.

In 2017 Trinity University Press published his book,

*The Spirit of Tequila*, based on his series, *Aliento a Tequila*, a photographic exhibition that is now on a national tour.

The emblematic landscape photograph from the *Aliento a Tequila* series titled *Atonilco el Alto* was recently inducted into the National Art Heritage Collection of Mexico and permanently resides at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Mexico City.

In 2021 Salcido Ruiz was a guest artist representing San Antonio at the Jornada Binacional para Artistas in Mexico City.



**At *Voices de la Luna*, we believe that poetry heals and arts advance the quality of life.**

Themes for future issues of *Voices de la Luna*:

May: Writing Pride

August: Quinceañera Issue

## Editor's Note

James R. Adair

“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.” “A book of verses underneath the bough. A jug of wine, a loaf of bread—and thou.” “When you are with everyone but me, you’re with no one. When you are with no one but me, you’re with everyone.” “I crave your mouth, your voice, your hair.” “O my Luv is like a red, red rose.” “Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds.” “Whatever happens with us, your body will haunt mine.”



These brief excerpts from poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Omar Khayyam, Rumi, Pablo Neruda, Robert Burns, William Shakespeare, and Adrienne Rich, respectively, engage a single subject—love—from different angles. Love poetry may focus on tenderness, passion, sexual intimacy, intellectual compatibility, friendship, family ties, and much more. The single word *love* seems inadequate to contain the various meanings, emotions, and actions that encompass it. Maybe that’s why the ancient Greeks had at least four different words to address the different shades of meaning: one that focused on physical, passionate love (*eros*, from which we get the word *erotic*); one for the kind of love that manifests itself in many ways, including friendship (*philia*, as in the name Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love); one that can mean the love of two spouses for one another but that was appropriated by many early Christian writers—borrowing from their Jewish forebears—to refer to the love between humans and God (*agapē*); and one that refers especially to familial love (*storgē*, a cognate of our English word *stork*, a bird noted for the care of its young).

This issue of *Voices de la Luna* focuses on love, examining it from a multitude of perspectives. Because the topic of love attracted the attention of so many poets, we had an extraordinary number of submissions to this issue, and we accordingly expanded the number of pages devoted to poetry. Here are a few excerpts from the poems we include. “Like a rhythmic dance our bodies became a delicious delight of magic as I watched your joy meet mine” (Diane Raab). “If love exists, it exists in thickets of grass, in the way you touch my hand, in the way the stream ripples over smooth stones” (Shanan Ballam). “My mother touched hearts with her words, encouraging shared work and sacrifice, criticizing rude behavior, reciting tones in the shape of prayers” (Dianne Bertrand).

That’s not to say that love cannot be expressed in prose, too, and we have four prose contributions that address relationships and show the characters connecting in different ways. And doesn’t love always begin with connection?

Finally, I want to acknowledge two important losses that have affected the *Voices* family in recent days. First, our co-founder Jim Brandenburg, poet and poetry therapist, as well as a regular contributor to *Voices*, passed away in January. A tribute to his life and contributions is on pp. 22-23. Second, our first board president, Dr. Harmon Kelley, also died in January, and a brief memorial is on p. 39. Our warmest condolences go out to their families and friends.



# Featured Poet: Ken Fontenot

## In Sorrento For a Bite

I loved comic books: Batman, Superman, the Flash.  
Sometimes Mother combed my hair with her fingers.  
In the back seat I read. We stopped, on U.S. 61,  
at a favorite restaurant. More comics on a rack  
that rotated. "Can I get Batman, Mom?" "No,  
you already have too many as it is." End of asking.  
The larger rack featured *Look, Life, Reader's Digest*.  
And a sign: "This is not a library. Please pay for  
what you want." You would never see that, now, in  
a bookstore like Barnes and Noble whose magazine racks  
are so full one wonders if they can sell them all.  
But the restaurant of my youth. Another sign, painted  
perhaps by a professional with his perfect lettering:  
"We cannot accommodate busloads of customers."  
Did they not want business? Or were they just practical?  
After all, this was the only road from Baton Rouge to New  
Orleans. Umpteen tourists must have passed every day.

On our way home from seeing my grandparents. They of  
the prairie Cajuns. Easter Sunday. After church  
Grandma and I gather eggs, from the barn's laying  
hens, into a huge pot. Then boil them. Dye them  
motley colors. This tradition is called "Paques-Paques."  
Each of two receives a colored egg. One person taps  
the strong end of another with their strong end.  
Whoever holds the egg which breaks loses that egg.  
This Easter my egg happens to be the strongest.  
Who knows why? I get to keep twelve eggs total!  
Bless all the good sports. Bless the hen who laid my egg.

## Tibet in My Reveries

The dirty laundry of clouds can exist side by side  
with their clean laundry. Or not. The soiled can  
exist alone just like the clean. Maybe too much  
said here. I'll simply have to give it more thought.  
I'll simply have to make sure the AC is off, then leave.  
I'm involved in a philosophical relationship with God.  
The part of me that studied biology and chemistry  
wants me to break it off. The needy part says: stay.  
How long should one be saying yes and no at the same time?  
Does one linger on the fence? Help me, versatile mind.  
After all, I've given you some very good years. It's  
like waking, being in the liminal area. Not awake, nor asleep.

In profile my photo shows the weak chin of my father.  
Never have I really liked it. But seeing that the poet  
E. A. Robinson had one too, then I feel less bad.  
What is ambition but a stubbornness for what one loves?  
I keep hearing the news coming down from the mountain.  
Where wise men and women go. Where they are special  
because they leave their energy to the sitting attitude  
of their followers. Ah, I would want as well,  
I think, some journey to the spirit, perhaps  
ascending on a pack animal, and perhaps alone  
with a self I'd change to call beginner, egoless, awake.



## To Those Born Later

Like a forgotten love the twenty-dollar bill  
doesn't mean what it used to. And the light  
passes through my hair along with my comb.  
I have turned myself into the madhouse of March.  
It has a way of making me feel better.  
What crime have I committed except to love the light?  
What essence comes over us just before we sink from life?

This path, always for those born later. This being,  
not even as simple as jumping rope to chants.  
The children know things we don't. But then they forget.  
And relearning requires a true spirit. If we're up to it.

I try to make my days easy to slip into. The sunset burns.  
The wind fits any body. The seas equal their great reputation.  
Often the full moon seems to be a TV set left on.  
At night. When it's the only light. As the leaves dance.

## Child's Play

somewhat after Holan

The more-than-generous swath of light goes past  
my window and settles on my desk, cluttered.  
I recall being an altar boy, but which altar  
in the diamond-bright world do I serve here?  
Are there surely meanings for the words "gratitude,"  
"mercy," and "redemption" that we need especially now?  
Go to the best of the ecclesiastical for answers.  
Yet, failing that, seek out a simple life's providence.  
The pines still stand tall. The rose still wants attention.  
I still greet spring as someone returning from a journey.  
For all my days it has come full circle like a hawk.  
Exalted and fresh, the daylight returns also.  
It has not been gone nearly as long as spring.  
It has never had to hurry in order to get here.  
The birds matter. Immensely. Being is not child's play.  
Pissing is child's play. As time turns another corner.

## Morrison's Cafeteria

The chef, his hat like a white mushroom.  
We five ten-year-olds were in the cafeteria line  
with Miss Myra, I would say we chose too many  
things to eat and Miss Myra said to each of us:  
"No you can't have that! I only have so much  
money," and the black men took our trays  
to our table where Miss Myra gave each  
of them 50 cents because it was just 1958  
and Dr. King was already there to convince  
America of inequality that had still to be  
addressed. Our umbrellas dripped on the carpet.  
Billy sucked tea in his straw and blew it on Amos.  
"That's enough of that," said Miss Myra. "Your  
parents didn't raise you to do that kind of thing."  
Brenda was pushing on Jill. Billy said, "I hate broccoli."  
Most of the kids picked at their meals, and only  
for dessert did they clean the whole plate.  
Years later Miss Myra's cancer left her to die  
in agony. And the other kids had families of their own.

*Ken Fontenot received an MA in German language and literature from the University of Texas at Austin (with a thesis on Heinrich von Kleist) and studied in Freiburg, Germany, under a DAAD fellowship during the school year of 1986-87. His second book of poems, All My Animals and Stars (1988), won the Austin Book Award, and his poetry collection In a Kingdom of Birds won the 2012 Texas Institute of Letters award for best poetry book in Texas. In 2015 a fourth book of poems, Just a Trace of Moon, appeared from Pinyon Publishing. His manuscript titled "Collected Translations from the German" and his translation of a novel by Wilhelm Genazino have recently been completed. His novel For Mr. Raindrinker was published in 2015 by Alamo Bay Press. He writes: "I believe the poet has the right to use his entire life as material for his work. The past is never off-limits. Too, poems can be imaginary. Poets should have the same license as novelists. How dull autobiography alone can sometimes be!"*



# Featured Interview: Lisha Garcia

## Interview with Lisha Garcia

Jasmina Wellinghoff

*Lisha Adela Garcia has been widely published in various journals, including the Boston Review, Crab Orchard Review, Border Senses, and Muse and Mom Egg Review. Her books, A Rope of Luna and Blood Rivers, were published by San Francisco-based Blue Light Press. Her chapbook, This Stone will Speak was published by Pudding House Press. Garcia was nominated for the Pushcart and was the recipient of the San Antonio Tricentennial Poetry Prize. She has also served as judge for poetry prizes. She's the leader of a women's poetry group in San Antonio and facilitates poetic medicine classes in social justice, archetypes, and other topics. Currently, she is a candidate for certification from the Institute of Poetic Medicine. She lives in San Antonio.*



### **Jasmina Wellinghoff: How would you describe poetry as a literary genre?**

Lisha Garcia: Kafka said that poetry is needed to break the frozen sea inside us. It is the genre that uses few words to convey our humanity.

### **When did you start writing poetry and what motivated you?**

I started writing at a very young age. My mother gave me a copy of *Sonnets from the Portuguese* by Elizabeth Barret Browning and I fell in love with poetry. I was pretty confident in my English by then and felt proud that I could read and understand the lines. I then started reading poetry in Spanish and fell in love all over again with poets like Alfonsina Storni and Juana de Ibarbourou.

### **How have the themes that you explore as a poet changed over time? What interests you the most at present?**

I have always thought that poetry was the best way to convey the human experience affecting us in the news and in our communities. When I was a teenager, the poetry revolved around relationships. Later, the poems evolved into nature poems, social justice poems, and work that reflected what was happening in the world. I've never been able to write a series of poems focused just on one theme or topic. Life does not evolve that way for me. It has always been about making sense of my everyday life.

### **Your day job is in a very different field. Tell us about that and how the two interests shape your life.**

I am as passionate about my day job as I am about poetry. I am a small business advisor with the UTSA Small Business Development Center. I work confidentially with clients who are trying to start, grow, and finance their small businesses. I also do a lot of training for entrepreneurs on various subjects. I have a master's degree for each side of my brain—one in business and then an MFA in writing. Rarely do my two worlds converge.

### **Tell us about your writing practice.**

I think a poet is always writing, even while driving. I have an app on my phone that I add lines to during the day when something calls to me. I write mostly on weekends, as my day job is very consuming as well. I usually follow my muse and duende as the writing unfolds, and I take my cues from what is happening around me. Sometimes, like in the case of COVID or Uvalde, poems will come as a result of those events as they affect the collective.

### **Can you name a poem that made a significant impact on your life?**

I don't think I can name just one. I would say that my favorite poet is Pablo Neruda, and his work continues to have an impact on my life. I also love the work of César Vallejo and Gabriela Mistral. In English, I am more in tune with lyrical poets and have many sources of inspiration. I love the work of Rebecca Seiferle, Loretta Diane Walker, Natalie Diaz, Ada Limon, and Louise Glück. I must read at least one poem a day. I am more prone to tune in with contemporary poets as they relate more to a global landscape. The Internet has changed everything including poetry, and accessing voices across the globe is fascinating and addictive.

### **You are the leader of a women's poetry group that is growing and becoming more active in the community. How did the group come together and what is its impact in the literary community?**

I attended several classes at Gemini Ink. There I met some kindred spirits and decided to form a group. There was no prerequisite for belonging, so we began meeting with me leading the organizing. Slowly it grew and now there are 15 members, and each woman in the group is very special and a leader.

### **Will you and the group participate in National Poetry Month?**

We are participating in National Poetry Month with a reading at the San Antonio Public Library on April 8th at 2 p.m. One of the unique dynamics of the group is the incredible leadership of each individual member. For example, Violeta Garza is the point of contact for this NPM reading at the library and just hosted a workshop on presentation. You, Jasmina, are also a member, and you organized a poetry collection inspired by life during COVID and published the anthology *Yellow Flag Poems*, and hosted two readings of the book. Etain Scott in Kerrville organizes a yearly event in that city on ekphrastic poetry in conjunction with the River Edge Gallery. Lita Bonciolini and Marla Dial are working on a newsletter, Jen Alaniz organized a reading dedicated to human rights, and Sarah Colby does a monthly workshop for veterans at Gemini Ink. Each person in the group has brought incredible gifts to the table.

# Poetry

## Love's Awakening

Diane Raab

What began as an urge to have you,  
something primal and needy  
turned into a wanting to be one with you.

I blossomed at your fingertips,  
I lost myself in your wet kisses  
with soft and firm way you held me

walking through the parking lot  
to our cars, your grasp which told me  
you promised to never let go.

I opened myself to you  
like a lily when daylight arrives  
and closed up when night sprung forth.

Behind our closed doors,  
your manly motions warmed me,  
all your movements of love

and how you gave me pleasure—  
careful strokes about my body  
as I became more vulnerable  
under your sacred spell.

Like a rhythmic dance  
our bodies became a delicious delight  
of magic as I watched  
your joy meet mine

underneath our moonlight  
which together we watched settle  
so many more times  
in a lifetime we were never able to share.



*At the Père Lathuille Restaurant*  
Édouard Manet

**More recently, you have studied poetic medicine and sought to learn how to use it as a tool of wellness. Tell us about that and what attracted you to this discipline.**

I was at the AWP conference here in San Antonio and attended a panel on “Writing the Difficult.” Some of the panelists read horrific stories of rape and domestic violence. The academic response to these topics was, and I quote, “We are not here to look at the content of the piece but rather look as to whether the stories work as literature.”

I was appalled. How can a woman write about a rape and not have the incident matter beyond grammar and literary value!? Honestly, I don’t believe that you can separate the content of a piece from the structure of a piece. The writers were told to seek mental help elsewhere. I found this to be very cold and not empathetic at all.

Shortly thereafter, I heard Cyra Dumitru read at Barnes & Noble. She mentioned that she was completing her certification in poetic medicine. She put me in contact with the Institute of Poetic Medicine, and I began the 3-year journey of certification. The entire premise is about how to use poetry as a healing modality. Content matters more than form. Many writers from my group went through a year of poetic medicine with me. Also, since the onset of COVID, I co-facilitated a poetic medicine group called Poets in Exile with the late Dr. James Brandenburg. The group will continue in his honor, and *Voices de la Luna* has already indicated that it will continue to publish the poetic medicine poems of the group. (See pp. 20-21 for a tribute to James Brandenburg - ed.)

**Do you enjoy performance poetry in front of an audience?**

I love it. I only wish, when hearing it, that I had a written copy to go along, as sometimes it goes too fast for me to capture all the power of the lines.

**Can you comment on how poetry is taught in our schools?**

The poetry taught in our schools is often not reflective of today’s life experience for young people. It’s up to us to make a path to its approachability for people of all ages. And no, it doesn’t have to rhyme, and yes, it can cover the entire gamut of human experience. I think if young people are exposed at an early age to the relevance poetry can bring to our lives, their life experience will be richer. The William Carlos Williams quote always comes to mind: “It is difficult to get the news from poems, yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there.”

**If you had no time or money restrictions, what poetry-related project would you undertake for yourself or for the benefit of our city?**

Without the restrictions of time and money, I would dedicate a good part of my life to writing and doing poetic medicine workshops with different communities. Poetic medicine is a gentle healing modality that everyone can benefit from. My dream would be to use poetic medicine as a tool with the refugee communities, women in shelters, women facing domestic violence, and with teens and college students trying to overcome their personal backgrounds and achieve academic or personal success.



## Black Fur

C.L. "Rooster" Martinez

I had mustache beginnings before eleven years-old.  
Magnum PI caliber taco meat by fifteen.  
Bird's nests in all crevices.  
I learn early how a yellow Bic, single-blade razor cuts and uproots  
the animal from the manscape.  
Ingrown and pocked, I am a moon under curls and tangles.  
Hygiene is the Colonizer's second word after God, before Savage.  
Black jaguar under a moon is the cleanest killing god.  
The mossy tree or the jaguar in the canopy—  
I am uncertain which I am but neither were meant for civilization's dress code.  
Shears and razors carve out a groomed gentleman  
from the beast with midnight fur and glowing eyes.  
Does the world stay wild to the boys with a foot still in the jungle?

## Recetas (Salsa Verde)

C.L. "Rooster" Martinez

lay it

on anything you consume  
like home

on everything you scorch  
and keep

serrano peppers submerge  
the mouth in their own green  
heritage you eat what the elders  
teach learning so much about  
pain (a source a genesis point)  
tears & screaming held back  
like all memories  
revisiting them only out of duty

## Flotsam

Kersten Christianson

After Mary Oliver's "Wild Geese"

You do not have to be another's half  
to be whole.  
You do not have to be another's rock,  
solid, their anchor to secure / strain against wind and current.  
You have only to allow the worn-weathered wood  
of your body to longshore drift the sinuous tideline  
to follow its wild instinct / inclination / heart.  
Articulate your losses / sweeps, and I'll share mine.  
Meanwhile the moon waxes / wanes.  
Meanwhile the tides advance / retreat  
shuffle sea-kept shells and sand to shore:  
Mica grains, quartz, feldspar.  
Meanwhile driftwood meanders in wind-tossed ocean,  
its only home the way of wander.  
Whoever you are, no matter rip / minus,  
no matter how lonesome, the waters gift you  
resilience / impulsivity, beckon you to take sea-worn  
wood by hand, palm crease / furrow, know  
this not for what it once was, but for the whole  
it now inhabits.

## Litany of an Idolator

*Karla Linn Merrifield*

### Padlocks

*Brandon McQuade*  
after Michael Longley

Along the wrought iron handrail  
of the footbridge near the little chapel

lovers have fastened padlocks,  
their keys tossed into the river.

I remember reading something  
about that bridge in Paris

succumbing to the weight of love.  
After all these padlocks have rotted off,

the handrail rusted, crumbling like ash,  
after the roads and walls that hold

this city together have fallen,  
the river will still run wild and free

as our love, through it all.

I want to worship your body  
(each inch of prime male of my species);

I want to stare into your eyes  
(so differently di-la-ted);

I want to murmur in your ear  
(my voice through those three smallest bones);

I want to kiss, kiss, kiss your lips  
(pressing fully your commissures and tubercles);

I want to involve your tongue  
(share fibrous tissue of song and lust);

I want to lick all your fingers  
(partake of nimble phalangeal bliss);

I want to nip at your man-nipples  
(curls of man-fur dusting my flaring nares);

I long to tongue your ouroboros  
(sup on your navel's saline excretions);

I wish to adore your very godhead  
(the works of hands, mouth, vulva, vagina);

I dare to be held firmly in your manly vise  
(your, o, long heavily-femured thighs);

and last, may I kneel between your weary feet  
(perform slow vascular ablutions bipedally)?

Then: I begin again, my sweet lord.

**Dear Nostalgia**  
*Laurence Musgrove*

Please stop with how much has changed  
And how much worse it is and how glad  
You'll be not to live to see it all explode.

We aren't interested in how it was different  
Back then when you were on top of the world.  
Tell us what's the same and never grows old.

**Storm**  
*Ellis Elliott*

Dearest M,  
I have not been gone a week from your arms  
and already I long to be back beside you.  
Storms bellowed over Cumberland Mountain  
last night, tore through as if all artillery  
of heaven had been brought into action. Darkness  
was thick as Uncle Bill's beard, and my men  
bumped into each other, stumbling over old stumps  
and scattered dead branches. Only the glitter  
of lightning offered momentary relief. Somehow  
we groped our way along until daylight.

Now my thoughts are of you.  
I've heard rebels now roam near the homeplace,  
close to Wildcat Valley and Wallings Ridge, robbing  
and ransacking, taking every wagon and all food  
they can find. Martha, I plead for you to keep  
the door latched, listen when Hep barks a warning,  
heed signs you hear and see so well. I cannot abide  
thoughts of harm to my family; fold your arms  
around them and think of mine around you. If rebels  
should appear, give the signal, steer the children  
down through the trapdoor, stay huddled under  
the floorboards until clear.

**Weight of Ink**  
*Ellis Elliott*

Dearest M,  
Finally we have made it past Powell's Valley,  
where one loud dog, then all of them, barked  
until it seemed every house had two or three,  
and sounded like one spontaneous yell.  
I thought for sure we were done for,  
and the town would be awakened, but  
we made it through without incident.

Now my haversack is heavy with letters.  
One from Jonas Keen, Samuel's oldest,  
to Melvina Stephens, asking for her hand  
in marriage, and a large package for  
the widow Campbell from her two sons  
in the 13th Regiment. Mostly it is greenback  
money and penknives. I must be even more  
careful now carrying such mail. I do not  
take lightly the weight our names hold in ink.  
My men seem more troubled and uneasy  
these days, as this war wages on, and these  
young ones have never been this far from kin.

I share their melancholy and their hope,  
glad I can carry desire and comfort home  
in a canvas bag. It seems even as my bag  
is filled with sympathies overflowing, it is not  
sufficient to describe my longing for you.



## Turbulence

Ann Howells

Sand blasts legs, stinging raw,  
whips hair to frenzied curl.  
Scent of scythed grasses  
exposed bob-white nests.  
My shirt tail ripples,  
snaps buttocks, small of back.  
Spangled pine branches  
stars flaking silver.  
No other soul except me,  
a mad girl, on the boardwalk.  
Wood cricket stilled.  
I berate myself for venturing  
into this blustery love affair.  
Ignore changing tides  
stinging winds.  
Newspapers perform pirouettes  
I'd appreciate were I not shivering.  
Pearl buttons undone  
shucked like an oyster.  
Cardboard cups and detritus  
pelt my stuttering heart.  
Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.

## For Dennis

Ann Howells

Loose-jointed marionette,  
fine turned  
as hand lathed wood,  
you move without strings,  
comfortable in sun-cured skin,  
hands rough and warm.  
Far from Celtic roots,  
coal mines, and slate quarries,  
you lie where moonlight stripes oak planks,  
mouth whiskey warm.  
Laughter burbles your throat,  
crinkles your eyes.  
A man's name is all he really owns,  
you whisper,  
then offer it to me.

## Little Signal

Clemonce Heard

for Fay

Out the window, the heavy snow lightens  
every branch like my upturned palms,  
and playful *fee-bees* of the chickadee.  
I've heard you flute along to rise like heat  
up the walls. Of course I move towards *it*,  
towards the edge of the trundle to feel  
held. & this, sweet darling, is just to say  
*I miss you*. That for the rest of my life  
I cannot hear this iamb of Paridae,  
some of which are called tits, without thinking  
of your sclera shaped like the vapor streaked  
across a chickadee's cheek. A creature  
that must see everything. Its *chick-a-dee*  
*dee-dee* the right size for your mouth, & mine.



## Crow at the Fountain

Margaret H. Wagner

Crow swigged water from my fountain,  
spoke raucous, head cocked sideways,

preening in the bubbler, dripping water  
like beads off a broken rosary.

Jumped to the wood rail, crisscrossed  
that rail three times with its beak.

Looked at me through the window.  
Was crow curious for connection?

Was crow my birth father or the dad  
who raised me, come for a visit,

propping half a bagel on the rail,  
breakfast stolen from a gardener?

Bagel balanced like the wooden lifeboat  
my birth father rowed on the Jersey shore,

rocking in the shallow surf, stuck in sand.  
Crow flew from rail to tree, out of sight.

Crow's beak open evoked my adopted dad's  
next-to-last breath. Inhaling wide

from calm to awe to fear to terror.  
What did he inhale from the other side,

my dad who paid for schooling, sat beside me  
for my first drive, showed me a J-stroke on a canoe?

Does spirit leave the body  
with a push from the chest bone,

like light pressure of spindly bird feet?  
I walked with my dad on a country road.

Scared by a sound, "A bear," I exclaimed.  
"A bullfrog," said my dad, the exceptional Eagle Scout.

What was that frog doing so far from pond or stream?  
When I hear the *boing, boing, boing* of the bubbler

in my home at night with the blinds drawn,  
I know crow's been near, with a hop

back into the fountain for baptism,  
mouth agape, panting at the glory of god.

**we tend to hear gunshots more than music.**

*audrey coleman*

*11th grade Pittsburgh, PA*

**i.**

it's lunchtime.  
what should be considered  
the most relaxing part  
of the school day.

kids chattering,  
cafeteria hustle and bustle,  
music floating down  
from the band room,

pop!

heads snap up,  
a few automatically go down.  
students scatter faster than  
the chips that fly from the bag.

**ii.**

it's friday night.  
there's a home game.  
the student section filled  
with a sea of hawaiian shirts.

middle schoolers running around,  
marching band chaos  
in preparation for  
the halftime show.

run!

fearful footsteps beating  
the aluminum bleachers.  
the sea parts faster than the vomit  
that makes its way down to the cement.

**iii.**

it's the holiday season.  
the mall is packed to the brim.  
the majority of those  
being last-minute shoppers.

santa's laugh cascading throughout  
the busy brick building.  
classic christmas songs  
fading from one store into the next.

boom!

the walk of a sale-hunter  
becomes more urgent.  
they leave before the custodian has a chance  
to mop up the shattered champagne bottle.



## Closer than God

Mary Elizabeth Birnbaum

I loved you before I knew you.  
You, the blind wish.  
Waxing moon shimmied through fog,  
first awakening.  
More precious than the tryst  
with Lord Shiva's flash.

Each child is an apocalypse,  
a throatful of sea.  
Little song in the grass, little feather,  
heartbeat echo.  
From your tight gums, looking into me,  
you drank from me.

Distant soul, I look back into you.  
Your astonishment,  
lightning writing on young shoulder blades.  
Now fine white hairs,  
lines of strain, the hope I sang  
into your growing bones.



*L'homme est en mer*  
Vincent van Gogh

## What Remains

Chavez Galvan

There were beautiful songs  
That were yours  
And though I tried to give them away  
Their melody stayed on repeat in my head  
I needed them to mean something else  
But you can't replace roses with asters  
And not notice  
The absence of space between petals  
And the scent that lingers

Sometimes the memories  
Collect in the hourglass  
And I'm trapped at the bottom  
Overwhelmed as the sands rain over my body

My arms reach wide, but I cannot hold any of it  
The hourglass fills and turns into a sea  
I'm lost in the undertow  
Under deep waves of regret  
I swallow my pride  
Choke on the frustration

For years,  
I looked for a reason  
An overstated simplification  
Amongst the lies  
I couldn't make sense of any of it  
I carried it all  
In a heart shaped box  
And carved your name  
In the wood with a dull knife  
Placed within it  
All of the ashes of the letters  
I never sent

And one day, I ran out dry  
Attended too many funerals  
I learned to control my breathing  
And could breathe in the scent of the roses  
Without feeling sick

I'll hold what's left  
In my hands  
And welcome your touch  
Over the contour of my scars

## **I Miss You Sometimes**

*Isabel Brown*

*17 years old, North East School of the Arts,  
San Antonio*

I miss you when  
I water my white roses.  
I can get distracted from  
The overflow of sunrise-  
And my roses drown  
In the simplicity of it all.

I miss you when  
My dog whines for food.  
She rubs against my calf  
Asking if the hollowness within  
Is as hollow as her bowl.

I miss you when  
The television stops working.  
The lights are on,  
My stove still rumbles  
In the background,  
But none of it brings laughter  
To my doorstep like how  
(You),  
Or the television,  
Could have.

I wondered for the longest time  
If my love was forgettable  
To the average person.

If the moon were to have  
Stopped shining in my patio,  
Then it is I who must  
Go back to you.

But it hasn't happened yet,  
For I only miss you  
Sometimes.

## **Sensible Love**

*Dianne Bertrand*

My mother listened with her eyes,  
focused on the speaker,  
reflected her reaction  
in deep brown notes.

My mother watched with her ears,  
listening for tears in her son's voice,  
waiting on the car door after curfew passed,  
closed them firmly when her decision was made.

My mother tasted with her fingers,  
sifting through flour, sugar, and salt,  
plumping meatballs, flattening dough,  
pinching textures together for supper.

My mother saw with her nose,  
stirring comino and garlic in her caldo,  
dividing popcorn into four smaller bowls,  
mopping her floors clean with ammonia.

My mother touched hearts with her words,  
encouraging shared work and sacrifice,  
criticizing rude behavior,  
reciting tones in the shape of prayers.

My mother trusted her senses,  
used humor like a lasso,  
spread forgiveness thick,  
carried resilience deep in her marrow.

## Learning How to Love You, Which Is to Say, Love Me

*Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo*

*We are learning and re-learning how to honor each other,  
how to go deep, how to take turns, how to find nourishing  
light again and again.—Alexis Pauline Grumbs, Undrowned*

If I were a mermaid, my tail would sparkle  
pink and the shells covering perky breasts,  
tart yellow. It would be forever summer  
like ice cream trucks, like cherry slush,  
like two naïve kids freely turning crisp  
under the shallows of a three-foot pool.  
In the ocean, I'd swim spin, full body  
blowing bubbles. I'd dive below weight  
of water to speak secrets only meant for you.  
Ah wa wu, would shape from my open  
lips, and together we'd lap circles  
building whirlpools, inviting rainbow fish  
to catch a ride. And not until I tired, drifted  
to the sea floor, laid my body across a rock,  
heard, I love you, too, sound me to sleep,  
would I dream of the undrowned  
children never aged. Brown, big-headed  
babies alive in their schools, playing  
clams with cousins, learning numbers  
by octopus, all the while being protected  
by whales and dolphins in a way that said  
they were always safe. And when I'd wake,  
I'd feed myself pineapple, do my stretches,  
squid ink dreams on paper making them real  
enough to be true, and tail to the surface to find  
you bathed in sunlight and us ready to start again.

### Ursa Minor

*Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo*

For Carlos Hernández Vázquez, 16  
For Juan de León Gutiérrez, 16  
For Felipe Gómez Alonzo, 8  
For Jakelin Caal Maquin, 7  
For Wilmer Josué Ramírez Vásquez, 2  
For Angie Valeria Martínez, 23 months  
For Mariee Juárez, 19 months

Each star belongs to a galaxy  
we can't identify with the naked eye. Download  
the app to hold the unseen in your hands.

Star registries, like the Sonoran Desert,  
have searchable maps. Somewhere a 16-year-old  
names a star for a first love. An eight-year-old

follows the northern star like a beacon.  
A seven-year-old sings a rhyme. And the babies?  
Well, the babies are goo-gee-gawing, but their  
mothers

know those wet, fleshy mouths mean estrella.  
In the sky a little bear plays in a river of stars,  
but on the land red dots mark the dead.

Over the bodies lay hands. Over the bones  
pour dirt. Over the rotting country  
watches a seven-point constellation.



## If Love Is Like a Torch

*Mid Walsh*

after Edna St. Vincent Millay

If love is like a torch that always burns  
to light a way through any fog, a flame  
inextinguishable, every turn  
equally illuminated, the same  
sweet abiding constancy accepting  
everything that falls within its gaze,  
I may need to plead a small exception:  
my love does not so dispel my haze.  
Nor is it constant, but a rise and fall  
in intermediate succession, highs  
and troughs, a giddy ascent, all  
mystery-robed, or whispering surprise,  
unclothing something sensitive or true.  
It helps me see more. I love, seeing you.

## This Morning

*James Dennis*

This morning I can't think  
of anything to write about  
other than the way the light  
slowly moves across my bookcases  
until it comes to rest,  
just for a little bit,

on Borges. To be honest,  
I cannot blame the light  
for pausing there for a bit  
of a respite. I, too, have lingered  
within the great athenaeum  
of his thoughts.

Wanting to break the ice, I summon  
my most affable, yet literary, smile  
and offer up a suggestion  
to the morning light:  
"Have you given any thought  
to Gabriel García Márquez?"

## If Love Exists

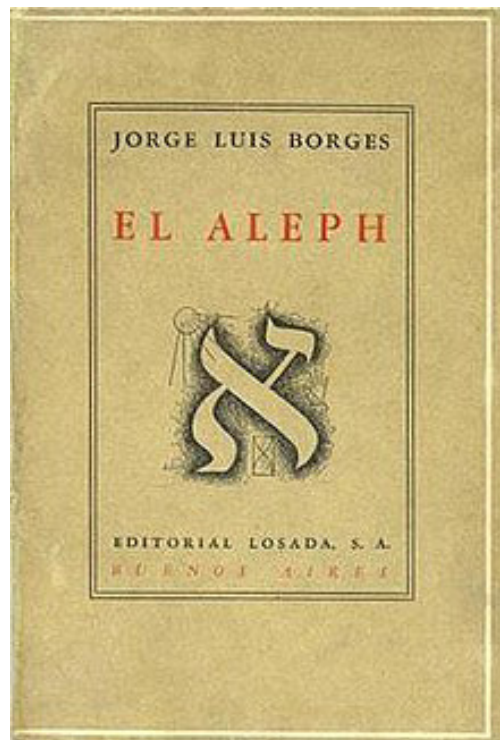
*Shanan Ballam*

for Brock

If love exists, it exists  
in thickets of grass,  
in the way you touch  
my hand, in the way the stream  
ripples over smooth stones.

It exists in the crowns  
of poplar and ash.  
Love exists in snakes sliding  
through silky grasses.  
It exists in my brother's ashes.

With your kiss, I vanish.  
We are the pitcher  
that pours the sweet water.  
We are the water.



*El Aleph*

*Short Story Collection by Jorge Luis Borges*

## water works

*avery scogins*

i am living by the words “be quiet,” as of late.  
i’ve been pushing waterfalls  
between my lips  
(shhhhhh)  
and watching myself water down—no,  
drown my thoughts in the torrents.

i kick my ideas into the sewer: submerge them  
into puddles and push them through  
steel bars leading to the trashy tunnels  
under the streets, where they can hide  
and you will never hear their echoes,  
you will never hear my echoes.

the words i want to say  
are never going to leave my lips  
because i doubt you would say them back.  
so instead, i retreat to the jungle of my thoughts  
and hide on the other side of the canal  
because i know that you can’t swim.

quite frankly, you drain me  
the way that the bees drain the flowers.  
and quite frankly, i like to pretend  
that my emotions for you are as existent  
as the loch ness monster of the scottish highlands:  
they may be there but you have no reliable evidence.

you’ll never find me here,  
and i’ll be safe to want you from a distance.  
yes, i hide here because i know that even if  
you did gather the courage to come for me,  
the stormwater runoff would catch you  
and you would slide right back to the start.

## Zircon

*Marla Dial Moore*

Scientists call it “resilience”—  
the art of holding one’s shape  
with integrity, no matter  
how many times I’ve been crushed  
underfoot, torn apart, smashed  
into pieces for the microscope slide.

I was there at the world’s beginning—  
seldom noticed, mostly colorless  
before the days of alchemy and carbon-dating.  
I found a way to burrow and hide  
inside the crust of almost everything.

Even after quartz and feldspar  
metamorphose, breaking down  
to particles no longer identifiable  
as quartz or feldspar,  
my heart of crystal

beats on, keeping time,  
counting days, remarking history—  
all that changes, and what does not.  
This constant structure of atoms  
endures, waits to be joined

with like crystals, the way  
love bonds to love,  
and raindrop to raindrop—  
rivers of time still eroding  
all of that granite, all

that is not us.

## On Things

*James B. Nicola*

I'd like to put a lid on things and screw  
it tight and have a little closure. But  
no jar of mine won't have a bit of you  
inside, as any door that can be shut  
is still a door, and rooms locked up are still  
chambers. And should a novelist expose  
the secret contents with a tale to thrill,  
the purple-passioned, Gothic-romanced prose  
would still be laced with you. Therefore I write  
this poem not to seal as mystery  
but crumple up its paper and ignite  
the thing for a brief flash of heat and light,  
tonight—and into perpetuity  
which is, in part, the point of poetry.

## The Child

*Christina E.*

I visited the graveyard  
rummaged through the bones.  
I took the journey through the night to make sure I was alone.  
I accepted the shadow as part of the light.  
I didn't feel afraid.  
Everything felt right.  
I decided I could suffer if I suffered in truth.  
For surely I had suffered for things that were of no use.  
Now I drive through the mountains.  
Through the boulders of truth.  
No longer a frightened child of youth.  
I welcome the desert as if it were an oasis.  
I drove for miles to see haunted places.  
I felt the essence of lives once lived.  
Still here willing to offer, to love and to give.  
I faced a demon so that I might find the truth.  
Traveling backwards to my youth.

## Think of a Spouse

*Paul Willis*

Think of a spouse  
as a pair of socks  
to pad around in;

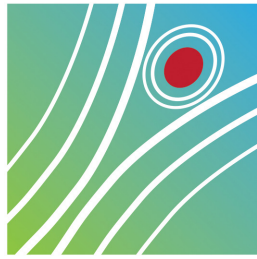
of a poem as boots  
in which to make  
your way in the world.

Without them, there is  
no traveling from the self.  
Without flesh and word,

you have to stay  
in your own home  
without ever quite getting there.

# Ecopoetry

*Stone in the Stream/Roca en el Río* is a gathering of writers and artists committed to the environment through contemplative, artistic, and activist response. They meet quarterly to share individual work grounded in an eco-poetics and to develop collective projects. This page reflects some of their work. To contact the group, send an email to Jim LaVilla-Havelin ([lavhav@gmail.com](mailto:lavhav@gmail.com)) or Moby Warren ([mobiwarren@gmail.com](mailto:mobiwarren@gmail.com)). See more of their work at [www.facebook.com/StoneintheStream/](http://www.facebook.com/StoneintheStream/).



**STONE | ROCA  
IN THE | EN EL  
STREAM | RIO**

## Return of the Oak Galls

Jean Hackett

An ice storm killed the cynid wasps,  
every tiny life in the trees on top of our hill.  
So busy were we taking stock  
of broken branches and wires,  
no one noticed. For over a year.

Not until I went scrounging under the live oaks  
to gather marble-sized galls  
a friend crushes to dye silk scarves,  
did I discover trees and ground  
bereft of mottled brown balls.

I wrote off the wasps as victims of a polar vortex  
climate change forced upon the nascent South Texas spring  
to massacre deer and prickly pear,  
burst frost weed and pipes,  
decimate populations of ignored insects.

Today, two years plus since the freeze,  
a rosy sphere blushed at me from between lush leaves-  
The cynid wasps were back!

How had the insects known to return?  
Had the oaks sent chemical love letters  
on early autumn breezes?  
Or fungi passed messages  
along their extensive underground network?  
I'll search for answers another day.

This morning, I celebrate every lone globe  
and glowing cluster sharing twigs with acorns,  
each nut and orb containing promises of future generations.

## Anthropocentricity

Mike Gullickson

Ask the evergreen they know.  
Ask the Redwoods, or the Bristlecone  
they are experts on climate change,  
the effects of fire, wind and rain.  
Ask them if they have ever felt pain  
or if our footsteps  
have meant anything to them.

Ask them about the stars  
they are closer to them than we are,  
on clear-edged mountain nights  
where it is possible to see new outlines for  
constellations  
to have their own names for galaxies  
what it takes to understand the dark.

Even the sap know what we do not,  
even seedlings have more knowledge  
than super computers can acquire  
we have no hope to withstand  
fire, wind, rain  
and the raging voice of hunger  
unless we listen to, follow  
what the trees know.

*Originally appeared in Blue Hole, 2nd edition, 2011.*

## Mike Gullickson (1944-2022)

Jim LaVilla-Havelin

Word came that Mike had died right after Christmas.  
Poet and lover of poetry, Mike was also, with his be-  
loved Joyce, the community builder of the George-  
town Poetry Festival and editor of *The Enigmatist* and  
*Blue Hole*. It was Mike's buoyant spirit, the joy he  
brought to making poems and nurturing poetry and  
community that made him special. And his twinkle.

## Goodbye Died in My Mouth

Toni Heringer Falls

The front's slate grey edge—darkens to charcoal. Pillar of stone.  
I watch three funnels drop. My son—my home in their path.

Despite my uncle's cries to run for the storm shelter, I shake my  
head, raise hand in goodbye. Eyes on the funnels, I gun the engine,  
skitter gravel, barrel toward them. Rain erases the highway.  
Flashes of lightning turn night-like sky—back into day: my car  
and body rattle with each thunder clap. Hail cracks the glass.  
Wind lifts the front wheels—terror drives this car.

The storm passes over—as I near home. Sunlight through thread  
bare clouds. On my street, limbs are down, but no trees. Home  
sits safely in its cove of pines, glistening under ice. Scent of pine  
needles, crushed. I race into the house, wild-eyed. My son sits  
at the table doing his math. Hey, Mom. Cool storm! Did you see  
the hail?



## It Was Late Tuesday

*Zen*

The pregnant pecans  
Dropping shells like bullets  
And on a leafy stretch between  
Where the City's landscaper Juan says  
Bees live underground and  
A shallow—where alligator flags  
And the bulrushes—somehow  
Managed moorings—  
(Creating a perfect swim-up  
For the fat-bellied carps  
A fishing hole for snow egrets)  
When suddenly—  
(Not sure if it was a noise  
Or a movement)—

(As subtle as a peripheral leaf falling)  
But in any case  
Almost instinctively  
I slightly turned my head  
And there on a wall  
Bricks covered in a thick mess of ivy  
Stood Hunter  
Taller than a foot—  
His barrel-chest—rusty red  
With downward strokes that  
Were coffee-colored  
And his tucked wings  
Marbled—like the look  
Of pebbles underwater

Hunter had a curved pointy beak  
Yellow at the top—tip black  
And long slanty eyes  
Jet black so you couldn't see in  
And a flash of red—  
His crown—color of the ground  
Like mottled leaf litter

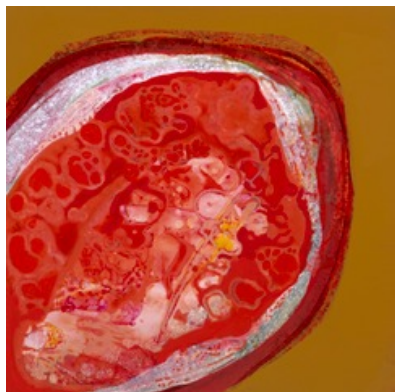
(Hunter didn't seem to notice us)  
I wasn't small enough—  
And neither was Timmy

Yet there was a brief exchange  
That had to do with things  
You wouldn't know  
Unless you've actually been—such as:  
You've got to fly high—and very far  
To reach the cloud-kingdom  
Of warmer currents—being held  
Like a giant hand  
Rising and soaring—seeing great  
Distances from above  
And hungry mornings—

Drifting downwards  
To a snaky squirrely river  
Monitoring the trees' swaying  
(How that matters)  
When the wind is your ride  
And can shift its course on a dime  
And sensing even the tiniest  
Of movements—

Without any warning—Hunter took off—  
Outstretched wings—several feet across  
And their patterns black and white  
Like keys of a grand piano

And I heard a symphony strike  
Yet where the music's coming from  
Was not so much—the air  
But closer—in the quivering  
Strings of a heart



**The Germinator #1**  
*Norma Jean Moore*



**The Germinator #2**  
*Norma Jean Moore*

# Remembering Jim Brandenburg

## Homage to Dr. James Brandenburg

Lisha Adela García and Sasha Guzmán

Dr. James Brandenburg, founder of *Voices de la Luna* along with Dr. Mo Saidi, was a visionary in marrying poetry and therapy to assist the San Antonio community and his students. Dr. B, as his students called him, was a school counselor and Jungian therapist for many years. At his Celebration of Life, his son-in-law remarked that he had so many certifications and degrees that they didn't fit on his business card! He was a life-long learner who shared his wisdom in presentations at the Jungian Society, poetry therapy conferences, and other professional circles. For the participants in his poetry circles, he was a numinous, inspired human who helped us meet the world one day at a time.

Sasha Guzman and I (Lisha Adela García) have been granted the incredible honor to continue his legacy in *Voices de la Luna* and carry on with the Poets in Exile Group that Dr. B founded. Although no one can replace Dr. B or his knowledge of archetypes, symbols, and motifs, we can continue the healing work in his honor. For this we are extremely grateful to the *Voices de la Luna* team.

Dr. B started his poetry circles in Barnes & Noble at least eleven years ago. Sasha Guzman joined Dr. Brandenburg in his poetry journey in 2013. Eventually, she became a fixture in the group and a willing helper in the conversations about poetry and Jungian archetypes and symbolism. Dr. B was a Doctor of Jungian analysis and worked closely with Sasha in teaching and guiding her personal journey and her knowledge of the works of C.G. Jung. During his illness and subsequent death, Sasha became the spokesperson for the group and assisted Maria Brandenburg by being the central point of contact for Dr. B's final journey among us.

Sasha: I had the great honor of being a member of Dr. B's poetry groups for the last ten years. He started at Barnes & Noble in San Antonio; at that time the group consisted of many seasoned poets with meaningful contributions. After a time, the group met at San Antonio College and attracted students of all ages. As time went by, the group became more focused on the works of C.G. Jung in relation to poetry, as many of the attendees had learned and read about motifs and the human condition, learning more about our souls through these works. Dr. Brandenburg touched many people's lives with his presence and grace.

I was not a special member, nor was I given any official title. I was a friend and mentee of Dr. Brandenburg. He guided me as my analyst for thirteen years, and I became loyal to him and believe heart and soul in the work he did with poetry and therapy. When Dr. B became ill, his wife Maria asked me to be the point of contact between the Brandenburg family and the poetry and therapy circles. I visited Dr. Brandenburg and provided updates to our community to ease their worry and to be a support during that time. We decided to create a few pages of words and poetry to hand out at Dr. B's Celebration of Life.

Eventually the idea grew into more than a few pages. I began to collect poems, memories, and words from our poetry community in the form of a booklet. When I became ill, Cyra Dumitru generously offered her time and a monetary donation to make our

booklet come to fruition. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend the service after testing positive for COVID. The booklet was my closure, my healing, and our souls reaching out to him. I read the poems that the poetry group members sent me for inclusion, their words, and Dr. Brandenburg's words, over and over. They are so meaningful and came from the unconscious contents that connect with him and us with each other. It is a keepsake I can remember him by. This was healing for me. (*Many of the poems from this booklet will be included in a future issue dedicated to James Brandenburg's memory. -ed.*)

Dr. Brandenburg guided me to become who I am today. His part in my life was so grand that I follow in his footsteps in becoming a therapist, a poetry group facilitator, and in the future a Jungian analyst. He influenced my life for many years, and I was very close to him. I am still becoming wise, as well as a healer like he was. I had not thought about facilitating the Poets in Exile Group. It was painful to think about him not being there. The Creator has led me to continue the group with Lisha Garcia in Dr. Brandenburg's stead. Our group remains a vessel for Dr. B's legacy and leadership. Each of us had a special connection with him that we are honored to continue.

Lisha: I began my poetic medicine journey in 2019 upon hearing poet Cyra Dumitru at a reading in Barnes & Noble discussing the power of poetry as a healing modality. I was accepted at the Institute of Poetic Medicine led by John Fox to become a Poetic Medicine Practitioner. I began my studies in January of 2020 with the recommendation to see a therapist prior to the onset of the program, and that put me in touch with Dr. B. The sessions consisted of uncovering the inner blockages in the individuation path via dream interpretation. A three-year-plus journey ensued, and now I am close to completing the certification. As part of my training, Dr. B invited me to co-facilitate the Poetry in Exile Group almost as it began in 2020, as the world moved to Zoom because of COVID. From that moment, until his passing, Jim and I became a strong team. I edited his presentations, articles, and poems, and we were in constant contact working on different projects.

The study of using poetry as a healing modality is not new. The approach that is followed is outlined in the books *Finding What You Didn't Lose* and *Poetic Medicine* by John Fox. The participants in the Poetry in Exile Group were mostly clients or former students of Dr. B's and had known and worked with him for a long time. Touching base every month increased trust and healing during a challenging time when we felt isolated and indeed exiled from our surroundings. Dr. B and I worked hard between each meeting to make the poems relevant to issues, archetypes, or individual challenges that people in the group might find useful.

Sasha was the touchstone within the group and would lead in the discussions of the poems chosen for the meetings. She is well-versed and passionate about poetry and Jungian analysis. Her contribution aided in opening discussions and bringing to the surface the sentiments, experiences, and passions in people's hearts. We are all vessels for divine material and just need to access the contents as we possess them.

The chosen poem each month was a character, seated in a chair front and center, for us to dialogue with and challenge, uncovering the distinct meanings for each participant. We wrote for seven

minutes from pre-selected prompts and shared our work. Beautiful heart-centered poetry emerged. Dr. B would say:

*As you write, don't think, don't overthink, don't judge, don't criticize, don't evaluate, don't beat yourself up, just let it flow as easily and quickly as you can. Doing the writing in this manner allows you to get into touch with the unconscious—and those archetypal energies.*

Dr. B would then ask us to refine the poems and send them to him for subsequent publication in *Voices de la Luna*, completing the giving back circle to the community.

We can't thank the editors of the magazine enough for allowing us to continue the poetic medicine tradition in his honor. Having decided to continue as a group, Sasha and I will focus initially on healing from the passing of our mentor, guide, teacher, and friend. As we process the loss of Dr. B and recall all the gifts he shared with us, we will honor him with new poems to heal our sadness.

Dr. B often quoted Carl Jung who said, "The sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being." Dr. B was a lantern in our darkness and the helping hand that guided us, and the nascent poems living inside us, to find the healing light of day. James Brandenburg cannot be replaced, but we can continue to write from a heartfelt place and share poems with the world as the carriers of his legacy moving forward.

### **James (Jim) Robert Brandenburg (31 January 1943- 13 January 2023)**

*Mo H Saidi*

An educator, poet, counselor, poetry and dream therapist, and co-founder of *Voices de la Luna: A Quarterly Literature & Arts Magazine*, Jim Brandenburg passed on 13 January 2023 after suffering two consecutive strokes. His dedication to engaging poetry as a therapeutic means for individuals who were suffering from emotional disturbances

was so deep that he pursued several avenues of education to enhance his knowledge as one of the leading poetry therapists in the United States. Eventually he added dream therapy through Jungian analysis to his impressive teaching and counseling skills. He never ceased seeking knowledge to help individuals with psychological conflicts. Toward the end of his career, he attended courses at the Jung Institute in Zürich and received a diploma, equivalent to a Ph.D., in analytical psychology, which included dream interpretation.



A former Poet Laureate of the San Antonio Poetry Association, Jim Brandenburg was an adjunct professor at San Antonio College, a retired counselor at Clark High School, and had taught at schools in other Texas cities. A tennis player and walker, he loved strolling in the woods. He wrote and published three books of poetry, the last one by St. Mary's University Press, which focused on dream interpretations. It is not an exaggeration to say that during his counseling work he saved several distraught teenagers from harming themselves. He is one of only two certified poetry

therapists in the state of Texas. In 2008, Jim Brandenburg, as he was moderating two poetry venues at the local bookstores, felt a need for a literature and arts magazine in San Antonio, so, along with Mo H. Saidi, a physician-writer, he co-founded *Voices de la Luna: A Quarterly Literature & Arts Magazine*, which is still being published online and in print.

Mr. Jim Brandenburg was also a marriage and family therapist and counselor practicing in San Antonio. Most of all, Jim Brandenburg loved his family, children, grandchildren, clients, patients, and devoted friends. He was a popular and sensible poet, editor, activist, and leader for San Antonio arts, literature, music, and human services organizations. He and his beloved wife Maria were major players in local cultural non-profit organizations. He was a supporter and moderator of San Antonio poetry venues, including the monthly workshops at Haven for Hope for homeless people and poetry readings offered by *Voices de la Luna: A Quarterly Literature & Arts Magazine*.



### **For Beloved Jim Brandenburg: A Ghazal**

*Mo H Saidi*

He was wise & bright with a splendid heart  
Reading poetry aloud, speaking from a clear mind

Taught and advised teens for four decades and more  
In high schools and colleges and Texas towns

Becoming a therapist counseling at SA College  
Dreams are connected to one's psyche, he opined

Like a priest preaching but following his words  
He spoke softly and performed poetry aloud

Jim had glorious moments hosting poetry venues  
Lest he sacrificed his health and family's valuable time

Unaware of the sudden burst of blood in his brain  
He joined the mortals and entered the quiet night

Mo, learn from the muse & enter the poetic realm  
Beware of the passage of time and recall Jim's call.



# Art/Culture

## Artist Spotlight: Melina Lozano

Andrea Kraus-Lozano

Our spotlight artist for this issue is Melina Lozano, a ceramic artist who lives and works in San Antonio, Texas. Though originally from San Antonio, Lozano attended college in North Carolina, where she studied ceramics. Lozano later moved to New Mexico where she continued exploring ceramics and was heavily influenced by the desert landscape. In 2020, Lozano returned to San Antonio and began her own business, Agave Muerto Clay. Through her business, Lozano sells small batch, handmade ceramics on her website and in retail shops around the Southwest. Lozano also participates in local markets, where she enjoys meeting other small makers in San Antonio. With several years of teaching experience, Lozano also offers introductory ceramics classes at her studio. According to Lozano's website, her ceramics classes serve as a fun and relaxing experience, as well as a therapeutic and educational introduction to clay. To view more of Lozano's work, please visit her website at [agave-muerto-clay.myshopify.com](https://agave-muerto-clay.myshopify.com).



*espina pitcher + cups*

lenge. I eventually grew to love it because I had never worked with clay before and was intrigued by the physicality of it as opposed to 2D work. I changed my major's concentration from painting to ceramics the following semester.

### How has your practice as a ceramic artist evolved over time?

The person I was when I first learned to throw on the wheel is different from the person I am now, so I think my work and practice reflects that. My pace is different, my color choices are similar but honed. Clay itself is always evolving, so I'd say my practice has evolved with it.

### How long have you been making art? When and how did your professional art career begin?

I've been a maker/crafter since I was a kiddo; drawing, painting, needle craft, and others. My professional art career started when I was a sophomore in college. I started out as an environmental science major, but I changed majors to art, and had to take an elective and chose ceramics. I was actually terrible at wheel throwing the first semester but I took it as a chal-



*agave mugs*



*black clay agave bud vase*





*agave sun mugs*

**Can you discuss your creative influences, as well as any fellow ceramic artists whose work inspires you?**

I'm influenced by agave, the desert, and water, simple as that. I grew up surrounded by all three, so my color and form choices are indicative of the experiences I was exposed to throughout my life. The agave plant, specifically *Agave americana*, is a sacred plant to me personally and will always inspire me with its multifunction and beauty. When it comes to artists, it's hard to say specific people because I take inspiration from all makers, regardless of medium, such as printmakers, weavers, and tattoo artists. Green River Pottery, Perro y Arena, Leah Leitson, and Not Work Related are all very inspirational clay people. I'm also heavily influenced by the tile and talavera work in Mexico and my hometown.



*jupiter bowls*

**You are the owner of Agave Muerto Clay. When did you start your business and what do you enjoy most about it?**

I started my business at the very end of 2020 when I decided to move back to San Antonio from Santa Fe, New Mexico. I enjoy that I get to make my own schedule. I also enjoy the fact that people genuinely want to use something I've made with my two hands in their home. People apparently really like the things that I make and want to utilize them in their lives. I also just really love having a job that allows me to use my hands. I love the grittiness and physicality. I hate the administrative and logistic work that comes with it, but it's worth it.

**In addition to owning Agave Muerto Clay, you also teach classes at your studio. What advice do you have for beginners in ceramics?**

I'd say to slow down. Daily life pace is vastly different from clay pace. Let go of instant gratification and accept that clay takes a long time. And keep your back straight! Get your posture in check. And if something you're working on has a crack or you're spending a lot of time on one piece to try and fix it, throw it away. Learn to let go. You'll get better with each piece you make, move on, you'll make a better one next round.



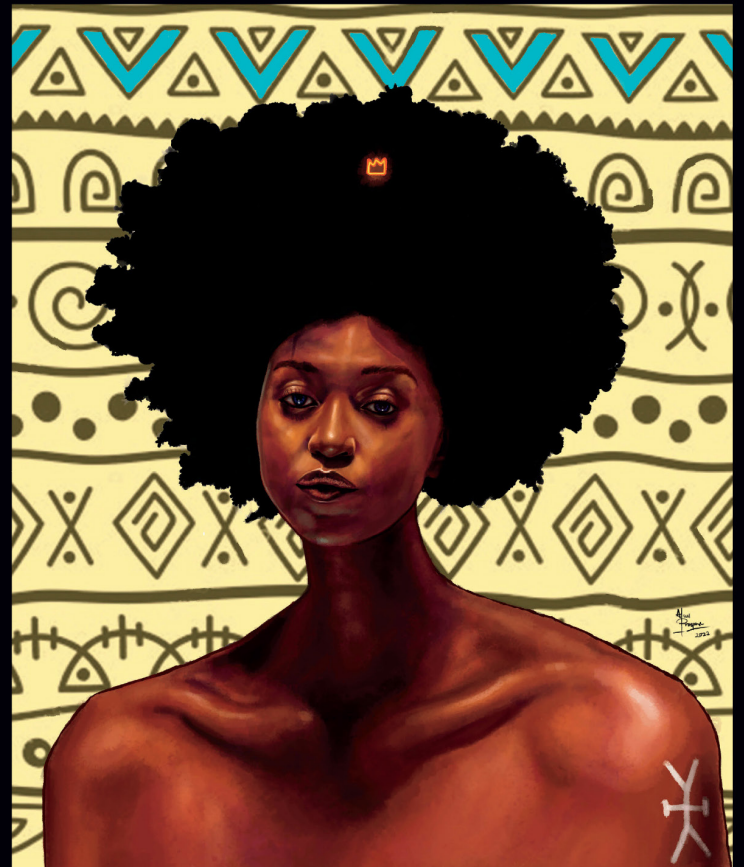
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"They Stood for Love"  
by Beth Seilonen

**VOICES DE LA LUNA BELIEVES  
THAT POETRY HEALS AND  
ARTS ADVANCE THE QUALITY  
OF LIFE.**



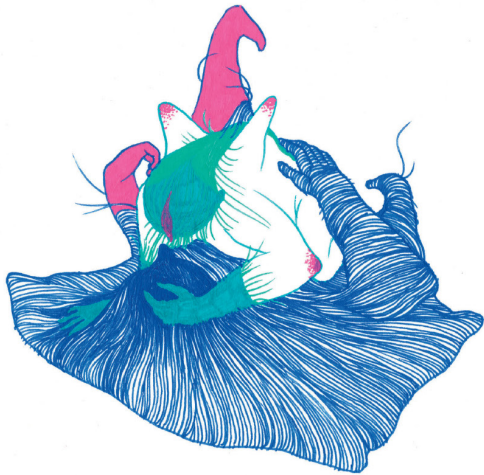
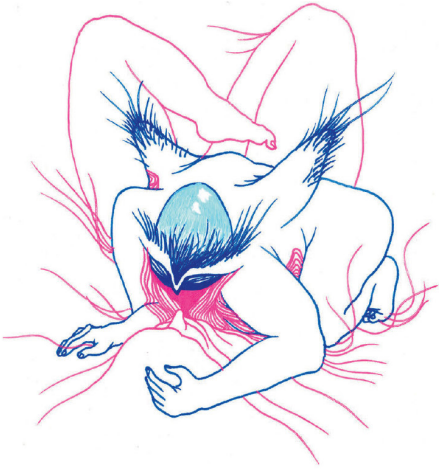
"Rough Hair"  
by Prosper Aluu

*Prosper Aluu makes figurative and expressive paintings. His stylized figures show the use of the artistic devices of elongation and exaggeration and his unique style of painting the iconic afro hairstyle. These are his ways of celebrating and negotiating African identity.*



**Kristen Herrington**

"Beyond the Limbs"  
"Gentle Opulence"  
"Practice Makes Progress"



**Rachel Mulder**

"Robin's Egg"  
"Sacred Exchange"  
"Playtime"







"AT THE EXPENSE OF LOSING MY SANITY"  
- I tried to swim to you. Didn't work.



"FULL RED FOREST"  
- I sleep on your side of the bed



"MERMAID SECRETS"  
- Today I had the privilege of visiting a place that you've been to a lot.

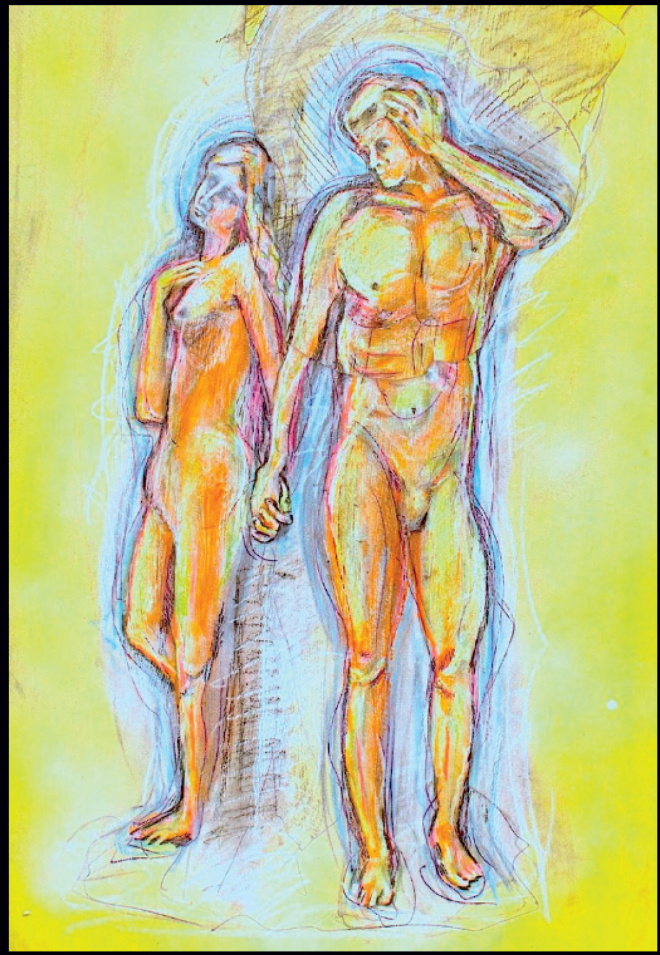
Jorge Luna was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico. At the age of seven he was inspired by a virtuoso circus performance by a troupe called *Círculo*. His first camera was a Kodak Ektralite 10 when he was around twelve years old.

*Each photograph includes its own dedicated epistle—an electronic love letter—98 days tries to encompass my never ending struggle to find what kind of person I become in solitude while missing my life partner. I found myself with this effort— I did. What I found was disastrous, unsightly, yet beautifully engaging. I was fortunate to have experienced this life-changing event and that, at the same time, I was able to refocus my plight towards pushing my artistry. A kind of endeavor therapy.*

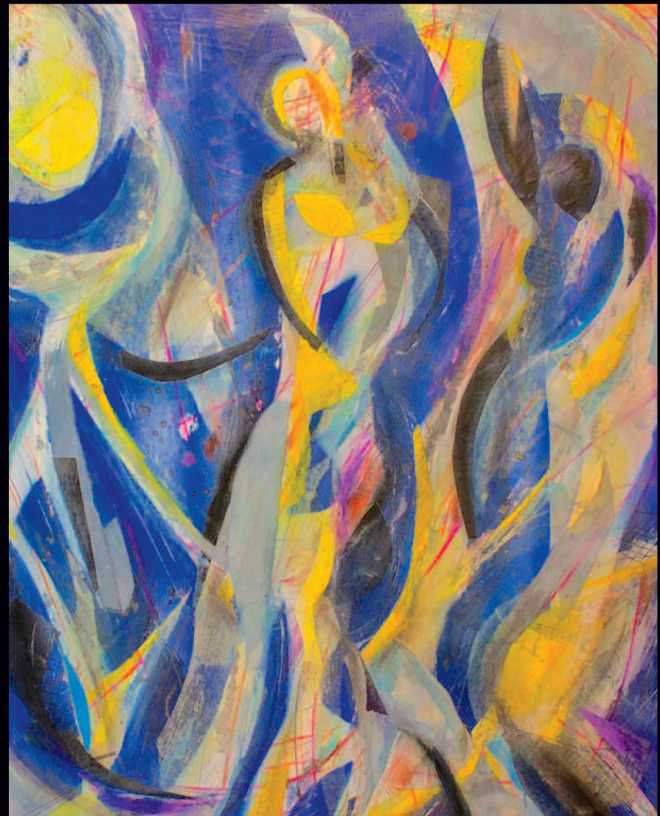




GJ Gillespie is a collage artist living in a 1928 Tudor Revival farmhouse overlooking Oak Harbor on Whidbey Island (north of Seattle).



"mother"  
"Soon Its Going to Rain"  
"Siren Song"





# Short Fiction

## My Father's Story

Cyndy Muscatel

Rain pelted Sidney's jacket, seeping under his collar as he hurried down the cobbled street. The clang of the trolley warned him to move aside. Still, his pants were sprayed with slush. One day he'd have enough money to ride the trolley.

"No!" he said aloud. "One day I won't need to ride the trolley. I'll have my own car."

He straightened his thin shoulders and continued on his way. The further he went, the shabbier the surroundings became. Holly Street, where his father had his clothing store, bordered Old Town, one of the roughest areas in Bellingham.

As Sidney turned the corner, he saw his father standing in front of his store. Papa had asked him to come by after school. All day Sidney had wondered why.

"Sidneyla," Papa called as he saw him. "Hurry, it's cold."

When they were inside, Papa led him to the potbellied stove.

"Your hands! They are red with the cold," Papa said. "Where are your gloves? Your mother would die if she saw your hands. A concert pianist must always protect his hands."

Sidney shrugged. His gloves were too small so he'd given them to his little brother. It was March and the weather would get warmer soon. As for being a concert pianist? His mother's dream, not his. He played well, but he knew he didn't have what it took to be great. He wasn't a little boy anymore who believed everything his parents said. Besides, he knew the future he wanted. He would go into business and make a fortune.

As he held his hands to the meager heat generated from the stove, Sidney looked around Papa's store. Stacks of Levi's jeans and bundles of flannel work shirts lay helter-skelter on wooden countertops. The cash register, with its elaborate metal curlicues, was covered in dust.

My business, Sidney vowed, will never look like this. I'll polish my business until it shines.

"Drink a little of this schnapps. It'll warm you up."

Papa, holding out a small glass, brought Sidney back from the future.

"Whiskey? It's illegal."

Papa shook his head. "Don't worry. Prohibition is the least of my problems."

"Where did you get the whiskey?" Sidney asked, not sure he wanted to know his father's problems.

"Mrs. Jones always has a steady supply," Papa said.

Mrs. Jones was better known as Madame Jones. She and her girls lived above Papa's store. When Sidney went to collect for the newspaper, he always tried to peek in and see what went on up there.

Sidney took a tentative sip. "Papa, what's going on? Why did you have me come here today?"

"I've made a plan," Papa said. "I want you to know about it."

"What kind of plan?"

Papa hesitated for a moment, then spoke in a low voice. "I am going to burn down the store."

Sidney's hand jerked at his father's words. Whiskey spilled onto the floor.

"Are you kidding?" he said. "You're thinking of burning down the store?"

"Shh, not so loud. This must be a secret between you and me."

"Papa, why would you do this?"

"I need the insurance money. To pay bills. To send you and your brother to college one day."

"I'm fourteen. Sollie's twelve. You don't have to worry about that now," Sidney said.

"It's not just that." Papa gestured around the empty store. "It's the nineteen-twenties. Things are changing fast."

"What does that mean?"

"I'm just a one-man outfit. People don't come in anymore. They go to Sears, to Penny's. I'm washed up."

"That's terrible, but there must be some other solution," Sidney said. "Run a sale. Go to the bank and get a loan!"

"I already ran a sale. It didn't do any good. And Mr. Gillespie at the bank said no more loans. No, this is the only way left. My plan is fool proof."

Papa crossed to the front door and locked it. Then he flipped the sign to Store Closed.

"Follow me," he said.

He shuffled across the heavily oiled floor. With trepidation, Sidney trailed behind him. In the back of the store, a ladder leaned against a brick wall. His father put his foot on the bottom rung and began to climb. Halfway up, he put his hand out, running it across the bricks. At his touch, one of the bricks moved. Papa pulled it out. He repeated this process with five other bricks.

"Come look," he said.

Sidney peered up and saw two shelves hidden by the bricks. A metal moneybox sat on the bottom one. A white candle, set in the center of a coil of darkened rope and birch chips, was on the top shelf.

"See." Papa's eyes filled with a gleam that frightened Sidney. "The candle will burn down to the rope, which I have oiled up pretty good."

"But what if Mrs. Jones and the girls upstairs get trapped?" Sidney pointed to the wooden flooring. "With this floor, the store would go up in a flash."

"This is a fire that will have much smoke. Everyone will have plenty warning to get out!"

Sidney shook his head. "Papa, please. You can't be serious. Can't you just go bankrupt?"

Papa looked scandalized. "I would never do that. Being bankrupt is a terrible thing. Think how it would look for our family. Even Mama's people back in Boston would hear about it."

"Going to jail for arson or being hanged for murder is a lot worse."

"Don't worry, my son. Everything will be fine. I'm not going to get caught."

Sidney stared at his father as if he were a stranger. "How can you talk like this? You always say you hate violence. You can't even cut off the head of a chicken so Mama can fix supper."

"That is disgusting to see the blood. With this, no one will get hurt."

"How can you be sure of that? You can't. If you don't stop this crazy talk, I'm going to tell Mama."

Papa looked at him for a minute. Then he sighed. He replaced the bricks, one by one, with a careful concentration.

When he again stood beside his son, he patted Sidney's arm. "You are right. Forget I ever talked to you."



Sidney nodded. He turned and left the store without another word. He had piano to practice and chores to do.

\*\*\*\*\*

Over the course of the next few months, Sidney tried not to think of his father's plan. He was successful most of the time. But they lived near the Whatcom County Fire Station. Once or twice, when the fire engines sped past their house, Sidney couldn't help thinking of that hidden candle, the coiled rope—and the girls.

One early Sunday morning, sirens awakened him. Since it was almost time to get up for his paper route, he dressed and let himself out the front door. Smoke billowed from the direction of Old Town.

He ran back inside. "Papa," he called, "Papa?"

His father opened his bedroom door. "Yes, Sidney. What is it?" "There's a fire in Old Town, probably near your store."

"I'll get dressed," Papa said.

They didn't talk as they hurried down the street. As soon as they reached the outskirts of Old Town, they smelled the smoke. When he saw that Holly Street was blocked by a fire truck, Sidney's feeling of dread increased. The flames shooting from his father's building made him certain his father had followed through with the plan.

He gave his father an accusing look. "Mrs. Jones and her girls."

Papa held up his hands. "I didn't..."

Sidney cut him off. "I just hope they're all safe."

He turned away from the fire, sickened by what he saw, and found one of his fears unfounded. The Madame and her girls stood across the street. She was talking to Mr. Gillespie, the banker.

His father started towards them. Sidney followed.

Betty, Mrs. Jones's maid, stood next to her boss, wringing her hands. "It's all my fault. It never would have happened if I was there, but my Charlie was so sick, I just had to go home," she said.

"Betty, don't go blaming yourself. It's not your fault one of the girls fell asleep with a cigarette. Anyway, we'll be back in business by tomorrow night," Mrs. Jones said. She winked at the banker.

A man with a small notebook moved towards his father.

"Hey, Sam," the man called, "what happened?"

Papa talked to the reporter and to Mr. Eriksson, the insurance man, when he arrived. Mr. Gillespie talked to Papa and so did Mrs. Jones. Sidney, it seemed, was the only person in all of Bellingham not talking to him.

On the way home, Papa tried to take his hand, but Sidney snatched it away, and ran on ahead.

The next morning when he went to pick up his load of newspapers, Sidney saw the front-page headline of *The Bellingham Review*: "Burning Cigarette Destroys Building." He scanned the story—no mention of a candle or arson. For the first time in 24 hours, he could take a deep breath.

Instead of selling the last paper, Sidney took it home. Papa was asleep on the couch when Sidney came in.

"Papa, wake up. See what the newspaper says," Sidney said.

Papa opened one eye and scanned the headlines. A small smile turned up the corners of his mouth. Without a word, he rolled over and went back to sleep.

Sidney tiptoed out, smiling too. Papa was going to get the insurance money and he hadn't done anything illegal to get it.

\*\*\*\*\*

For 40 years, they never mentioned the fire again. But in 1962, Papa's kidneys started to fail. Sidney drove to Bellingham from Seattle in his Rolls Royce.

In the hospital, he was shocked to see how his father's skin had yellowed in the three months since he'd seen him. Sidney held a glass of water to his father's lips.

His father took a sip. "Ah, Sidney, you're such a good boy. You always were such a good boy."

"Dad, what are you talking about?"

His father coughed. "I've wanted to tell you something for a long time. Nobody will get hurt now. Most are gone."

"Okay, Dad. But don't tire yourself."

"Don't worry, my son. I don't have much time left and I want to tell you about the store, when it burned down."

Sidney frowned. "What about it?"

"I never did burn down the store."

"I remember. It was a cigarette."

His father shook his head. "No, Sally Jones did it."

"The Madame? But why?"

"Gillespie, the banker, he had built that beautiful Hotel Victoria and wanted Sally to be his partner. The trouble was she had three years left on her lease and she couldn't break it." His father's voice was so weak, Sidney had to lean over to hear him.

"I thought it was Gillespie who owned your building," he said.

"No, Gillespie's bank held the mortgage."

"Okay, but what makes you think Mrs. Jones was the one?"

"She told me. On the night Betty was off, she left a white candle burning near some curtains. When she saw the flames had caught, she got the girls out."

The same little smile lit up his father's face that Sidney remembered from 40 years before. He also remembered a white candle, a rope, and birch chips hidden in a brick wall.

"Dad, where did Mrs. Jones get the candle?" Sidney asked.

There was only silence from the bed.

"Dad?"

Sidney leaned closer. "Papa?"

But his father had fallen asleep, and Sidney never had the chance to ask the question again.

## The Arrowhead

*Ed Patterson*

Thirteen-year-old Raymond O'Riley's father takes a left turn off the two-lane highway, crossing the bumpy Norfolk Southern rail lines and continuing on past the "POSTED No Trespassing" signs that line the narrow dirt road. Like a hunting dog waiting to spring out of the car, Raymond waits impatiently in the front seat to start his quest on this early November afternoon. "Here ya go," says his dad. "This is a good spot."

When the car finally rolls to a stop over half a mile from the highway, Raymond steps out of the brown '76 Plymouth Volaré into the gray country of late fall. He looks out over the wide, sweeping field to the distant river.

"My first real Indian treasure hunt!" he says. His imagination takes flight as he envisions miles of Native American teepees and rising smoke on the shore down by the lazy brown Susquehanna River.

The whole freshly plowed field is his to explore. Row upon row

of leveled waves of dirt before him are open for him to hunt. Nothing will stop him. He has always wanted to touch something from buried history. Something to break himself free from his everyday life.

His dad grabs his shotgun from the back seat and snatches up a handful of red 12-gauge shotgun shells. "I'm going up the hill for a few hours. If you get cold, stay in the car. I'll be back when it gets dark. Hope you find an arrowhead."

But the POSTED signs loom, and Raymond feels a strange crawling sensation under his skin. He looks over his shoulder and thinks: *Some farmer owns this land, and maybe the railroad had it before they did. Now, no one'll know I'm here. Who's to see me anyway?... I can take what I want!*

The late-afternoon sun is bright and warm. Raymond sheds his red windbreaker, peels off his sweatshirt, and pushes up his sleeves. He tosses the sweatshirt into the back seat and ties the sleeves of the windbreaker around his waist. He watches his dad walk past the No Trespassing signs, cross the railroad tracks, and head beyond the two-lane highway to the hill.

Raymond laces up his calf-high rubber boots and walks into the field, his bright eyes hungry for treasure. He hunches over to inspect the rich soil, searching for odd shapes edging up from the ground. He pulls up the clod of an old cornstalk and finds a broken white clay pipe.

*This is a great spot! If this was gold, I'd be rich!* His adrenaline quickens as he searches for the next artifact. An arrowhead! A one-and-a-half-inch, precisely chipped arrowhead of black flint. He rubs off the crumbling dirt and holds it up to the lowering sun like an offering. Raymond breathes in the clean earth from the ancient sharp stone. *My first arrowhead!*

He is proud of his find and wants to keep hunting, but the darkening sky is stealing his shadow. He's losing daylight fast. A murder of crows flies over the field, and he feels the crawling under his skin again, as if he is being watched. "Who's there?" he shouts, turning around. Nobody. Nothing but the long shadows, the wind, and the crows sitting on a broken maple tree watching him from across the field. "Whatever..." he shrugs dismissively.

Soon his cotton-lined windbreaker isn't enough to ward off the increasingly sharp, cold wind buffeting his face and chest. He zips the jacket and flips the collar up. *I should go to the car, unload my pockets, and grab my sweatshirt.* As he looks back toward the Volaré, he spots another artifact, forgets about the sweatshirt, and rushes to unearth it.

Suddenly his feet sink into soil still wet from the prior night's rain and he can't move. The cementing muddy ooze has trapped his legs.

As the wind howls, the strange crawling returns. Raymond holds onto the treasures in his pockets to keep them safe. He feels nothing but the biting pain of his cold ears, hands, and face. He can't move his legs without going knee-deep or worse.

"I'm stuck! How can I get back to the car?" he whines out loud. The brown Volaré sits, safe and warm, out of reach.

Gray clouds whip overhead in a dangerous rush. A squall is turning. Like a whelp, Raymond's chattering teeth open, and he lets out a primal cry. "H...eill...p! Daaaad!" Hoping to be heard, fear tightens his throat. His screams scare him and the sitting crows look menacingly upon him.

His eyes water and his legs shake. Raymond's naked face, ears, and hands have no protection against the fierce wind, and the cold stones in his pockets have lost their allure.

The murder of crows fills his head with a *caw-cawing* cacophony. Their ominous calls grow louder as they wait for Raymond's surrender. *Are they laughing at me, or are they waiting for me to...die?*

"This fucking sucks! I'm stuck! I can't move!" he blurts. His uncontrollable shaking is not keeping him from feeling frozen to death. "No one can hear me. No one can see me!" he mutters. "These Indians have been long gone, and all I have is their junk!" Raymond closes his watering eyes and lowers his head.

His forbidden treasures and hopeless thoughts weigh him down. *The Indians are dead! They can't help. Nothing can help me!*

"Auuggghh!" Raymond yells into the deaf wind.

He tries to fight his paralyzing fear and frustration. Suddenly he throws the stones and the broken clay pipe, one by one, toward the Volaré as an insane release. Defeated.

Hunger hits him like a hammer. His fading energy and the steely cold slow his breathing.

*Caw-caw...Ray-Ray-mond...*

"Those stupid crows...keep calling my name."

The wind clutches the back of his neck. He can't stop the chill.

Time slips in his delirium. Raymond sees himself as a thin red frame, looking like a lonely scarecrow from the cars driving by over half a mile away on the highway, no one able to hear him or help him.

"D...aaa...d?!" he yells again at the distant hill. Nothing. A hopeful truck comes closer, and then it, too, drives away without a care.

Anger flares in Raymond like a match. Savagely he thinks, *Why did I do this? Yes, I wanted to find arrowheads, but why today? Why did Dad say this was a good place? Why didn't he warn me I might get stuck in this field? He doesn't care! He's off hunting and can't help me. I'm freezing and I'm gonna die...!*

The wind bristles Raymond's thin, brown hair. He rubs his stinging red ears. His eyes are full of alarm. "I can't cry. I won't cry. I can't..." His tears sting.

Suddenly the crows take off from the dead tree, rising like a black cloud. The strange crawling sensation has taken hold again, and he wonders: *What spooked them? Is a farmer coming? I'll get caught!* "Who's there? Somebody...help me!"

Nobody answers his call.

Alone in the open field, Raymond's hands have turned from pink to blue. He buries them deeper in his windbreaker pockets. His nearly frostbitten right fingers stab with pain.

The eye-popping sting pierces Raymond's consciousness. He pulls a small, forgotten arrowhead into his palm and instinctively grips the arrowhead's sharpened edges. His raw fingers and thumb rub every chipped edge up and down.

Raymond feels the warmth of his blood mixing with the dirt and stone. His blood warms the arrowhead. The stone's power warms his bones. He senses this arrowhead brightening his darkness as it cuts a path to his heart.

His heartbeat is pounding in his chest, like war drums along the Susquehanna before a great battle. Raymond slowly raises his head and faces the purple light.

A rising power. A warrior's cry fills Raymond's soul. His calm fury is one with the arrowhead.

Then, like a clarion trumpet, a flock of Canada geese flies in over his head. They circle in their V pattern to touch down at the lower end of the field. His right fingers and thumb passionately

rub the V of the arrowhead, as if each stroke is one of the geese coming to his rescue. He watches the leader land his flock safely on the ground.

As the sky darkens, Raymond fights to live. He raises his right leg. The sucking, soaked dirt grips his thin rubber boot. He feels his cotton sock almost coming off his foot halfway up the boot. The lower empty boot collapses like a flat tire.

Raymond sinks his right foot back in and works his foot sideways. He sways his legs and torso sideways as if he's in a trance. The earth breaks to his weight and the power in his circular warrior dance. He swiftly pulls his right leg up and out of the mud, and his right foot lifts out of the boot. Luckily, his left leg holds his balance while he lifts his vulnerable right leg free over the dark mud.

*I've only got one chance to yank my boot out, or I'm gonna fall in this shit.* Raymond swings his arms out for balance. He leans backward toward his earlier footsteps. His empty right boot is still stuck, and his white-socked right foot is hanging in the open cold. He cautiously arches back with two left fingers under the tied boot laces. He pulls. The empty, collapsed boot holds in the dark earth and tips his balance. His muscles ache as he regains his one-legged stance. He pulls harder and angrily hollers, "This won't *bury* me!"

The wind switches and pushes Raymond forward. The suction lets go and his right boot gives way.

The young warrior places his right boot in his back right foot-step. Continuing his wanton dance, he shifts his weight and slides his white-stockinged foot into the green rubber boot. It's almost warm.

From left to right and right to left, Raymond feels the solid ground climbing back underfoot. He looks behind as he gains momentum walking backward and traces each step closer to higher ground.

His final stumbling steps slam him into the Volaré's headlights. He gasps a heavy, "I survived! I made it...back!" Exhaustion overwhelms him.

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Raymond opens the driver's door and turns on the headlights. He opens his soiled and bleeding palm and examines his arrowhead in the bright lights. Then he looks back across the dark field in disbelief at the one-way track leading into middle earth. "I almost...died...out there. I made those footprints but...they're not mine."

The wind has stopped. White snowflakes float down, one by one, and kiss Raymond's head. It is cold but the crawling sensation is gone. Smiling slightly, he goes back and picks up his discarded artifacts.

Soon his father appears in silhouette, approaching from the distant highway. He waves and calls out, "Raymond! Raymond!" as the soft snow falls between the two men like a veil. Raymond climbs into his father's seat, takes the keys out of the center console, and fires up the Volaré.

## **My Wife's Hip Replacement**

*Matthew Wherttam*

My wife, Julie, needed to replace her cartilage-less right hip but didn't want to be sliced open, so I wasn't badgering her about it. Like lots of other little old ladies, she waddled when she walked,

and she waddled on account of her bad hip; and just like those other little old ladies, she was made grim by all the pain. But there were still other old women who looked jolly, even when they were waddling. They could have been waddling because they were overweight. And maybe they had gotten overweight because they were jolly. As you probably know, Betty Boop has taught us that you get fat when you laugh too much. She even sang a song about it: "Keep Your Girlish Figure."

My grandmother was fat. But she also had a cartilage-less hip. And when she waddled she looked grim. Then her asshole son-in-law talked her and the rest of the family into having her bad hip surgically replaced back when such surgery was not much more than experimental. She died. And the rest of the family became furious. Back then I was too young to be furious, but I was old enough to be confused.

After Julie crashed her car on account of her bad and painful right hip, she found an orthopedic surgeon who replaced that hip and sent her home the same day. It was winter. She slept that night on the sofa in our first-floor living room. No going up and down any stairs for her. Her new hip was too new. The next morning, though, she fainted while rising from the toilet in our ridiculously small, first-floor powder room. She smacked her head against the powder room wall on her way down and also tangled her legs up enough to make us all suspect that her new right hip might have come undone.

My daughter Beth had been beside her as she was going down. In fact, she slipped through Beth's fingers.

Beth was the wrong person to have seen that. She already saw cancer in every callus and wart, so seeing her mother's eyes roll back in her head while she was fainting hadn't been cool.

She called 911 and the police and the paramedics arrived. They arrived simultaneously.

They were all in uniforms; they were all fat; and they were all wearing masks on account of the pandemic. They had arranged themselves like bowling pins on my front steps, and when I opened the door, they tumbled in. Then two of the paramedics began yelling at each other through their masks. Was this the way first responders usually responded?

Their argument was heated but not overheated, and the police had sense enough to retreat back outside my front door.

A tall, fat, black paramedic, who was the leader of the paramedical team, was one of the two guys yelling. He was arguing with a short, fat, white guy. He shut him up. That white guy was more than fat. He was bulging. His fleshy cheeks stuck part way out of his mask and crowded up and around his tiny, gray eyes. Santa Claus's cheeks bunch up a lot, but he is not ordinarily arguing with people, and he does not usually wear a mask.

And aside from the yelling, why was every paramedic on that paramedical team fat? Shouldn't they have been thin? They are supposed to be bringers of good health. Shouldn't they at least have looked the part? Don't barbers usually have good haircuts? Don't tailors wear well-fitting clothes? And aren't leading ladies and leading men usually fun to see when you're at the movies and you want to be seeing people who are fun to look at? So, again, why were these paramedical guys so fat? And even if they had little interest in their own health, shouldn't they at least have been thin enough to get quickly to any artery that was spurting blood? That contentious, fat, white guy wasn't getting anywhere in a hurry.

The tall, fat, black guy took my wife's pulse and blood pressure,



shined a penlight into her eyes, and then told her she had probably not suffered a concussion but she should return to her hospital anyway. But she wasn't agreeing to that. In her opinion, her hospital and all other hospitals were no safer than long stretches of quicksand. Fortunately, that fat, black guy and the rest of his fat paramedical team didn't press the issue. They left. And they left with the police. They all left en masse, like a football team that had just given up a touchdown.

But Beth kept insisting that Julie go back to her hospital. Beth interrupted her own badgering only long enough to announce that that short, fat, white paramedic had been the biggest jerk in the bunch. He was the fattest. Meanwhile, I began feeding Julie canned and crushed pineapple mixed with cottage cheese. I didn't know it at the time, but our neighbors had seen those paramedics and police come and go, and they must have suspected that some catastrophe may have been in progress. So they wanted to do something nice for us, and in the coming week they brought us enough cake and cookies to make us fat.

Although she had also seen her mother go down, my older daughter, Annie, had not been nearly as alarmed by it as Beth had. Annie, herself, is fat. Not that fat but at least ponderous. And she is also phlegmatic. But while she is phlegmatic, she is not dumb. In fact, she was the first of us to realize we should have had a commode in our living room so that my wife would not have had to use that hard-to-get-to toilet in our ridiculously small, first-floor powder room. And Annie even went to a nearby surgical supply store and bought such a commode and also a battery-powered blood pressure cuff and a thermometer. But that was two days later, and I don't want to get ahead of myself.

After the pineapple and cottage cheese had been inside Julie for a few minutes, she agreed to return to her hospital.

So we all drove back to that hospital, but because those were coronavirus days, Julie was only going to be allowed one visitor at a time. Beth was elected to be that visitor. As I've already suggested, she believes that everyone is on the verge of death for some reason or other, and yet she is also the most levelheaded of the three of us, and that was why she was chosen to be the first visitor. Beth led my wife back into her hospital while Annie and I drove to one of the hospital's many surrounding parking lots.

To pass the time, Annie read me stuff from her smartphone. She loves to read. She could have been an editor except that whenever she finds something she really likes, she reads it again and then reads it some more; as an editor, no good manuscript would ever have gotten beyond her desk and out to market.

She read me stories about "virtual real estate."

"Virtual real estate" is situated in "multiverses." And "multiverses" are universes that are not our universe. And this "virtual real estate" is being bought and sold for millions of dollars in cryptocurrency. And, finally, cryptocurrency is not something you can put in your pocket; it's something that exists in the ether, and fluctuates in value, and can become unreachable if you lose your password, and also can disappear if your cryptocurrency manager has a tendency to steal. This all made sense to me. After all, while Annie was reading this to me, streams of money were electronically flowing into my wife's hospital; its doctors and nurses were looking more at their instruments than at her; those instruments were spitting their own electrons in all different directions. There was something virtual, intangible, and indirect in all that, so why not also have "virtual real estate" located in "multiverses" and being bought with money that is not exactly

there?

My wife was getting X-rays, MRIs, CT scans, and maybe even some multi-axial tomographic imaging to see where that new right hip of hers might have gone awry if, indeed, it had gone anywhere; and while we hoped that at least some of what was being done to her was being done for medical reasons, we knew a lot of it was being done for the benefit of medical malpractice attorneys.

Maybe she had a good case against her doctors and that hospital. Maybe she had collapsed because she had become dehydrated. And maybe she had become dehydrated because she had not been given enough to drink after she had been cut up. She had waited a long time to get into one of that hospital's recovery rooms and onto an intravenous bag. And that could have been because her hospital had been too full of other cut up people to fit them all into recovery rooms all at once. And in his closing arguments, a dazzling medical malpractice attorney might be able to convince a dazzle-able jury that that profit-mongering hospital and its doctors would have allowed my wife to shrivel into a fig if it meant a bigger bottom line for them.

I will concede that even in a perfect world, orthopedic surgeons should be allowed to replace more than one hip per day. And in that same day, they should even be allowed some time on a golf course. But since she had collapsed, shouldn't my wife's surgeon now be questioning the density of his own schedule and the overall density of the cut up and waiting patients who filled his hospital each day? And shouldn't he be reconsidering his practice of replacing an entire hip and then sending his patient home that very same day?

Doctors and nurses now have dominion over too much fancy machinery and too much graph paper. Too many computers and TV screens come between them and their patients. It leads to overconfidence and inattention. Medieval barber surgeons, on the other hand, cut our hair, pulled our aching teeth, and chopped away all the lumps in our faces and throats; and even though they also sent us home the same day, at least they didn't bother us with all sorts of fancy machinery. And our *medical records* back then were whatever remained in our barber surgeon's drunken head the next time we needed a haircut. Best of all, there were no lawyers back then—at least no medical malpractice lawyers. Centuries went by before any lawyer ever asked any doctor what in hell he had actually been doing to his patients. Priests had been at center stage back in the Middle Ages. Doctors were killing us but that was okay because in those days, God was actually deciding whether and when we were going to die. And after we died priests were saying things in Latin and putting us into the ground and then saying more things in Latin.

Beth got tired and I became my wife's next sole visitor.

Hearing about "virtual real estate" and "multiverses" and cryptocurrency and being with Annie had been fun. But I was glad I was the next visitor and not Annie because if Annie had gone next, Beth and I would then have been alone together waiting in the car, and Beth and I never have much fun when we are alone together. She's too able to hate me, and I too often deserve it.

My wife's X-rays and CT scans and MRIs were finally all taken, and toward evening it was decided that she would stay in her hospital overnight.

That hospital was more crowded that day than it had been the day before, and so she and many other cut up people were again waiting for too few beds in too few recovery rooms. And while they



were waiting, they were being stored in rolling beds along a wall in a dim and crowded hallway and being bumped every now and then by other beds being wheeled on through. That hallway was like a funeral parlor filled with coffins that contained bodies that were almost but not quite dead. And the light in that hallway was dirty yellow, and it flickered from time to time. And so Julie appeared and disappeared like an actor in one of those early, herky-jerky, silent movies.

Every one of us in that hallway was masked on account of the pandemic. Some of us were already infected, and others of us were going to be infected, but we were all masked. And the only place in that entire hospital that had any chance of actually being covid-free was a special covid-free wing. So my wife was now waiting to be sent to a room in the covid-free wing. And if, hypothetically, the covid-free wing had been in one of those multiverses Annie had been reading about, then it might actually have been covid-free, and its only viruses would have been computer viruses.

The light in that hospital hallway really was half-hearted, and when evening fully arrived, that light lost still more of its enthusiasm. The walls of that hallway were beige or tan or some other such color, and as the minutes ticked by, things were not getting any cheerier. Not many of those cut up people along the hospital hallway were being wheeled away to recovery rooms, and as their rollable beds accumulated, they and their beds began to look to me like planes at a rainy airport where no one is getting cleared for takeoff. Too few nurses were doing too many things to too many patients and nothing much was happening. When a doctor did appear, which was rare, he looked less like a doctor and more like a sports referee on a field surrounded by unhappy athletes and an unhappy and unruly crowd of spectators. His stethoscope looked like a whistle, and his clipboard could well have been filled with the rules of the game rather than any information about any of those cut up people lining the walls.

My wife had a specific nurse. Her name was Danielle or Desiree or something else starting with a 'D.' She was quite pretty and well-built and genuinely pleased to be attending to my wife, whom she called "ladybug" because she looked so small under her hospital blankets. It was good that this nurse was cheery. It was good that anyone in that hallway was cheery. Many years earlier my favorite uncle had been in a hospital and had also looked tiny in his hospital bed. He was jaundiced—very jaundiced. Before they let me in to see him, they warned me he was jaundiced. But it turned out that he was yellower than the long pages of a legal pad. I was not happy to see that. He had to cheer me up!

There was humming and clicking and clinking and dripping and other subdued, medico-mechanical noises going on in my wife's action-packed and yet static hallway; and since she had been doped up all day, she was, by now, not saying much for long stretches of time, so I began listening to other conversations.

Somewhere in the nearby shadows, a gaggle of nurses were telling each other that earlier a man had arrived in the emergency room with \$16,000 in cash in his winter coat, and if they could have figured out how to make off with his cash, they could now be in Las Vegas having all sorts of fun.

An old man in a nearby bed was talking through his mask and into his cell phone and saying:

"Now dear, in the bottom left drawer of the desk in my study is a blue tin of my finest pipe tobacco, which you must take at once

to my friend Howard..."

And then he fell silent and he stayed silent. And then he said:

"Yes, dear. I am forgetting about my tobacco now. I am forgetting about it, and I am concentrating on getting better instead."

Another patient, a ghostly lady lying in a ghostly bed, was also talking through her covid mask into her cell phone. She was speaking very rapidly in a foreign language that was not Spanish, French, or Italian. Her tone was urgent. She had quite a lot to say. And she was speaking with too much energy to be dying any time soon. Maybe the person at the other end of her line was about to die.

That hospital hallway was now positively bursting with activity—expensive and billable activity. And amid all that activity, nothing was changing. My wife had become impossible to talk to. Her serious thoughts were gone, and the single words she was saying now and then weren't making much of an impression on me either.

At 8 p.m. visiting hours were over. That's what the hospital's scratchy public address system said. A very fat and masked security officer in a uniform materialized, and that dreary hallway became even less fun to be in. I wanted to remain near my wife, but I also wanted to get the hell out of there. A second fat and masked security officer then joined the first one. Fat, masked men in uniform were, apparently, the order of the day. Those two fat security guards were not looking directly at me, but they were looking in my direction. Other visitors were saying goodbye and departing, so I got up to leave. I touched Julie lightly. I was afraid I might break her. Then she asked me to ask Danielle or Desiree for something, but her nurse was busy with another patient's instruments, so without waiting for her to turn around, I announced that my wife wanted her, and then I left without waiting for her to answer me. In fact, things were so poorly lit in that hallway that I wasn't sure whether Danielle or Desiree had actually been busy with another patient's instruments. She could have been getting her own smartphone out and fired up so that she would be ready to buy plane tickets to Las Vegas the instant the next guy with \$16,000 in cash arrived at the emergency room.

When I was altogether gone from that particular hallway and into other cluttered and gloomy parts of that hospital, I encountered still more masked, fat men in uniforms. They didn't seem surprised to see me, so I kept walking, taking care not to pass through any doors marked *Doctors and Nurses Only*. I must have been going in sort of the right direction because I finally found myself outside that hospital and inside a cold, dark winter night but nowhere near my car or my daughters. That hospital had smelled and even tasted like antiseptics, antiseptics that hadn't been killing off coronavirus.

I was now staggering around like a drunkard. That hospital had acres of parking lots and acres and acres of parked cars. And all the things around me were not well lit. My hours with my wife had been worse than the time, long ago, that I had spent with my very yellow uncle. And now I was lost. I had been lost when my wife crashed down to the floor that morning, and lost amidst all those police and paramedics, and lost in all that "virtual" real estate, and lost in that hospital, and now I was lost in its parking lots, and I was also all alone.

## Reboot

*Rhea Callum*

“Sienna!”

She swung left at the sound of her name, eyes flying to a dark face out of her past, his brown eyes bright in a crinkle of laugh lines. Then her red leather tote slipped off her shoulder, pulling her gaze away as she grappled with it, as she hauled the heavy flat bricks of her latest book proposals up on her shoulder again. She didn’t realize the folder of conference materials was slipping out of her other hand until it was too late.

As all her schedules and brochures hit the floor, she knelt with tears inexplicably pricking the backs of her eyes. She wasn’t ready. They were supposed to meet at the convention center’s café in an hour, after she had taken some time to collect and orient herself to the Science Fiction Writers Association conference. By the time she got to that café, she would look professional, in control of herself and her career, hair down, framing and lengthening her too-round face, neat and maybe even a little pretty.

Right now, she was none of those things. Her skirt suit was askew, her unbrushed hair wound up sloppily out of her way, and now her things were strewn across the floor.

Suddenly he was there beside her, the knees of his khaki pants on the flat commercial carpet, his big mocha-dark hands setting aside his own conference packet to pick up and reassemble hers. He was speaking, apologizing, but she wasn’t registering the words.

Finally, she looked up at him, her cool green eyes flashing amidst a riot of flyaway red curls. Marlon inhaled sharply, as if sucker-punched. She was beautiful, like a Wyeth watercolor, all soft dishevel and shy confusion. He hadn’t expected this sudden desire, the fierceness of it, the twist deep in his gut, the sudden paralysis of his arms and his breath. She had been beautiful thirty years ago, but now she was ... luscious. Lines on her face told stories he suddenly itched to touch, wanted to discover.

Of course he had noticed, when they had first begun talking about movies, politics, and their writing over Facebook more than a year ago, that they were both single again — she a widow, he a divorcé. It was an observation he had ruthlessly repressed. After the way he had treated her all those years ago, in his misbegotten young adulthood, there was no reason she would want to go back.

He valued the professional relationship they were building, writer to writer, sharing ideas, critiques, new markets to try. It would be self-sabotaging to jeopardize all that they had rebuilt between them for this rush of hormones he had almost forgotten he could have. He was no stranger to self-sabotage, and this time he was determined to recognize it and nip it in the bud.

Seeing her here, though — in the flesh, flawed and vulnerable and more beautiful than ever.... His body, tensing and stiffening, had other ideas.

“Ma’am?”

Sienna realized she was staring at Marlon, at his broad nose, thick lips, close-cropped beard. She wanted to touch the dense bristle, remembering how, as a young co-ed, she had not been able to keep her hands off his long goatee, so much softer than it looked.

“Ms. Seville?”

In a back corner of her mind, she understood that she still had to finish her registration.

As she and Marlon rose slowly to their feet, she noted that he, too, needed to grip the table edge for leverage. Like hers, his body was thicker, softer, and she was completely unprepared for the hot liquid blossom of desire in her belly. She found a new interpretation of love handles — not the result of good loving and complacency, but flesh that her palms itched to love. She swayed, staggered back a step, unprepared for how powerfully she longed to feel the length of his body against hers.

“You should—” He waved one hand towards the registration table. “I’ll just—” He waved the other pale palm towards the couches near the door.

“Right. Okay.” But it wasn’t until he stepped away that she was able to turn back to the table and, with a deep breath and something a younger woman might call a giggle, turn her brain back to registration. She grinned at the registrar, her blood suddenly humming with the excitement of the day ahead of her.

Marlon made himself sit down in one of the rotunda’s clusters of plush chairs. He made himself stop staring. He got the ever-present notebook out of his bag and tried to be productive, but his body wouldn’t settle. She was beautiful. Not beautiful in the way that she had been as a slim, lithe co-ed with gleaming hair and an overly bright smile. Now she was beautiful in a full, lush, confident way that had less to do with body and more to do with soul.

Yes, he had flustered her when he caught her off-guard. Under it all, though, was confidence, obvious in her minimalist make-up, her simple muss of hair, that bold red folio bag and the way it stood out against her classily modest maroon skirt suit. She had habitually worn heels decades ago when they were dating, always self-conscious about her height, which she considered short and he always thought was perfect. Now she wore practical flats appropriate to walking the conference halls. Everything about her was classy but comfortable.

For the second time, he made himself stop staring, turned his head deliberately away and looked out the window. They were friends now. That was all they could be. He had burned that bridge decades ago. They were friends, colleagues, a mutual admiration and encouragement society. All things that he valued, that he needed more than he needed a romantic entanglement. He didn’t have a great track record there, and he had decided to prioritize his writing life.

Deep in his own spiraling thoughts, Marlon didn’t hear her come up to him, and jumped when she said, “Okay. I’m registered.”

He stood quickly, acutely conscious of the proximity of her body to his, the literal and emotional warmth she radiated, and embarrassed by his carnal thoughts, emotions that he had promised himself would not poison their newly reforming friendship. “Hey, listen, I know I usurped the plan. I just saw you there at registration, realized it was you, and couldn’t stop myself.” Thinking only about how much better she looked than her pictures on Facebook, Marlon’s eyes raked her body. “I can’t believe how—” He stopped himself, meeting her eyes, his cheeks warm. “It’s so great to see you.”

There was so much more he wanted to say, so many questions he wanted to ask, needed to know. Instead, he said, “It’s not too late to get back to the plan. Can I buy you coffee? Maybe a pastry? Do you still like cheese Danish?”

Sienna smiled broadly, revealing lines of pain and laughter from ear to ear. Again, he thought, he wanted to know it all. She said, "Sure."

Marlon's palm flexed, wanting to be pressed against hers, their fingers intertwined. He curled his into a fist instead. Then he thought better of it and extended his hand. "Can I take that bag for you?" he asked, reaching towards her tote. "It looks heavy."

"I should have gotten one of those wheeled totes, but I didn't want to look like the old lady that I—" She stopped abruptly, flushing.

He wanted to tell her she wasn't old. He wanted to tell her that he wanted her as much as when they were twenty-two. Maybe more, because now he was clear-headed, sober, wiser.

Instead, as she let him take her bold red bag, he changed the subject. "A bag this heavy? These must be manuscripts or proposal packets. What are you pitching?" He gestured for her to precede him towards the small café on the far side of the conference center rotunda.

"There are four proposals that I'm shopping around, all very different, three of them complete manuscripts. My fantasy epic, the one I've been rewriting over and over again since middle school. You were right, all those years ago. I wasn't ready to hear it then, but you were right — it had too many characters. Now it follows less than half as many."

Marlon remembered that manuscript. It had been so good even then that it intimidated him. He had downed a lot of beers reading that manuscript, trying to drown his sense of inadequacy, his doubt that a woman of such talents could ever really be happy with a man like him. It had been the beginning of the end for them, and something he had regretted ever since.

Looking ahead and not at Marlon, Sienna went blithely on with her description. "Also a space opera, a boy-meets-girl-meets-aliens adventure."

"I didn't think you wrote hard sci fi," he said, "just fantasy."

Sienna shrugged. "I didn't, back when you knew me before."

He closed his eyes on a sharp kick of regret, a reminder of all the years they could have had together if he had been a better man. He'd had good times in those intervening years, and not for a second could he regret the two smart, thoughtful, caring young women he had raised. Still, he would always wonder how much better it could have been with Sienna.

Marlon dragged himself back to the present moment. "And the third manuscript?"

She looked at him sidelong, hesitantly, blushing. "It's a ... genre cross-over."

"Oh?" He turned his head, watching her face as they walked, but she wouldn't look straight at him. "What genres?"

Blushing, she said, barely more than a mutter, "A fantasy romance. Werewolves."

Marlon laughed. He wanted to wrap his arms around her and twirl her across the conference center corridor, but instead he said, "Well, I always knew you were a romantic, Sienna! And those books sell well, those fantasy romances. Especially werewolves."

She laughed, too. Faintly. "Yeah. That's kind of half the idea right there."

"Nothing wrong with bringing home the bacon, Sienna! We've all got to eat!" He smiled. "So, that's three manuscripts. Those are your completed ones, I presume. What's the incomplete manuscript?"

Incredibly, her red-headed complexion could get even redder, and did.

"You can tell me," he said, trying to keep the laughter out of his voice. "I won't judge you."

After a long pause, she said, "Well... It's got aliens. An alien invasion of Earth, actually." It was clear by her pause that there was something she was reluctant to admit to him.

"Okay..." he said into her silence.

Rolling her eyes, she said, "Okay, fine. It's post-alien-apocalypse erotica!"

He felt his jaw fall open.

Without looking at him, Sienna shrugged. "Look, it started out as a joke, really. When he was in remission, I was ecstatic, but also anxious." He knew she was talking about her late husband, the man she had supported through several rounds of cancer. "I had him back, but he didn't have ... his mojo back, and I..." She bit her lip. "So, well, he dared me to do the most ridiculous thing I could think of with my ... excess energy. It was a joke. But it was really fun, too." She smiled. "And there's money in that. Good money. So, it grew into this ... thing. A novella. So ... here I am, confessing my embarrassing erotica to my ex."

"It can't be that embarrassing," he said, "if you brought the book proposal with you."

She shrugged, still unable to meet his eyes. "I guess. I mean, yes, it's here. But I haven't decided whether I'm going to tell anyone about it — other than you, I guess." They were in line at the café now. "Do you still drink it black with lots of sugar?"

"Uh-uh," he said, edging ahead of her in line, and knowing that she was trying to change the subject. "Yes, I do, but coffee and a pastry are on me, an apology for ambushing you this morning."

They took their coffees and Danish to a small round table right outside the café's glass wall. "How are your girls?" she asked as they sat down.

"They're all right, both in college now. And their mother is ... out of my life now, and mostly out of theirs, too." She saw the naked pain in his eyes, heard the words she knew he would not say out loud about the mother of his two beautiful daughters. Manipulative, controlling, abusive. Sienna knew as much from Facebook, and was sorry to have brought it up.

"And how are you?" he asked, deflecting.

She knew he was asking about her grief, and saw in his eyes the moment that he saw the pain in hers.

"I'm sorry," he said, reaching across the small table to take her hand.

Inappropriately incongruous in that moment, a spark kindled beneath her skin at his touch, a heat that shot straight to the core of her. She watched his eyes watching hers. Watched them darken with desire to match her own.

Without letting herself think too much about it, she said, "It's so good to see you, Marlon. You make me feel young again." Not just young. Desirable. She hadn't felt that for a long time.

"Me, too." With a sudden bright laugh, he said, "We're like the X-Men. Or Star Trek. A reboot."

"Mad Max!" she countered. "Ghostbusters!" She laughed, too. "I do feel like I'm starting over. When we knew each other before, I just wasn't serious about this writing career. Now I'm ready to put in the work."

They went to workshops all day, mostly together, but sometimes



they decided to divide and conquer. Sienna knew she should attend “Finding Your First Literary Agent,” but she couldn’t resist a workshop titled, “Invented Languages: How? How much? How much is too much?” Marlon could give her the crib notes from the former over dinner, well before tomorrow’s “speed pitching” with literary agents. He, in turn, had “The Hero’s Journey” at the top of his priorities, but Sienna had read Joseph Campbell’s book — all of them, actually, and everything George Lucas had ever said on record about the anthropologist — at least a dozen times.

Between workshops, they talked. About the workshops. About their works in progress. About the latest movies they had seen, interesting podcasts they had heard, books they were reading. It wasn’t that different than the conversations they had been having online for well over a year.

Except that everything was different. She couldn’t stop looking at him, smiling at him. When she couldn’t feel the radiant heat of his strong, solid body beside her, she missed it. When he was beside her, she wished he were closer.

At lunch, Marlon finally addressed her grief again. “I don’t know how to.... About your husband....”

Sienna nodded. It had to be broached. “I loved him. He was good to me. As good to me as your ex was awful to you. He made me a better woman, just as your ex shattered you and made you rebuild yourself as a better man.”

“Well, I....” He blushed.

“No, it’s true. I can see it. I could see it months ago in our online friendship. But my husband is as much in my past as she is in yours. Not forgotten, certainly. Not ever. Still a part of me, but gone. My life isn’t over, though. He wouldn’t want that.”

Her husband had made Sienna promise that she would love again, have a sex life again. When she had demurred, said that she would try, he had pulled the old Yoda adage: “There is no try.” He had never believed in the “one true love” myths, and he knew that she never had, either. When Sienna looked at Marlon, at his hopeful eyes and the concerned tilt of his mouth, she wasn’t filled with guilt or betrayal, or even grief. She felt possibility, hope, and surprisingly powerful desire.

As they walked to their first afternoon workshop together, she had a strong urge to hold Marlon’s hand. She almost did.

All too soon, they were regrouping after their last workshops — his on effective freelancing, hers on editing the book proposal. They met outside the café.

“How was it?” she asked brightly.

“Good. Helpful. I think I got a lot of good tips, a few good leads. Yours?”

Sienna nodded. “I have a lot of work to do, I think. I almost want to spend the night rewriting for tomorrow’s speed pitching, but I’m going to resist the urge and wait until I get home.” She shrugged, looked around the rotunda. “So, what now?”

He stepped closer, edging into her personal space, his hands came up, then fell limp at his sides again. “I want to....”

Breathing deep, Sienna tried to ignore the flutter of “I want him to kiss me” deep in her gut.

“Will you go to dinner with me?” Marlon asked instead. “And then, maybe.... Well, I hear they’re showing classic sci fi films at the movie theater down the block, special for the convention folk. What do you say?”

Impulsively, without time for second-guessing, she closed the distance between them and pressed her open hands against his

polo shirt for balance. Rising ever-so-slightly on her toes, she pressed her lips to his. Briefly. Then Marlon took her by the elbows in both hands and kissed her back. Her lips parted, her breath fast and urgent as their tongues touched, then parted.

Almost as suddenly as the kiss had begun, Marlon pulled back. “Can you ever forgive—?”

Sienna smiled, a little sadly. “I forgave you long ago. Long before your Twelve Steps brought you back to apologize. So long ago that I don’t even remember when. I forgive you, Marlon. Always have, as far as I’m concerned.” She didn’t know why there were tears in her eyes and a smile on her face.

But he had the same tears, the same smile. Now, when he kissed her, there was no hesitation. Only passion. She clutched his shirt, pressing close, feeling the solid softness of his body against hers, the warmth of his body as well as the heat of his kiss.

With a sigh, he ended the kiss, pressing his brow to hers for a long moment. They both stepped back, and she could see a million things in his eyes.

“So, dinner and a movie, then?” She was trying to be bright and casually cheerful, but sounded breathless and almost sultry instead. If it was even possible, she flushed even more.

He smiled, his dark eyes still liquid with desire.

“I should warn you, though,” she continued, grasping after her emotional equilibrium, knowing she was perilously close to babbling like a teenager. “I fully expect you to sneak your arm around me during the opening credits, whisper in my ear — but only in the slow parts! — and try to make out with me when the hero gets the girl.”

Marlon’s grin broadened, the desire in his eyes brightening with sparks of laughter. “I love a woman who knows what she wants!”

Then he kissed her again, deep and slow, wrapping both arms securely around her, cradling her head in his palm. It almost made her want to skip dinner and a movie in favor of taking him straight back to her hotel room.

Almost. But Sienna wasn’t a college girl this time. She was a woman who knew what she wanted, and had the self-control to do it right. This time, she and Marlon were going to take it slow. “It’s a date,” she grinned.



**Bardón Book Store, Madrid**

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## Harmon Kelley (1945–2023)

Dr. Harmon Kelley was born in Cameron, Texas, a small town about 70 miles northeast of Austin. His parents owned a grocery store that Kelley worked in as a young man, but he had his sights set on a medical career. After graduating from Prairie View A&M College and serving in the U.S. Army, Kelley was accepted into the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, the only African American student in his class. In 1971 he earned his M.D. degree, and in 1978 he moved to San Antonio, where he established Southeast OB/GYN Associates. For the next 44 years, he served his community on the southeast side of San Antonio.



*Sharecropper*  
Elizabeth Catlett

courtesy of the Kelley Collection

fellow OB/GYN physician and *Voices de la Luna* cofounder Dr. Mo Saidi, he agreed to become the first board chair in *Voices* history. He even offered images from his collection to be used for cover art in some of the earliest issues, like *Sharecropper*, which graced the cover of the March 2010 issue. He continued to be a generous supporter of the organization. *Voices de la Luna* offers our sincerest condolences to his family, especially his wife Harriet and his daughters Dr. Margaret Kelley and Jennifer Kelley.

## Banksy in Kyiv

The prolific—and thus far anonymous—artist known as Banksy apparently visited Kyiv sometime after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. (In)famous for his street art and graffiti that started appearing in the UK—then later in the US, Australia, France, and elsewhere—Banksy has claimed credit for several murals painted on the sides of bombed-out buildings in and around Kyiv. One of his pieces depicts a small boy in a judo outfit throwing an adult man who bears a striking resemblance to Russian president/dictator Vladimir Putin. The connection to Putin is made more obvious by the fact that Putin is an aficionado of the sport of judo, and was even named honorary president of the International Judo Federation, though he was stripped of the title early last year after Russian troops began their invasion of their neighbor to the west. Someone in the Ukrainian government took note of Banksy’s art and transformed it into a postage stamp, which can now be purchased to send letters and packages from Ukraine. As the war enters its second year: Slava Ukraini!



## Two Love Poems from the Song of Songs

How graceful are your feet in sandals,  
O queenly maiden!  
Your rounded thighs are like jewels,  
the work of a master hand.  
Your navel is a rounded bowl;  
may it never lack mixed wine.  
Your belly is a heap of wheat,  
encircled with lilies.  
Your two breasts are like two fawns,  
twins of a gazelle.  
Your neck is like an ivory tower.  
Your eyes are pools in Heshbon,  
by the gate of Bath-rabbim.  
Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon,  
overlooking Damascus.  
Your head crowns you like Carmel,  
and your flowing locks are like purple;  
a king is held captive in the tresses.  
How fair and pleasant you are,  
O loved one, delectable maiden!  
You are stately as a palm tree,  
and your breasts are like its clusters.  
I said, “I will climb the palm tree  
and lay hold of its branches.”  
O may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,  
and the scent of your breath like apples,  
and your kisses like the best wine  
that goes down smoothly,  
gliding over lips and teeth.

I am my beloved’s,  
and his desire is for me.  
Come, my beloved,  
let us go forth into the fields  
and lodge in the villages;  
let us go out early to the vineyards;  
let us see whether the vines have budded,  
whether the grape blossoms have opened  
and the pomegranates are in bloom.  
There I will give you my love.  
The mandrakes give forth fragrance,  
and over our doors are all choice fruits,  
new as well as old,  
which I have laid up for you, O my beloved.

NB: Mandrakes were considered aphrodisiacs. - ed.





**Tierra Espina Agave**  
*Joel Salcido Ruiz*

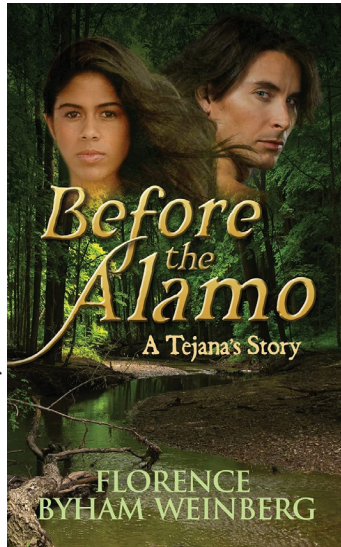


# Reviews

## *Before the Alamo: A Tejana's Story* by Florence Byham Weinberg

Reviewed by James R. Adair

Many histories of the Battle of the Alamo and events leading up to it have been written over the past 180+ years. Most focus on the brave (Anglo) Texian soldiers resisting Mexican autocracy in the person of General Santa Anna. More recent works have pulled back the curtain to reveal the seamier side of the Texian settlement—both legal and illegal—of the northern portion of the Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas. The common thread in almost all of these histories is their focus on the Texians, white immigrants (many of whom



brought their Black slaves with them) who were first welcomed by the Mexican government as a buffer against the Comanches and Apaches, then later opposed by the same government. *Before the Alamo* differs from all these histories in two ways: first, because it is not a history at all, but rather a work of historical fiction; second, because the most important characters in the book are Tejanos, the Mexican inhabitants of Texas, most of whom were born and raised there.

The protagonist of the book is Emilia Altamirano, the daughter of an Indian woman and a creole (of pure Spanish ancestry) father. She was born, and in fact lived her whole life, in a time when *mestizos* like her were looked down on by both creoles and Texians. Nevertheless, her mother María—who, though an Otomí Indian, was raised in a well-to-do Mexican home—taught her proper Spanish and Mexican customs. Most importantly, she instilled in Emilia an immense pride in herself and a level of self-confidence unusual for someone of her social standing. And what was her social standing? She was an illegitimate child, a love child, whose mother was the servant of her father and his wife. Although everyone in Béxar (the Tejano name for San Antonio) suspected that Juan Andrés Altamirano was Emilia's father, no one commented on it in his presence, and he refused to acknowledge his paternity, except to the priest when he took the infant Emilia to be baptized.

Emilia's drive to succeed and be happy in life first manifested itself when she learned that her older and more privileged cousins were being tutored to read and write. She found a local man, one of Béxar's leading citizens, who agreed to teach her as well. Her ability to read opened new worlds through books and eventually led to her obtaining a place of service to the local *ayuntamiento*, or city council. Although she primarily served them *pan dulce* and hot chocolate, she listened in on many of their deliberations, and she learned not only about the affairs of local citizens—water rights and minor disputes—but also about the events involv-

ing far away cities like Saltillo (the state capital) and the politics involving the new settlers with their strange looks, customs, and language led by a man named Stephen Austin.

The novel traces Emilia's life from her birth in 1814, through her childhood and adolescence, to her falling in love with a local boy, Dámaso Jiménez. Just as the couple is on the verge of confessing their love for one another, tragic events lead Dámaso to flee from Béxar under cover of darkness south of the Rio Grande, where he is eventually pressed to join the Mexican army, which marches on his own hometown. Upon his return to Béxar as part of the Mexican army, the impending Battle of the Alamo, which was fought in February and March of 1836, looms large over the newly reunited couple. Will Dámaso side with the army with which he has campaigned for the past three years, or will he join the Texians and many Tejanos in opposing the autocratic leader Antonio López de Santa Anna? How does the Texian desire for an independent state square with the desire of the majority of the Tejanos for a return to the federalist 1824 Mexican constitution?

Weinberg weaves a compelling and informative story in the pages of this novel. Other than a handful of the main characters, most of the people mentioned are historical figures, and many of the events described really transpired, from the 1813 Battle of Medina, to the depopulation of Texas at the hands of Royalist General Joaquín de Arredondo, to the declaration of Mexican Independence in 1821, to the Anglo (and Black) colonization of Texas led by Stephen F. Austin, to the tumultuous Mexican political situation that facilitated Santa Anna's rise to power.

Matthew Pearl, author of the best-selling historical fiction novel *The Dante Club*, says, "What's most explosive about historical fiction is to use the fictional elements to pressure the history to new insights." Weinberg does just that in *Before the Alamo*. She tells a fictional story of adventure and romance embedded in a solid historical setting. But this book is more than just an entertaining story. It's an account that challenges readers to consider the history leading up to the Texas Revolution from a different perspective. After Emilia learns that her master Andrés is also her father, she is heartbroken and asks her mother to explain what happened. María replies, "It's the world we live in, *m'hija*. Andrés loves us somewhere deep inside, but he can't admit it. You see, he believes a very old lie, that white people are better than anyone else" (p. 35). This is a book that would likely be banned in Florida, and perhaps in Texas too before much longer. Read it while you can.



Flag designed during the Texas Revolution, referencing the federalist 1824 Mexican constitution



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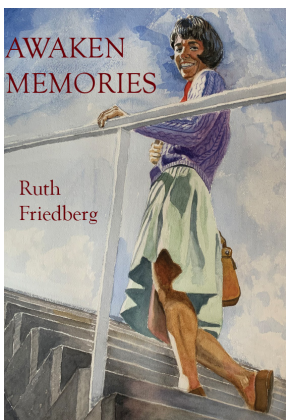
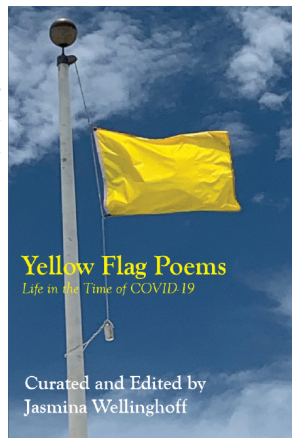
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**Minx Maze by Lyle Adair (2023):** Three friends ride their bikes west on an adventure: Bonneville Speed Week. One woman heads east to escape danger. When their paths collide, trouble ensues, and no one will remain unchanged. "Featuring engaging storytelling, memorable characters, and artful descriptions of the American Southwest, readers will feel that they have come along for the ride" (Andrea Kraus-Lozano, UTSA).

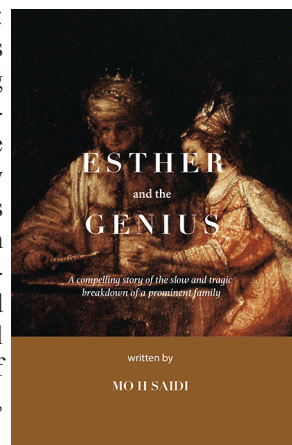
**Yellow Flag Poems: Life in the Time of COVID-19, curated and edited by Jasmina Wellinghoff (2022):** A poetry anthology, featuring the work of more than thirty different poets, and containing reflections on living in the challenging time of COVID-19.



**Awaken Memories by Ruth Friedberg (2021):** A poetry collection spanning 70 years that reflects an extraordinary life well lived. Enhanced with numerous original illustrations.

**Esther and the Genius by Mo H Saidi (2019):** The novel tells the compelling

story of the sudden dissolution of a family. How does a brilliant doctor become a murderer? What happens to his family in the process and aftermath? "Esther is a suspenseful contemporary courtroom drama. Dr. Saidi, novelist and physician, provides a fascinating background depiction of medical practice, the legal system, and the political machinations of the academic world" (John Schmolesky, St. Mary's University).



## Community Outreach Efforts

In the past quarter, volunteers associated with *Voices de la Luna* have held many workshops, both in person and remotely, led by volunteers from the *Voices de la Luna* community and involving multiple participants from the region and across the country.

## Submission Guidelines

*Voices de la Luna* is a quarterly publication dedicated to the artistic expression of a wide range of perspectives and topics. In the service of that goal, we welcome diverse, well-written submissions from every quarter. To submit material for publication in *Voices de la Luna*, go to [voicesdelaluna.submittable.com](http://voicesdelaluna.submittable.com).

## Voices Mission Statement

*Voices de la Luna* inspires and promotes literature and the arts and serves as a platform for all authors and artists to share their work with others. It further uses literature and the arts for both educational and healing purposes in the community.

## Voices de la Luna

A Quarterly Literature & Arts Magazine

[www.voicesdelaluna.org](http://www.voicesdelaluna.org)

ISSN 2168-4316 (print)

ISSN 2168-4324 (online)

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## Brief Bios of Selected Contributors

### Ellis Elliott

Ellis Elliott has been published in *Apricity Magazine*, *Belle Ombre*, *Copperfield Review Quarterly*, *Euphony Journal*, *The Ignatian Literary Magazine*, *The MacGuffin*, *OPEN: Journal of Arts and Letters*, *Perceptions Magazine*, *Plainsongs*, *Signal Mountain Review*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Thin Air*, and *Wrath-Bearing Tree*, among others. Her poems “Easy Fix,” “After Words,” and “Our Truest Hungers” have been nominated for the Best of the Net awards. She received a bachelor’s degree in English from Rhodes College and an MFA in Creative Writing from Queens University. She has taught ballet for over 30 years and currently teaches ballet and yoga, as well as leading online and in-person writing groups.

### Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo

Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo is the daughter of Mexican immigrants and the author of *Posada: Offerings of Witness and Refuge* (Sundress, 2016). *Incantation: Love Poems for Battle Sites*, her second collection, is forthcoming from Mouthfeel Press in fall 2023. A former Steinbeck Fellow and Poets & Writers California Writers Exchange winner, she’s received residencies from Hedgebrook, Ragdale, National Parks Arts Foundation, and Poetry Foundation. She has poetry published in *The Acentos Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *A Dozen Nothing*, and most recently, her poem “Battlegrounds” was featured in *Poetry Unbound: 50 Poems to Open Your World* (W.W. Norton, 2022). She is the director of Women Who Submit, a literary organization fighting for gender parity in publishing.

### C.L. “Rooster” Martinez

Rooster Martinez is a spoken word poet and educator from San Antonio, TX. He has authored two poetry books: *A Saint for Lost Things* (Alabrava Press, 2020) and *As It Is in Heaven* (Kissing Dynamite Poetry Press, 2020). He co-edited *Contra: Texas Poets Speak Out*, a poetry anthology (Flowersong Press), and was a writer on the 2016 play *American Pride*, which won two ATAC Globe awards for Writing of a Drama and Overall Production of a Drama. His previous work has appeared in such publications as *Button Poetry*, *The Huffington Post Latino Voices*, *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*, *Scalawag Magazine*, and *The Acentos Review*.

### Ed Patterson

Ed Patterson was a finalist in Bellingham Review’s 2021 Tobias Wolff Award for Fiction. He was the producer and screenwriter of a short film adaptation of Guy de Maupassant’s “The Conservatory.” He also produced and directed “Beyond the Horizon” by Eugene O’Neill in Portland, ME. Patterson was the executive producer of the 2016 Connecticut Irish Film Festival. He received his bachelor’s degree with an English minor from SUNY Plattsburgh. He is the president of Patterson Family Chocolates. A SAG-AFTRA actor, he also enjoys spending time with his family, fishing, hiking, and traveling.

## Idioma

### Tupperware Words

James R. Adair

It is natural in a language for words to change their meaning over time. Take *meat*, for example, which means the flesh of an animal that is used for food. In the 18th century, Samuel Johnson used the term to mean any type of food (“the horses could not travel all day without rest or meat,” *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*). Another instance is the word *conversation*, which today means a discussion or exchange of ideas, but in earlier centuries it meant one’s place of residence (literal or figurative: “For our conversation is in heaven,” Phil 3:20 KJV, 1611), a circle of acquaintance (“You may know the man by the conversation he keeps,” 1620 translation of *Don Quixote*), or even sexual intimacy (“His conversation with Shore’s wife,” Shakespeare, *Richard III* 3.5.20).

These words evolved naturally over a period of centuries as people began to use them in different ways. This is in contrast to words whose meanings are purposely changed to something other than the way in which the word is commonly used. Such words may be called Tupperware words, because though they retain their outward appearance, their content has been removed and replaced with something completely different. There is a Greek word that appears several times in the Gospel of Matthew and captures the process I’m describing pretty well, though it is applied to whole sentences rather than individual words. That word is *πληρῶω plērōō*, which is usually translated *to fulfill*, but in the context of Matthew can better be translated *to fill with new meaning*. For example, Matt 2:15 quotes Hos 11:1, “Out of Egypt I called my son,” a reference to the exodus event in Israelite history, and says that the passage was filled with new meaning when Joseph and Mary returned from their flight to Egypt with the baby Jesus. I supposed it could be called a Tupperware sentence.

Two common Tupperware words in current usage are *Critical Race Theory* (CRT) and *woke*, both of which have been emptied of their original content and filled with new meanings. CRT is “a cross-disciplinary examination—by social and civil-rights scholars and activists—of how laws, social and political movements, and media shape, and are shaped by, social conceptions of race and ethnicity” (*Wikipedia*). Many who say that they oppose CRT claim that it means something entirely different: discussions of race, including aspects of the history of slavery and discrimination in the U.S., and on that basis they say that it shouldn’t be taught in public schools. Similarly, the term *woke* may be traced to the 1938 song “Scottsboro Boys” by the American folk and blues singer called Lead Belly. He said he wrote the song to warn Black people, “best stay woke, keep their eyes open.” That’s how most people use *woke*, to advocate awareness of racial and other forms of discrimination, but many states have had laws introduced that their supporters call “anti-woke” laws, redefining *wokeness* in ways to suggest that it means discrimination against White people, straight people, and others.

Whether the new meanings of these Tupperware words will hold over the long haul remains to be seen, but purposely redefining words, at least in the short term, does not bode well for enlightened and honest discourse.