

# POETRY

AT THE

# BACKYARD

July 12, 2023  
Tahoe Poetry Collective



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# Never Again

Kelley Dixon

---

It was the beginning.  
And I knew this.  
Only the beginning.  
Of a journey that would be filled with both the deepest sorrow and the deepest joy.  
Yet still I chose to go.  
I knowingly took each step.  
I knowingly put myself on this path.  
Because something bigger than me told me to.  
And really, I didn't have much of a choice.  
Something bigger than me took over.  
And I wasn't scared.  
But so much of it was unknown to me.  
So much of it brought back memories.  
Pain that I had yet to confront.  
So when my heart was ready, things slowly found their way to me.  
And one by one, I sat with them.  
The rage.  
The tears.  
The hurt.  
The mistrust.  
The not being cared for how I needed to be.  
The not knowing what was happening while it was happening.  
Not until much later could I see all that they did to me.  
The way they took advantage of what was supposed to be most tender to me.  
When they walked into the room they felt like ruthless vultures.  
Cackling with their uninvited intentions.  
And me.  
I just sat there.  
Mostly in shock.  
Later in disgust.  
And I vowed, never again.  
Never again.

# 2 Days Till

Julie Morrow

---

I tried to get  
inspiration from reality  
today.  
Today my reality  
consisted of speculation.  
Complete interpretation.  
From your head  
came mine  
and therefore  
vice versus,  
completely mistaken.  
I take it to be a sign.  
Signals blinking  
from atop my bedroom  
door.  
Door's ajar.  
Gimme, give me time  
to undress my head  
of the names its been fed.  
Try to see myself through  
the thick of it. Get a fix instead.

# Texas 6 am

Julie Morrow

---

Taking up two seats with  
Your pillow, Here in  
Texas. The news speaks  
Of death again. Nothing  
Was changed. Should be  
Writing a song, but  
Feel destroyed and sad.  
Realize the truth of  
Me when the quiet  
Seeps in. Settled  
And such. No one to  
Talk to and no way  
For sleep. Oh sleep  
So safe and away.  
Dallas air is hot  
And thick, outside at  
6am. Wish I was  
there, wish you were  
here. Both of them  
loved again, how strange  
and guilt inducing.  
I will never understand.

# Cigarette

Julie Morrow

---

Cigarette tightens  
grip of sane  
lost in shadows  
bit off by God  
Can't go to sleep today  
gonna stay awake  
Contemplate life's goodness  
and then fast away  
Never eat again until  
I rot away  
Vindicate my lessons  
teacher. Told her  
of his ways..  
never make much  
sense but kinda  
like it that way. Wonder  
what I missed by  
not being there.  
Never really known  
by anybody's brain  
even mine own.

# Heartflesh

Aimee Lowenstern

---

*Originally published in 45th Parallel*

Every organ in my body is a heart.  
It is only their relentless twitching  
that causes me to move. I am sorry to break this  
to you, darling, but I am not a person.  
Just blood, vein-tossed, my hydroponic puppet strings.  
No lungs in my chest, just a pair of pulses  
that earthquake the air into sound.  
Sounds like breathing, sounds  
like "I love you". You can hear my heart,  
you can hear every one of my hearts,  
or have you tuned me out, my sweet?  
Have you tuned me out, have you turned me inside-out,  
seen my innards hang  
like ripe tomatoes from my arteries?  
It's nothing to worry about,  
it happens all the time. At night my skin slips off  
like rough old silk, and birds gather to scavenge treats  
collected in my stomachless gut.  
They tell me they miss you. I ask them how  
they learned to speak. They open their beaks  
and swallow another one of my hearts whole.

# My Mother In the Morning

Aimee Lowenstern

---

While I slept, dreamt, nightmare-bound,  
still and still searching  
(frantically) for my mother's  
dismembered limbs,  
she was six feet below  
me, in the kitchen downstairs,  
intact and pouring blood  
orange juice into a cup.  
She is worried about me.  
I am worried too,  
about everything;  
hence the nightmares,  
and hence her efforts  
(sweetheart that she is)  
to "start my morning off right".  
I wake with a jolt to the sound  
of a teacup set on my bedside table.  
I hug my mom, cry, hug the dog  
who has trotted her little legs upstairs  
to see what all the fuss is about.  
In the glass cup,  
a liquid ruby. It is at once too tart  
and too sweet, too real for someone like me  
who lives in muddled and malnourished suppositions.  
But my mother juiced an orange because she loves me,  
and because it looks nothing like blood.  
There she is in the clean sunshine,  
alive and able to do things  
about her worry and her love.  
Here I am, too:  
awake at last.

# Winter's Dream

Scott Green

---

A love supreme, a love supreme, a love supreme, a love supreme...  
A love supreme, a love supreme, a love supreme, a love supreme...

In the winter I dream of the southern coast of Spain with its gold sand  
beaches  
In Kiev, they mourn the young commander killed in battle  
He was a famous soldier as a boy and now a martyr as a man who fell in  
the field.

Heavy snow on cedar and pine  
Lake waves crash on boulder after boulder  
Water spits into the sky and returns as ice.

Emerald Bay has frozen over  
The eagle counts are high  
The drilling in the arctic has begun  
The young caribou stops  
The old hunter takes his aim and sets his sights  
A monk blows into a conch and calls in an extinct wolf  
The Thrush knocks on the door  
The fantasy begins.

You don't need a boat, just a friend with a boat.  
You don't have to be faster than the bear, just faster than the other guy.  
Take it slow on ice and snow, know before you go.

Do your homework, study your maps  
Excavate your memories  
Separate artifacts from false positives and burnt wood from  
"the campfires of youth where I once saw fire cities, towns, palaces, wars,  
heroic adventures.  
Now, I see only fire".

# The Creative Process

Scott Green

---

Mail your responses to me in a letter from earth, in the voice of Hades  
In the spirit of Bilbao, through the peace of Patrick  
And from within the heart of the sunflower blooming from the rotting  
pocket of the soldier  
who dies on the battlefield today for a reason he didn't understand.

Tell it to me in a whisper, say it into the ear of the dying soldier.  
Dig your own trenches and rise from your own ashes.  
Because the boat will sink and the bear will catch you both!  
Compose your suite in four parts, chant your acknowledgments and  
resolutions!  
State your pursuance and read you psalm as you struggle for purity.  
Do I express gratitude to a higher power?  
Do I bang the tam-tam and hit the cymbal to wash me clean?  
Do I baptize myself in the waters of my children's streams of conscious-  
ness where they fish with hook and line for dreams of their own?  
Repeat the solo, sing the chorus, learn the chords.  
These are giant steps for heroes, but small leaps for boys and girls.  
Listen to the bear as she growls, a love supreme, a love supreme and  
wakes you from a boat called winter's dream.

There are no limits to the creative process.  
Slap on another coat of paint.  
Mix in enough pigment.  
Darken the lines and adjust the brightness a bit.  
Throw in some flowers and a splatter of blood.  
Your blood, of course spilled from pruning the rose bushes in the commu-  
nity garden for your annual service hours just so you can water the weeds  
in a less than sacred place.  
Throw a pot on a wheel of porous stone. Fire the kiln with the bones of  
ancestors. Your ancestors, of course until the temperature will melt glass  
and forge iron.  
Look for it at the exorcism of the family ghosts with a spell from the old  
man at the campsite whose cabin burned down in the fire. Who dances  
with Dylan and cries to presidents.  
Receive it from the babbling boy in the bleachers of the baseball game who  
carves wooden signs and speaks in rhyming juxtapositions.  
Find it in the painting above the piano in the blue branches and the tulip  
magnolias painted by the artist that loves too much.  
Locate it in the willows without leaves buried in snow by the creek side of  
childhood, your childhood of course.  
For it will be found in the last patch of snow when the Evening grosbeaks  
come to play.

# JULY FOOD TRUCKS



7/8 (Sat) Mountain Lotus

7/12 (Wed) Big Blue Q BBQ

7/22 (Sat) Mountain Lotus



## Pegasus and Patsy Cline

Scott Green

Pegasus rises above Jupiter  
Eastern stead  
Leaping over Round Valley  
Crossing Casa Diablo  
Mahogany obsidian  
Ancient caldera.

Pine cone campfire  
Patsy Cline sings  
I go out searching  
After midnight  
I fall to pieces.

Pegasus laughs  
And snorts  
Stamps his hoof  
He wants to go  
He wants to ride  
With haste  
To tomorrow  
To the sunrise.

To the Warm sun  
To be walked in front of the grandstands  
To wear the roses  
I want to see the horse win  
And strike the bell for his final lap  
To take my ticket to the window  
And cash in my winnings



She thought  
I'd be interested to learn  
That poetry was the medicine  
The magic  
To stop the sorrow  
To return the smile

To make her see the lights  
To dance to sing  
To love  
To feel what was lost  
To find it and put it back where it belongs.

The wayward winds is a restless wind  
Until it settles in the valley  
Softly and with peace.

Pegasus laughs again.

Your stars twinkle  
Your stars shine:  
Markab  
Alpherantz  
Algenib  
Sheat

The four horseman  
Ride till the break of dawn  
When I saw your stars shine!  
Each time I became more star struck.  
Each time I cupped your light  
And held it fast to save for a  
Cowboy dance on a winter's night.

I'm crazy for trying.  
And I'm crazy for crying.  
And I'm crazy for loving you.

# The Lightning Bug Refuses to Glow

Kirsten Casey

*Nevada County Poet Laureate*

It's not that I can't glow,  
I refuse to—the stars are too bright  
tonight, and why would I want  
to compete with patterns—I am  
only one fly in a field of hundreds—  
we blink off and on like some kind of county fair  
billboard—I am tired of the attention.  
The children come at dusk  
with their jam jars and metal flashlights—  
tiny hunters with no measurable remorse.  
Behind the glass, a green short glow  
of mortality. The last light trapped  
for show. I watch them get into their cars  
and drive away—their small faces shine  
in the backseat, with triumph. I want  
none of it. It's much simpler to be  
a dull bug—a spider in a barn corner, full  
of thread and hunger, spinning fly traps  
and laying eggs, such unassuming simplicity.  
Is anonymity too much to ask for? If only  
instinct was a choice—I would  
chose darkness.

# What Summer Knows

Kirsten Casey

*Nevada County Poet Laureate*

The summer sky remembers winter:  
the thickness of snowstorm clouds  
that blocked her view and helped  
her sleep, the cold blades  
of grass, frozen and painted in tips  
of white, the blank stillness  
of it all. Now, the summer stars flicker  
on and off, a series of unplanned power outages,  
a popular optical illusion of the cosmos.  
These aren't diamonds rolled out  
on black velvet, in the jeweler's  
locked display case. Please don't use the word  
twinkling in a poem about summer.  
The summer nights pass the time peeking  
in every open window, where the fans shake  
their heads slowly, always saying no,  
and the curtains sway in response.  
Summer watches over gated gardens  
of soon-to-be string beans, tomatoes,  
and cucumbers. Summer notices the deer  
pacing tracks through the yards, and the  
gentle way they sleep, curled in clover. Everywhere,  
the signs of June: closed poppies nod off, and short-lived  
sweet peas become a lighter shade of pink  
overnight, with petals that make  
the mountain misery reek  
with envy. At noon, summer's sun reflects  
off of white novel pages, burns  
shoulder skin, and warms the granite boulders  
along the Yuba River. Gravity interrupts  
the still pool's surface and pulls  
the willing jumpers below.

When the swimmers  
reemerge, they climb the rocks with wet feet,  
and surrender on their stomachs, lying flat  
on the bare, heated stone, backs facing  
the cloudless blue above. Summer doesn't ever forget  
to shimmer there. Seeking relief, the summer afternoon  
visits the city pool, where the children in line  
carry striped towels over their shoulders. Once inside,  
they create colonies around the concrete deck,  
using back packs and snack bags to mark their borders.

This is the kingdom of childhood.  
Chlorine water drips from hair tips,  
leaving magical, fading trails wherever  
they walk. Their smiles, temporarily purple,  
are the same shade as the grape popsicles  
sold in the snack bar. By August, their fingertips  
will be stained a similar hue, from harvesting  
pails full of blackberries, off of barbed branches  
that snag on gathering wrists. But for now,  
at the edges of the crowded pool, hungry  
bees hover over all of the sweetness, confused  
that the sugar spilling around them  
isn't a single peony bloom. The summer knows  
that there is nothing quieter  
than an empty school, and at the end  
of another day, the ground will still be warm,  
holding the daylight.

# Samuel Clemens reacts to seeing The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn on a Kindle

Kirsten Casey

*Nevada County Poet Laureate*

The thickness is gone from it, the handsome golden tooling on the leather cover, removed. This thin tin machine merely reproduces paper, without that whisper sound of a page turning, the comfort of air floating between chapters, a light wind caused by interest in the next half of a story. Where shall I lay my bookmark? The wide satin ribbon I use, a scarlet one that Clara wore, tied in her braids, will slide off of the screen, and my intention is to never lose it, or my place. There is something about the magic of pressing a flower in a good book and finding it later. Better than a photograph, to hold the flatness of the years in a honeysuckle, preserved more clearly than an old memory. I never imagined a book that could be turned on and off, shouldn't it always be on? Where does the story go when you've finished it? No need for a bookshelf with this contraption. If only the air could hold up words, the way the right wind can suspend a red paper kite. I was once a printer's devil, a typesetter's apprentice, arranging words in a dark, wood paneled newsroom that smelled of ink, machine oil, and cigars. I spent each day with metal letters, called sorts, marking my palms. These small pieces of language were light,

like the fattest honeybees landing on lavender, but each still held a singular, distinctive weight. Back then, there were so many sorts of things I wanted to write, but was convinced I never would. My ideas were like white streaks of shooting stars through the midnight sky. My thoughts kept time to the sound of the running press. Its rhythmic click and whoosh, the reset lever, the ink spread, each sheet of paper exhausted, beaten, bruised with pigment. After printing, the used pieces were discarded into a hellbox, left for me to sift through and rearrange to make new words out of all of the old ones. But this random pile was my salvation. The debris of stories strewn like they exploded. Their precious placement—all potential. I knew the physical weight of a word, what it meant to carry all of the right ones in my hands, and then leave them alone, and trust in their adventure, like unchaperoned children boarding a steamboat, all terror to the witness, all wonder to the children.

# Poetry Pharmacy

Kirsten Casey

*Nevada County Poet Laureate*

We refuse to overprescribe antibiotics, which, did you know means “opposing life,” a treatment that started simply from moldy bread in ancient times, covered in dusty green spores, a color the poet craves. Poems are not taken, but given by mouth, swallowed like the last word in one of Shakespeare’s sonnets. Are you frightened of iambs, I am. Sometimes a poem is an intravenous affair, words travelling straight into a blue inner arm vein, suddenly a part of all of your hidden systemic maps, and when your finger is pricked, or you visit the phlebotomist for a draw, you will not need any testing for the tech to sense you are infected—this contagion of language, sometimes terminal, often a lonely, long sickness. Just ask Keats, blood on his lips, on his pillowcase, on every one of his ivory handkerchiefs, in that single Roman bedroom, where the nurse waited to burn all of his bedclothes. We can treat you, we can keep you comfortable, listing the shades of blue on an Indigo Bunting’s breast feathers, or in the still pool of ink in a glass jar on a calligrapher’s pine desk, or the poet’s pale eyes, moments after seeing the Seine for the first time, unsure of which language to use for his metaphors. You will not feel any pain, unless you want to, and you will never be cured.



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Tahoe **BACKYARD**

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