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for Patricia Dobler
Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. xii

MADALON AMENTA
Strawberries .............................................................................................................................................. 1
Boston 1950 ............................................................................................................................................... 2

TESS BARRY
Death in Greenwich Village ..................................................................................................................... 3
Salvador of Bahia ...................................................................................................................................... 4

JOAN E. BAUER
Breathing .................................................................................................................................................. 5
Amnesia in Southern California ............................................................................................................... 7

ANGELA BAYOUT
Hot Metal .................................................................................................................................................. 8
Aquarium .................................................................................................................................................. 10

GERRY ROSELLA BOCCELLA
Picnic With Tess ...................................................................................................................................... 12
Those Sundays on the Job ....................................................................................................................... 13

KAY COMINI
St. Patrick’s Day Massacre at the ............................................................................................................. 14
BladeRunners Arena in Harmarville
The Neighbor ............................................................................................................................................. 16
PAMELA D. CURTIS
  Intrusion .................................................................................................................. 17
  Passage ....................................................................................................................... 20

WENDY DAVIES
  Scavenger Man .......................................................................................................... 21

MARILYN P. DONNELLY
  Counting ..................................................................................................................... 24
  Trio .............................................................................................................................. 26

JUDITH DORIAN
  Smoke ......................................................................................................................... 27

MARY ALICE DRUSBASKY
  Rabbit's Foot and Other Forms of Animal Cruelty .................................................. 29
  Blood Roses ................................................................................................................. 30

VICTORIA DYM
  What Clowns Talk About .................................................................................................. 31
  Vaccine .......................................................................................................................... 32

ZIGGY EDWARDS
  Comeback .................................................................................................................... 34
  My Brother Donnie ...................................................................................................... 35

ANGELE ELLIS
  Slippery Slope ............................................................................................................. 36
  Spared .......................................................................................................................... 37

CONTENTS
ALICE FUCHS  
from “Green Mouth” .................................................................................. 38

LOIS GREENBERG  
About That Faith I’m Supposed To Trust ................................................. 43
Storm In Emerald City .............................................................................. 45

CAY HAMILTON  
1918 Cotton Candy Sells War Bonds ...................................................... 46
Your Great Grandfather Pepin ................................................................. 47

DOROTHY HOLLEY  
Lillian ........................................................................................................ 48
Sugilite ...................................................................................................... 50

LORRAINE LOISELLE  
from “The Tournament” ...................................................................... 51

CAROLYN LUCK  
Grieving in French ................................................................................... 57
Love Poem ................................................................................................. 59

CHRISTINA MURDOCK  
My Narcoleptic Mother .......................................................................... 60
The Winter After ........................................................................................ 62

MARILYN MARSH NOLL  
from the novel A Glass Half Full ............................................................... 63
LIANE ELLISON NORMAN
  Laying Sgt. Shaffer to Rest ......................................................... 69
  Severe Weather ............................................................................. 71

LEONE P. PARADISE
  Reservoir ....................................................................................... 72
  Early Morning Surprise .................................................................. 73

HARRIET PARKE
  from “Reruns Part 1” ...................................................................... 74

KATHRYN KATAFIASZ PEPPER
  from Storm Dreams .......................................................................... 78

JO ANN F. PRATT
  Take Only Photos ............................................................................ 83
  Notes from the Garden ..................................................................... 84

ANN RAYNE
  from “Overboard” ............................................................................ 86

SUSAN SAILER
  Mercurial ......................................................................................... 91
  Pattern ............................................................................................... 93

KAYLA SARGESON
  Fucking Joe on my Grandmother’s Porch ...................................... 94
  To the Next Moron Who Wants to Date Me .................................... 95
ERIKA SIMILO

712 Characters ................................................................. 96
“Joe Rock” Saved Christmas Cards, 1938–41 .......................... 97

ELLEN MCGRATH SMITH

First Communion ............................................................. 98
Aubade Noir .................................................................. 100

SHIRLEY SNODEY

Diva Elm .................................................................... 101
Second Mourning ............................................................. 102

ELLEN STRICKLAND

A New Day .................................................................... 103
Water Rising .................................................................. 104

ANN TOMER

The Sun is High ............................................................... 105
And This Is How I Pray ...................................................... 106

BERNADETTE ULSAMER

Now That I No Longer Live There ....................................... 108
She Just Wants To Be Elegant .............................................. 109

LUCIENNE WALD

“The Erstwhile Ghetto” from the novel Everybody Same ...... 110
SARAH WILLIAMS
Tonight, Not Again ................................................................. 115
Some Other Lock ...................................................................... 116

LORI WILSON
The Bearing Falls Out of the Pump ........................................ 118
Last Days in Escondido .............................................................. 120

Notes .......................................................................................... 121
About the Madwomen ............................................................... 122
Madwomen History ................................................................. 131
About Patricia Dobler ............................................................... 132
The Editors .............................................................................. 133
Books of Note .......................................................................... 135
Introduction

*Voices from the Attic*, Volume XIV, is the best work from the Madwomen in the Attic Writing Workshops in Poetry and Fiction at Carlow University in 2007 and 2008, taught by myself, Evelyn Pierce, Ellen McGrath Smith, and Carolyn Luck. The writers in this collection represent a cross-section of talented women, representing different age groups and backgrounds. They range in age from early 20s to mid-90s. Their experiences are deep and varied, as some have never studied poetry before, while others have been writing for many years. Some have long been “desk drawer” writers, hiding everything they’ve written in a lump of papers. Others have received MFAs in writing from major universities. Many of the Madwomen are returning to writing after many years of living, of taking care of others, of pursuing a different career, of believing they could never be a writer. One thing they have in common: great desire and courage, and a resilience that is unparalleled.

In the past year, there has been much to celebrate. The Madwomen have been reading their work in the community, on the radio, and in other venues around the country. They not only continue to have their work published in literary journals, but they bring news of new books on the horizon. Angele Ellis’ new book, *Arab on Radar*, was published by Six Gallery Press in 2007. Marilyn Marsh Noll won the 2007 Chapbook award from the Pennsylvania Poetry Society for her chapbook, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at Bones*. Joan E. Bauer’s new chapbook, *Another Country*, was published by Pudding House Publications in 2007, and her full-length book, *The Almost Sound of Drowning*, was chosen by Main Street Rag Publishing Company for

The Madwomen who haven’t yet published a book are in the process of putting together a manuscript or are already sending it out for publication as a chapbook or full-length book of fiction or poetry. Their work can be found in national journals such as North American Review, Quarterly West, Pearl, and Southern Poetry Review. The selections in this anthology reflect their rich voices, their varied lives, and a true commitment to the craft of writing. I am thrilled to know these Madwomen in the Attic, these talented women soaring ahead into the world with their words.

—Jan Beatty
Her Plan

If she could call, the past
might suddenly come back
and there she’d be with only
foreign money in her purse...
She wants to die
no more than necessary.
What if she took leave
of her senses and went back
to the nothing-well one last time?
There is, and for everyone,
a final room to enter,
a single room to which
each of us is drawn.
The poet she loves best has said,
“Great misfortune simplifies.”

The next poem tells you how to live.
Strawberries

that morning knee deep in June
after you entered
my home
my body,
my heart—

we ate strawberries
fragrant
fragile
moist in sweet acidity

that delivered a hemopoietic rush
into our every living cell

and fused us in a double bond of love
Boston  1950

Weren’t we lucky
on warm summer nights
to be able to wear
black sleeveless sheaths size 10
and rhinestone studded earrings
to eat lobster salad
and drink French 75’s
at the Lincolnshire with a beau
then stroll hand in hand
around those seated
on the esplanade
listening to Mozart
in the sunset and
later drive to Squantom
and sit talking
under an endless gentian sky
as long as it took
without a thought of morning?
Death in Greenwich Village

Your New York Times obituary interprets you as “Muriel Castanis, Sculpturer of Draped Cloth,” recounts your tenement start, a cold water flat, but leaves out your cruel mother, never references your tiny hands and feet, how they shuffled you across Sixth Avenue to Fourteenth Street, a Depression-era girl, you knew value, picked priceless antiques from trash heaps, lived among Picassos too, cut-up old Christmas cards for gift tags, and with Elmer’s Glue draped an ancient world epoxy new.

Today the LA Times reviews your existential forms, your ghostlike corporate goddesses, atop a Philip Johnson skyscraper, where you hover over San Francisco, your sarcophagus twelve giant empty statues, but I remember you cooking asparagus lasagna for us at two a.m., drinking Dago red, smoking cigarettes, your daily arguments with George, your tiny fingers tearing bread, shooing Mynah birds through storied windows, pulling warrior women from fabric folds, their hollow bodies cast in bronze, their headless dread.
Salvador of Bahia

In the old city of Salvador
bared brown boys tie prayer
bracelets to my wrist  pink
blue  green  their reedy fingers
slip on a mix of Catholicism
and African voodoo, beg
for food, rub empty bellies
like burning eyes, here in Bahia
where the slave trade thrived
cacao gives white seeds, fermented
into cocoa and chocolate it feeds
the world’s brown sweet-tooth
embeds its tangled taste in
cavities of mangrove root.
Breathing

The plumbing’s busted in the gray-windowed waffle where you live, second story of twenty
(in case you need to jump). A half-inch squish-squish beneath your feet, a dank smell rising.

They’ve taken up carpet, brought in blowers. You’ve moved the books again.

Where’s Neruda? Anyone seen the bios?
Hey, it’s small potatoes. You’ve got a roof & you’re still breathing.

* 

At 4 a.m. under three blankets, Joseph is sleeping (takes a lot to keep some guys warm).

Past the mountain of his arm, in the dusky morning sky, a silver moon.

You think: Isn’t that romantic?

So breathe already! But you’ve put back the mask, let weights pile on. Sure, you love the guy:
he gave you back your body, as if it were
a fertile field: honeysuckles, hyacinths.

*

A four-eyed woman lives behind the mask:
One eye: rose-foolish with joy.

Another, black fury. A third, jealous
of what might have been—

The last eye, half-blind & hungry,
facing the wind.
Amnesia in Southern California

You thread your way, looking for the needle, looking for the Pancake House on Pico, your old haunt, thirty years ago.

You’ve been lost before and maybe should be grateful for how rarely you remember crying down these streets.

Gone. The tick-tack shops, morphed to grey canyons pulsing, their flagrant neon, all along Sepulveda. The midnight fog so dense—should’ve brought a map. Who knew you’d have this amnesia? You packed your life in boxes, drove to the high Mohave and left behind a stolid man who, studying his shoes, offhandedly confessed,

*I just cannot remember why I loved you once.*
Hot Metal

“Take the Hot Metal to work,” I say. He looks at me empty. “The bridge,” and I give him directions because he doesn’t know where it is.

The next morning as usual, I creep downstairs at 6:10 AM. A wad of tobacco spit dries in my stainless steel sink. He bolts my door at six in time to grab coffee someplace out of the way where his silver coins clang in a tip cup, only his pennies are left on my mantel.

I prefer to sleep on an empty couch this time of day, gray scowl on cigarette ash peppered on my great grandmother’s crochet blanket,

inhaling his aftershave ghost on the pillow.

There’s a love note pinned under a star-shaped magnet on the fridge, a thanks for his shacking up, for the time being.

And for the time being, he comes back with metal worked into his fingerprints. All I wish for are sooty ten hour stains just above my underwear “From grinding iron all day,” he says, spits chew in the sink, scratches the scalp under his cap with gray, gray cuticles.

Stacks eight slices of hard salami between four slices of white bread for noon tomorrow. Talks about getting a welding license.

Where are the bruise-kisses of steel mill on my hips?
He settles like sparks idling on the couch, he watches forensic dramas with a Newport in the crotch of his cigarette hand. I curl up beside him like a domesticated cat, shift every commercial break. Smoke rides on the glow of the TV.
Aquarium

That day,
    hollow aquarium between
your hands
    at the busiest corner.

On our feet, cars scorn us.
    Red lights all over
Oakland stare us down like
we’d stepped into the wrong church.
    Raining on us.

My hair flat like poor singing.
    Drippy threads tie
holes in my stockings.

I thought you’d kiss me
all out of sync,
    that you’d press the aquarium
glass against the rib
of my red wool sweater,
    I’d stretch on my tiptoes,
heels exposed out my of shoes.
    They’ve become buckets in

a leaky house.
    But the glass just beaded
wet,
filling with rain, but no
darn fish.

Just us two, a little stuck.
Picnic With Tess

We packed our basket 
with animal crackers, figs 
and a sippy cup with juice. 
Headed to the park to find 
the perfect spot under a tree near the swings. 
You told me exactly where. 

We took the four corners 
of the cloth, threw it up, 
watched it billow and 
land on the grass, unpacked 
our lunch and munched on 
lions, tigers and elephants. 
We heard squawking geese 
heading south in V formation. 

Felt the wind gust 
that showered us with gold. 

Look Tess, it’s raining pretty leaves. 
Isn’t nature wonderful? 
You leaned into me and said, 
I love you Grandmum.
Those Sundays on the Job

*for my father*

Gas heat and refrigeration forced you
to put aside ice-picks, tongs, coal chutes
and shovels: a ledger with names of customers
who through the years became your friends.

Your next job took you to post-war housing plans
in the suburbs. You carried trowels, levels,
floaters and edgers in a black leather case
you jokingly called your doctor’s bag.

Sometimes on a Sunday after Mass,
you would take us for a ride
to the construction site to show us your work,
all marked with the company stamp.

A smooth driveway with just the right curve,
a pair of steps still in a wooden form.

Once it was a foyer laid out in the shape of a star.
You showed us how each piece of flagstone
was cut and fit into place like a large mosaic.
You said a doctor lived there.

Years later, you imprinted your grandchildren’s
hands in cement-filled pie tins, then poured
our sidewalk. When you were satisfied with
the smoothness of the surface, I watched you,
with a little flourish, mark it with your name.
St. Patrick’s Day Massacre at the BladeRunners Arena in Harmarville

The Slumber Party Slashers move ahead of the Hot Metal Hellions, 113-90. Front row seats and the wind from the skaters blows into our faces. The guy behind us keeps yelling *Kill the Ref.* The penalty box is a white plastic lawn chair. The deadpan announcer looks like the judge from TV’s Night Court, derby hat perched on the back of his head, retro shiny sharkskin suit. Busty Brawler shoves a shoulder, Sugar Plum Scary sprawls and rolls, gets up grinning. It’s the opening match of the Steel City Derby Demons’ new Roller Derby League. The place is sold out. Second Period: Wham Bam Pam in the penalty box. Damage Dahl tears up the track. The Refinator peeps his whistle; signals the Jammer she can now begin to score. The Crippler glides on pink wheels, a point for each opponent she passes. Formalda Heidi chats with Betty Bone Crusher then trips her. She heads for the penalty box. At intermission, children the size of leprechauns dance to Irish Folk Music. Frizzy orange curls bounce as people eat kolbassi and french fries.
Last period: Skaters poised and ready to go.
The Slashers’ pink baby doll pajamas are rumpled.
The Hellions’ neon green shorts and halters are dusty.
Points score too fast too see.
Everyone hooting and stomping.
The announcer is losing his voice.
The Hellions win it by two points.
The Neighbor

I watch the house across
the street, emptied now
of the occupant, the furniture,
the cats and the airplane parts.

No more homemade
compression bombs
startling me out of my chair.

No more sauna parties on Sundays
and no more parking crunches.
The rusted car in the garage
has been hauled away;
the garbage trees cut down.

Empty liquor bottles
sit lumpy in blue bags
waiting for recycling.

His friends mixed his ashes
with spectacular fireworks
and scattered his remains
into the sky.

KAY COMINI
Intrusion

after Nancy Krygowski

It was early fall in my
garden. Hyacinth bean
climbing over the trellis, late
blooming iris, squirrels burying
acorns, small patches of sun.
And suddenly, monk’s hood.

My friend Gail’s husband was
dying. She needed help. I drove
to New Jersey. I was not home
for six days. I drove up the alley
in late slanting sun, saw the raspberry
bush climbing over the back fence.

The gate was open. I’d forgotten
to lock the gate. I opened
the garage door. The noise
would make them run, if
anyone was in my
house. I grabbed an ax

and opened the door
into the garden. Monk’s hood
trampled, the kitchen
window open. I called 911.
   My fence is tall to keep
   people from climbing over,
then I forget to lock the gate.
   They came through the back
   alley. I was not home.

Four pairs of gold earrings, an Acer
   Aspire laptop, an Aquos liquid crystal
   television, an Aiwa compact stereo
system, my Japanese anemone
   by the kitchen window, trampled.
   They cut the glass around the lock,
opened the window, and climbed
   over the kitchen table. They broke
   the crystal vase with the cut
iris in it. The earrings were in a box
   on the bureau next to my bed.
   I was not home. My friend

Gail’s husband died, and I
   was there to make meals and phone
   calls for her. I came home
and wished I’d left monk’s hood
   wine on the kitchen counter, with a
   sign saying, “Help yourself.” But then
I thought about what had been taken from Gail. I cut back the anemone.

It will come back next year.
Passage

If life was fair, we would have fallen asleep after filet mignon and Pinot Noir, the Lehrer News Hour, our usual commentary, and a few chapters of P.D. James and Patrick O’Brian. The neighbors would have wondered, not seeing us pruning the roses or taking our slow walks around the block. They would have found us lying side by side, at peace in death as we had come to be after fifty years of learning to love one another. Instead, they heard my screams when I woke up to your still, gray face. Now I’m living in this foreign land, too old to learn a new language.
Scavenger Man


We’ve been packing boxes for hours, trying to ready my brother to move out of his loft apartment tomorrow. My husband and I had arrived this morning with our truck. It seems like years ago.

I take yet another box down to the truck, lean against the wall by the front door of the old factory building, try to stretch the aches out of my back and shoulders. My hair is stuck to the back of my neck from the muggy air and my exertions. I pull my tee shirt out from around my waist to let some cooler air in, but it doesn’t help much.

Across the street is a trendy restaurant made to look like an old-fashioned diner with rounded chrome details, iron-railed balconies with hanging metal steps on each end and a long row of windows along the side. Red candles burn in the windows. A skull with flashing purple eyes hangs from the center door, under some jangling bells. I can smell frying food every time the door opens, and my stomach growls. People in costumes come and go, call greetings to each other, stand talking in the middle of the street. A figure dressed all in tin foil with a huge tin foil penis sticking out from between its legs poses under a streetlight. A vampire waiter slips out the side door of the diner to have a smoke. A ghost lady in filmy white catches her flowing hem on a fire hydrant, rips it free with a scowl.

I know I should be nervous about standing on a Brooklyn street alone so late at night, but I’m so tired that everything seems unreal.
I notice a tall black man wearing a sagging tuxedo and an Indian headdress made of cascading white feathers approaching on my side of the street. He pushes a shopping cart decorated with bright feathers and strands of beads. He stops and begins rooting through the piles of junk accumulating outside my brother’s building, notices me watching, and smiles gently. “You don’t mind if I look through this, do you?”

I surprise myself by smiling back. I usually don’t talk to strangers, and street people have always made me uncomfortable. “Help yourself,” I say.

He holds a battered electric fan up to the light, puts it back on the sidewalk. A pile of my brother’s old photography magazines is placed in the cart, then a battered cooking pot.

“Do you like photography?” I say.

“Well, now, I guess I do. It’s like captured moments, isn’t it?”

“I’ve always thought that, too.”

The warm breeze collects and delivers a whiff of the spice factories from the next block. I take a deep breath. “Can’t believe how warm it is tonight.”

“It’s a strange night all around,” he nods as he picks two candles and their holders from the heap and places them in his cart.

“Yes,” I say. “I’ve seen some pretty amazing creatures tonight.”

“I believe that.” He finds some plastic dishes in the bottom of a box; they join the candles. “The spirit of the city changes on a night like this,” he says with a sideways look. “Sometimes it walks like a man.”

I don’t know what to say to that. I have trouble meeting his gaze; I look downward and notice that he’s barefoot. His toes are crusted with grime; the toenails thick and yellowed. I wonder if
my brother has any old shoes he’s throwing out. When I finally look up again, the man is patiently waiting for my response.

“I can believe anything tonight,” I say, finally.

“Good,” he nods. “It’s good to believe.” He shakes his head, goes back to his task. He rearranges his findings in the cart, straightens his tuxedo and his feathers. “You be careful of those ghouls and goblins now,” he says. He starts to move off down the street.

I call after him, “Come back tomorrow. There will be lots more stuff when we’re done moving.” I’ll make sure of that.

He turns his head, light glints from his smile. “I’ll do that.”
Counting

For Reverend Stephen DeMott, M.M.

On an unpaved road
high in Peru’s Altiplano
fifteen thousand feet above sea level
crammed in a collectivo
we are playing count the cars.
There are few automobiles
other than our old Dodge—
three or four trucks
with slatted wood sides
packed with campesinos,
a single jeep, two cowboys
on mud brown horses at a dead canter,
herds of sheep, thin black dogs
with cunning eyes and matted tails,
a hillside of llama.

As children on our way to the seashore
we played count the cows.
Double the number
should you pass a white horse,
drop all your cows
when you come to a cemetery.
My sister always chose the right side
of the car for luck.
I took the left and lost.
Now she sits at the right hand
in another kingdom
while we count cars
on an impossible road
disregarding all our losses
searching only for white horses
and the paved road to Arequipa.
Trio

1.
I am not to blame
Still I hang my head in shame
For keeping silent.

2.
Honor the soldier
On his third tour of duty
He did not survive.

3.
Once they had a son
Now they have a folded flag
And grief hard as stone.
Smoke

I do not need to go to Vienna again.
Why should I
when I can stay here
and listen to you and Rudi play piano four hands,
watch you feed sugar to Freud’s dog
outside the tobacco shop?
Did you learn your lesson
when he caught you and said
“Du musst mein Hund nicht fressen!” (you must not feed my dog!)
your claim to immortality?

I have no need to be there
to know your yesterdays.
I have no need to be anywhere
not even near Lichtensteinstrasse.
I have no need to stop
to hear your mother greet Mrs. Freud at the butcher shop
or sit across from Schoenberg, Webern, and the others
when you come home from school at noon with your brothers
and she serves Schnitzel.

Nonetheless, I climb the stairs you took two at a time—
that is, when you still could walk—
up to the fourth floor flat on the Turkenstrasse.
I stand and listen outside the door
and hear beneath the roar of the alien vacuum cleaner
your first cries of life on the dining room table
where you later set up your trains
with the salt and pepper shakers for cargo
until your mother says enough!
And orders an embargo.

Soon I’ll flirt—just a little—with your father
while Yuksi wags his tail at me,
embrace your aunts visiting from Bohemia whose red petticoats
and country ways embarrass your mother in her pale cloak
before they disappear on the trains east that give off foul smoke.
No windows or water in the cars.
Excrement and dead bodies piling up. It’s all there.
Rabbit’s Foot and Other Forms of Animal Cruelty

She is given a rabbit’s foot, for good luck.  
She fondles its softness, placing it in her pocketbook.  
The rabbit, of course, is out of luck.

With no novocain or a prayer, a knife cuts deep,  
cuts clean, cuts off and it yelps in bloody pain;  
tries to limp to freedom but is weakened

by the sound of children’s laughter  
and the jingle of dangling good luck souvenirs  
which are hanging from a metal hook.
Blood Roses

Soft pastel petals, like baby’s skin
so sweetly scented—tea roses.

*But you are flat broke, you cannot afford these*

He is silent, the hole in his arm tells
that he has sold his blood, again.

*I wanted to buy them for you, I know how much you like them*

A person should not have to sell
part of himself, especially not for
flowers, I thought, gesturing them away.

*I don’t want them*

His eyes even more blue, his face
is closer and the roses fill the close air.

I receive them and put them in a jar.
What Clowns Talk About

gravy
thick and meaty,
not Ragu or Chef Boyardee—

heat is slow
then bring up the flame
then lower the flame

let it simmer
let it cool
put it in the ice-a-box.....gravy

secret ingredients of Clown Alley
— a piece of boned pork
— Jersey tomatoes,

(cultivated from Old World seeds
brought over on the boat
smuggled by Uncle Vinnie

in isinglass packets
stowed and safe
between socks and toes)

a pinch of this—a smidgen of that
tomato gravy tease
from Wednesday until Sunday night dinner.
Vaccine

I had Cooties.
Steve Dixon did not.
It was like being it all the time.
don’t know how I got them or why?

“ffizzzzssss” imaginary spray cans
and the cry, “COOTIES”
would find me like radar, like bees,
near the tether ball court; it was third grade.

Silently, I prayed at night,
in bed, after Amen,
please let me not have
THEM tomorrow.

But everyday, under the
smiling fox flag of
The Fox Chapel Country Day School,
I would still have them....I still had cooties.

One day, it was warm
we were in the woods
behind the playground
Steve Dixon stood before me.

We both had our shirts off
bare-chested, flat-chested
pressed against each other
his arms around me.
The smell was sweaty leaves and boy,
his fingers traced on my back,

*Circle, circle, dot, dot,*

*now you’ve got the Cooties shot.*
Comeback

Karen Carpenter descends the airplane steps
in a fur parka, face pared
to cheekbones and teeth.
She looks wiser, tan and lined.

I interview her on late-night TV.
What's your secret? I ask
and she laughs, cupping her mouth
with one hand. Lemon juice, I swear by it.

Buy them fresh, cut them in half.
She describes lying on towels, squeezing drops
the length of her naked limbs, massaging them in.

Mmm, tartar sauce, baby!
That’s my big punchline.
The audience hoots and cackles; Karen Carpenter
drops her eyes, smiles without blushing.

After commercial she sings “Close to You.”
I stare at her close-up in Monitor 2, berating myself.
First publicity tour since her body
was exhumed and revived,

and I never asked where she’s been,
what she saw.
My Brother Donnie

Every few months we’d find him
frozen in shock at the bathroom mirror.

He’d sit on the back steps
blinking slowly at grass, fist in his teeth.

Staring wide-eyed unfocused,
he read shadow oceans
on the bedroom ceiling,
cringing from air.

I asked him Donnie why do you freak out like that?

He said it’s just in case

I’m testing a virtual reality program

and the only signal for “GET ME OUT”
is a flare in your mind, bright and constant.
Slippery Slope

I didn’t stop that day – no time –
too fast – no place to turn around –
but the next day – on that ordinary
stretch – something pulled me over.
I climbed the slope to see it again –
the girl who looked eleven but may
have been older – fighting his grip –
the thin furious man – the long arm
striking her face. She was still standing –
after – my rear-view mirror told me.
No footprints in the slick grass – no blood –
just one glint – like a broken bottle.
A child’s glasses with thick lenses –
intact – reflecting that day upside down.
Spared

Grief or sunshine blinkering my vision,
I cross into the path of a car.
Unlike a burnt child, it jerks away in time.

The driver, unnerved by this miracle,
curses me all the way to the corner.
Oh shut up, I say softly, adjusting my pack,
spared once again to think of you.
from “Green Mouth”

One St. Patrick’s Day we all rode out on the Party Liner to celebrate my son, Cody’s, one-liner in his fifth grade play. “Ho-hum” was the line, after which he feigned sleep under his hand-made sombrero—wise thinking on the part of Miss Graham. It was what he did with the ho-hum that brought the house down. Bound to make it to lawyer, or at least police chief, we thought. Something about his tone.

The three rivers were mostly clear of ice and just about everything on the boat was green, with all the free green beer and ginger ale we could drink. Soraya, Cody’s second to oldest sister, was squeezed in on the bench between neighbor Maggie Patrickson, widow and mother of five grown girls, and me. Soraya was just finishing junior high, not eating lunch in the bathroom stalls anymore, finding out that other girls had come through adversities, too—like two hip surgeries and a divorced mother of four with weird friends.

Maggie initiated the Irish Jig by stealing old man Macilerny’s hat off his head, plopping it on top of her fresh perm. Soon she and everyone else, Irish or not, were dancing. After a few more beers, Maggie’s words started to slur as she listed all the states that people were okay in—“the Bronx, Rhode Island, Cincinnati, Michigan...McKeesport...Punks...Punksatawwwwny....” Wobbling over the railing as we sailed past the Point, Maggie confided to me, her one true friend, that she didn’t care what the neighbors thought, I was okay in her book. Then Mr. M. asked her to dance.
“Mom,” said Carmen, my oldest daughter, first year nursing student with all the latest dope on hand-washing (which didn’t particularly impress Cody), “You know, Mrs. Patrickson is right. The whole neighborhood talks about you.”

“Oh yes? How do you know?”

“My friends tell me things.”

“They tell me things, too.” Soraya, overhearing us.

“And your friends, Cody?” He might as well be included.

“They don’t tell me anything, Mommy. Nobody says anything about you.” The compassionate one, defense attorney. Once I had accidentally melted the baked Alaska I’d substituted for a boring birthday cake at his party, and he told me it was okay, nobody cared. But one of his friends’ mothers had called me a witch to my face when she heard I had taught her kid how to levitate at the Sunday morning kids church I started, which met in the woods. Cody rushed to my defense then, too.

“Well, Cody, that’s good, then.”

Parsival, older brother, home from San Francisco with a new lease on life: “You girls are hurting your mother’s feelings.”

“No, we’re not.”

“Oh, yes you are,” I said. “I want to see myself as perfect like everyone else.” Their reaction to this comment was not easy to fathom.

“Mom,” said Carmen, “this isn’t funny. You really shouldn’t go on so many dates when you have children at home.”

“Oh, so you’re studying family psychology? So many dates? Are you counting these guys who are just my friends? Are you tired of babysitting, Carmen? Is that it?”

“It’s not that.” Yes she was, she was tired of babysitting.
And she wanted to have more dates of her own.

“You’ll get more dates, just be patient.” But maybe I didn’t want her to have too many dates. Maybe she would meet the right guy immediately, settle down, raise a family and stay put. But who would want to spend a lifetime staying put?

“I do have dates.” She did? Why had I never met—

“It’s the kind of people you hook up with, Mom.”

“What exactly do you mean, hook up? And why have you never mentioned this before?”

“We all do. You just don’t hear us. And you know what I mean by hook up.”

“Here, here,” cried Parsival, the rescuer. “Let’s have a toast to our poor overworked Mother. Here’s to a great Mom. Whatever your faults, Mom, you’re the greatest!” All the green beers and ginger ale’s went up—Carmen’s reluctantly. But there was one missing and that was Maggie’s. Where had she gone?

“HERE, HERE to MOM!” yelled the children, and drank.

“Thank you, kids. Say, can anyone go see if they can find Mrs. Patrickson?” In no time at all, the children came back telling that she was dancing around by herself with Macilerny’s hat on.

“Too much green beer,” I whispered to them. “Mrs. P has had too much.”

“Mommy, it’s not because it’s green, it’s because it’s beer.” Soraya was getting so, so smart.

“Oh, I see. Well, I guess you’re right. Cody, go and see if you can find Mr. Macilerny’s hat. Come on now, Mag, let’s have another sip of coffee for all those dates of ours!”

“All those dates?” She sobered right up. Figuring she was getting ready to tell us, for the hundredth time, how she had
turned down young Frank Sinatra back in Yonkers because he was too skinny, I interrupted. “You know,” I blinked one eye, “all those dates you and I have been having on weekends?”

“Oh, those? Oh, good gracious yes. Here’s to the bunch of them, may they rest in peace.” She lifted her coffee cup.

“Are the dates all dead then?” asked Cody.

“No,” Soraya cleared this up for him. “They’re not dead. Mrs. Patrickson never dates. She’s too old.”

“She does, too. I’ve seen her.”

“She does not, she’s making a joke. It’s St. Patrick’s Day, so you can say anything you want.”

“Okay, then, Mom,” they all chimed in. “Since we can say anything we want, when are you going to find a husband?”

They put their heads together and eliminated Carmen’s friend’s father right away because he always ran out of gas on dates and had the nervous habit of dropping large jars of beans all over the kitchen floor when he met someone new.

“Well, I’m glad you’ve eliminated him, I can just imagine how many jars he would drop if he met—”

“Maybe Mother doesn’t want to get married,” said Cody. “Maybe she wants to stay the way she is.” As Cody’s girl—among other things.

“Yes, maybe I want to—”

“No, she doesn’t,” insisted Soraya. “She needs someone with a nice car. How about that singles’ group that meets every Monday night at the Upstreet Bar? It’s called Unstructured Nothingness and has mostly intelligent men. Sandy’s mother came home with a nice one.”
“Since when,” cut in Carmen, “do you care about people being intelligent?”

“Come on you two, let’s just leave your mother alone.” Parsival chased them all into the ballroom for another drink and a candy bar as the boat was beginning to slow. Suddenly it was all quiet. Quiet and cold, with Maggie on a bench near the railing, either asleep or passed out. How were we going to get her off the boat? The band had stopped playing, and we were approaching the dock. My toes ached from the cold and from my narrow dancing shoes. Why hadn’t I worn my Birkenstocks? Who was going to ask me to dance, anyway? The last bridge passed overhead like a giant buzzard.

I put my hand on Maggie’s shoulder. “Here’s to the two of us—or here’s to the bunch of us, you know, all our kids and everything—and all the men who tried in their own way to stand beside us? It wasn’t easy for any of us, now, was it, Maggie? Maggie?” She raised her head. She had been hatless since the big turn at the old Penitentiary, though Macilerny had never made an issue of it. Maybe they should start seeing each other.
About That Faith I’m Supposed To Trust

God, on this holy-of-holy-days
I have called 1-800-DIVINE and no One answers—
Why am I surprised?

I called the children—who should have called me first—
made a brisket, read Kaballah aloud
and argued with my iconoclastic soul
about what lies below the smooth surface of this lake
or beyond the galaxy we call home.

I don’t have a clue!

I remember the way cool blue water
felt on my hot young summer skin, how puffs
of white shaped/reshaped across the sky, settled
on green foothills at dusk, draped mist there
in early mornings... and the child who trusted
something in that sky.

Yes, somewhere in my murk,
there must be graven images.

This deep blue Adirondack lake
does not remember me—it just licks the shore,
reflects the blue/green/black of time.

But somewhere in my deep,
I must know the magic.
What I meant when I said “DIVINE”
was that there should be an answering service.

Across this lake, gaping boathouses
sit in maritime ennui, await the return
of their craft,
as I sit
waiting for a return call,

my uncertain hand
doubting unknowing moving
across this page
like a ouija.
Storm In Emerald City

My dog shrinks from the thunder,
my father’s shoulder crashes through the doorpane,

Mother drowns in red
tears, whispers below the sound track,
Don’t! No sunshine streams through
the window. I wait out the storm
in the living room, hide behind gold velvet drapes, eyes closed to kitchen wars,

counting roses on invisible garden walls,
will the wind to blow the whole fucking house to Oz.
1918 Cotton Candy Sells War Bonds

We five sat in a two seated phaeton
just the topless carriage—no wheels—
Papa and Mama in front
David James and I behind.
The low round cotton candy machine
stood by to spin large pink puffs
on a long fancy handle.
The town square was bustling.

Papa’s sales pitch was passionate,
the country’s enthusiasm ran high.
He said, “Your Mama’s the real ‘come-on’
she looks just like one of those Gibson Girls
with her wavy chestnut hair piled so high.”
He himself cut quite a handsome figure—
dressed like our war time Uncle Sam—
striped pants and stove-top hat.

We kids laughed watching Papa
pointing his right forefinger
at passersby while shouting
“Uncle Sam needs You!!”
Patriots who bought war bonds
were rewarded with a cotton candy.
Stray kids were drooling and bug-eyed
until Papa gave each his very own.
Your Great Grandfather Pepin

He started at sixteen
with his uncle Clayton,
a successful blacksmith
who died rather young.

John Peter carried on the business
making a name for himself
as a brash young upstart
who bragged about his skill.

His avant-garde advertisements,
oft times poetry or philosophy
sent people to the dictionary
to learn what he really meant.

John compared his own products
to a fine Stradivarius violin,
his workmanship to the best
in music, art and literature.

He made wagons, shod horses:
dray and show, farm and race,
fashioned andirons and screens,
set a tire, and told a tale while at it.

This large strong handsome man
forged his own life and that
of his devoted family with words
from the sacred gospel.
Lillian

I’d heard of her many times,
how she spoke of Mary and Jesus,
felt He had touched her hand.

It all seemed very strange
until I met her and instantly
knew love filled her soul.

She invited us to her home,
showed us her circular garden
with blue salvia, gold marigolds

and in the center of the garden
stood a statue of an angel
that I photographed one day.

When printed a white aura
encircled it and Lillian said,
You have a magic camera.

But the magic was knowing her.
We sat around her oak table,
studied, explored God’s word.

As she served us coffee with cream
we shared our pain and sorrow,
loss, disappointment and divorce.
She assured us like Julian of Norwich:

*All shall be well. All will be well.*

*All manner of things shall be well.*
Sugilite

A semi-precious stone, striated with purple, smooth when held in the hand. A friend gave me this somewhat obscure stone. She must have known one of its properties is attracting healing power and is called: *a love stone for age and perfection of spiritual love.*

When not being touched it sets facing me above the computer keys as I create messages.
Verelda and Blossom, half-sisters, seemed to alternate their periods of lucidity. This helped to keep things on track. They shared a modest house in a small town of no recognizable fame. They had lived together for fifteen years and were none the worse for it.

Blossom, older by three years at 89, had lapses on occasion in which she talked about her husband Conrad as if he were still alive. Verelda’s lapses were greater. She remembered Conrad was dead but spoke of him as her husband.

“I remember when my husband Conrad built the cottage at the lake,” Verelda said one day. “We had our own sauna down by the edge of the water. We’d heat up like lobsters, then run down the dock and dive into the water under the stars. My, that was lovely.”

“Conrad was my husband,” Blossom said. “Your husband was Benny.”

Verelda looked annoyed. “Have it your way. You always do.”

“Does that mean you ran naked down the dock with Conrad?”

“Well, I guess I didn’t.” Verelda looked regretful.

Verelda had a beaky nose, a forehead that sloped back plus a receding chin. She seemed to be heading into a gale, propelled by the tightly wound bun at the back of her head. Blossom’s face was flat like that of a Persian cat. Her appearance suggested she had taken offense by something and was rearing back. Nobody had trouble telling the directional sisters apart, especially since Verelda was thin and Blossom tended to overflow.
No matter how dispossessed they became of their senses, one thing never left them: an uncanny ability to come up with seven-letter words when they played Scrabble. They were better than anyone at the senior center, probably the whole town.

Verelda and Blossom played every day. It worked out that each won an equal number of games since they were evenly matched. Whoever lost sulked for an hour, then decided to think about something else. Blossom would settle in her wing chair covered with pink plaid chintz and gaze out the window. Verelda would be inclined to stretch out on the plum colored sofa with her back to the room.

“Look here, the senior center is having a covered dish supper on Sunday night two weeks from now,” Blossom read from *The Bulletin*.

“Well, that’s plain stupid.”

“Over here it says they’re having a Scrabble tournament in January.”

“Let me see that!” Verelda grabbed *The Bulletin* from Blossom and put on her glasses. She read the article about the holiday supper, then handed the newsletter back to Blossom.

“It’ll be the same old story: Santa visits the old folks and calls us ‘Honey’ as he gives us hand lotion and scented soap. He can go jump off the roof.”

Blossom was going to ask Verelda where she got the notion that Santa would come to the covered dish supper, then changed her mind. Maybe she was right. Santa had an annoying way of showing up around the holidays. She didn’t remind Verelda about the Scrabble tournament.
Two weeks later Verelda and Blossom dressed in their best red and green holiday sweaters and warm pants and attended the Christmas supper. The senior center was festooned with garlands over the doorframes, wreaths on the windows, and a huge tree trimmed blue and white in one corner, its lights twinkling. Teasing aromas from the kitchen filled the air. Loud Christmas carols made talking difficult.

“They must think we’re deaf because we’re old,” Blossom sniffed.

The sisters sat down at a table for eight decorated with holly leaves entwined around fat white candles resting on dark green tablecloths and waited for the meal to be served. Most of the fifty or sixty men and women seated similarly about the large hall had become used to talking in loud voices. Trying to converse over the music merely enhanced the celebratory atmosphere.

“I didn’t see your name on the Scrabble tournament sign-up sheet,” Viola Johnson shouted into Verelda’s ear. She was sitting on the other side of Verelda. Blossom sighed. She knew what was coming next.

“What tournament? Nobody told me about any tournament!” Verelda gave Blossom an angry look. “I suppose you knew about it and didn’t tell me.”

“I did tell you. You forgot.”

Verelda turned back to Viola. “Tell me where that sign-up sheet is and I’ll write my name on it right now. Blossom is afraid I’ll win.”

Viola told her it was posted on the hall bulletin board. Verelda dug a pen out of her purse and put it on the table. Two servers came out wheeling carts with plates piled high with turkey, mashed potato, dressing, cranberry sauce, and green beans.
At the end of the meal Verelda remarked that the Thanksgiving supper was even better than the year before. She noticed the pen by her plate.

“This looks like mine,” she said, picking it up.

“You were going to sign up for the Scrabble tournament,” Viola reminded her.

Blossom took Verelda to the sign-up sheet. She counted over a dozen names, but Verelda was her only real competition. The tournament was scheduled to start January 14. Verelda took out her date book and wrote it in.

The next few weeks the sisters played Scrabble with more intensity than usual. Neither was willing to admit to any anxiety over the upcoming tournament. Blossom fussed about their brother stationed in Alaska.

“Duncan didn’t get here for Christmas. The Army never lets him go anywhere during the holidays.”

“Duncan is eighty-four years old. He doesn’t come to visit because he’s living in Arizona in a nursing home and needs a wheelchair. It’s too hard for him to make the trip.” Blossom didn’t like it when Verelda was the one who was focused. She moved to her pink plaid chair by the window and stared out, trying to work out the greater scheme of things.

The holidays passed without undo confusion. Verelda and Blossom spent hours reminiscing as a way to avoid talking about the tournament. They talked about Duncan when he was a child, five years younger than Verelda. They were his big sisters and they doted on him. A lively child, Duncan was into bugs, microscopes, and had a stack of books on science so no one was surprised when he eventually decided to go to medical school.
Duncan graduated, married, set up a practice and produced three children. Verelda and Blossom married and waited for children, but none came along.

“Most girls didn’t go to college when we were young,” Blossom said. Everyone in the family had scrimped and saved for Duncan’s medical school expenses. “Did you ever dream about going?”

“What was the point? We barely got Duncan through.” Verelda had worked for years in a local bakery and became the head baker in time. It had been tough work, rising in the dark hours of the morning so customers could pick up still-warm doughnuts or other pastries on the way to work. “But I’ll tell you the truth. I always wanted to be a biologist. I caught the bug from Duncan,” Verelda laughed but it went by Blossom.

“I once thought about owning a yarn shop.” Blossom had stood on her feet for fifty years as a supermarket cashier. The idea of sitting and knitting while waiting for customers had great appeal. “Duncan did well, but why did he give it all up and join the Army?”

“Duncan was never in the Army.”

“Well, somebody was.”

“It wasn’t Duncan.”

The day of the Scrabble tournament finally arrived. It was a clear, sunny day with no snow on the ground. Blossom and Verelda had been impatient all morning, waiting for the time to depart. They bundled up and climbed into the fourteen-year-old green sedan parked in the garage. Blossom drove but was not allowed to turn the key in the ignition until they went through the checklist attached to the visor.
1. Fasten seatbelts.
2. Nothing on the floor near the pedal.
3. Garage door up. (Blossom had backed into it twice.)
4. Put car in reverse. (Blossom had driven into the back wall once.)

Blossom drove down High Street carefully, while Verelda kept her eyes peeled for a stupid dog or person that might cross their path.
Grieving in French

*Le mot* for widow is *veuve*
soft like *fleuve* and yes it is
a river not hard like widow:
without what now get on
with it. *Le coeur de mon mari*
est arête. I speak French
to myself the year after,
translator and translated,
absorbed by connection
of sound and meaning.

French words take me into my
schoolgirl brain, unused for love,
limber and eager, an open space.
I search my LaRousse for vocabulary
I can bear to pronounce inside my head
and in my house so quiet that each
word I speak resonates over long.

*Mon mari est mort depuis un an.* My
husband is dead since one year.
*Il avait mal au coeur.* Mal a la tete
is a headache. Heartache. I have mal
au coeur *sans* disease. I write definitions,
check agreements, genders, never certain
I say anything the way a *veuve française*
would say it, but the sound of everything softens from *tres dur* to *plus facile*. I miss him doesn’t translate. *Il me manqué,* strange and reflexive. I cling to the literal, its lack of grace. *He is missing/lacking to me.*
Love Poem

after Neruda

I won’t tell you that I love you
even when you sleep quietly beside me
and I might think you have a peaceful heart,
when I smell the grassy sweetness of your skin,
follow your slow breath with my own.

Love is water:
ocean and droplet,
tide and flood.
I’ve drowned. I’ve been
where water’s memory
can keep you
alive, floating. But
who can contain water?
Who can hold what
will not be held?

I won’t tell you that I love you
when the moment flows,
my ocean, your back
a sandy rest.
My Narcoleptic Mother

After so many years
we finally have a name
for the reason she never made it
more than five minutes into a movie,
would always abruptly nod off
the second she sat down,
even in the middle
of yelling at us. She fell asleep
in the bathtub last week, didn’t wake
until after she choked
on a mouthful of soapy water.
We have a rule now:
no bathing alone. Only showers.
But sometimes she can’t tell
if she is awake or not, drifts off in short waves
then snaps back a millisecond later.
You would never know. I swear
I am becoming her. Every day
I am slowing down, more tired than before.
It’s getting harder to move my limbs
against the current. It scares me,
how delicious it feels
when I give in and stop wrestling
with my eyelids, just let them fall
until there is nothing in this world
but pools of deep dream, the kind
with riptides and requiem sharks,
where thoughts scatter like startled schools of bluegill,
the kind where we can all breathe underwater.
The Winter After

There is wind, a single
icicle of rain. Chains,
windows rattle: this is not
the life I wanted.

A water stain mushrooms across the ceiling
and I can’t hide it, the russet bleeds
through the gray. Every storm eats away
at cliff-side, pulls my house closer
to the shore. I stare at my hands. Nails ringed
with dirt, salt. Sea sludge.

I dream I fall into a pool
of water. I never learned to swim,
can’t scream. My mouth
stuffed full of dandelion seeds,
locust shells. Ghost shrimp.

I get stuck in the same position,
limbs spread, like the gnats that end up
in my nail polish. Spindle legs, cellophane
wings, black bodies locked in brick red. Like
forever or only. I’ve made
promises I could never keep.
Her mid-length flowered nightgown barely covering her heavy thighs, Charlene rolls across the bed and throws her feet over the edge. Her straight brown hair falls in tangles above her shoulders. Considered attractive before the birth of her son, Joey, seven years ago, Charlene has unsuccessfully tried several diets to lose the fifty pounds gained during her pregnancy. Her job seated all day long as a receptionist and “New Accounts Clerk” doesn’t help, and she knows she doesn’t exercise enough. At night, after helping Joey with his homework, Charlene is too tired to do anything but read. As for social life, she has none, and, as for dates, no one has looked her way since Dennis left for good four years ago. Who wants an overweight Mom, who is dead tired at night and broke all the time?

Charlene loves to read. It takes her mind off things she’d rather not think about—like how, on her limited income, will she buy the new shoes for Joey that he needs for school? Rent, food, payments on her second-hand 1969 Dodge Dart and gas to drive to work are her top priorities. Yet she’s stored a shoebox of romance paperbacks under her bed that she’s gathered from a second-hand bookstore in town. Soon she’ll return them all to the store, where the owner will buy them back for a quarter—half of what she paid.

Peering sleepily around the hot, sun-streaked room, Charlene is relieved it’s a sunny day, just as the TV newscaster has predicted—but she knows that, by mid-afternoon, the temperature will soar higher, and, with it, the humidity will close.
in even more. But, Charlene and Joey expect to be long gone to Cedar Point Beach by then on a long planned Saturday outing.

Wrapping her flowered pink and red housecoat around her, Charlene stumbles into the living-dining room, past the overstuffed sofa (covered with a faded blue throw to hide the torn cushions) and her one window air-conditioner, and opens the door to her son’s tiny room. Joey, a lanky second-grader with freckles and blond hair, is sleeping on his back, his hands and feet thrown out in several directions. He’s wearing his favorite orange and blue dinosaur pajamas, and his hair sticks out raggedly in what resembles a crew cut. (Charlene cuts his hair herself.) As everyone constantly reminds her, Joey looks like his father, Dennis, more than Charlene.

Hands on her hips, Charlene yells from the door. “Hey, Joey, wake up! It’s time to head for the beach!”

Joey moans, and turns to face Charlene with sleepy eyes. “Okay, Mom,” he sighs, half-awake, and starts to fall asleep again.

“I’ll give you five more minutes, Joey. And that’s it.” She thinks what a beautiful child he is—better natured than she, and he hardly ever complains—except about his hair. Despite all her problems with his wandering, drug-prone father, she’s never been sorry that they’d had him.

Charlene has already piled the food for their picnic into the cooler, and has collected towels, bathing suits and a blanket for their trip. While Joey showers and brushes his teeth, she sets Corn Flakes, milk and orange juice on the wobbly kitchen table. Ugly as the table is, Charlene is glad to have it and other discarded furniture from her aunt and uncle’s barn next door.
Two years before, after their deaths in the farmhouse fire, her cousins wanted to dispose of the old furniture stored there. After allowing Charlene to rent the old concrete-block building once used to house temporary farm workers (her rent helped pay the land taxes), they were happy to have her take some of it off their hands.

By the time Charlene and Joey are out of the house and into the car, it’s 8 a.m. rather than 7:30 a.m., when she’d hoped to leave. Thank goodness the car air-conditioner still works. She waves at her elderly black neighbor, Old Mac, who sits on his lopsided porch chewing tobacco, with his tired, old dog, Zip, flopped down beside him. Long a farmhand hired by her uncle, he’s been allowed in his older years to live in the nearby abandoned tractor shed and perform small chores on the property, such as mending fences. Charlene has known him since she was a child. Old Mac waves back.

Soon Charlene is driving steadily along the winding, two-lane, blacktopped road leading to Cedar Point. Trees and tropical underbrush are thick along the road, and, by now, houses and farms are few and far between. A huge dragonfly splats against the windshield. “Yuck,” says Joey, as Charlene briefly stops to wipe it off with a paper napkin. She hopes to arrive at the beach by 9:30 a.m., before the hottest part of the day. Time to go swimming before noon, eat their lunch under the awning near the ocean-side café where there’s a breeze, and visit the amusement park and nearby town of Tyler, where Joey likes to stop in the five-and-dime to buy a Richey Rich comic book (his favorite) with the quarter Charlene always gives him. By now Joey has a huge stack of Richey Rich’s that he keeps under his bed. Charlene
has noticed that Richey Rich, although from a wealthy family, seldom sees his father. He is on his own, except for his butler, who often comes to his rescue. She wonders if Joey misses his own father, although he never mentions him or the comic books. Nor does Charlene.

Charlene figures they can leave by 5 p.m. and be home for dinner. Usually on outings to the beach they stop mid-way for gas and a snack at Sissie’s Place, a small roadside gas station with a restaurant attached. Nothing fancy, just eggs, biscuits with sausage gravy, good hamburgers and a pretty good Southern fried chicken dinner with mashed potatoes and slaw. Sometimes Joey and Charlene share eggs and grits. Today, in a hurry, Charlene, has decided not to do that.

“But Mom,” complains Joey, as they near their usual stop, “I’m thirsty!” Charlene gives in to his plea by offering him his favorite drink. “Maybe we could stop just a minute to use the rest rooms and pick up a Slurpee,” she says. Grape is his favorite flavor, and it will help quench his thirst.

As they near the gas station, Charlene notices that the grass plot in front of the building, usually neatly mowed, is filled with underbrush and weeds. As she enters the parking lot, she notices that there are no cars. The big front window of the restaurant is boarded up, and the flower boxes underneath hold only a few dried-up petunias. A big hand-written sign, taped neatly inside the window of the front door, announces:

Temporarily Closed due to Family Emergency
Open Again in December
Next Gas Station Ten Miles West
Charlene needs gas before the end of her trip, but knows she can make it to Cedar Point without a refill on the way. She is about to drive onto the main road again when she hears, or thinks she hears, a faint animal-like cry coming from the restaurant. She stops to listen. Nothing.

“Joey,” she asks. “Did you hear anything just now?” Joey looks perplexed. “Yes, Mom. I thought I heard a sound—almost like the meow Spike makes in the morning when he wants to come back into the house.”

A pushover for stray animals, Charlene backs the car into the driveway again, and steps outside. “Stay here, Joey,” she says, and heads toward the front door, trying to peer through the dusty window. But there is nothing in sight except a nearly empty counter with a cup, a dish and a fork on the far end, neatly stacked chairs and the familiar maple tables all pushed into one corner. The candy rack is empty and, by peering sideways with her face against the glass, Charlene can see the cash register with its open drawer. By turning to the right as far as she can, she notes what looks like a pile of blankets. A few newspapers are scattered on the floor, and on one of these is set two blue dishes. By squinting, she can just make out the date on a newspaper near the door: May 15, 1974, three months before. But no sign of life. Maybe the cat is outside and is ok. Charlene backs away from the door, heads for the car—and hears the noise again. Yes, it sounds like the meowing of a cat, but is more insistent this time.

“I think we’ve got an abandoned cat here,” she calls. “Come on, Joey.”
Charlene, followed by Joey, walks to the side of the neatly painted restaurant where they find a stone-lined path leading to a side door. As they near the door, they hear the sound again. Yes, it’s a loud meow.

“That cat sounds really hungry, Mom,” says Joey, as Charlene tries the handle on the back door. To her surprise, the door swings open easily.
Laying Sgt. Shaffer to Rest

Sergeant Shaffer’s family and town—Mt. Alto, Pennsylvania—planned to lay their child to rest in peace, who died in war.

In Qais Ataiwee Yaseen’s neighborhood, one block of southeast Baghdad, suicide bombs killed thirty-four boys at once.

“Buzz” Shaffer, twenty-four, loved dill pickles, collected baseball cards, wanted to marry his girl, work, raise a family.

Abbas Yaseen loved insects, begged his father not to poison ants. They also have families and houses. Abbas and his brother, Ali, both killed.

Sergeant Shaffer, wounded on the road to Ramadi, a roadside bomb, eighty percent of his body burned, two hands and one foot amputated.

Twenty-nine families in Mr. Yaseen’s neighborhood lost children, ages six to fifteen, limbs burned and scattered. The clocks in the neighborhood froze.

Sergeant Shaffer given small chance of maimed survival, was the three-thousandth American soldier to die in Iraq.
Each month three thousand Iraqis died. Mr. Yaseen’s town disintegrated. His wife and daughter left. *Life has no taste*, he says.
Severe Weather

The TV weatherman’s in ecstasy: tornados in Technicolor on the move, hot pink, flame gold, a pulse of purple, honking banners across news of the day’s ordinary mayhem.

It’s as if King Kong were poised to crush our puny house, turn the city rickety. Still, it’s nothing more than rain. Then sudden midnight—crack of Judgment Day—waterfall of fire from the corner of my eye. We feel for candles. They bloom in our hands, in neighbors’ windows. With a flashlight we barely see live wire dangling from the pole, call 911 on the basement phone, the only one that works. All night the flare and murmur of men, lit up on high lifts in the rain, slice through our sleep.
Reservoir

Across Jay Street
the old reservoir
concrete cracked by time

back of Gerber’s house
built on a hill
beckoned to me.

Crumbled squares, dismal gray
quiet with no one
on the hill.

I climbed the tree
lifted myself up
onto the roof,

down on my hands and knees
crawled over to the broken place
where bare rebar poked the air.

I looked down into the black water
and knew that if the roof splintered
I would fall. They would never find me.

Serve them right.
The dark water would hide me.
They would never see me again.
Early Morning Surprise

It might as well have been a lion.
Right in the center of Clyde Street,
this wild turkey, elusive in the woods,
saunters down the middle.
Not to be believed.
But there it was.

Then I walked my dog,
mailed my thank-you note, and there,
in my neighbor’s yard, a brown creeper
circling up and down
a pin oak. I read my horoscope
this morning, but it didn’t promise
anything like this.
from “Reruns Part I”

I was watching a re-run of Mork and Mindy when my father died. It was an early episode. Earth was a new, strange place full of unknowns for Mork. Robin Williams, as Mork, came from Ork into this alien place.

I almost always watched the television when my mother and I visited my father at the VA hospital where dried-up remnants of WWII soldiers had gone, blown into the big old building like so many brittle leaves. . . old men in wheelchairs, cream-colored bath blankets over their laps. Sitting in wheelchairs along the walls of the hallways, like a frozen parade. The warm, yellow, musty smell of urine everywhere. Old men mumbling to themselves, sitting in the hallway.

My father is in a four-bed ward, one bed in each corner, each bed with a patient. None of them talking. None of them even able to talk. These patients are too ill to sit in wheelchairs. They lay in whatever position they are placed. Above each bed is taped a piece of paper with D-B-W written on it. Door, Back, Window. Every two hours two attendants sweep through the unit, stop at each bed, and turn the patients. D-B-W. First turn them to face the door, next turn them onto their backs, third turn them to face the window. All the patients face the same direction. The attendants call themselves the turning team.

Robin Williams, as Mork, cavorts across the screen. Manic energy surrounds him. He is never still.

The four men in this room lay silently. Mouths open. Eyes open, not blinking. Dried, red lower lids drooping like the eyes of basset hounds.
And Robin Williams still moves, still exudes energy.

My father lays with his mouth open. His jaws look frozen open. Frozen open and never, ever able to close again, to speak again. His tongue is dry, coated with a white film. I use a glycerin swab to wipe out his mouth. He has lost the ability to chew, to swallow. The glycerin swab makes his tongue look better. My mother is very quiet.

Robin Williams jabbers away, trying to hide his confusion in this new place.

My father’s diaper needs changed. I can smell it. I go to the nurses’ station, walking past the crumpled men in wheelchairs, men who do not look up when I pass, men who do not swat at the flies on their hands. Men with dried dribbles of food on their pajamas.

The nurse at the station doesn’t look up at me. She busily writes something, something on someone’s chart. Maybe something about appetite, or maybe something about medicine, or maybe something about whatever, whatever, whatever. She doesn’t look up at me.

I tell her I think my father’s diaper needs changed. Room 108. “Someone will be in,” she says.

I go back to room 108. My mother sits, a dried up comma of a woman, at my father’s bedside. She’s been at his side during each stage of his illness, watching Alzheimer’s steal bits and pieces of his mind. Over time she seemed to shrink smaller and smaller and become quieter and quieter. We don’t talk much anymore.

Each patient in this four-bed ward has a TV suspended above his bed. Each TV is tuned to a different channel. A low
babel of sound. Each patient lies unaware of the TVs, unaware of the low babel.

Robin Williams still bounces around on the TV screen. I feel sorry for him. Here he is in this new place, a scary place. There are no emotions on Ork. No emotions. A black and white world with no love, no hate, no fear, no anger, no emotions at all. And suddenly he is on Earth where emotions rise and fall and swirl like wind into every corner of life. Wind pushing you where you don’t want to go, where you can’t push back, can’t go back.

Nobody came to change my father’s diaper. The nurse said someone would be in, but no one came. Even if the turning team came into room 108 they wouldn’t change my father’s diaper. The turning team only turns patients, nothing else. They start at one end of the hall and move from room to room, from bed to bed—door, back, window.

Robin Williams still delivers his rapid fire dialogue, his manicy movements, his exuberant energy.

I sit watching this rerun with my fingers on my father’s pulse. It’s weak and thready, rapid and irregular. Much weaker than yesterday. Much more rapid. His breathing is different, too. Several rapid shallow breaths then a long pause with no breaths. I know what this means. I know. I don’t say anything to my mother.

Robin Williams is confused in this episode. He learns to feel emotions and is frightened by them. He wants to lock them up, these emotions. Robin Williams will continue to have difficulty understanding events on Earth. He will continue, throughout the series, to be faced with difficult situations and will struggle each time.
My father’s pulse is weaker and weaker. It feels like moth wings on my fingertips. His pulse flickery, flickery, flicker, flicker, flick, flick, gone. There are no more breaths.

I look at my mother. I tell her he’s gone. She stands up. We walk out of the room, past the men in wheelchairs, still sitting, waiting to move on, waiting to go somewhere. Past the nurses’ station. The nurse is still sitting there, writing on a chart.

I stop and tell her my father has passed away. She looks up briefly. Her eyes are a dull winter gray. “Someone will be in,” she says.
from *Storm Dreams*

*Note:* Alyssa, 49 years old, has been widowed for seven years and recently lost her house in a tornado. She is driving home to Ohio after attending a conference in New York City called “Finding Inner Peace and Your Life’s Purpose” when she decides to stop for the night at a Bed and Breakfast that her friend recommended.

Alyssa read the directions to the B & B with her overhead light while driving, and ended up lost. The narrow roads through the Pennsylvania woods all looked the same: dark and tree-lined. The silvery glow of the moon was like one big streetlight, but even that didn’t help. Other than a few lights from houses up long driveways and a raccoon scampering away, there was nothing to distinguish one road from another. She wanted to retrace her path to the highway to start over, but wasn’t sure if it was in front of her, behind, or to the right or left. If she could only find a street sign, she’d call the B & B for help. She squeezed the steering wheel until her knuckles hurt, then took her best guess at the direction to head in. Where was that inner peace when she needed it? She came to a fork in the road.

She hit her brakes hard. Her seatbelt locked. A man stood at the point where the roads met, shielding his eyes. She realized her brights were on, blinding him. She turned them off and pulled up until he was alongside her window. That’s when she noticed he held hedge clippers. She locked her door. What would anyone be doing with long, sharp blades in the dark? He didn’t look scary. Even in the moonlight she could tell by his open stance and welcoming smile that he seemed friendly – and interesting, with
broad shoulders and hair long enough to be pushed behind his ears and curl up around his collar. He said something that she couldn’t understand through the closed window.

“Can’t hear you,” she said so loudly that she startled herself. He motioned for her to roll down her window. She brought it down a crack.

“You can open wider. I’m safe,” his full lips said through the crack. His face, definitely masculine but with a softness, didn’t seem to be a killer’s face. She still wasn’t sure. Some of the murderers she’d seen in the news looked nice enough, even that one who had slashed a dozen prostitutes. “I’m the guy selling the property.” He pointed to a sign stuck in the ground with the blades of the clippers, then tossed them near the sign’s post. Between the moonlight and the reflection of the car lights she could make out the words, “For Sale by Owner.” Part of a wild shrub had been cleared from in front of it.

Afraid of appearing rude, she rolled down her window halfway. The man bent over sideways to the level of the window, resting his left arm on top on the car.

“You must be Louise. I’m Flynn Connor; pleased to meet you.” He thrust his hand through the window, offering a handshake. The sleeves on his jean shirt were rolled up, revealing thick veins in muscled forearms. Alyssa pressed herself against the seatback. She fingered the window control and stared at the hand – too close to her neck.

“No, I’m Alyssa.”

“Sorry. I thought they were sending Louise. Well, it’s good to meet you, Alyssa.” He withdrew his unshaken hand. “I can ride with you up to the B & B. It’s hard to find the turn off in the dark.”
“No! I mean, nobody sent me.”

“You’re not from Love Suites?”

“Love Sweets?” He thinks I’m a call girl! “Oh my God, no!”

She rolled up the window and shifted into drive.

He threw back his head in laughter.

She wanted to pull away fast, but he still had his arm on top of the car so she inched forward to shake him off.

“Wait!” He stepped with the car’s movement and yelled at her closed window, “I thought you were from the developer’s office. To see the property...and make an off—” He tripped and fell, vanished from her view. She hit the brakes. Was he lying under the car? A motion caught her eye: he was rolling into a shallow ditch.

She shivered, as if sprayed by cold water. What if she hurt him? She pressed her nose to the window to see where he landed.

Wait – he’d said something about a developer. Oh no. If only she understood how to be present and peaceful the way Keiko had taught at the conference, she wouldn’t have impulsively misjudged him. She flung her door open and jumped out, but hung close to the car. He was pushing himself up from the ground.

“Are you hurt?” Her heart pounded in her ears.

“I’m fine.” He stood up and brushed dried leaves and various bits of the woods off his jeans and shirt. Did he wince?

“I’m so sorry. I thought you ...” She decided not to say what she thought he was. “Are you sure you’re okay?” Her voice sounded small, laced with guilt.

“Hey, I’ve survived worse,” he said while rubbing his knee. When he crunched up to the road near Alyssa, she noticed he was about a half foot taller than her, probably just over six feet, and this made her body hum with apprehension or excitement,
she wasn’t sure which. “I didn’t mean to scare you.” He seemed friendly and amused, not angry as she had feared. “I assumed you were from the development company and would know who I was. We don’t often see women traveling alone around here.”

“I was trying to find the Forest Grove Bed & Breakfast.” The rumble of the car engine plundered the quiet of the woods.

“That’s next to my place.” He gestured in the direction she had come. “You missed the turn off. It’s almost hidden by scrub. I’m planning to clear that too, after I finish the sign at the fork.”

“I’m really sorry I jumped to conclusions. Do you want a ride home? It’s the least I can do for making you fall.” A breeze blew the heat from the idling engine towards her.

“It was a bramble that tripped me, not you, Alyssa. But I wouldn’t mind a ride. The blades are rusty on those old clippers and I need to get my chain saw to take down that overgrowth.” He flashed a grin. “I’ll go unarmed, without the clippers.”

“Yeah, good idea,” she said with a laugh, and tossed her purse from the passenger seat onto the one behind her.

Flynn jaunted around the front of the car, his shadow momentarily huge when he passed through the headlights. He folded himself into the seat, then paused for a few seconds, meeting her eyes and smiling before he pulled the door closed. He ran his fingers over the top of his head through thick chestnut-colored hair that was combed straight back without a part, then rested his hands casually on his thighs. There was something in the way he held himself – a quiet confidence, an easy openness – that made him seem different than other men she’d known. A wave of nervous warmth flooded her, and she swallowed hard. She threw the car into neutral and gunned the
engine before she steadied herself enough to find reverse and turn the car around.

“\textit{I appreciate the ride,”} he said. “\textit{I wanted to walk – this night’s too good to miss – but it takes awhile to get up the hill and back.”} He watched her as she twisted to see over her shoulder and back up to the fork.

“I’m glad to do it. Now that I know you’re not dangerous.” She regretted saying it immediately since it reminded her how vulnerable she was. “Mind if I ask why you’re cutting things in the dark?”

He chuckled. “Still worried about me, aren’t you? I just got back from a weekend with my daughter and noticed driving in that my ‘For Sale’ sign was hidden. Probably why I haven’t had any calls for the place in a long time.”

“So you’re moving away?”

“I stay here on and off. The property was my uncle’s. I inherited it when he died over a year ago – no kids and I was his favorite nephew – and I wasn’t eager to sell it until now.”

“It seems pretty and peaceful here, from what I can tell.”

“Yeah, I often thought about keeping the place to retire to. You want to slow down. The road is on the right here.”

There was the sign for Forest Grove, nestled between high grasses. She turned onto a narrow road barely visible between overhanging branches and encroaching shrubs. No wonder she missed it earlier.
Take Only Photos

Centuries of dust scatter across my sandals
pass through walls of crumbling brick
ancient sculpted windows let in rain, wind,
snow.

Scattered raven feathers, a corncob
long ago stripped for Piki bread
carbon traces on clay sherds.

Jasper? Shaped to hold a thumb’s
pad, the sheen of ancestral genes
a favored tool abandoned in haste.

Was it left for me? It’s part of their heritage
a language I’ve only just begun to speak.
*Take it, it is meant for you,* my heart
calls out. My head? *Leave it!*

I slip the precious stone into a pocket
and return to the ranger’s version
of history.
Notes from the Garden

—November
Beach weather from skies
so blue the eye needs sunshades
to scan it. Neither AC nor
tree shadows give relief.

Grey-tailed radar scouts search
for deposits to fill winter vaults,
enough hookworm for all.

Dazzled fliers at the window feeder
cock their heads as though to ask,
“Is that food hiding behind the glass?”

Retreat to leaf-flooded shelters,
sleep time between visits to humans
buried in “secure” ego-filled nests.

—January
Gypsy seeds sprout in wet, warm
earth, certain doom when winter
pulls up the cold white sheets.

Runners, in shorts and sleeveless
tees, delight in sun-filled respites.
Galapagos evidence goes unheeded.

—March
Polar cubs starve, unable to jump
from ice floe to ice floe. Marshy
bogs replace frozen tundra storage,
seals decay before man’s belly.

—June
Shelter found in flaming forests
and concrete cities. Evidence
from the Galapagos more conclusive.
Can we bear to watch the first to go?

Chief Seattle repeats his warning
from the other side:  You will smother
in your own garbage. We listen and
listen.
from “Overboard”

She was still angry about having to go sailing today. Why should she have to give up her own plans to work in her art studio? It was almost an order—Jack had promised his friend that they would go sailing. “Andrea, you’ve got to go!”

Here she was then, first getting the boat pointed in the right direction and then jumping in at the last minute, something she was always nervous about—imagining that she would end up in the water as the boat sailed on without her.

Jack was busy talking with George, but he stopped long enough to look up at her. “Hey, Andrea, George discovered the spinnaker and thinks we should put it up,” Jack grinned at her. He knew she was terrified of spinnakers – too many disasters resulted from them not being handled properly. She was not amused.

“The spinnaker looks pretty, George, but it’s not something you’d want to get into,” she assured him.

He just nodded. “You sound like a real sailor.”

Whatever that was supposed to mean.

“Let’s point toward the Smith’s cottage so we can catch the wind and get off to a good start” Jack yelled at her.

Once they got going, she relaxed and held tight to the jib as they tacked back and forth, with her shifting from side to side to keep the boat in balance and George just sitting solidly in one place, carrying on an endless, jaunty conversation with Jack. Andrea only vaguely heard what they were saying; she was too busy handling the jib. “Ready about, hard alee,” Jack called out when it was time to change sides. And she had to be ready to move and move quickly.
They were speeding along at a nice clip when, very suddenly, things began to change. Andrea had looked over her shoulder and knew they were in trouble. The tranquil lake they had started out in was not the same.

“A storm’s coming,” she told Jack whose hand was on the tiller but whose mind was elsewhere. He was telling George about the church-held property bordering the lake with its long, elegantly-kept grass. He wasn’t really paying attention, she realized.

“Look at the sky,” she repeated with more urgency. And louder. Jack looked this time. She could tell that he was caught off guard, trying to appear in charge but knowing that he had miscalculated. They were a long way from their dock. Too long.

“Better head for home,” he said. His friend kept talking about the way the Catholic Church always manages to buy up the best property before anyone else notices. “A sixth sense,” he called it. Jack nodded from time to time, but she could see that his mind now was on the boat. They were in a broad reach, with the wind at their back. Their boat sliced through the waves with constantly increasing speed, and Andrea had her hands full just holding the sail.

“Let it play!” Jack shouted and she let it out a bit more. She kept looking back to see the sky, hoping it would somehow disappear, become a dream from which she could wake up. But it got darker, and the black sky seemed to be running towards them. She realized that they were alone on the lake now—everyone else had seen the weather change and gotten to shore.

Their boat was almost planing now. No one spoke. She watched her sail carefully, letting it flop occasionally as the boat shifted directions. She couldn’t look back at Jack any more. She had to trust him.
And then she saw the rain, denting the waves gently in the first few moments and then hitting like a sledge hammer. She didn’t hear thunder, but the thought of lightning never left her mind. The sail started to shift and without further warning, they started to tip—voices yelling, attempts to scramble up on the boat to balance the weight. It all happened too quickly. She saw George’s hat disappear into the wind, finding its way to the water, now just a totally irrelevant detail. She completely lost her sense of balance and tried to reach for something to hold on to—the mast, the rigging, anything. She felt herself slipping out of control.

And suddenly they were in the water. She felt herself flailing helplessly in her life jacket, the boat just to her right, wobbling in hesitation, the sails flat and filling more and more with water. But she knew she was not caught in the sails, something that had always worried her. She knew her husband was safe, she could hear him.

Then she saw George dangling from the center board, his leg seemingly caught in one of the ropes. He looked puzzled, almost as if this just couldn’t be happening to him.

“Get out,” she shouted and reached toward him as if to help disentangle him from the ropes. George managed to free himself moments before the boat finally lurched to its complete belly-up position, hopelessly mired now with no hope of righting itself, even if they had been strong enough to stand on the centerboard to apply needed pressure.

But in attempting to reach George she had swallowed a lot of water and now struggled to grasp the boat’s hull and catch her breath. At least it represented some kind of stability. George was asking what he might do to help and Jack was busy diving
into the water to search for any possibility of righting the boat. Andrea frantically looked to see what was going on around the lake—any activity, any rescuers.

Eventually they all just held on to the boat. “I’m scared. What are we going to do?” She articulated the words that George and Jack both undoubtedly felt, but being men, they held it all in. No one had any ideas. There was no lightning, fortunately, but the sky was completely dark, the rain pummeled down on them, and they were far enough from shore that she was afraid they would be there for some time.

“The Johnsons know we’re out here,” Andrea said. “I waved to Marcy on the dock on our way out. Maybe they’ll call the shore patrol.”

“I hope they’ll remember us,” said Jack, subdued now. They were cold. They were wet. And they were stuck.

“Maybe one of us can get to shore,” George suggested. He couldn’t be serious. They could see the houses with all their lights on and they might have been reachable under ordinary circumstances, but not now.

“You okay, George?” asked Jack.

And then Andrea saw the speed boat coming toward them and yelled out, “We’re going to be saved!” They all waved and yelled “Help!” somehow fearful that the boat wouldn’t see them. The boat was filled with young, exuberant boys who hollered and waved—she couldn’t really understand what they were saying as they gently steered their boat as close as they could.

“Are we glad to see you,” Jack shouted.

“We saw the whole thing,” they screamed back, “the crazy speed you were going.”
“Please help my wife and friend, then we’ll worry about the boat.”

“Sure, man.” And they started to reach for Andrea to pull her aboard. It was an old motorboat—not one of the fancy ones for waterskiing—and there was no ladder, no steps, nothing. It wasn’t easy getting from the water into the boat, which was high off the surface. There was lots of undignified pushing and shoving, not only for her but for George, too.

It took ages for the rescue—towing the boat in, George and Andrea wading to shore and watching while Jack and the boys struggled to upright the boat. They finally managed to get it steady. Jack waved goodbye to the young men as they headed off across the lake. He turned to walk towards Andrea and George.

“Hey—I sure am glad you didn’t go to your art studio,” he said as he struggled with the zipper on his life jacket.

She had been thinking just the opposite. What had she been doing here when she wanted to be sculpting?

“She was the one who saw the storm coming, thank God,” said George, finally getting around to taking his life jacket off.

She glowed—and quickly forgot the fear of being in the water miles from shore. She was safe now which did make a difference, but she had liked the excitement of the storm. She had managed not only to keep her cool, but to even act as if she knew what she was doing. Maybe she had.
Mercurial

Above the violin’s bridge, eerie ghosts parade.
He hasn’t played in years except a few duets
with Mom, now double-stops through Paganini.
I’m soaring on the scratchy horse-hair sofa, far away
when he lowers the bow.

He’s reading one more Western, pages whisper
under his fingers. Six long shelves of Zane Greys.
More of Freud, Molière, Dante. Fired from another
teaching job, he has all day, almost all night, to blue
the living room with smoke.

When a car hits Hiho, he shovels, scrapes.
I pet Hiho’s head. No blood but his sides heave.
When they still, Dad wraps him in soft cloth,
gently fills the hole. We take turns reading
the Twenty-Third Psalm.

All his stories begin, “The boy and the bear set off
into the woods with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
their moms had made tucked in knapsacks.” They
always catch their fish, emerge safe, sleep well
in their own beds.

From my bed I hear him rage again at Mom,
his voice so loud plaster rattles in the wall.
It’s late, she needs to sleep for work. I stiffen,
furious I begged him to stay. In my diary,
*I love Mom.*
My six-year-old brother tells a fib, won’t retract. Dad removes his belt, lashes my brother’s back three times. My brother screams. I’m rigid, seated, forced to watch. I refuse to cry, decide to kill my dad.
Pattern

Black angus facing east
graze on a hill still green
though yellowing toward winter.

How I remember happiness—
Dad smiling, joking, then
his face freezes. Wrinkles deepen.

He lights a cigarette, shoves his plate away,
leaves us at the table, forks stopped
midair. For days speaks to no one.

Suddenly
he’s back. Offers a joke, green on black,
until the joke freezes, though it’s August,
seventy roses blooming seventy shades,
black on black.
Fucking Joe on my Grandmother’s Porch

The piss yellow streetlight highlighting the empty street avoided our bodies. The darkness enveloped us. My back pressing against the scratchy green carpet. My legs wrapped around his clothed back. It was quick. The delicious pain of penetration. One, two, three thrusts, talking dirty into my ear. A muscle spasm, kicking the plastic chair behind him.
To the Next Moron Who Wants to Date Me

I like quick fucks on my porch and long burn rides on windy roads.  
I could pack a bowl in my sleep.  
My friends are my family and writing is my life.  
If you can’t be my best friend, baby, we’re not going to work.  
I take my birth control with mixed drinks  
and I’ve been sober two nights in ten days.  
(I’m not Ms. Right.)  
My hair’s a different color every two months  
and don’t even think about telling me what to do.  
Don’t touch me when I’m drunk  
(let me touch you),  
hold my hand when I’m stoned,  
and don’t put your shoes on my bed.
Quit drunk-texting me. i don’t want 2 talk. i don’t want to know how u r or that u r in therapy 4 depression. We are not friends and if you miss me—not my Steelers tickets—as much as you text that you do then maybe you should’ve thought enough of me not to stand me up for your mother or Jesus or whatever other lame-ass excuse you thought I would accept. I deserve better. Better than drunk phone calls or saying you wouldn’t marry me because I want to adopt children. You should’ve tried paying for dinner before you started worrying about the children and, after a year of not hearing from me, if you’re really wondering whether or not I still care about u then, apparently, therapy isn’t working.
“Joe Rock” Saved Christmas Cards, 1938–41

We found
your scrapbook of Christmas cards
postage 1½¢ then 3¢
addressed Oscar Similo
Blythedale, Pa or
The Grand Theatre
Sutersville, Pa

each placed carefully in its envelope
waiting
almost seventy years
to be opened again.
First Communion

Every tongue awaits the body.

Every body is a word.

Every word a possibility.

Grant the open wound
its correspondence to
some mystery unshrouded.

Give the heart its place within
the grape-dark midnight sky.

Skull, full of sparkling water.

Joy like a fly trapped in honey
(where its wings were:
a chronic neuralgia).

Each head that crowns
each roseate petal of vulva
says it again. Then,
the jagged cry
that means it’s alive.

Whole hungry centuries!
Eyes of intelligence
opened and closed!

Lambs in the meadow
each spring.
The tottering legs
of original love.
Aubade Noir

It’s four in the morning. In catworld, the shadows won’t stay with their shapes, though the air is as still as the drapes in the old widow’s cavernous house. The shadows won’t stay with the scrapes of the cello inside the tall bushes — persistent, a warning, cold-blooded: stand back.

June rubs its wet thighs on catworld; a blossomy syrup so strong it caves in a human’s round heart, trimmed to fit bowls of cream (which are all but forgotten in catworld this morning, with the keys, cushions, things of domestic desire).

If the cats are our animal souls sent to wander, I’m afraid they’ll be lost in the ivy they’ve marked. Stand back, cello answers the high mewlings of love. And the high tone relocates like pain.
Diva Elm

She stands naked in the wild
gold colored dress at her feet
ready to make love to, winter’s
wind

Her lips kiss snowflakes
that sate her with wetness
she enchants her audience
in brazen delight

And in the springtime
she changes her leaves
to callow green attire
for her virgin role
Second Mourning

I still see her, but vaguely.
The big-boned woman, long braids,
left breast missing.

I press my ears closer to the
thickening fog, and try to remember
the sound of her voice when she’d speak.

Sunflowers she planted are still here,
as is the husker’s truck that brought her
liniment and coconut candy.

But I sense a second rain, that I’m losing
her once more, as I’m now the age she was,
the day of her first good-bye.
A New Day

Here comes the new day,
inch by inch of it,
edge the door,
striping the blinds.

Here hovers the new chance
uncertain, as the luna moth
beating the breath
of this curtain.
Water Rising

Tumbling sky.
Water-slapped road,
sleek, rain-black,
littered with rusting,
restive leaves.

Doors shut. Blinds
stutter in tight sleeves.
Noon rolls dark. Rains
swallow like a sea.
The Sun is High

after Malena Morling

The sun is high
and I’m knee deep,
thick into my garden.
Weeds & flowers—the weeds
are growing fast,
each minute larger.
The weeds are bad
mouthing the flowers,
each insult also bigger.
The dandelions are
especially obstreperous,
and the poke weed
snickers. The agastache,
lilies and liatrus go first.
Heavy blooms
deflating away.
Stamen/stem & root. Gone
all gone.
And This Is How I Pray

The red brick wall is hot and the heat
beats through my calves—my hands, too. There are no dogs
barking in this afternoon of thick air. Somewhere
there is a perfect shadow of a perfect
tree. And somewhere there is a pure
love, maybe. Meanwhile—

I step over the guardrail careful not to catch
my pants. The field ahead blooms in weeds
of no particular consequence. (Horsenettle. Dewberry.
Dogbane.) Snags & snarls and some abandoned rebar.
My dog has already flushed out the birds. So always—

Please don’t let this be the day when we become
“the woman and her dog” who find the body.

I think again of the perfect
shadow of the perfect tree & how
I am given toward wanting
to be elsewhere. I know
what it is that I don’t like: too
clearly sometimes. Today—

Please give me
patience for that which I easily hate.
So I manage to read 15 lines of the poet whose work irritates me. Instead of none. I quote it, in fact and make myself touch the purple spines of the Canadian Thistle & the purple seems softer than possible. And the possible feels more like the spent fuzz of seeds than the edges of asphalt. I wonder—

*Thank you for the water that comes out of my faucet.*
Now That I No Longer Live There

The air is dry in my hometown and
tap water tastes clean.
Famous for something small
as the sun shines a bit too bright,
first lumber barons then metal wire workers.
Not all the roads are paved
certain stoplights are ignored.
Front room windows stay open at night,
a few street signs have been blown off their poles.
Families have dinner watching TV.
I remember which street to turn up for church,
living room lights give off a haze on the sidewalks.
Familiar as a groove in a stone
as if I were 16 again,
worn deeper each year
out to prove I wasn’t ugly or awkward
reminiscing on a boy and a can of beer.
She Just Wants To Be Elegant

One time. She wants to stand still, feet together, her bra strap not showing. She wants a photo taken; have it framed so she can remember that moment when it all came together with everything and everyone perfectly placed, instead of leaning askew, cut off, running in circles, smashed or flaking over.
“The Erstwhile Ghetto” from the novel
*Everybody Same*

One day after taking Saki to school, Chizuko was approached by a woman in a shabby grey kimono whom she had often seen, also accompanying a child to school. They had nodded to each other in recognition but had never spoken.

“Please,” the woman whispered, “help me.”

Chizuko, sensing that the woman was about to faint, took hold of her arm and led her to a nearby bench. She didn’t know what to do so she simply sat by her side, still holding onto her arm. The woman, very pale, sat with her eyes closed for what seemed like a very long time. Finally, she opened her eyes and said, “I’m so sorry for troubling you.”

“Oh no,” Chizuko said. “It’s no trouble. How do you feel now?”

“Better. I often feel faint. It’s the radiation sickness. I must go home and lie down.”

“Do you live nearby?”

“No. Most of my home was destroyed. I don’t know what happened to my husband. Some soldiers built a roof over what was left of my house. It’s a pitiful dwelling but adequate for my daughter and me.”

Holding onto Chizuko’s arm, she walked through the demolished city, past ruined buildings, yet to be cleared away. Finally, they reached the riverbank. Makeshift shacks, thrown together with pieces of discarded wood, corrugated metal and tarpaper covered the area. It was worse than when Chizuko had lived there, much shabbier and so fragile it could all be blown
away in a storm. There was no sign of the shack in which Chizuko had lived and no familiar faces.

“I live on the other side of the river,” the woman said. “I’m sorry we have to walk through this desolate area, it used to be a ghetto for the eta, but now only the very poor live here. I thank Buddha I am not that badly off.”

They walked past the shacks and crossed the bridge under which Chizuko used to scrub her husband’s filthy clothes. “The other side of the river,” Chizuko thought, which was off-limits to her before and probably would be now if this woman knew of her origin. The once elegant area had been partially rebuilt and the woman slid open the door to a six tatami room. The tatami and walls had obviously been repaired.

“Please come in,” the woman said. “I will make some tea.”

Chizuko felt she should protest but she felt even more the need to luxuriate in being the guest in a home that would have ordinarily been closed to her.

The woman served an ordinary herbal tea in two softly glazed cloudy blue ceramic bowls. “Precious possessions that were not damaged by the bomb.”

When she had settled down on a satin covered cushion, patched like the one on which Chizuko sat, she introduced herself as Mijikami Yoruki. Chizuko, in turn, introduced herself and explained that she was Saki’s nanny. “We live on Anyoko Island. We too are survivors of the bomb.”

“Oh. Where were you when it fell?” Chizuko said she was on her way to the post office. “I was knocked unconscious, but one of the priests helped me get to Dr. Takanaka’s clinic. Saki, who is the Doctor’s niece, tended to my needs, and then I took care of
her when she came down with a bad case of dysentery, and that’s how I became her nanny.”

As the women chatted, it occurred to Chizuko that Mijikami-san could be the owner of the kimono she had found on this side of the river and put on following the blast. The kimono that had enabled her to hide her eta origin. What a difference in their present attire—her own brown-patterned autumn kimono and dark peach obi that had belonged to Saki’s Auntie compared to the drab gray kimono and faded brown obi her hostess wore.

Chizuko, feeling very lucky and not in the least guilty, returned to the island that was now her home, a home that was comfortable and safe as long as her origin remained unknown. She told Taeku-san about her encounter with Mijikami-san.

“The wife of Mijikami-sensei, the tea ceremony master?” Taeku asked.

“She only told me that her husband disappeared. She didn’t say anything else about him.”

“She and her husband were prominent tea masters. I must write to her and invite her to tea. Will you see her again when you pick up Saki?”

“Probably,” Chizuko said.

“Then please give her my note this afternoon.”

When Taeku received the note from Mijikami-san accepting her invitation, she immediately consulted Okamura-san and Tanimoto-san, (Matsuda-san was away) voicing her concern about five participants fitting into the small teahouse that only held four comfortably. Neither of the widows would consider missing such a momentous event, and since Chizuko-san had acted as go between, they all agreed she would have to be included. But
Chizuko, who knew nothing about the tea ceremony, told Taeku-san, “It has been such a long time since I have attended a formal tea ceremony I would not know what to do in the presence of such a master.” Taeku san said, “As go-between you must participate. Simply copy the actions of the widows.”

A week later, Mijikami, wearing a somewhat more attractive kimono, mauve with a maple leaf motif and auburn obi, accompanied Chizuko back to the island after dropping off their charges at school.

“Welcome, Mijikami-sensei,” said Taeku-san, bowing in front of the teahouse, flanked by the two neighboring widows who also bowed.

“It was my husband who was the sensei, not I,” Mijikami said as she bowed in return.

“Oh, Mijikami-sensei,” protested Taeku, “I was fortunate enough to attend one of your tea ceremonies and to me you were every bit on a par with your husband. I am most honored that you have come to the island for a modest ceremony in the humble teahouse built for us by the villagers.”

The five women took turns washing their hands in a moss-covered stone basin before entering the teahouse. Taeku-san indicated that Mijikami-sensei should enter first, followed by Okamura-san, Tanimoto-san and Chizuko. One by one, they removed their shoes, bent their heads and, crouching, entered through the small door—a humbling reminder that all are equal in tea, regardless of status.

Chizuko was surprised at the simplicity of the structure’s wooden beams and paper walls. Incense caressed her nostrils. In the tokonoma alcove there stood a solitary orange
chrysanthemum fitted into a slim tapered vase in front of a scroll with two black letters painted on it. Mijikami-sensei read “Autumn Peace.” The women all murmured their approval.

Chizuko did as Taeku-san had said, following the example of Okamura-san and Tanimoto-san. The five women knelt, a bit close to each other, around a hearth filled with glowing embers in the middle of the room on which Taeku-san placed a cast iron kettle full of water. In silence the guests watched Taeku-san wipe each utensil with a small cotton cloth, vigorously stir green tea with a bamboo whisk then carefully pour the concoction into a black raku bowl. She handed the bowl to Mijikami-sensei who took a sip of the tea then passed it on to Okamura-san, first turning it slightly. Okamura-san repeated the procedure as did Tanimoto-san who handed the bowl to Chizuko, “I’m entitled,” Chizuko reassured herself as she took a swallow, then rotated the bowl and handed it back to her hostess.

Taeku-san took the final sip, then wiped the utensils and passed them around with the tea bowl to be admired. The women continued to sit in silent contemplation as they listened to the sounds of crackling fire and bubbling water.

Chizuko wondered how equal the women would consider her if they knew of her actual status. She sincerely hoped she would never find out.
Tonight, Not Again

One day, your name will belong
to an old man. Mister You.
A proud rooster swallowed by a tired dragon.
Slow steps. Hats and canes.
I, too, will walk slowly. To your grave.
You will be gone someday. It is a funny thing.

Tonight, we walk, South Side to Downtown.
Listening to the night, to each other,
so late it is early. You ask the hard questions:
Brooklyn, or Seattle? Does she love you?
Do you want him? And suddenly,
I am crying in the middle of my laughing.

Your face glows. In the dark glistening night,
I wrap my self, like a fish net,
around you. Your cool, sweet skin.
Laughter like chocolate. Your eyes,
bright and full as the open ocean.
Some Other Lock

Every now and again,
you are given a night
in which you are reminded
that you are given too much,
all these things that you do not need –
this hardwood floor,
granite countertops,
this breath in your lungs,
and even your beating heart –
it is too much.
These new clean sheets on a fresh
queen size bed that’s finally large enough
for you and your man who carries
only one pound of bullshit in his bag.

The man who you’re not sure you love,
who you’re not sure has the right key for you,
but the one who opens some other lock,
to what you do not want to see
but want desperately to change,
and what he thankfully doesn’t mention:

your too-many folds of skin
he touches softly in the morning;
your jokes, too fast and loud,
he laughs, louder and longer than you.
When he takes your face in his warm hands
and tells you he loves you,
you wonder if he pities you.
The Bearing Falls Out of the Pump

Gary, the mechanic, shakes his head.

You never know
when a thing like that’ll happen.

His son gives me a ride to work,
tells me he plays in the Minors,
pitches for the Montreal Expos.
But I’m thinking about the day
I bought the car, paid for it
with my money: twenty-five
hundred dollars cash—
first thing I bought without my ex.

I found it in the paper:
1993 Ford Taurus wagon,
seventy-nine thousand miles
on a rebuilt engine—
hundred and twenty on the rest.
It was blue with a dent in the door.
When it rained, the rear windows
fogged so you couldn’t see.
The battery died at the high school.
The serpentine belt broke in Michigan.
The rear-view mirror
snapped off on Cheat Mountain.

I drove it to my mother’s funeral,
to Chicago for the family reunion.
I drove it fifty thousand miles
hauling kids and dogs,  
lumber and trash, hockey bags, bikes,  
the remnants of duct tape decals  
still stuck to back windows:  
*Go Lady Blades.*

Gary’s son pulls up in front of my office,  
says maybe he’ll take a class or two  
during the off-season. I say: *Once*  
*when the starter quit on Christmas Eve*  
*we pushed that blue baby*  
*all the way home in the dark.*
Last Days in Escondido

The elderberry grows three feet tall by the stoop.
I want to cut it, root it out—
it’s crazy to let it grow there,
where the sidewalk meets the porch.

In my dreams, an ocean liner
stands grounded in a desert without a desert’s beauty.
We don’t go out.

The mare pees in her stall until the gnats come
and her hooves grow tender from thrush.
They move her to another stall and she does the same thing.

All day, the Mexican moves hay.
He lives in a trailer without lights at the bottom of the ranch.

At night the moon spills white,
a baby cries and cries.
Every stone and bit of shell lies dark against sand.

You tell me I’ll be back:
Stack rocks beside the cypress.
Remember how the shadow of the eucalyptus bends.

When I lay my wrist on yours
my fingers don’t cover the knuckles of your hand.
Notes

“She Just Wants To Be Elegant” by Bernadette Ulsamer, p. 109, is written after a poem by Beverly Rollwagen.
About the Madwomen

MADALON AMEN'TA has published three books in the hospice field, one of which won an *American Journal of Nursing* Book of the Year Award. She has studied poetry with John Holmes at Tufts University and in Pittsburgh with Judi Robinson, Ellen Smith, and Michael Wurster. A member of the Pittsburgh Poetry Exchange, she has been published in *Parents Magazine*, Salon.com, *Signatures*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and *Stories About Time*.

TESS BARRY is currently enrolled in the University of Pittsburgh’s MA program in literature. Her poetry has appeared in *Three Rivers Review* and *Pittsburgh City Paper*, and she has been a guest poet on WYEP’s weekly radio show, *Prosody*.


ANGELA BAYOUT received her BA in creative writing from Carlow University in 2006 and has plans to attend graduate school, possibly out of the country. She enjoys poetry first, but also explores creative nonfiction. She has had poems published in the *Pittsburgh City Paper*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and *From Beneath the Bum Rush*, an anthology whose proceeds benefit Pittsburgh’s Books to Prisoners Program, Book ’Em.
GERRY ROSELLA BOCCELLA is an arts advocate, educator, and designer. She graduated from Carlow University in 1958. In 1994, she received the Carlow Alumnae Service Award in the Arts, followed, in 1996, by a Carlow Woman of Spirit® Award. Her poetry has been featured on Prosody on WYEP-FM.

JENNIFER BURNAU is a writer of short fantasy fiction. She has degrees in music education and musicology and has worked in the fields of education and non-profit fundraising.

KAY COMINI earned a BA in writing and women’s studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Her poetry has been published in the Pittsburgh City Paper and the anthologies, Dark Side of the Moon, Voices from the Parlor, and in the Sandburg-Livesay Anthology: No Choice But to Trust. She is a certified Gestalt therapist, retired welfare caseworker, and an energy healer.

PAMELA D. CURTIS is a writer, editor, and Web site developer at the Software Engineering Institute. She has over 15 years of experience in the software development industry as a systems analyst, programmer, process improvement team leader, technical communicator, and manager. Curtis holds an MS in management information systems from Boston University and a BA in management from Simmons College. She has published several articles in technical publications.

WENDY DAVIES graduated from Carnegie Mellon University with a BA in creative writing. She won the grand prize for fiction and first place in Poetry from the Westmoreland Arts and Heritage Festival in 2004. Her poetry manuscript is titled, Dancing the Blank Stage, and she is working on a collection of short stories called Photo-Reality.
MARILYN P. DONNELLY has been with the Madwomen in the Attic since the beginning, and considers herself the oldest and maddest of the Madwomen. Her poetry has been published in journals such as *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Cape Codder*, and *Sojourner*. She hopes to one day publish a non-posthumous book.

JUDITH DORIAN received her doctorate in musicology from the University of Pittsburgh. For several years, she wrote the program notes for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra with Frederick Dorian, her late husband and published several scholarly articles. Judith is a graduate from the mastery program of the Somatic Institute of Pittsburgh. She’s lectured and narrated in New York, Pittsburgh, and at the Bedford Springs Summer Festival. Her poetry is published in *The Higginsville Reader* and in Omega 2000 Clusters. At present she teaches piano.

MARY ALICE DRUSBASKY has been a Madwoman for three years. She has been published in *Pittsburgh City Paper*. She is a child care advocate and has a BA from the University of Pittsburgh in creative expressive arts, which she uses in her poetry, painting, and creative movement.

VICTORIA DYM is a graduate of Ringling Brother’s Barnum and Bailey clown college, Bachelor of Fun Arts (BFA), *Humility*, and has earned her BA, philosophy, from the University of Pittsburgh. She is currently working toward her MFA, creative writing—poetry, at Carlow University. She is a Screen Actors Guild member and has appeared in movies, on stage, television, radio and has had a stand-up comedy career.
ZIGGY EDWARDS is the author of *Hope’s White Shoes* (Pittsburgh Poetry Exchange, 2006), and publishes chapbooks through Monkey Sea Editions. Now working as an editor and medical writer, she earned a BA in fiction writing from the University of Pittsburgh. Her poetry has appeared in *Ship of Fools, Nexus, Main Street Rag, Confluence,* and *Paper Street.*

ANGELE ELLIS is the author of a book of poetry, *Arab on Radar* (Six Gallery Press, 2007), and co-author, *Dealing With Differences* (Corwin Press, 1997), a diversity workbook named as a top classroom resource by *The Christian Science Monitor.* Her poems have appeared in *Mizna, Pittsburgh City Paper,* and *Grasslimb.* She was a prizewinner in the 2007 RAWI Competition for Creative Prose for “Desert Storms,” a chapter of a novel in progress.

ALICE FUCHS won a poetry scholarship to the MFA program at the University of Pittsburgh, where she completed one year of study. She then went on to write prose and is working on two novels, a novella, and several short stories. She also continues to write poetry, of which she has two chapbooks: *Morning in Agrigento* and *Blood Poppies.*

LOIS GREENBERG is a licensed clinical social worker in private practice. Her work has appeared in *Paper Street,* the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette,* HEArt (Human Equity Through Art), *Pittsburgh City Paper,* in the anthologies: *Electric Fire* (National Book Foundation), *Alternatives To Surrender* (Martin Willetts, Ed.), and *Along These Rivers* (Michael Wurster and Judith Robinson, Eds.); on e-zines, hotmetalpress and writersalliance, and was recorded on a YAWP CD. She was a finalist for the 2007 Patricia Dobler Award. She is a member of the Pittsburgh Poetry Exchange and the Advisory Board of Paper Street Press.
CAY HAMILTON is 95-years-old and a lifetime social worker. She writes poems about her father’s blacksmith shop, World War I, and the horse and buggy days.

DOROTHY HOLLEY has completed a trilogy: *A Whole Quart Jar; The Garden Journals: Poems and Garden Notes;* and *Late Day Thoughts,* published by FootHills in 2005, 2006, and 2008 since attending Madwomen in the Attic poetry workshops. She has been published in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette,* the *Purple Menace,* *Pittsburgh City Paper,* *Tale Spinners,* *The Time of Singing* and *Along these Rivers.*

KATHRYN KATAFIASZ PEPPER received top prize in the Westmoreland Arts and Heritage Festival Short Story Competition. She is a student in the MFA program at Carlow University. She works as a life coach specializing in helping people with their own practice of writing and meditation.

LORRAINE LOISELLE has published many poems, children’s stories, pieces of fiction, newspaper articles, and two memoirs. She is retired as a teacher in the Pittsburgh public school system.

CAROLYN LUCK was a member of the Madwomen in the Attic for several years, working with Pat Dobler and Jan Beatty. She taught a Madwomen group in Spring 2008. She is managing director of the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project in the Department of English at the University of Pittsburgh. Her work has appeared in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette,* *Southern Poetry Review,* and Writing Project publications.
CHRISTINA MURDOCK was awarded the 2006 Sara Henderson Hay Prize from *The Pittsburgh Quarterly Online*, and her work has been featured on the radio show, *Prosody*, on NPR affiliate WYEP-FM. Her writing has been published in *The 10th Floor Review, Collision*, and *Pittsburgh City Paper*. She graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a degree in English writing and film studies.

Marilyn Marsh Noll received her MFA in creative writing (poetry) at American University in Washington, D.C., in 1994. Her poems have appeared in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Folio, the Restonian* and other publications. Her chapbook, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at Bones*, won the 2007 Chapbook Award from the Pennsylvania Poetry Society. She has been a member of the Madwomen in the Attic Writing Workshop at Carlow University and the Pittsburgh Poetry Society since 2001.


Harriet Parke’s work has been published in *Pittsburgh Magazine*. Her writing received an Honorable Mention in the *Atlantic Monthly’s* fiction contest.
JO ANN F. PRATT holds a BA from the College of William and Mary and an MA in anthropology from the University of Pittsburgh. An award-winning visual artist for over 30 years, she has worked as a teacher and docent at the Carnegie Museums of Art and Natural History for 15 years. Her poems have appeared in *Pittsburgh City Paper*, and she is currently working on her chapbook titled *Leaf Writings*.

LEONE P. PARADISE has studied poetry with Jan Beatty, Ellen Smith, and Michael Wurster. Her work has been published in *Brevities, Just Harvest*, and *Pittsburgh City Paper*. Paradise has practiced law with the National Labor Relations Board for 29 years in Western Pennsylvania.

ANNE RAYNE has taught writing for many years at the University of Pittsburgh and the Academy of Lifelong Learning.

SUSAN SAILER completed her MFA in poetry through the low-residency program at New England College in 2007. She holds a doctorate in British and Irish literature, and taught in the West Virginia University Department of English until she retired in 2000. Her poems have appeared in the anthology *Wild Sweet Notes II*, and in periodicals including *Pittsburgh City Paper, Kestrel, Pearl, Appalachian Heritage*, and *Poetry International*.

KAYLA SARGESON is a creative writing and professional writing major with a philosophy minor at Carlow University. Her work has been published in the *Critical Point* and the *Purple Menace*.
ERIKA SIMILO holds a JD from Duquesne University Law School and a BA in English from Bucknell University. She is one of the co-coordinators of the Pleasant Hills Writers’ Group. Her poetry and prose have appeared in two editions of the Writers’ Group Literary Journal, *Metamorphosis—A Literary Journey*, and her poetry has been published in *Pittsburgh City Paper*.

ELLEN MCGRATH SMITH teaches poetry in the Madwomen in the Attic program, and writing and literature at the University of Pittsburgh. Her poems have appeared in journals such as *CQ, 5AM, Café, Pig Iron, The Prose Poem, Pearl, Southern Poetry Review*, and *The Pittsburgh Quarterly*. Her work received the Zone 3 Rainmaker Award and the Ascher Montandon Award (HyperAge). She received a 2007 Individual Artist Fellowship in Poetry from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

SHIRLEY SNODEY is a writer of poetry, fiction, and song lyrics. A former student at the Community College of Allegheny County, she is currently a homemaker and lives in East Liberty.

ELLEN STRICKLAND has spent much of her adult life overseas, living in France, Scotland, and New Zealand. She has a BA in fine arts from Wilson College, is a photographer, and member of the Pittsburgh Poetry Society. She has been published in *Christianity Today*.

ANN TOMER has written two books: *Today I Will Nourish My Inner Martyr* and *Today I Will Indulge My Inner Glutton* (Prima Publishing, 2000), which she authored with Sarah Wells. Her chapbook, *A Night Blooming*, was published in 2007, and she is currently compiling her first full-length book of poetry.
BERNADETTE ULSAMER earned a BA in poetry, and a MLIS from the University of Pittsburgh. Her poetry has appeared in *Pittsburgh City Paper, Main Street Rag*, and *Along These Rivers: Poetry and Photography of Pittsburgh*. Ulsamer is the author of two chapbooks: *Blue Notebooks* and *The Strangest Thing I’ve Ever Seen*. She has been featured on WYEP’s *Prosody* and has performed with the Pittsburgh Monologue Project and the Hodge Podge Society.

LUCIENNE WALD, an artist and poet, has been a Madwoman for 20 years. One of her poems concerning post war Japan was published in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. She is working on a novel based in Japan.

SARAH WILLIAMS is a poet and mixed media artist who received her BFA from Seton Hill College. She works as an education associate at the August Wilson Center for African American Culture.

LORI WILSON lives in Morgantown, West Virginia, where she works as a computer programmer. Her poetry has appeared in various journals, including *5 AM, The Comstock Review, Main Street Rag, Paper Street, Poet Lore*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. Her first full-length book, *House Where A Woman*, will be published in Spring 2009 by Autumn House Press.
Madwomen History

The Madwomen in the Attic Writing Workshops, named after the groundbreaking study by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar on the 19th-century woman writer, were formed in 1979 by Dr. Ellie Wymard, now director of the MFA Program at Carlow, and esteemed fiction writer Jane Coleman after a campus visit by the writer, Tillie Olsen. When Olsen was mobbed by women with stories, poems, and questions, it became clear that there was a hunger and a need for women’s stories to be told. Over the years, visiting writers such as Tess Gallagher, Maggie Anderson, Marita Golden, Naomi Shihab Nye, Judith Vollmer, Maxine Kumin, and Jean Valentine would arrive to feed this hunger. The workshops were originally taught by Ellie Wymard, then by Jane Coleman, and later the beloved poet Patricia Dobler directed and developed the Madwomen in the Attic Workshops until her death in 2004. Patricia Dobler dedicated many years of her working life to the Madwomen to create an inclusive, vibrant atmosphere where women of varied backgrounds could meet and study the craft of writing. For this the Madwomen will be forever grateful.
About Patricia Dobler

Patricia Dobler was born in Middletown, Ohio, in 1939. She is the author of *UXB* (Mill Hunk Books, 1991) and *Talking to Strangers* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), which won the Brittingham Prize in Poetry; a chapbook, *Forget Your Life*, was published by the University of Nebraska Press. She also completed a third full-length collection, titled *Now*. Her poems have appeared in such publications as *Mid-American Review, The Ohio Review, Ploughshares, Prairie Schooner*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. Her work has been anthologized in *A Gathering of Poets, A New Geography of Poets, The Carnegie Mellon Anthology of Poetry, Working Classics, Vital Signs, Anthology of Magazine Verse & Yearbook of American Poetry* and others. She has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, fellowships from the Corporation of Yaddo and Villa Montalvo and a Pushcart Poetry prize. She lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and taught for many years at Carlow University, where she directed the Women’s Creative Writing Center, the Madwomen in the Attic Writing Workshops, and was instrumental in developing the MFA program. She died July 24, 2004. After her death, her *Collected Poems* was published by Autumn House Press in 2005.
The Editors

JAN BEATTY directs the Madwomen in the Attic writing workshops at Carlow University, where she is also director of creative writing and teaches in the low-residency MFA program. She is the author of three books of poetry, all published by the University of Pittsburgh Press: *Red Sugar* (2008), *Boneshaker* (2002), and *Mad River* (1995), winner of the Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize.

Beatty’s limited edition chapbook, *Ravenous*, won the 1995 State Street Prize. Awards include the $15,000 Creative Achievement Award from the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry, and two fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Her poetry has appeared in journals such as *Quarterly West, Gulf Coast, Indiana Review*, and *Court Green*; and in anthologies published by Oxford University Press, University of Illinois Press, and University of Iowa Press. For the past 14 years, she has hosted and produced *Prosody*, a public radio show on NPR-affiliate WYEP-FM featuring the work of national writers.

EVELYN PIERCE teaches the Madwomen in the Attic fiction workshop and undergraduate fiction at Carlow University. She has published short stories and two contracted screenplay adaptations, and is currently finishing her novel. She has been teaching writing since 1983, and is the recipient of multiple teaching honors. In 2004, she received the Sustained Excellence in Teaching Award at Carnegie Mellon University, where she teaches business management communication in the Tepper School of Business. She received her MFA in fiction from the University of Pittsburgh.
AMY SUTTON received her MFA from Carlow University. Her first manuscript, titled, *Tabloids*, pays homage to Teri Hatcher, Clea Duvall, and the working class folks who are her everyday celebrities. Sutton is a sound engineer for the public radio show, *Prosody*, WYEP’s weekly series featuring the work of poets and writers. She teaches literature and creative writing at Carlow University.

KAYLA SARGeson is a creative writing and professional writing major with a philosophy minor at Carlow University. Her work has been published in the *Critical Point* and the *Purple Menace*. 
Books of Note

BY PATRICIA DOBLER:

— *Talking to Strangers*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1986 Brittingham Prize in Poetry.
— *Forget Your Life*, chapbook, University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

BY ELLIE WYMARD:


BY JANE COLEMAN: *(additional titles not listed)*

BY JAN BEATTY:

— *Boneshaker*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002.