VOICES from the ATTIC

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VOLUME XIX
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Thanks to:

Carlow University’s division of University Communications and External Relations;

Sigrid King for inspired leadership;
Lou Boyle for generous mentorship;
Ellie Wymard, founder of the Madwomen;
Joy Katz, Nancy Kirkwood, Nancy Krygowski, Evelyn Pierce, Anne Rashid, Kayla Sargeson, Ellen McGrath Smith, and Sarah Williams-Devereux for superb teaching and editing;
Celeste Gainey, Liane Ellison Norman, and Kayla Sargeson for skilled editing;
Sarah Williams-Devereux for intense organization, planning, editing, and extraordinary spirit;
Jude Waldo for assistance with editing;

The Madwomen for irrepressible madness.
for Patricia Dobler
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Voices from the Attic Volume XIX is the best work from the Madwomen in the Attic Writing Workshops in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction at Carlow University, taught by myself, Joy Katz, Nancy Kirkwood, Nancy Krygowski, Evelyn Pierce, Anne Rashid, Kayla Sargeson, Ellen McGrath Smith and Sarah Williams-Devereux.

The Madwomen in the Attic are a group of women, ages 20-90, who meet weekly at Carlow to study the craft of writing. They are a spirited, serious group from varied backgrounds. What binds them is their love of writing and their commitment to the craft of it. Over the years, the Madwomen have grown and prospered. We now offer nine sections of day and night classes for women from the community and also undergraduates at Carlow University. The exchange between these writers is inspirational to witness, as beginning writers often work with writers who have MFA’s or books published. The quality of compassion and support is unparalleled. I have observed so many acts of kindness and support as these women writers have formed a deep and solid community, helping each other in and beyond the classroom, through illness and struggle, success and celebration.

Some of the many successes that we want to celebrate this year include the publication of Susan Sailer’s book, Ship of Light by Port Yonder Press and M.A. Sinnhuber’s new book, The Leaving Field, by MadBooks. Liane Ellison Norman has been busy publishing a book and two chapbooks, Breathing the West: Great Basin Poems, by Bottom Dog Press, Driving Near the Old Federal Arsenal by Finishing Line Press, and Roundtrip by Yesterday’s Parties Press. Also this year, we celebrate the publication of Madwoman Harriet Parke’s new book, Agenda 21, through Mercury and Simon and Schuster, which made The New York Times bestseller list upon its release. Judith Brice won an honorable mention in the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards, sponsored by the Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College. Kayla Sargeson’s chapbook, Mini Love Gun, was released by Main Street Rag.

Madwoman Tess Barry was selected as a finalist for the 2013 James Hearst Poetry Prize for her poem, *Not a Self-Portrait*. Barry also was chosen as a semi-finalist in the Tucson Festival of Books Literary Awards competition and was invited to participate in the Tucson Festival of Books Masters Workshop. Madwoman Sheila Carter-Jones was named a finalist for the New York Center for Book Arts Chapbook Prize. Poet Jill Khoury tied for third place in the Split This Rock 2013 poetry contest and was also nominated for Best of the Net: Poetry from the journal *Escape into Life*. Judith Brice won an honorable mention in the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards sponsored by the Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College. Daryln Brewer Hoffstot was awarded a residency at Breadloaf this year for her writing. Teresa Narey has been invited to read her poetry at the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association conference in Chicago, April 2014.

Many other successes include journal publication and readings across the country by these illustrious women. This past Fall, we celebrated our annual *Voices from the Attic* release party at WESA’s community broadcast center on Pittsburgh’s Southside. The party was sponsored by Thomas Shannon Barry and Associates and supported by Madwoman Tess Barry and a committee of mad Madwomen. We thank them for their generosity and their exuberance in making this a yearly celebration of women’s writing.

On a sad note, we have had some intense losses this year, among them the death of the inimitable and delightful Madwoman, Lois I. Greenberg. We support Madwoman instructor Nancy Kirkwood as she mourns the loss of her daughter Tess Raynovich, who was a poet of the world. We send our condolences out to the many Madwomen who have suffered losses this year, and embrace you as part of our writing family.

We thank the Madwomen instructors, Joy Katz, Nancy Kirkwood, Nancy Krygowksi, Evelyn Pierce, Anne Rashid, Kayla Sargeson, Ellen McGrath Smith, and Sarah Williams-Devereux for their shared commitment and spirited teaching. As the Madwomen program grows and prospers, the lives and writing of these extraordinary women become more and more visible. I value the chance to work with them and to witness their stunning success, their incomparable work, and their mad, mad selves.

—Jan Beatty 2013
Insight

The left eye can read books,  
the right one interprets highway signs.  
They have learned to work apart,  
one near one far.  
They accommodate each other,  
and though the world  
they report on is flat,  
you have come to accept their evidence.

Now that we know one of us  
will not see the other one  
out of this life,  
we are learning to accommodate  
the collusion of us both  
in the general calamity.

On the one hand  
a basket of glitter,  
some days like single jewels,  
and on the other  
a hard and singular certainty:  
one of us will not see  
the other out.
Pick You Up

I’ll pull the truck up
to your back door, gravel
crunching I’m here.
Headlights twist
in the glass block
window & the three posts
in the lot burn orange.

Me & crickets
till you turn around.
The smell burns dark
at 6 PM, the hood
cold, your nose, cold.

Climb into the back
with me, sometimes
I’m a finger
in a brown bottle
& you’re the dash
board sucking warmth
from the heater.
Scoring the Sunlit Halves & Thirds

*I’m a Man*
by Spencer Davis Group
comes on the radio
and my Greek father says:

*I was at The Party Club*
in Kaiserslautern, Germany
*when this song came out*
*All the Germans went crazy.*

In it the rolling organ
fucks a rhythm
against the basement wall
that all the neighbors can hear,
I’m sure. That song

so unlike my mother, her private
jazz kept in the cabinet under the TV,
it slips into the air on Saturday afternoons
roasting with baked chicken and potatoes,
scoring the sunlit lemon-dust particles
in halves & thirds, in blurs that drift
& will sink as the sun sinks, as the pointed
wide-yellow stare of the streetlamp
takes over.
How Do I Love?

Count the stars
Count the clouds
Count the waves

Count the eons
    the nanoseconds
Count the days

Count the breaths, the heartbeats
    the smile, the tears
Count the ways
Night on Broadway

It is hot,
even as breezes blow cool,
from the East River up
on First Ave where
the bench is warm

and lovers stretch
the setting sun out to Lady Liberty,
like mango salt water taffy
teasing her hair.

Were it not for the screeching and bellowing
you might have continued to watch
everything unfold—

but your mother just died pulling the night sky over her
making the cars scatter and search
for their secret way to the tunnel.

It is Times Square and time runs out—
and you’re rushing where?

You wanted the raisin bagel and an icy cold orange fizz,
pop the top and tingle as the boy brushes by,
let it spill on your fingers and numb the back of your hand.
You wanted the last light
and a good book in a small café on Lexington.

But the street has flooded black tears, the bookstore’s closed
like Sunday, early—
the girl weeping next to me reads minds
of flowers at Joey’s market, all wilting now.
There’s always the subway downtown,  
cross-town, underground,  
where details of The World blur.  
A veil becomes many veils—  
talks you’ve tried to have with her  
that fog the window like a fine, white lace.

Finally you emerge with the others,  
headed home, curled in pocket blackness,  
a magazine folded under your arm.

You wanted an alarm clock to help you wake up.  
You wanted to have it out with heartache,  
but the ache is drunk and still at Sinclair’s Uptown,  
wandering from table to table  
trying to remember what to say.
The Name Game

Theresa sat at the kitchen table over her crossword and sucked on her third cigarette of the morning. A heaviness pressed on her chest, as if the atmosphere had put on weight, sagged where it used to float.

Her grown son meandered in, yawned and scratched his pouch of a belly with manicured fingernails—clear nail polish, of course. He wasn’t that kind of man. The polish was a new habit, ever since he’d won a lifetime supply from Tips so Bright for naming their new spring color. “Spotted Fawn,” he’d called it, although to Theresa it was more puke beige.

“Morning Jeanette,” Clancy said and bent to kiss the skunk stripe of her roots. She thought of mentioning the heaviness in her chest but didn’t. He had enough on his mind. That child had always had way too much on his mind.

The Jeanette thing, for example. Theresa couldn’t remember when that started. Even when he was tiny, mom fell from his lips as if the very word were spoiled or under ripe. He’d tried calling her Theresa, but eventually settled on Jeanette. She’d given up correcting him long ago. She could see how those Ellis Island immigrants with their unpronounceable surnames never had a chance against a whole nation of persistence. She set her pencil and crossword aside and worked to breathe.

What a pair they made, she thought, Clancy in his flannel sleep pants, she in the robe she’d worn when she’d first brought him home from the hospital so long ago, the bright floral pattern now a mere suggestion, the faded colors just another sign of the way life changed everything. Back in school, she’d learned about evolution, the fancy word that scientists used to clean up the image of too much change, that tried to give change a point. But she knew better.

Clancy fumbled in the cabinet for his coffee mug, the one marked with a gold C. She watched him, still surprised at the
large human her son had become, his dome of a head shiny with that odd smelling oil he rubbed into his scalp. It was hard to believe that next week would mark thirty-seven years since his birth. Wasn’t it only yesterday he’d been a swaddled mass of potential?

“More coffee, Jeanette?” Clancy asked, turning to her and smiling as he filled his cup. She shook her head and sucked as much air as she could into her lungs. It wasn’t enough.

She fidgeted in her chair. There, that was a little better. What had she been thinking about? Oh yes, Evolution. Clancy didn’t agree with it. But that was like standing in a soaking rain and swearing that cloudbursts were mere theory. Still, she’d like to ask Charles Darwin if he actually liked the idea that he’d put forth, that our whole history rests on slippery chameleons, never content with just being. Not that it was his fault.

A twinge shot through her chest. Maybe it was the cigarettes. She emptied the beanbag ashtray she’d won at bingo. She would quit smoking today.

In a way, she admired Clancy. He had a single, clear purpose, like a marker in the Clue game in the cupboard—the candlestick, maybe. Solid and dependable.

He said the only problem with the world, the reason things went amiss, were the names. His full cheeks got all rosy when he said that names weren’t arbitrary. They were real. A single mother tongue lived within each of us and we all knew it in our heart of hearts. By some stroke of providence, it had fallen on Clancy’s shoulders to retrieve it.

He said he needed to rename things to find their inner essence, the way Michelangelo had to liberate David from the block of marble that had trapped him for God only knows how long. Clancy didn’t change names. He connected with the holy grail of once and always. Yet, somehow, Clancy had been Clancy from the get go.

He was hard to argue with. Still, she admired him. He was wrong, of course, but what a river of optimism he floated down.
He watched the scenery go by without even guessing that it was all as unreal as movie props, just waiting to shapeshift the second he blinked, like the day her young husband stepped into the path of an oncoming car and left her alone with Clancy. Or this morning, waking up with her chest squeezed as if someone had dropped a piano on it. Panic mixed with the heaviness. She lit up another cigarette. She would quit smoking tomorrow.

Clancy lifted the chair across from her as he pulled it out to sit. He was sensitive to how she hated when it screeched. She handed him today’s classified section, although she imagined that they were both in on the joke. He circled ads for jobs he didn’t intend to pursue. She encouraged him when he read the capsule descriptions. “Truck driver for organ donation transport” was one of their favorites. They pictured him careening through city streets, sirens blaring, a lumpen kidney in a glass case, pulsating in hopefulness. Now and then she wondered if she ought to participate in such silliness, if she shouldn’t just tell him to beg Mr. Sanders for a job at the diner waiting tables. But really, what was the harm?

For Clancy, it was mere diversion anyway. Clancy had a master plan, although Jeanette wasn’t entirely on board with it. His plan was simple—to name or rename the world. He told her that if he’d been around for Genesis, life on earth would be a whole lot smoother. The creation process had been executed in too much haste, those whopping six days that could only end in exhaustion on the seventh. Not that he was one to complain. Everyone was born with a purpose, and he’d figured out his, that’s all.

He had a strategy, too. Mountains could be moved one spoonful at a time, he said. Besides the nail polish, he’d already named seven moon craters, a bear in a Brazilian zoo, a few tiger cubs, a viral skin rash, a lichen discovered in a Parisian park, a Chinese restaurant in Milwaukee, and oh there were so many more.

It wasn’t easy, but he kept track of what he’d named. Some days it was all he could do to check in with the proprietor of the
Chinese restaurant, who usually thought he was trying to order Moo Shi Pork or some such thing. And the folks who manned the moon crater operation often hung up on him four or five times before they cooperated. Gave him real respect for God, he said, keeping track of this world.

Most mornings, the mailman would ring the doorbell and drop off the latest batch of responses to Clancy’s queries, contests, rants. Ever since Jeanette had retired from her job dolloping out lunch at Roy’s Eats, she’d taken to inviting the mailman in for coffee. Maybe when he came around today, Jeanette would ask him about the pain in her chest, if there were something she ought to do about it.

“Here it is,” Clancy said, triumphant as he circled the occupation of the day.

The pressure in Jeanette’s chest ratcheted up. She worked to absorb it, to make it into the new normal. That was the key, she knew, to move right along with it, to out-ooze a shifting reality. Good pain tolerance they’d called it when she’d given birth to Clancy, and then again later when she’d nearly severed a finger deboning that chicken for the church picnic. But they had it all wrong.

She tried to listen to Clancy, but she couldn’t concentrate. The pain ascended, settled in her jaw, reached her eye sockets. The kitchen table blurred, but she fought back, level with the reality that changed by the second now.

It occurred to her that she hadn’t feared death, only the way she’d meet it. What if she weren’t in the mood, didn’t want to be interrupted? But here she was, not sure if she would come out of this in one piece, and all she felt was understanding. If the pain broke, she would tell Clancy from firsthand experience that rigidity was never the answer. She felt herself fall forward and then Clancy’s hands strong on her shoulders as he lifted her. She looked into his pale, worried face and saw him as he was, as he’d been, as she’d always loved him, that sweet son who kissed her on the head and was careful not to make a screech when he pulled out his chair.
“Clancy,” she said.
“It’s okay, Jeanette,” he answered. The doorbell rang and she wanted to tell him to run and get it, to invite the mailman inside, that she would be fine.

And then the mailman was next to her. “Theresa, hold on, we’re calling the ambulance.”

After that, lots of flurry, Clancy directing the paramedics. “Help her,” he said. “You have to save her.” He smoothed her hair with his big hand. “She’s my mom.”

Theresa smiled. They might help her. She wasn’t sure. Either way, she would rise to the occasion, ooze right along with it, wrap herself around it until she pulsed with life’s deep rhythm, certain that in her gentle surrender, she would find the pearl at some shining center.
Bring-your-gun-to-the-beach-day in Hermosa Beach

brings a big turnout of NRA members. 
Most of them don’t go near the water. 
They’re fearful of sharks. 
Instead, they sit under striped colored umbrellas 
cleaning their hand guns. 
They discuss bullets, hair-triggers, gun laws. 
No women attend. 
The men all look related 
in t-shirts that rise over guts curved like mountains. 
They clutch aluminum, 
raise their voices to yells 
so loud they don’t hear each other, 
don’t hear the gun going off. 
The gun owners, lulled into a false sense of bravado, 
swim and are eaten by sharks.
Want

There is an aching want in the air tonight, the black sky wanting
dawn, the moon wanting to be whole, to be seen. So much want in me tonight. I want
to see, but close my eyes, turn my face, feel night’s want pull at me with deft hands. I stand outside a hospital landscaped by budding trees. They are so ordinary,

the open doors to other rooms where the sick are visited and recover, or die, some of them hopeful, some bitter, some filled with sadness, like I am. Some don’t want
to know the truth about living and dying, want to believe everything will be well, their loved ones restored to health. But I can’t be restored. An April rain breaks hard, indiscriminate as want.
Birthday in Beijing

April thunderclouds in battleship formation
but the rain is light as we touch down.
At last, the swarming, noisy, candy-colored streets of the city. Breakfast:
soy boiled eggs, red beans, dumplings,
strong coffee—four cups. For jet lag.

Tiananmen? Closed for ‘renovation’
& no one is surprised. So our guide Mr. Ho
distracts us, talking about love, Beijing-style,
how young people pay $11 for a broadcast ad
while old-timers ballroom dance in the park.
There are still arranged marriages. A groom
doesn’t see the bride until the veil is lifted.
He tells us: In China it’s not rude to ask
personal questions, even of strangers.

That day, Mr. Ho tells us what features
Chinese men most admire in women:
*oval face  dimples  small mouth  straight nose*

That day, my companion is cranky.
I forget my nametag in my room & again
I don’t hear (or remember) what he’s saying.

*I give up! There must be something
neurologically wrong with you—
that you don’t hear me.*

That day, Mr. Ho explains astrological signs.
He asks ours. We tell him & he laughs,
*Not the best match. Sorry—*
Mother Never Saw Palermo

She was afraid of travel, of heights, of planes. And she was never much for la cucina. Boiled chicken, her specialty.

When the City of Angels was beet fields, walnut orchards, trolley cars, backyard vineyards, and her father hauling fruit a hundred miles a day,

my mother saved her brother from drowning. But wasn’t the water half-a-foot deep? I remember her at thirty-six. Rag-tired, slender,

sitting on the front porch step, swearing she’d leave, and never, never come back. I was seven. Then she’d swing open

the screen door, quietly return, hold me close. That was the beginning of her black days, shroud-dresses. Some sorrow she couldn’t share.

I do know this: At ten, my mother saw a boy lose his fleshy head to a passing trolley. I remember her nerve-throb voice:

Don’t play beyond the Volpes. Don’t tell anyone we eat meat on Fridays. Never tell your troubles outside the family.
Blue Star Street

Almost every family on Tioga Street displayed a Blue Star Mother’s flag. 8/10 satin with a 2 inch border, gold braid and fringe on the bottom, a stenciled blue star in the center. Sometimes, two.

Ours had four stars: Army, Navy, Air Force represented. Scotch tape held the twisted gold cord in place on our front room window, floss tassels dangling on each end.

Five houses up, my cousin Jeremy displayed one star for her husband, Henry. When he was killed in Normandy, the Army sent her another flag with the blue star heavily embroidered with gold thread.

An added honor, they said, making it almost three dimensional. Deep, like her sorrow.
Normandy to Mount Carmel 1945

Genevieve was 8 months old when you came home on furlough before being shipped to England, then France. Her christening was delayed so you could be here.

They brought back your belongings in a little box. Silvery aluminum dog tags: Pvt. 1st Class Henry I. Rich, Company L 3320 Infantry Division.

We visited you in your flag-draped casket at Morasco’s on Brushton Avenue and followed the long procession of cars to Mount Carmel Cemetery.

The flag was snapped into a triangle by two officers in dress uniform, brass buttons and epaulets catching the sun.

Your wife Jenny, dressed in black, held the flag and wallet containing the worn photo of you holding your baby dressed in a white christening gown.

The three deafening blasts from the gun salute sent your toddler scurrying for cover under her Aunt Mary’s coat.

Your remains were lowered into the ground, your brother-in-law wailed taps, the bugle sustaining and diminishing that long last note.
Leaving Home

Once I took
whatever a teen girl takes
on the Greyhound
to Hagerstown, Maryland
to elope with a boy twenty-one.
I was eighteen.
August 28, 1968.

Once my father called me
to the front door, pointed,
said, There goes Homewood!
Smoke, rising from the G.C. Murphy’s,
Antonio’s Pizzaria,
Georgia’s Shoes.
Outsiders said, Why are they burning
their own houses?
April 4, 1968.

The message plain
as the gray
of a carrier pigeon—
prosaic, ordinary, inevitable.
Plain as litter pooled in a gutter,
as dilapidated storefronts,
as the face of the clerk
who typed the letters ed
at the end of the word color
on the marriage license.
Talisman

Beelzelbub’s toothless head grins
from the slender neck
of the chalky-skinned girl in the coffee shop.
Does she know who he is, what’s his magic?

Once someone asked me, a little black girl,
*Where did you get this?*
I wore the gold Star of David like a medal.
Then I wondered why I had it.

Once on a Sunday morning,
I saw Oral Roberts
calling the ill and injured
to place their hands on the television to pray.
I watched my grandmother shuffle
from bed, and with her right hand, lift her left
on top of the twelve-inch set.
I kept quiet, pretended to sleep.

This morning from my shaky corner table,
I’m reading Philip Levine’s *The News of the World*,
the jacket, papery in my hands.
The last poem, *Magic*, rises
up like a shield to the armies of pestilence
marching this day.
An Offering to My Sister

You and I are in a store
wearing capri pants
that pinch us like dirty uncles.
We are looking for something.

I suggest 1970’s housecoats,
ironic and quirky,
and so plain or so ugly
you wouldn’t want to go out in them,
except to chat up a neighbor or sit on a porch.

I say: look for sturdy zippers
running up the front like a kind of vein.
Metal tab closures, heavy on the collarbone,
a medal on a little girl chest.

There used to be four of them hanging
in the closet by the TV. Mine was the littlest
and marked me as one of her birds.
I was glad to belong,
to belong, to stay there,
wrapped in a dream of order
and hell with the rest of them at school.

They were: no vain fuss.
Plain in shape but always wild,
like the bold flowers of wallpaper,
like peacock feathers on a burlesque dancer,
and she cut them to fit our bodies,
so we could move freely.
I don’t know if you would have liked all the closeness. There were fights.
You were too young
to have one of your own.
She has grown too old to sew another.
The world had arranged itself
in that way for only a little while.

It is not kind but it is true:
I have nothing that comes close
to a homemade housecoat for you.
And stores are empty of what I mean.
On Going to Krakow to See Szymborska

It comes down to this:
your eyes adjust
to the interior shadows of the cathedral,
you scan the rounded backs
of kneeling women.
Their kerchieved heads bowed.
Their hands tangled in rosaries.
No one bothers to turn toward you.
The sound of your heels unwelcomed
as knocks on a door in the morning.

Your friends assure you,
but yes, she is there. Look.
You peer down half the aisles for her, again.
Why aren’t there bodyguards? Where are the cherubs?
There are so many women scattered in the front pews.

What can you know by looking at a face?
You haven’t mastered your introduction.
You don’t have your notebook.
Also, cameras are forbidden.
Soon, the last bus will be leaving.

Yes, you’ll say at the party, I saw her at the church.
She looked like a Polish grandmother. As secret penance,
you sing a folk song. And that summer, you buy
every book in the Old City with her name on it.
On one cover, she holds a lorgnette
and a sidelong grin you can see from the couch.
An Alphabet Misplaced

Your words: a charm-system
spell against my absent sound,
driven into a chasm,
chasing the question out.

A sigh— the auditory
invisible quotation writhing
between four tiny black dots
framing their intent.

Which is less real:
the flesh, or the letters
of a word in heat?
Distance

I went looking and found you beside an empty box. You were standing in the rain without your hat. The wet corners of the box limp down like your smile when it leaves your face. Your image blurs out my swollen eyes. Open shut. Open shut. Hear a car door, open shut. Open shut. You drive away in your box. I go home.
Unsame

I kinda believe that you and I were harvested from the same sacred vine. One of us was *clip snip* or *plucked* the other unhinged with a bruising *thud*. We’re different kinds of ripe. And there’s something to apples meeting apples or oranges with their own in the grove. You and I will never have the same definitions of love or of home and that’s the kind of unsame that can turn stomachs. That’s the difference between fresh squeezed, or not, at brunch. That’s the look of disgust, or not, on your face upon finding the bowl of fruit from last summer folding in upon itself in my family’s cabin, mummified under the delicate colony of spores.
In Rome, Without my Aging Mother

The owner of the café on Via Fornaci sends his regards. He remembers you were a fan of the American breakfast.

A big painted cone of gelato stands on the corner near the hotel. The steps inside the Coliseum are even more worn and dangerous.

A young Japanese couple now asks me to take their photo. You are not at my shoulder as I count the taxi fare.

Or when the grizzled driver eyes me in the rear view mirror. In cathedrals, I light candles for the people you pray for.

My coins land loudly in the collection boxes. The train station is still surly, I find the track going south.

Across from me, a routine traveler and his newspaper. Out the window, the sun-dried hills of our Italian family.
The Mikqvot (an excerpt from a novel-in-progress)

The stone step felt cold and damp beneath Avi’s bare feet. She peered down the staircase that led to the bottom of the mikqvot, the pool for the ritual cleansing. It was dark in the basement of Adina’s new house, and although Avi was grateful to Adina for allowing her to perform the rite of purification there before her wedding, she hadn’t expected it to be quite so cold and quite so dark. Her father’s mikqvot was cold and tiny, and although Adina’s was larger, it was just as dark. The public mikqvots were bigger and generally there were others performing ritual cleansings, too, so to be so completely alone left her feeling vulnerable. She almost regretted asking Adina to wait in the changing room for her. She peered into the darkness at her feet. With all the recent rain, the rain water that filled the pool had risen and she watched the black sheen dance under the flickering light of the torch attached to the wall. She couldn’t make out the wall opposite her at the end of the mikqvot. Her big toe traced the crevice in the middle of the steps that delineated the pure from the impure side of the stairs. Although the stairs were wide, she was still a trifle anxious that she would step over the middle on her way back up out of the pool, thus making herself impure again. The public mikqvot had two sets of steps—if only she had chosen to use it, she’d have no worry about where to step. Reaching out, she felt for the side wall, but it was out of her grasp. She moved several steps sideways until her fingers felt the rough rock. If she held onto the wall on the way down, she would be sure to stay on the right side of the crevice. Once fully immersed in the pool, she would be able to kick to the other wall, and if she held onto it, she would rise out of the pool purified.

She shivered uncontrollably, as much from excitement as from the cold. Although she had performed ritual cleansing before, this was different, so very different. She was purifying herself for her wedding. She loved Uri so much, and tonight she would
be his. She took the first step down. The stone was wet, and she knew the next step would be into the water. Avi sighed. She didn’t think anyone could love someone the way she loved Uri. In the cold and dark of the mikqvot, she let her mind wander back to a hot summer day in the market. She was shopping at the fruit stall and behind her she heard Uri talking to someone. The sound of his voice fell like a soft rain upon her shoulders. So sensitive was she to him, that her skin almost hurt as his voice covered her. How different her marriage would be from her sisters’. Not that Rivka hadn’t loved Jacov, and not that he hadn’t loved her, but even before the scandal, there was no passion, no excitement. They just seemed to live. And as for Adina and Zeev, well, for them…she grimaced. No, she and Uri were different. Lost in her reverie, she lowered her foot slowly to the next step. As soon as her toe hit the water, she let out a squeal.

“Avi, Avi! Are you all right? Are you all right?”
“This water is SO cold, Adina! Why is your water so cold?” Avi could hear Adina trying to stifle her laugh.
“It’s winter, dearest, and it’s rain water. It’s supposed to be cold.”
“This is not cold; this is…” Avi was at a loss for words. For the briefest second, she hesitated. She was alone; Adina was in the anteroom. Maybe she could splash some water on her, appear to have gone in, and that would be that. There was so much wrong with that plan that she sighed.
“I will have warm water for your bath afterwards,” Adina promised from around the corner. Avi could hear the amusement in her voice.

Avi glanced around and then, quickly and with determination, she stepped down. The water came well above her ankles and she gasped at the numbing cold. Holding onto the wall, she took the next step, then the next. The cold left her speechless and unfocused. Her breath came in gasps as she descended the stairs. At last only her head remained above the water and her hair floated on the stagnant water behind her. With one last gasp, she stepped down and out, and then she was completely submerged. Underwater, the
cold and the dark were so absolute, she felt suspended in time. She did a half turn, kicked with her feet and reached out for the other wall. As her fingers felt along the clammy plaster, her foot searched for the step, and pushing herself up by the ball of her foot, she raised herself enough to have her head out of the water. She wanted to take a deep breath, but the cold was so complete that she could barely breathe in. Holding onto the wall, she took the next step up, her foot almost slipping off the slimy step. She leaned into the water, feeling it push against her body as she stepped forward and up. As she climbed step after step toward the light at the top, the mossy water, heavy with depth, flowed against her body, its slippery residue clinging to her skin. She rushed quickly out of the mikqvot once the water was below knee level and, visibly shaking, grabbed her garment and tried to wrap it around her, but her hands had gone almost numb and she called out for Adina.

Adina came quickly with warm robes and after bundling Avi up led her to the changing room where a small tub waited. She helped Avi into the tub, calling for the servant to bring warm water. Adina pried Avi's fingers from her robe and pulled it off. The servant struggled in with a large urn of water, placed it beside the tub, and filling a small container, began pouring warm water over Avi pitcher by pitcher. Little by little, the smell of the pool was washed away and although her skin was still cold to the touch, Avi had stopped her uncontrollable shaking. She stepped out of the tub, allowing Adina to wrap her again in clean robes, then kneeling on the floor at the side of the tub, she leaned over and let them pour water to clean her hair. After much clucking and cooing over her, she was finally done and in the dim light of the anteroom, took her sister's hands in hers and squeezed them tight. “I'm getting married tonight!”
Green Lantern

*Knock three times*, I hear the music
I’m stomping again
Thursday nights at the Green Lantern,
removable dance floor,
jukebox until closing, 2 A.M.
Klunder-Blunder so good at the polka
all the girls wanted turns.
Today, a mere suspicion of days
farewell bid to my sixties, I hear
volleyball thumps, snow hikes at Raccoon,
Labor Day bus to the Jersey shore,
late nights, broken lamp switch
on / off, mock signal
to rooms across the parking lot.
Tall guy, spun me over his shoulder,
landed me safe on faux parquet.
*O my sweetness*, hair
halfway down my back, a body
thinner in pictures than I remember.
Green Lantern, *music playing, body swaying,*
the place razed to make way: Borders,
Wild Birds, Fleet Feet shoes.

*If you look out your window tonight,*
I’m the one listening for old songs,
surprised to be weeping.
Quiet / Disquiet

Hard-face moon, early light, pale silver
scrapes the slate sky fading,
twig / brush / thorn / a yardman’s felled trunk
infused with spectrum hues, light
breaking to first color.

Underfoot, known dangers:
mud / loose rock / splintered branch.

A titmouse darts in flight,
gunmetal gray on the back sparks as wings fire.

From breezy evergreen fronds, streaks to feeder / back to tree
peck another seed coat open, feed again, again
wary of movement surrounding.

Hard, now, a roaring plane overhead—
fear of another willful crash.

Night clings to rhododendron leaves,
settles the shallows beneath.
Sun climbs the routine rise, a far margin of fog,
the blush climbs uphill, shingles of seven houses,
roof by roof, color stacks a calm the cardinal claims,
perch where demons linger.
Cardinal fluffs the scarlet morning coat,
returns to near-black regions of spruce.
Brilliant flash / blood red.
Phasing In (a memoir excerpt)

I sit quietly at the breakfast nook—definitely the best feature of this cute, little three bedroom apartment. The nook is set back between two walls with matching white benches on each side. The benches comfortably sit two or three people but last night we had five people crammed on each side; bums hanging over the edge, shoulders rubbing together, spilling beers, laughing over the card game asshole; and this morning my head hurts.

I close my journal, get up slowly and walk to the counter to grab a bowl for cereal when Reyna walks in draped in Dustin’s long, blue terry-cloth robe. Her bare feet step lightly across the tile. One white, unshaven leg breaks through a slit in her robe. She probably just got out of the shower with Dustin who technically does not live here, but might as well.

“Good morning,” she says with a smile, pouring herself some coffee. I do not drink coffee but maybe I should. Perhaps I would have her smile this morning if I did.

“Good morning,” I return. “Do you have class today?”

“Yep. This is my last week,” she answers happily. “Finals are almost done and I’m starting to think about plans for this summer.”

“Oh, yeah. What are you thinking about?” I ask as I grab my cereal and return to the nook. She joins me, sliding onto the other side with her coffee and answers, “I want to go to the Telluride Bluegrass Festival.”

By the look on her face I know there is more to this comment. “And…?” I ask.

“And I want you to drive,” she states simply, like she’s telling me to pass the milk.

“Sure. Why not? Where’s Telluride?”

“Not too far. Just Colorado.”

“Colorado! Are you kidding! Have you seen my car? It can barely make it up the hill to our apartment.”

“Yeah but it’s dependable. And how else will we get there?”
“We? Who’s we? You and Dustin? We’ll never fit!”
“Can’t hurt to try,” she adds taking a sip of her coffee with two hands.
“Reyna, your CD case alone will take up the whole trunk.”
“Okay, so I will make it without the CD case for a few weeks…”
“A few weeks! I can’t take off work for a few weeks.”
“Sure you can,” she replies. “Just ask your mom.”
“How did you hear about this anyway?” I ask.
She pauses for a moment. Takes another sip of her coffee and then answers, “Ted. He’s been to it a few times. He said it’s the best festival he has ever been to. We should go for him.”
I look up at her. Her long brown hair is already beginning to frizz. She lifts her small rectangle-shaped glasses onto her eyes and gives her biggest smile. “Come on,” she prods. “It will be fun. When have I ever let you down?”
I think for a minute and take a bite of my cereal to disguise the sentimentality. Then with my mouth full I answer her simply…“Never.”

It is a cloudy Pittsburgh day in late June. The rain has thankfully held off while we shove more and more supplies into my tiny, blue Geo Metro for our two-week venture to Colorado. I sit unwillingly patient on our cement porch steps, a small hemp journal with a cloth cover resting on my knees, and wait for Reyna and Dustin to finish packing. I have been done for hours.
Dino, Alex, and Molly are sitting at the breakfast nook. I can hear them laughing. “Hey let’s do an over/under on how much longer it takes them to get ready,” suggests Dino.
“I’m in!” says Molly, throwing some change on the table. I’ve got thirty cents that says it’s another hour.”
“I got seventy cents that says it’s another two!” laughs Alex. “Hey, Naya,” he calls through the screen door. “I’m sleeping in your bed while you’re gone.”
“Fine,” I yell back. “But that would require us ever getting out of here!”

Dustin is in the kitchen finishing up a batch of ganja cookies to take with us, and I can hear Reyna in the shower. I know it will be awhile—

“Here, try one,” Dustin says, pushing open the screen door.

“Sure, why not? I’m on vacation,” I return, holding out my hand.

It tastes surprisingly good and is still warm. Before I know it, all that is left of the cookie are sticky remnants of chocolate on my fingers, which I put in my mouth to clean. Another half hour passes. Dustin finally shoves the last piece to his tent into my trunk. I watch Reyna’s unusually skinny dog graze in our front lawn. He tiptoes around small piles of poop that litter the lawn like land mines. I stare at swarms of flies that circle around each pile. The wind must have picked up because the smell of the front yard becomes unbearable and all at once, like getting hit with a surprise left hook in the stomach.

I am consumed with panic. I can’t notice anything but the things I want to avoid—piles of dog shit, exhaust from passing cars, swirling black clouds, and worries stacking upon worries almost ready to collapse. The heavy Pittsburgh air closes in on me, and I have trouble breathing as more thoughts attack my wavering confidence. How will my car make it up the Rocky Mountains? What if I get pulled over and arrested for Dustin’s pot? How will I fall asleep in my two man tent, alone?

Dustin sits on the edge of my trunk and gives himself his insulin shot. He removes the needle and a small dot of blood is left sitting on his arm. I feel like I am going to faint.

What if Dustin drinks too much and goes into insulin shock like he has done twice already this summer?

Why aren’t they ready yet? We’ll never get going at this rate. In fact, maybe this whole thing is a bad…

“We’re ready! Let’s do this!” calls Reyna from the door. She
grabs the back of my shirt and lifts me excitedly the ground. “Let’s go,” she prods. “Stop being so slow!”

As we take off out of the driveway, it is not five minutes before my predictions that this trip is doomed are completely confirmed. Black clouds form a thick layer over the city. Lightning begins striking and torrential rains blast from the clouds. We escape into the Fort Pitt tunnels, but when we emerge on the other side, the weather is even worse.

The sound of the rain is like gunfire on my poor little Metro. Cars are pulling off to the side of the road, as visibility is almost zero. With one strong gust of wind my driver’s side windshield wiper goes flying off the car and splashes onto the highway.

“Dude, your windshield wiper just flew off,” Dustin intelligently observes.

“Yeah, thanks for pointing that out, jerk off,” I say with panic-tinged laughter. I quickly pull over to what I think is the side of the road to collect my thoughts. I rest my head on the steering wheel and try to slow my breathing, but I jerk up when I hear Reyna screaming.

“What! What’s wrong?” I yell.

“Naya! Look!”

I turn around and notice everything behind me is getting bigger. This image makes no sense, as the tunnel we had already driven through gets closer and closer. It only begins to make sense when I look down and see the parking brake in its resting position.

“Holy shit!” I scream while wildly grabbing for the parking brake. It is a miracle that no cars were in my line of destruction but perhaps a bigger miracle that we have drifted back to the exact spot where my wiper had flown off.

“Go get it,” I say turning to Dustin.

“You go get it,” he shoots back. “It’s your car.”

“Exactly,” I shout, “and you’re lucky to be in it! Plus you’re a guy and this is why we even brought you along. Now go!”
“Fine,” Dustin concedes and adds a “whatever,” as one foot steps out into the raindrops that fire down on him like bullets. “Don’t get run over,” I call to him as he circles around the Metro to retrieve this necessary piece of car off the six-lane highway. I shift my butt awkwardly over the parking brake and into the passenger seat where I hope to get my head together for the rest of the trip.

“You drive,” I say glaring at Dustin.

“Why?” he asks confused. “What’s with you?”
Lunar Impact: Rocket Boy

(For the record: No photos of the man in the moon have ever been returned to earth.)

Imagine
a thousand blackholes
in the back of a head
where a small rocket-ship
can enter the deep quiet
of a boy’s cranium,
like Ranger IV, rocket shot up
from Cape Canaveral through
1962 clouds of a black & white TV.

The small rocket-ship’s charge,
a bullet perfectly launched
through thick afro hair, scalp skin
pierced—skull shattered,
bone implodes in a tail spin,
begins the circle of death’s orbit.
Go Rocket Boy. Go round Rocket Boy.
Go round.

Ranger IV became a speck,
disappeared into the unknown.
I forgot about it until it reappeared,
crashed on the far side.

That’s the way I see it
when news reporters announce
the shooting of another
black boy. I think, How tragic.
Start cleaning: sweeping,
rubbing weeping eyes, scrubbing until another Rocket Boy appears dead in free fall dust and I think again, that spurt of blood from a summer hydrant is gravity’s pull. Rocket Boy’s body—magnetic field attracting precision of chiseled metal, space junk falling through city sky.

I rerun the same picture; Rocket Boy deathless with the same every face/no face. Head full of moon spinning down the drain. Spin Rocket Boy. Spin round Rocket Boy.
My Father’s Wish Bone

Hungry for the bigger piece that promises a wish after the snap, I pull at a chicken breast bone; neat-fingered as the surgeon who incised my father’s chest,

cut close to sedge of clotted dreams stuck in low belly bedrock, beneath navy beans ham hocks and corn bread.

Two phalanges and one thumb grip crusty bone until my hand shakes. Not steady like the doctor’s hand that wielded the scalpel with samurai precision, keen-edged blade,
sliced seven inches below the sternum as my father slit catfish snout to caudal fin filleted the bony spine.

Physician skilled in the art thwacked the breast plate precise as my expert fingers perched to break wishbone sucked clean. He slid a retractor between halves of tender meat,
splayed open my father’s chest as if garden green beans might come climbing on veins, clinging to blood vines.

Specialist Shiro took a small hammer, the size of a toy, k-plunked the breast bone, just as fast slipped his hand inside a cavity of flesh, snipped a diseased valve and cauterized like my father cracked one egg each morning on the edge of his cast iron skillet, untucked a heart of yoke and fried it up sunny side.
I concentrate and hold the dried wishbone as if struck by lightning, give a quick yank fast as the surgeon’s hand lifted the sick heart, chunk of hidden hope unearthed from the coal mine
like my father starry eyed, rode the shaft down, picked for wishes in bituminous hunks, brought home the smaller bones.
Have I done enough?

my mother used to say the best birth control
was to keep your legs crossed
have I taught you that
been honest true
to the point

Did I raise you right?
not from my womb always with my heart
when they said you were different
not like me did I do enough?

Did I notice in time?
show-up
advocate——
fight
bring cup cakes
come to plays
pick up your meds
wrap gifts
wake up at the crack of dawn
schedule your rides
watch as the driver pulls away
be home when you arrive
Did I take enough?
pictures, movies time-off
when other parents didn’t show
did I clothe you
feed you
talk about food groups
explain about sex
watch as the boys sniffed
Oh how the boys sniff

Did I do enough?
so you look-up before you cross
bow your head before you eat
say please when you ask
expect thank-you
when you give
and give
and give
Deep indigo of darkening twilight illuminates his tall form between the willow trees.

Stepping out only after his long beak and stretched neck lead him haltingly forward,

the Great Blue lingers as if to savor the calm and quiet of the night that covers him as he makes his way along the island’s edge. Now and then, he pauses and his beak darts into the water shadows. Sometimes he pulls up a wriggling, silvered fish but other times he misses his catch.

Mostly, he seems content to spend his time in the habitat he’s been given, a solitary heron alone on his quest.
Two Sycamore Trees

Before the sun is up
over the far distant hill,
before the nesting geese
move off their warm eggs,
before the Great Blue heron,
the one with silver-tipped wings,
makes her inaugural morning flight
to scout out deep pools where
the fish are gathering in the first rays
of sunlight, two sycamore trees
are standing tall, proud across the river
on the greened island.
They are of equal height,
smaller than the oak trees, set apart
from each other by thick Japanese knotweed,
as straight as telephone poles dotting
landscape beyond. One is in the sunlight:
the other remains in the shadows.
Spindly, uneven branches, sparse foliage
covers the darker one, while its almost-twin
carries its verdant, lush greenery spread evenly
in all directions from its center core.
I marvel at the difference that sunshine makes
on two identical seeds, rooted
in the same rich soil, on the same river bank,
on the same day, on island primeval.
Carolyn at the Airport

We ran into each other at baggage claim. She was arriving in Pittsburgh to visit her sister, I coming home from my aunt’s funeral in Chicago. My car was there so I gave her a ride. We had been close friends for forty years until I got sick ten years ago. She could never abide illness. We talked on the drive to Mt. Lebanon, about our children, our grandchildren. Not much about ourselves. She’d had a few surgeries. Me too. No need to dwell there. Our grandkids are in college and high school in other towns and states. No greats yet. We’d been young mothers together, met at the Social Workers Wives’ Club that included one husband when our husbands were in graduate school. She stayed married. I didn’t. I dropped her at her sister’s place.
Carolyn at the Beach in Yellow

The VW is old, rusty, unreliable. We park in a deserted open lot walk down a rocky path to the shore. The scrub pines provide scant shade. Spread blankets, anchored with coolers, we slather on sunscreen, hop over the hot sand to the salty waves. No lifeguard. A red flag waves: 

*No Swimming—Riptide,*

keeps us ankle deep looking for sea glass and shells. To the blankets for sandwiches and beer. Settle to play Scrabble, talk and read. Carolyn has on a yellow one piece. She always wears yellow, loves the color. Painted her kitchen yellow with a painting of daffodils on the wall. Grew forsythia in her yard. Is thinking about a yellow Fiat.
Herman’s Baby

The congregation sang with the choir. “And then one day, I’ll cross the river. I’ll fight life’s final war with pain.”

Herman glanced at his wife, Annie. He knew she would be dabbing at her eyes. He took her hand, squeezed it, and whispered, “Do you want to leave?”

She nodded, and they slipped quietly out of the back pew while the hymn continued. That third verse always hit Annie like a cartload of bricks. It hit Herman, too, but he had learned to keep his tears in check a little better. Their lives were never the same after their only daughter, Emily, died of Hodgkins’ disease at age twelve, and that was five years ago. It had taken eight years of trying before they had her, and she was their pride and joy. It was odd what little things could resurrect grief. A sight, a sound, an old acquaintance, a hymn. Anything.

They passed through the front door of the church into a warm summer day and started to wend their way home. Rather than driving, they always walked the several blocks.

“It makes me think of the chemo, the dry heaves ... if only we could have helped her.”

“I know. It’s left a big hole in my heart, too.” The feeling of loss sometimes overwhelmed him as much as it did her. “But I try to remember the happy times. Remember her dancing. She could tap dance better’n anybody else in her class.”

Annie smiled, her eyes red rimmed and shining with tears. They had walked about half a block when he, seeing a quarter on the sidewalk, bent down and picked it up. “There’s something for the money jar,” he said. Anytime he took walks, he checked the ground for coins, particularly in front of bars and at bus stops. It was a game for him—a pastime. It helped him focus. But it also helped others. By the end of the year he had a nice jar of change, which he always dropped off at the church office for their food bank.
Just as he was standing up, trouble came around the corner on the other side of the street.

“Uh oh, keep looking straight ahead,” Annie said. “Justin and his cohorts are comin’. Just ignore them.”

Justin, a sixteen-year-old, and two of his cronies stared at Herman, mumbled something to each other and snickered as though he was the funniest thing in the world.

“Still pickin’ up money off the ground, old man? How much do you have now, fifty-two cents?” Justin said. The other boys snorted.

“You think you’re smart, don’t you?” Herman said. Annie grabbed his arm. “Let’s go.”

“I am smart. Are you washing your car again today? I saw you washing it yesterday. It might have a speck of dirt on it since then.” His smirk seemed to be pasted onto his face.

Herman knew he washed his car too often and took care of it as though it were a child. It gave him satisfaction. Justin was the type to ridicule any eccentricity. Herman was about to say something, but Annie tugged at his arm. Seeing the apprehensive look on her face, he took her hand and they walked away.

Justin called after them, “I know you’re married to your car. Maybe it’ll decide to leave you for another one.” All three guffawed.

“Ignore them,” Annie said.

The boys sprinted up the street, their noisy derision fading with their distance.

“There’s a kid who should’ve got a good spanking when he was three. It might have stopped him from gettin’ into trouble later,” Annie said.

“Yeah, the parents always blamed somebody else whenever he did something wrong. What can you expect? Not too long ago, I heard him bragging about shoplifting, but I ignored it. His parents would sue me for defamation if I said anything.”

“I betcha he’s involved in the house break-ins on Twelfth,” she said.
If he is, he’ll do something stupid and get caught. They let that kid out of his cage too often.”

They continued their stroll over the hilly terrain. When they got home, he let out a yell. “Where’s our car!?"

She gasped. The carport at the top of the sloping driveway was empty. His blue Buick Skylark was gone. “What lousy stinkin’ punk would steal my car?”

“I don’t know,” she said rubbing her hands together nervously.

“Maybe it was Justin. He’d be likely to do something like that. Hell’s bells!”

“Herm!”

“Two of my oil paintings were in the trunk too—and some of my paints and my easel. I was going to sell the paintings at the Art Mart!”

“Oh, Herm, this is terrible!”

His artwork was good enough that he had sold some of it. He always signed only his middle name, Penrose, because he thought it sounded like an artist.

“I’m calling the police,” she said and climbed the steps to the porch and entered the house. For several minutes, he stood staring at the empty space where his car had been. Then he went into the house.

“I’m so mad, I could spit poison darts.”

“Calm down. It won’t help your blood pressure to get yourself in a tizzy.”

He flopped down in his easy chair, and stared straight ahead. He felt as though he had been punched in the stomach. In a little while the police came and took information about the car. “What was the make, model, color, VIN. . .”

Two weeks later, he had heard nothing from the police. “Annie,” he said, “I’m going to look for it.” He had been pacing around the living room again, as he had done frequently since his car was stolen.
“No Herm,” she said, “The police are looking. How would you be able to find it. Don’t make trouble for yourself. You can’t do nuthin’ about it.”

“I can do sumthin’. I can look for her. I know that car inside and out. Maybe some kids—like Justin—took her for a joy ride and abandoned her. I don’t know if the police are even looking. They probably forgot all about her. If anybody can find her, I can.” He put on his baseball cap and a light jacket.

“Don’t confront those hoodlums. You don’t know what they’ll do.”

He waved. “I’ll be okay.”

Maple trees shaded the sidewalk and made it pleasantly cool after being in the sun. He passed well-kept yards, some with boxwood lining the outer edges, others with hydrangea bushes in bloom or clumps of pink and white impatiens. A few houses were in disrepair, and the yards overgrown with weeds. He had taken these same walks with Emily, when she was little. He had taken her to Margo’s for ice cream, and everyone there had made a fuss over her—exclaimed about her long auburn curls and blue eyes. How her eyes danced! He had taken her to tap and ballet classes in the Buick. He took off his glasses and ran his hand over his eyes, then took out his handkerchief and blew his nose. He had to find his car.

After wandering for about an hour and checking out every car he passed, regardless of the color, his frustration overwhelmed him. The thieves could have painted it. It could be anywhere. It could be in a junkyard.

He wandered aimlessly. Emily’s face kept filling his mind. When she was a little older, and he told one of his corny jokes, she would roll her eyes and say, “Daddy!” He could hear her like an echo in his mind. Her voice was so distinctive. How proud he was of her at the kermises she performed in, and what a beautiful child she was. How Annie had cried and cried, she couldn’t get past it. The blue Buick was the car he drove Emily around in and
it was gone and she was gone, Annie home worrying about him right now. He needed to stop worrying about the car, needed to stop being ridiculous, thinking he could find it and figure out who stole it, maybe Justin had nothing to do with it. He needed to stop worrying Annie. He couldn’t bring Emily back. He couldn’t bring her back.

His cell phone rang. It was Annie.

“Herm, they found the car in a garage on the North Side. It’s stripped. Both sides are dinged in, all the tires are gone, and everything’s gone from the inside of the car and the trunk. It told them to tow it to Bill’s Auto Body. He may be able to fix it.”

Herman sighed. He could see Emily’s face. He could see it recede. He blew his nose again. “The car’s ten years old, Annie. Sometimes you just have to take your losses. I think we should give it up. Get a new one.”

There was a moment’s hesitation. “I think so too, Herman. Please. Come home now?”

“I’m on my way, Annie. I’m on my way.”
To a Train

*after Judith Vollmer*

Low whine from the steel box-cars
no noise will mute your whistle on my shift

no ticket-collector from the vacant tracks
of Penn Station will yell Hush

no time-clock scold All Aboard, or you’ll be late
& off your schedule

I love your bluesy horn-
stack of notes

sounding off the crisscross choo-choo braces,
& wooden planks bolted at their joints

Solely you, silver rolling serpent
ease the black & blue of iron & carbon beams

stained red from the nose-dive splatter
After the homicide corpse-car collects him

I’ll walk off this cold rail crossing
and back down the rusty parallel tracks

blowing wind into melody & song
among the city’s late night refrain inside

brick & mortar shops where old
lonesomeness rattles & shakes me

within ear-shot
of your rumbling moan.
The Ukranian Pianist

for Valentina Lisitsa

The sun glitters on Kaufmann’s clock.
A flock of pigeons swirls and swan dives
over forest green Mellon Square.
The Ukranian pianist
just raised heaven and hell at Heinz Hall.
Arms rise from keys in alleluias.
Head bends low on pianissimo.
She rocks with Rachmaninoff’s Concerto 2.
The audience erupts in joy.
The strings raise and lower their bows—
over and over they applaud
the blonde in golden gown glowing
like the sun setting on Kaufmann’s clock.
Drawing Home

It looks insubstantial
  unfinished
like if you pushed
hard enough
it would collapse

a treasure trove
of what didn’t work—
dreams with no sticking point
flowers that want
to sketch themselves
into blossoms

This is hope.
The steps bigger
than the mountains
start here
end somewhere else
Fayetteville, Arkansas, December 26, 1977

I have never liked fruitcake
but I remember eating pieces
broken from the loaf
my sister sent
bits stuck to my fingers
and my clothes
as I tried to taste Christmas

I lived with my husband Danny
in a shack of a house
shafts of sunlight
poking through the walls
had to step over a frozen stream
when the neighbor’s toilet
backed up in our yard

Danny had been gone for two days
alone with my sister’s fruitcake
I stuffed my mouth
chewed and swallowed
chewed and swallowed

Didn’t taste it
couldn’t cry
as I ate it all
nuts and raisins
bits of pineapple
and dried cherries
the sticky cake
coated my teeth
No money to leave
nowhere to go
I couldn’t tell my people
how unbelievably
unbearably
helpless I felt
eating fruitcake
on my birthday
and gagging
Tourists

Ed thinks these plants look like malformed erections. Sherry is shrieking. She is examining each plant with a magnifying glass. She says, “I see a beetle.”

They are waiting for their tour guide, Don.

“No don’t be so loud,” Ed says. He is glancing behind him. His pink polo shirt is stuck to his back by a handprint of sweat.

“See his face,” Sherry says, “It looks like an old man face. Come down and see.” She snaps her fingers, motions for him to come, the way you’d summon a dog. Ed rolls his eyes.

“It’s just a beetle,” he says, not bothering to look at Sherry or the wiggling black rectangle she is clutching between her sandy fingers. Ed turns to look at the sky. Sherry pouts and then, whispering something imperceptible at the beetle’s head, drops it back on the sand.

Yesterday, while they were showering together, each soaping up their own sunburnt skin, he said to Sherry that he thought this desert place looked like the surface of dried out peach pit, except close up. She smiled, and through the gaps in her white teeth he caught a glimpse of her tongue. Today the sun is so bright the world looks bleached and Sherry’s smile is hidden by the shadow of her floppy hat. The gnarled arms of the plants are the only shapes that pierce the horizon.

“No do you think these plants are poisonous?” Ed says.

Sherry picks her nose a little and then scratches it ferociously. “Probably,” she says.

“God, where is Don?” Ed is running his hands across his bald spot, which is blistered.

“I told you to wear a hat,” Sherry says.

Ed sighs. “I just want to know where he is, he should be here by now.”

Sherry leans back on her heels and the soles of her boots sink into the sand. “Soon,” she says, “He’ll be here soon. He won’t leave us out here, now come look at this plant.”
Ed obliges.
They both kneel down in the white sand, arch their bodies over the strange plant.

This was once an ocean. Yesterday morning they discovered fossils of fish and plants. Don named the plants, and fish, and the ocean, but in bed that night, as they talked about the day, Ed and Sherry struggled to remember everything they had learned.

Sherry and Ed aren’t saying anything. The wind touches the places where Ed’s hair has stopped growing. The wind touches Sherry’s red freckled skin. They lean their heads together, let their sweaty forearms touch. Eyes grow calm. Breathing slows. Below their shadows the alien plant extends its evergreen stubs toward their faces. It is covered with purple flowers. Ed and Sherry both reach out at the same time to touch the tip of the same petal. They run brown fingers across its supple surface. They are leaning on each other under the white sun. Rocks skid to a stop by their hiking boots. They do not look up.
End of Days

While Janine secures the paper-towel necklace and adjusts the dentist’s chair, she gives me the rundown about her prayer list this week: “That poor Lindsay Lohan. Filled with all that sad trouble. Lord. Her poor mother.” Iris stands mute behind us waiting to jot down my latest gum measurements.

“She’s still got her canines,” Janine says to her, “but 15, 16, and 17 are gone.”

I squirm.

“You okay, hon?”

I nod, mouth sky-wide, the piña colada numbing gel that Iris had painted on my teeth makes my gag reflex jumpy. I could have asked for plain old mint, but I didn’t want to hurt her feelings. (“This one’s tasty and my personal fave.”) The tiny sharp pricks on my gums as she measures send emergency signals to the tips of my toes.

Buck up, girl, you’ve still got your canines. Six months ago I had four hours of gum surgery that included five extractions and two implants. Eddy had given me his iPod to listen to for the duration, on which he had downloaded Eckhart Tolle reading the “The Power of Now.” Though I didn’t tell Eddy, “The Power of Now” and dental surgery wasn’t a good match. Add to the equation nitrous oxide and the background Musak yowl of Celine Dion, and you’ve got an almost foolproof recipe for suicidal ideation.

Janine is an eco-born-again Christian, at least that’s how I describe her to Eddy. At my post-op check, I got an earful from her about bees and colony collapse disorder and how millions upon millions of them have just vanished from their hives. “It’s honeybee Armageddon,” she said, and explained, as go the bees, so goes humanity. “God’s given up on us.”

Doctor Davis had wanted to pull my two front teeth, which protruded a bit and had a large gap in between. I refused.
Bone loss was significant but not beyond saving. “I like them,” I said, “They’re me.” Even after 15 years of kisses—from the hit-and-run variety to dozy mouths nuzzling—Eddy still slips his tongue there, sliding it in and out of my gap; a place no one else can go but him. How would he find his way if the dentist closed it up with a bridge and crown? I agreed to let the bottom front four go. They were loose and had begun to resemble one of those small graveyards around here with hundreds-year-old withering headstones leaning toward each other out of lonesomeness.

Finished measuring, Janine starts the cleaning and begins to scratch at my teeth with a shiny silver pick ax. I can feel each jarring scrape zip down my spine. “You’re doing so well,” she says, soft like a lullaby, rubbing my cheek, causing my eyes to well up fast like a 2-year-old with a boo-boo.

“Those poor bats. Have you heard?” she asks. I shake my head. “It’s the plague,” she begins, “thousands of dead bats all over the Northeast. They’re calling it white-nose syndrome, cuz the poor dead babies have some kind of powdery film on their muzzles—You’re almost there, hon, keep breathing.” She turns my face inches from her pink frock. “Their tiny brains are infected. Flying in broad daylight. Crashing into snow banks. Piling up like so much trash in their caves. It’s the apocalypse.”

My last encounter with a snow bank happened when my brain was infected, too. It’s coming up on two years ago, well after midnight, between my car and the house. I had accomplished the monumental task of exiting the driver’s seat, stepping out onto the driveway, and pawing at the car’s door until it closed properly. I steadied myself, gloved hand on the side mirror, pre-navigating the curvy path to the house.

I hadn’t crashed into the snow bank like the bats, just sort of sank into it super-slow-mo, as effortlessly as a sleepy foot into an old fuzzy slipper. The force of gravity pushed the heft of my butt down deep into the frozen burrow, leaving my arms pinned snug against my waist and legs raised and flapping in the air.
Eddy had made sure I was wearing my puffy, red down jacket because of the cold. I had told him when I left the house earlier that I was going over to Maria’s for tea and Scrabble—just one more red-nosed lie.

The front porch light was on, but Eddy was millions of light years away, in our bed, under the comforter asleep. His worry had called it quits months before, given up its nightly vigil of keeping his eyes ajar, waiting for the faint roar of the front door opening when I returned. A bag of kitty litter was in the trunk of my car, where Eddy had put it, along with a small shovel, just in case I slipped off the road and got stuck on ice or in a drift. What I needed was a crane, not kitty litter. I couldn’t budge.

My mouth fell open and my vodka-pickled tongue stretched toward the stars as if they were crushed ice at the bottom of my glass still offering vapors of booze. I stared up at the fuzzy glitter of the Pleiades, the seven sisters, the ones who committed suicide. For the life of me, I couldn’t remember why. They seemed closer to me than Eddy. How many Scrabble points could I get for Pleiades, I wondered. I’d ask her, but Maria has stopped returning my calls.

She was with me in the caregivers’ support group before I quit going, before mom died. There were seven of us. We called ourselves samurais not Pleiades. Each week we’d haul in our weary puppy hearts and lick one another, until showing up felt like just one more thing on my “to do” list. I turned to seven Stolichnayas for comfort instead, then I stopped counting.

Snow bound and swimming in the soup of my muffled brain, I remembered one of those sisters up there had married Sisyphus, a mortal. My ass went numb. You really can’t blame her for checking out. Imagine living with him. Hour after hour, up the mountain, down again. No crane, no bulldozer, no kitty litter. He’d drag himself home at night, barely able to stand, stinking, bitter and resigned. What was she supposed to say? How was work, honey?
Eddy. I was killing us. My arms and legs felt like fossils. The water leaking down my cheeks would soon freeze. They should have a support group for people who quit support groups. To pass the time I kept counting the seven twinkling siblings over and over, wondering if there was room for me in the black starry night of the dead. If I were up there the earth would breathe a sigh of relief. The neighborhood roads would get rid of one more spongy-brained menace.

“Jack diddley squat,” Janine says, her words pulling me back. “That’s all those scientists know. End of days, hon. End of days,” she repeats as she slips off my bib and tells me to spit. “We’re done. You made it.” She rubs my back, doesn’t ask why I’m crying.

If Eddy had carried me into the house, he would’ve found a way to let me know. My jacket was on the hook, gloves tucked into the pocket, boots neatly side by side on the rug. Blackouts are tricky that way. Maybe those sisters did it, just reached down and gave me a great galactic heave-ho.

I rinse and spit. *We will not regret the past, nor wish to shut the door on it.* I measure these words as I rinse again. It’s one of the promises of AA. *We will know peace.*

“I’ll see you in three months,” Janine says, handing me a new toothbrush. “God bless. Floss daily!”

“I will,” I say, and decide to go to a meeting on my way home, say a prayer for Eddy, for me, for the bees and bats, and poor Lindsay Lohan.
At Squire Tarbox Inn

Stepping from one stone to another, our advance cautioned by the memories of shattered bones, we reach the meadow with its soggy morning patches, columnning cattails and tawny monarchs whose coming disappearance we lament.

Then pick our way down the tree-lined trail for a glimpse of sun-flecked water singing “zum galee galee…”
Exploding Piano for Sale

I saw the ad in the Kansas City Times.

Imagine the shrieks when it explodes
— the joy, O!

The keys rigged to fly away, the lid falls off,
front leg comes crashing.

There’s also a gimmick, a squib pot, built in.

Yes, Yes, an exploding baby grand of my very own!

If I have to, I can live inside with
evening gown, toothbrush, candelabra and rabbit.

Instructions to detonate enclosed within.
POX

running away from the gorilla:
apish breath so close and moist, and me, running,
running, my small feet tripping over rotating terrains: trees,
hallways, animated throbbing backdrops—
the breath— fear, like the grape that sticks in the throat.

And then, the witch’s hand, all gnarled, bony
wrinkled green, with long cracked and dirty nails
grabs for tiny ankles from underneath the bed—

Mother ties my hands and feet to the bed

so I won’t scratch the chicken pox— leave a
mark on my face.
That Christmas, Grandfather Sam insisted on driving us to Aunt Sade’s in his antediluvian Plymouth sedan with its fake mahogany dashboard. “Why not go in my Olds?” was on the tip of Daddy’s tongue; but we all knew the answer.

The ride was unforgettable. Preoccupied with Mother’s dramatic hospitalization, Father hadn’t noticed that Sam, now in his early nineties, had been driving around anywhere he wanted, mistaking people for horses. And, in his day, any side of the street was fair game.

“Dad, it’s about time you sell this thing,” our father called into Sam’s only good ear—as our right rear wheel nearly crushed a sidewalk curb, knocking Father’s Stetson hat to a rakish angle. “It’s becoming an antique, might fetch a tidy sum.” Father straightened his hat as Sam put us back on a steady course, steadier than ever. His knuckles, like pale gourds, clung to the steering wheel for dear life.

First of all, one didn’t refer to Grandfather’s cherished old Plymouth as a thing (or the old bucket, as the kid next door called it). And second of all, one didn’t bring up the subject of early twentieth century transportation. We all were aware—and if we ever dared forget, Sam would remind us—that the automobile would in time bring about the fall of civilization.

But Father didn’t give up: “Remember when Uncle Will used to meet us at Mercer station with Nellie hitched up to the old wagon? Quite a horse, old Nell.” And since when did Father give a hoot about horses—unless they were under Confederate generals? It was Mother, when she was well, who saw to it that we had riding lessons.

But, despite Sam’s gloomy predictions when it came to the automobile, he longed to be modern. “Those horses smelled, I prefer a car.” After a near miss, he veered back into whatever lane he was in, then squinted harder than ever through...
the square windshield into the gray afternoon. There we were, driving down the wrong side of Fifth Avenue. Hunched in the back seat, our wool sleeves colliding, sister Jane and I tried to avoid the nervous looks we got from other drivers. By some miracle we made it into the porte-cochere of the Royal York, the old Plymouth’s reflection a contradiction in the eloquent mirrored facade. The door man disdainfully pried open our door.

The Royal York was an apartment house designed to distract people from the gloom in their lives, especially around Christmas. Upon entering the building, we were face-to-face with a shimmering white Christmas tree, the white lights multiplying themselves in the mirrors and on the alabastrine floor. The four of us glided serenely toward the elevators, Grandpa’s cane tapping at the stars under our feet.

We rang for St. Peter and the pearly gates opened. We could tell the elevator man remembered Jane and me from our childhood, but in the polished brass elevator cage with its heavy red velvet wreath, he pretended he didn’t. Elevators were one of our foremost fascinations back then. In the movies they went crashing to the ground floor, killing or maiming scores of screaming people just like us. But now it was Christmas, and the elevators had been modernized.

On the ninth floor the doors clanked open and we immediately discerned the pesky odor of Ali-baba, the Pekinese who slept in Aunt Sade’s bathtub. The apartment door was propped open with something that looked like it had been taken from a ship, and out of the ivory foyer charged Ali-baba—along with the odor of scorched fat. Sade was not known for her cooking. For all we knew, she always ate out.

“Merry Christmas! That’s the Ho Tai Buddha you see there, happiest Buddha in the three realms. If you rub his belly you’ll have good luck!”

I could almost hear Father thinking aloud, “What in tarnation does the Buddha have to do with Christmas?”
Sade was referring to the live lizard curled around an arched oriental bridge in one of the long, mossy, humid terrariums on the floor. Instead of rubbing the Buddha’s slimy belly, I reached out to surrender to Aunt Sade’s layers of eclectic Bohemian (“affairs” or “get-ups,” Father caustically referred to all that stuff). An apron might have saved me from coming up against the food caught in her strands of pearls, but oh no, Sade didn’t believe in aprons.

After her explanation, in terrible French, of the visual onslaught in her living room—the artificial tree hung with Murano glass balls which looked like they’d been thrown there (très recherché, n’est-ce pas?), and other decadent things—we passed the afternoon around her dragon-laden teak coffee table which had an odd circumference for dining. In the midst of her crowd of medicine bottles, we consumed something that looked like plum pudding while discussing the pros and cons of my majoring in English as opposed to drama. “A woman needs something to fall back on, doncha know.” (We all knew, and time would certainly prove her right. She was only thinking of our good.) During this discussion, our father seemed a bit distracted, sorting as he was through an endless pile of postcards of simulated disasters while keeping his foot from knocking over a pile of Royal Darby tea cups. Then there was poor old Sam next to him, near to disappearing in the tea-stained folds of her davenport.

This would turn out to be our last Christmas with Sade and Sam. The next year we’d be back from Sam’s rooming house on South Graham, and into our little square overheated house with our recovering mother. And Father’s model railroad.

Eventually, the Plymouth would end up in a landfill, Jane would inherit the Royal Darby, I would get the Murano glass balls, and our future generations would eventually wind up with the simulated-disaster postcards. They would be the only objects that actually survived, making it harder to explain who their great-great-great Aunt Sade actually was.
Someone who cared. Someone who tried her darnedest, in her own way, to give us a decent, even if Mother-less, Christmas.
more / less

more gay
than queer
more queer
than lesbian
less lesbian
than girl
more girl
than woman
less woman
than man
more boy
than bi
less bi
than butch
more butch
than dyke
more dyke
than trans
less trans
than faggot
more fag
than bulldagger
more bulldagger
than top
less top
than bottom
least top
no top
more bottom
less ‘s’
more ‘m’
more bottom
more bottom
less homo
more sexual
this morning

for larry bogdanow

february 24, 1947 – june 29, 2011

the start of
Independence Day weekend:

sun too bright/heavy/
dragging its hot ascent,

traffic already
on Three Mile Harbor,

SUVs jamming the gravel lot
at Round Swamp Farm.

None of this surprises.
What does—

(I roll the window down
let the humidity hit)

—is the gap
in the privet,

naked plinth of foundation
forsaken in the field,

the riderless bicycle,
empty wicker basket
drooping forward.

* * *
Larry’s is 3-speed, black, 
and he’s peddling up the cobblestones 
on Wooster, out of SoHo, 
past the early days—SOB’s on Varick, 
Kleinsleep on Sixth, the Carmine St. Pool, 
Bondini’s on Ninth, the Lone Star and 
Iggy the giant iguana on Fifth, 
Union Square Café on Sixteenth— 
Texas boy turned city architect, 
the rolling blueprint of this promised land 
ceaseless 
beneath his churning feet— 
a place to be tilled and built, 
tilled and built again. 

* * * 

Unintentionally, 
I turn my car from the traffic 
down a dirt lane to the bay: 
outlay of Gardiner’s Island on the horizon, 
the sky a milky haze, 
a lone kayaker propelling by, 
water foaming through the stones at my feet, 
sun higher now, heat bearing down.
Laundry Day

Today, I felt sadness
flood over me
when I was folding
the laundry
and noticed less and less
of your shirts.
Positive

I try to forget about the black eye,
arms twisted behind the small of my back,
hard voices grunting and heavy breathing,
sound of one spitting into his rough hand.
I try to forget that I was crying
after they smashed my face off of the wall.
Told me to relax and they would be fast,
the only light came from under the door.

The bruises are gone and I’m back to work.
It’s been three months but still see blank gazes
in every man’s eyes that I look into.
I go to group therapy, sit silent,
nervous for my turn to talk about how
there’s a pink plus sign in the small window.
Old

It’s a quiet thing—easing into age, giving up the struggle for mastery. Like sitting at the evening campfire, leaning against the bark of a tree so much older than your time, warmed by a soft blanket gently draped over the shoulders, listening to crackle of dry wood catching the fire, watching Earth turn slowly past our moon.

A quiet thing—no longer challenging damaged limbs, reluctant body parts, just making peace with relevant aches and pains, accommodating to crises that come with the territory. When did it stop being an adversarial process? Last year? Last week? This morning awakening from a dream with a cast of remembered characters?

Perhaps sitting at the window on an autumn afternoon, holding souvenirs of passed life, savoring photo memories, remembering the taste of fine wines, beat of good jazz, steps no longer part of the dance but felt in those deep places that remain in touch.

Old. No longer looking ahead, but not stuck in rear view—settling into a new present, buying it as is, knowing the meaning of without.

No last hurrah. There won’t be trumpets. It’s such a quiet thing.
Sixty Summers Later

_The future ain't what it used to be_  
_and besides, it never was._  
—Will Hayes

I remember sky, bluer then, brilliant red-orange sunrise, golden pink sunset beyond a horizon

close enough to be touched by heat of daylight, cooled in starlight, ocean waves breaking

in the blackness of night, surf swirling under the beach house in that dark, house swaying

subtly in night wind. Afternoons strolling warm sands, his smile warming the space in my heart

where dreams are made. Evenings laughing, making love and conversation. Then shorter

autumn days, winter nights—Memory lies deep like a coral reef embedded on the ocean floor,

accessible to homeless fish—easy in, easy out. I swim inside looking for refuge, refreshed in

reminiscence, wonder if he recalls any of it. I remember all of it. Sixty summers later,

the half-empty bed still felt. I wonder if I am even a glimpse of history for him.

I still remember sky, bluer then.
That is not to say that every poem is about love:

the shield-shaped body
of the stink bug who lives
on your lampshade,

a towel momentarily left
next to the burner catches
fire and smells

like marshmallows,
your cat’s nose
is the exact same shade

as a pink Sweet Tart—
this is a slow drinking love
song to the truth
To Age

While camping in the woods, she vows she will begin to thicken, bust to sprout those rungs of sturdy boughs and earn a hard and gnarled trunk. To change her will take a chainsaw, no small injection will smooth her husk. And, decades after churning dirt for deep water, her thick roots will still hunt.
Dear Mrs. Gardiner (an excerpt from a longer work)

The breeze was out of the south and the sky blue. Hope rose early to start the bread. When Natalie appeared, her mother’s hands were already covered in a yeasty concoction.

“Good morning, sweetheart,” said Hope, hugging her daughter. Natalie caught a whiff of fermentation emanating from her mother’s apron, the one with the Bernese Mountain Dogs on it.

“Happy birthday,” said Natalie.

“Thank you, darling, and thank you so much for coming,” said Hope. Natalie saw a tear escape from the corner of her mother’s eye. “Now, let’s get down to work.”

Hope welcomed help in the kitchen, but wouldn’t think to allow anyone else to prepare lunch, even on her own birthday. It was her job. She always called herself “the chief cook and bottle washer” and that wasn’t going to change at age seventy-five. For her, food was love and making it was the thing she knew how to do best. Before finishing her first cup of coffee, Natalie had helped Hope peel eggs, wash apples, and slice the freshly-baked bread—after it cooled, gently with a serrated knife, as her mother had taught her. Natalie dumped a bag of ice into a cooler and covered in wax paper the special hummus wrap Hope had made for Rob. Hope didn’t approve of her son-in-law’s veganism. “How would one want to go through life without eating steak au poivre?” she used to ask. But she was always accommodating.

“Where is Rob, anyway?” Natalie asked, expecting him sooner or later to carry everything to the dock. It was his job and he did it every year, in exchange for his mother-in-law’s special sandwich.

“Not sure,” said Hope.

“I’m sure he’ll turn up any minute,” Natalie said.

“Now, will you please go to the basement and fetch the picnic basket?” Hope asked. “I didn’t have a chance. Should have done it already. I need to sit down for a bit.”
Natalie was just about to say, let’s not lug that heavy thing again but stopped herself. It was her mother’s seventy-fifth birthday, and if she wanted to use the old, wicker relic, they would. Natalie made her way down the creaky basement stairs and pulled the chain on the light, a lone 40-watt bulb. She sniffed, sensing mold behind the freezer, then nearly tripped over her brother’s old lacrosse sticks. Natalie thought the basement dirtier and more cluttered than usual. So unlike her mother. Through the old floorboards, Natalie could hear Hope, above, humming “One Enchanted Evening.”

The picnic basket wasn’t in its usual spot. She could hardly see. Finally, she found it in the corner by the cat litter. She wiped the dust off with a rag. It wasn’t that Natalie disliked the basket. She was sentimental about it, too. But using it required a lot of extra work that should have been done earlier. The silver cutlery had to be shined, the crystal glasses and Minton luncheon plates washed carefully by hand. The silliest thing of all, perhaps, were the monogrammed napkins that Hope insisted be folded just the way her mother had done, and no one ever used them anyway. Natalie’s sister Rosie said the napkins were so old they were officially heirlooms and therefore too good to use.

Back upstairs in the light, Natalie noticed one of the fancy brass hinges had broken. A shame. They just didn’t make that kind of hardware anymore. She didn’t tell her mother. It would upset her. Natalie hadn’t begun to tackle the contents of the basket when her girls awakened. They were bleary-eyed from a short night’s sleep, but showed an eagerness that both Natalie and Hope recognized immediately as something birthday-related. Five-year-old Nellie was ready to hit the beach, but before they left, Natalie insisted her daughters help with the napkins, teaching them the proper fold. When the job was finished, Nellie begged to be released from additional duties.

Flora, a grown-up eleven-year-old, chimed in. “We have a chore to do,” she said to her grandmother. “We won’t be long.”
Hope winked. Natalie knew Hope suspected what they were up to, but her mother kindly feigned ignorance so as not to spoil the girls’ surprise.

“But I have to wash the stuff in the basket,” said Natalie, “and ...”

“Oh, don’t worry,” interrupted Hope. “I’ll do it.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course, don’t be silly,” said her mother, flicking perspiration off her brow.

With that, the three of them excused themselves from the kitchen and went outdoors. The girls blew their grandmother kisses. Natalie turned to wave goodbye. Hope flashed back a knowing and loving smile.

A few steps beyond the screen door, Natalie stopped and turned for a moment to see her mother lick mayonnaise off her fingertips, then bend over and load into the cooler beautifully made egg-salad-and-chive sandwiches, freshly-sliced carrot sticks, and her son Sam’s favorite oatmeal raisin cookies. Oh, how Natalie wished she’d lingered a moment longer, just another minute to—what? Watch her mother snip peonies from the shrub by the back door? Pour milk into the chipped china bowl for the stray cat? Save her life?

Had Natalie stayed, she’d have seen her mother tidy all the counters and begin to load the dishwasher. She’d have watched her mother write a note and leave a week’s pay for the housekeeper, who had forgotten her money a couple days before. Natalie would have smiled as Hope tossed off her apron with her usual flourish, then hung it properly on the hook in the pantry. Her mother was probably scrubbing her hands at the kitchen sink when her aortic aneurism burst.

Natalie had tried over and over again to piece together the actual events. Natalie’s stepfather, Jack, said later he thought he had heard a strange thud, but the sander was so loud he wasn’t sure. Ten minutes must have passed before he found her. The
thud, he learned later, was probably Hope as she fell on the dishwasher, breaking the door. Natalie’s husband, Harry, wasn’t around because he needed to place a business call and was up the hill trying to get better cell phone reception. Gordon’s family, not the “up and at-em” types Hope admired, was just waking up in the guesthouse so they couldn’t offer any information. Rosie was showering about the same time Rob placed the picnic basket on the dock.

Natalie never forgave herself for not being there the moment it happened. She was sure there was something she could have done. But she and Flora and Nellie were just where her mother had assumed they were: down at the beach collecting heart-shaped rocks. Nellie said she found “the best stone ever,” redder than the usual granite with a line of white quartz through the middle. Nellie buffed it on her windbreaker so it was shiny. As they rounded the corner from Branson’s beach, Natalie heard a siren. Probably old Mr. Potter’s heart condition. The EMS guys could make a living driving out to check on him. But then Natalie remembered Mr. Potter wasn’t coming until the fourth of July. Natalie grabbed Nellie’s hand, practically pulling her shoulder out of the socket. “Come on girls, hurry up.”

“What’s the matter, Mom?” yelled Nellie, looking up into her mother’s eyes.

“Run,” said Natalie.

“I can’t run fast on these rocks,” said Nellie, starting to cry. Natalie picked her up and carried her.

When they hit the sandy stretch, Natalie’s feet felt as if they were anchored in concrete. Her mind raced, but her feet hardly moved. They saw flashing lights.

“There’s an ambulance at our house!” screamed Flora. When Natalie flung open the screen door, a paramedic was beating mercilessly her mother’s chest.

Was that her mother’s rib cracking? Natalie remembered the bright green Easter dress her mother wore when she was
hugely pregnant with Rosie, the one with the big bow across her breast. Was it Natalie’s imagination or were her mother’s fingers already turning blue? The EMS guys smelled of sunscreen, and Natalie thought she felt her mother’s fingers on her back as she remembered her rubbing Coppertone in a circular motion on her skin. On the bookcase, she saw a photograph of her mother—was it 1967 or ’68?—holding up the biggest trout of the season? She thought she might vomit.

That night, Natalie clutched Harry in the darkness, using his chest to muffle her cries so the children wouldn’t hear.
Trudy, Trudy, Trudy

Trudy was not an orphan or even adopted. She wasn’t born in the city or the rocky mountain high country, didn’t live with the violence and speed of the ghetto, or in the country, toiling in an honest soul-searing but hopeless round of farming. Trudy didn’t have any of those things. She was just a kid from the muddled mess of the suburbs. She wasn’t poor or rich; she was just flat.

It started out presumably okay. Trudy had no more than the usual number of humiliating experiences. She threw up on a classmate at the amusement park, proving once and for all time that motion sickness would keep her from being an astronaut. She fell down the school steps in a dress, revealing her mother’s old graying panty girdle, a hopeless attempt to keep stockings from sagging around her ankles. She sneezed in class, boogers everywhere and no Kleenex. She was, as I said, sort of okay. She was just waiting to turn out to be pretty. When that possibility faded, she was just waiting to get a chest.

First, it was of no concern. Trudy, in retrospect, called those years the perfect years. All equal, so to speak, a level playing field. She could run pretty fast, and she could definitely scream better than anyone. She did, too. All of the agonizing stress of Release, or Army, or Hide and Seek, or plain old Tag, released in one or twenty drawn out, howling, shrieking screams. Trudy’s folks called her in, threatened her and ultimately, kept her in, claiming neighbors thought someone was being murdered. Possibly they were over-reacting, or maybe not.

Trudy had no problem with the shared baths in the laundry tubs. Her brother seven, her six, sitting in adjoining tubs, with the basement door open to the sticky heat of a summer day. The concrete of the tub was scrapey on her bum, but the water was cool and no one had a chest so she was golden.

Later, Trudy noticed, couldn’t help but notice, that other girls were getting chests. She thought she was just biding her time.
But junior high school is a painful place with no chest. Gym class was a nightmare; why oh why were the girls taking group showers? Why did the gym teacher stand at the entrance? Claimed she was making sure the girls actually washed. HAH! And if gym class was bad, swimming for gym was worse. The suits had no elasticity. Oh Trudy’s poor, skinny, scrawny, chestless body. The leg holes were too big, the top sagged down, and her flesh mottled purple from freezing water; all this was on display to the boys watching on the other side. It seemed her whole life purpose must have been to make everyone else look good. She did such a good job of it, you’d think they’d thank her. But no. Trudy was alone in the no chest zone.

A girl can only go so many years telling herself it’s coming. Finally, Trudy determined to act. Of course acting with all the skill and deviousness of a fifteen year old with no wherewithal and no intention of speaking to anyone of the nightmare state of her chest, she bought a padded bra. Badly padded. Worse and worse with laundering. She drew the line at adding Kleenex; although that could have been helpful in the sneezing, snot on the face scenario. Although possibly even more embarrassing to pull the necessary Kleenex out of her bra. Did I mention wherewithal? Trudy had none. So, she couldn’t even buy enough bras to get her through a week. Some days she was lumpy, some days flat and some days slightly smelly. There really was no one to talk to about these things.

Trudy could see what the boys were thinking. She could see that they wanted chests on the girls they talked to or called or anything. What could she do? There was nothing to say. Trudy had to guard her heart and she gave up the screaming. Her friends had chests. She sneaked glances at them except never, ever in the showers. Some displayed their chests to advantage, bouncing and pointing and tight sweaters, but for the most part they just had the quiet certainty that inside their shirts if they ever needed them, they had chests. This was an incalculable advantage.

Trudy couldn’t be a cheerleader without a chest. That was on the application. Even less could she become a majorette, are you kidding? Possibly, she could have been part of the drill team,
marching in formation wearing go-go boots. But fate is so cruel. Trudy had her period on the day of try outs. Concomitantly, her hair refused to hide the acne on her face and her white shirt was headed to gray. She had no chest; she felt and looked gross, oh, sanitary napkins the size of small logs in her underwear and her shorts revealing all. Trudy had to agree with them that they shouldn’t pick her. So the whole high school athlete hanger-on thing was out of the question. Her father didn’t allow girl athletes either; on a dime, he was sure, she could turn dike-y. Trudy certainly couldn’t be a hood. They required chests more than anyone. You just cannot wear orange pancake make-up, heavy eye liner, teased hair, leather jackets and not support the whole thing with a respectable chest.

Other groups to fall into were few and far between. So, Trudy elected to become a hippie. She was looking for acceptance, anticipating that “everything is beautiful” thing, looking for a place to hang her hat. She became political, alienated her parents, challenged authority, and demonstrated against the war. But she had a sneaking suspicion that even among the hippies, chests were requisite. Sure Trudy could be braless, but who would care? Did you know that people act out against these kinds of things? Or possibly they retreat in. Trudy did both, wishing to leave all her options open. Once again, she became noisy, arguing with guys who otherwise would not give her the time of day. She insisted on the right to do things dangerous or stupid to show that she didn’t care. Trudy was not invested in the whole social construct. She became contemptuous and demeaning; you are a football player; you are an idiot. You salute the flag; how blindly you follow. She looked off into the distance. She was not making the splash she had imagined. Trudy thought everyone was watching her, thinking, she was wild and crazy, but possibly, probably, they were not noticing her at all. She was not keen on the outcome either way. She had painted herself into a corner. Trudy needed a new life.
kiss

the cargo bay’s payload
waits, like the mouth
on my flushed face
waits—warming

waits as the hum
of engines vibrates lips
apart slightly, doors
to my concussive core—

skin-slipped plutonium
waits one goal
and the trigger—
ignition of tongue

you contemplate miles away
my breathless kiss—
I crave the massive
earth of you
Pass Over

Raw horseradish root is washed and dried to remove every drop of water, then rubbed on a rasp—metal wand usually used to shear burrs and edges; here each stroke collects, not subtracts, memory, recalls my life as your slave, when I became like the coarse acid root.

I scour desire into pulp, each stroke stokes acrid air to sting the mind.

I place the paste on my tongue—swallow to remember. Now I will wander in the desert for forty years. (This was foretold.)
How to Wear Knee-High Lace-Up Steel Toe Boots

First you want to take them home and for a few days, practice lacing:

aglet eyelet aglet eyelet
pull them taut
next row.

Use a stopwatch or count the seconds out loud.

Cotton laces are easier on the fingers but nylon lasts longer. Blisters = dedication.

Though it makes your footstep heavy, the steel toe is important. Witness:

students slump outside a classroom.
The door is open; fluorescents buzz but they do not enter. It’s the first day.

They wait for the teacher to walk among them like a priest or general,

to place her arsenal of knowledge on the teacher-table. Then they may arrange themselves away from her line of sight. I wait

among them unnoticed. I wait until nervous energy
is primed. I steel-toe-heel-toe
right through them.
\textit{in three minutes I will tell them I am blind}

\textit{(sort of)}
\textit{there will be questions}

I toss my jacket (leather) to the table, think \textit{just shoot}.
Practicing My Half-Smile

It’s just us, alone, opposed, on two narrow lanes of sidewalk. Oncoming. Tap tap. White cane.

That’s me.
I see you, appraising.

Like the bowl of an upturned umbrella, my mouth flips contrary.

Like a broken, upturned umbrella, it is only contrary on one side.

I do this, fellow pedestrian, to make you feel at ease.

Little wells are starting to form in the bowl of my upturned umbrella. Are you feeling easeful yet?

When I’m alone I try my smile on in the mirror. I work toward humanlike finesse.

Muscles have no memory of how to fake it so constantly. Like diodon nicthemerus

I’m used to the boil of toxin behind my expression. Waiting for you to set it off.

Steer around me. Turn your gaze away. Until I manage that half-smile, fellow pedestrian,

I can only barely see you. But you can see into me.
Big Sky Summers

blue & white & red 4-H fair ribbons
each summer you sewed the skirt’s insides
as perfect as the out in Mrs. Yost’s cool
basement where you ate marshmallow Skippy
banana cream sandwiches wrapped in wax
the insides as smooth as the paper’s out
as fireflies escaped safe shrubs to die
in the bouldering pit     aspen leaf-quaking

you drew silver back
arrow  bow  canoe
Science

a garden
where bees may come

mister biology
experiment

little mint with no
leaves to see

breath
between

crushed soul forms
land

a garden
where bees come
Leaving Your Mark

Last week
you handed me beets,
pickled and jarred
and pretty in purple.

Their bitter-sweet sauce
dripped from my lips,
stained a bruise
on the counter beneath.

I didn’t know
it was the last
mark you’d leave
with me.
Silent at Seven

Lee Ann holds the flowers steady by the lamp post. I push warm dirt around them, a cocoon for their safety.

A phone rings.

Her mother comes out. She folds me into her marshmallow belly. “You have to go home.”

She grows flowers by her lamp post, not on what will be my sister’s grave.
Deadlines

are just that to me
a line that is dead
flat line, no life. asystole

an annoying beep
a stinging dart
permission to vomit on the page
a self-inflicted paper cut
a case of page rage

the ripping of hair
the biting of lip
eyes blurred by tears

but when it comes
and the work is done
there is such
a sense of glee
My Father Dreamed of Building Bridges

Snaking down side streets
    in Lawrenceville
trying to avoid stoplight stoppage

I slip down 44th
    and get in line behind
several cars with the same idea

Seldom are things a
    straight shot
in Pittsburgh

I find Foster Street
    and land on the
40th Street Bridge

In Lawrenceville, streets become bridges
    that drop you straight into
towns across the river

That are not Pittsburgh
    but love Pittsburgh
just the same
Reflecting Pool, 1985

Our life together is two years away,
but for now it is enough to be sitting on a ledge

by water streaked with clouds,
while on either side of us rows of trees

shuffle bars of light between their branches
in barest wind. I know that my strongest

impression of life will be the feel
of your broad palm in my hand.

It is not in Paris or Venice,
those fabled cities, but in a small town

in northern Indiana where we sit silently
in a shaded courtyard, that my life

has broken open like dry leaves unfurled
and cracked by driving summer rain.
What We Burned

I don’t have time to tell you more.
It was never easy
just pushing through
like a rocket shedding stages
as it flew higher
everything falling off in steps
so much of it scared me
but there was no other way
into days
of blistering blue
and scudding white clouds
so clear and fast
we barely breathed
over air or ground—
who knew?—
we could only burn
up the days
we hoped we had left
as we raced forward
the next day and the next
holding on for one more
breath of clear air
what we burned
was our days our youth
what we dreamed
of becoming
we held on
in the shuddering air
to what we couldn’t see
but knew—
the only solid footing
was the last step
the last breath
into vanishing blue
Chinese Brush Painting

Rice paper ripples onto desk
ink held by surface tension in dish
water the medium between paper and ink.

Horse hair hovers,
brush vertical over paper.
Plump with water tipped with ink.

Press and lift, two dabs for ears
two dots for nose and eye of panda bear
haunches define the ground.

Red Feather brush to a point
fine lines curve the brow
flat stroke suggests a paw

splayed brush a fringe of claws
ready to grasp a bamboo shoot
and my heart without tearing.
Next Assignment

Two tea lights set in circle of black/white granite, each in its own yin, yang apostrophe, burn through my breathing meditation.

Heat forces a current of air up the candles, cooling the sides, but the flame runs down the wick until smothered in a pool of liquid.

Now the yang soars, the flame shakes as I struggle to pay bills, fill forms. Wax melts beyond its rim only the hollow of stone supports it.

The yin flame burns lower and lower, threatens to expire. I tilt the base, expand the pool of molten wax. The flame breathes easier, as I hope my love can do.
Backyard Picnic: 1932

He — dark tousled hair falling over his forehead — grabs the branch of an oak tree in both hands. Clowning, he chomps on the wood as if it were a leg of mutton.

She — blond hair in finger waves, demure in a simple blouse, skirt flowing over her knees and three months pregnant with me — smiles at his tricks as she sets out sandwiches.

They — thirteen years later, parents of two boys and me — torn apart by betrayal and sorrow, walk away from each other, moving themselves to separate pages in our family photograph album.
Peephole

Who’s knocking on my door at night.
They make loud raps. I wait before I look.
No one is there. The hall is dark.
I pull the cord to tell the nurse.

Who’s calling on my phone at night?
Two calls or three. One ring for each.
I’m only half awake. I reach across
my bed to answer. No one is there.

I fear that man across the hall. Avoid him
if I can. He’s the one! If he comes close
at dinnertime I never speak or look at him.
I study my newspaper until he goes away.

Today that man connived to follow me
into the elevator. We were alone.
I clutched the arms of my wheelchair
the whole ride up. I didn’t say one word.

I’m in my room now, safe at last. I lock
the door behind me. I stuff cotton
in the peephole. Now no one can see
into my room. Why is my phone ringing?

I turned it off last night.
Self-Interest

The world I live in
doesn’t need God,
not to make it go

not to save it.
We just look around
and say: here’s

where I live;
I won’t foul my nest,
which is your nest, too.
Summer Rain

it’s been
a long
drought
crocosmia
and ferns
cooked
as crisp
as if French fried
sudden storm
2 pm thunder
moving
the heavy
furniture
of heaven
rain melting
the air
Daddy’s List

The dog squirmed as she tried to unfasten the chain from his collar.

“Hold still, Jesse,” she said. “Quit wiggling.” She knelt beside him and stroked his head. The grass felt cool and wet against her knees. The lilac bush near the doghouse was blooming, its lavender flowers fragrant.

“Daddy left me a list of things to do while he’s away and you’re on the list. Yep, you’re on the list.” The dog licked her face with his wet tongue. Finally, she opened the clasp, freeing the dog from his chain. He ran around her in tight little circles and then lay down, legs splayed out, panting. He kept his eyes on her face as though waiting for something.

She sat under the lilac bush, cross-legged, knees tan, feet bare, toes curved like small pink seashells. Damp from the grass, the hem of her blue cotton dress ringed the bottom of her dress, the dark blue the color of deep ocean water near shallow surf.

“Smell them flowers, Jesse. Ain’t it like a little bit of heaven? Wish you could talk. Maybe I just can’t hear you.” She scratched the white spot between his ears. “I know you can smell things. Daddy says you’re the best damn hunting dog ever. Hunting dogs can smell most anything.” She plucked a flower from the bush and held it out to the dog. He ignored it and kept his eyes on her face.

“Oh, well. Just so you know, I think this is what purple smells like.” She laid the flower on the grass and took a piece of dry toast from her pocket.

“Here’s a little bitty treat. I saved it from breakfast.” The dog ate it, then sniffed at her pocket for more.

“That’s all there is, Jesse. Daddy don’t want me to spoil you.” She took a folded piece of paper from the pocket of her dress and carefully opened it. “Here’s the list, Jesse. Ten things. Daddy wants me to read it every day till he gets back. First, I
gotta kiss Mommy every morning and blow a kiss to Daddy. I already done that.”

“Then I gotta say prayers. Okay. I’ll do that tonight.” She held the paper in front of the dog. “See, here you are. Number four. Take care of Jesse for me till I get back.”

Jesse cocked his head and whined.

“I swear, Jesse, you know what I’m saying.”

The dog rolled over, and she scratched his pale pink belly. A bee buzzed among the lilac blossoms in erratic zig-zag patterns.

“I’m not afraid of that bee. Are you afraid, Jesse? Hunting dog like you, you’re not afraid of anything. Now, what’s next on the list? Help Mommy. Today she wants me to pick strawberries.”

She refolded the paper, slipped it into her pocket and stood up. The dog stood also, alert, watching her.

Her mother, a vague shadow behind the screen door, called to her. “Mary Elizabeth, you pick those strawberries yet?”

“Going to do it now, Mommy.”

“Well, hurry up. Don’t be eating any. I need them for jam. And tie Jesse back up. Don’t want him running off or getting hurt.” The shadow slipped away from the screen door.

The door of the garden shed screeched on its hinges. The inside was dark, dusty and jumbled with garden tools. She took a small basket from a low shelf and stepped back into the sunshine. She decided not to tie Jesse yet and hoped Mommy wouldn’t notice.

The strawberries were planted along the edge of the garden, their leaves dark green. Under the leaves were the berries, firm and full. She picked them carefully, her fingertips soon stained. She ate one, sweetness lingering on her tongue. She didn’t notice the dark shadow in the grass ahead of her as she moved along the row.

Jesse tensed, the fur along his back pricked up. He moved between the child and the shadow. With a low growl, he lunged. Startled, the child dropped the basket, scattering the berries. Too
frightened to scream, she stood rigid, with her soundless mouth open wide.

The snake struck, straight and fast as an arrow, with cotton-white mouth open and fangs buried deep in the dog’s throat.

With a lethargic shake of his head, Jesse crumbled, appearing to fold himself downward onto the grass. The snake slithered back into the shadowy darkness of the garden. The child stood over the limp dog with only the garden as witness.
The Hollows

I hold on to the day to keep away the night.

When late afternoon stiff-arms darkness
before slipping into the glove of night,
I walk into my mother’s house alone.

The scent of powdered sugar lingers in the air.
Red velvet bows adorn a house of silence.

I finger the packages under the tree,
smiling at a tag which says, “To Louie from Rudolph.”
I think of the singing telegrams and the hot chocolate.
I listen for the carols and the laughter.

I hold on to the day to keep away the night.

The Christmas lights come on.
The lights and darks are everywhere.

The ornaments cut me.
They are too beautiful
for life in the hollows.
Silver

It is bells, mirrors, samovars, and faucets.

It is not a kicked-up gray,
not platinum’s poorer cousin,
not white gold’s understudy.

It frosts the fields of autumn,
slinks uncoiled down the stairs,
powers the vapors of comets.

It is sterling enough.
Vultures

When I was younger, like about six, I would squeal and clap whenever somebody in the family died. It happened a lot, because grandma and grandpa had nineteen brothers and sisters, and they all had wrinkled husbands or wives. “Mandy,” Daddy would say, “stop that disrespectful behavior or you’re goin’ to bed without supper,” but I would catch Mommy snickering behind her hand.

Death meant the whole humongous family hung out at the funeral parlor. My cousin Beth and I would go swooping through the rooms pretending we were vultures and pop up between the flowers, at the head of the coffins, our fingers bent into claws, and go “yum-yum-yum,” much to the horror of the people who stood or knelt in front of the body. Sure we got yelled at and swatted but, boy, was it worth it. Then, they shoveled us into the bathroom and we had to play Simon Says or Mother May I in front of the stalls. We made the other kids, who were all too chicken to be vultures, join us because it was only fun with the room jammed full of elbows to knock into and toes to step on.

I liked when funerals lasted three days because I got to stay overnight at Beth’s house, and then she came to mine, and our moms never had to talk. That last part was important since my mom didn’t like Beth’s mom and vice versa, so they avoided each other, and Dad always said he wouldn’t get involved. Once when Beth and I woke up before anybody else at her house, she braided half of her blonde hair with my brown hair to make one weird pigtail that I called a chocolate-vanilla twist cone. Beth laughed when I licked the pigtail. And, boy, was it funny when we waddled like a duck to breakfast with her head bent sideways because she was taller than me. We played Siamese twins and laughed through our cereal, making milk squirt from our noses, and that made us laugh harder and pulled on the pigtail—ouch—
but that was funny, too! Aunt Madge got mad about the mess. We made her even madder, when we said together, like we practiced, “We are Siamese twins; we cannot unbraid.” She swore using words I’m not allowed to repeat, and said I was an “instigator,” just like my mother. I didn’t understand why she was so upset, and I felt guilty even though it had been Beth’s idea. I got us into trouble other times so I told Beth we were even-steven. But I didn’t want to play anymore after getting sworn at like that, and I undid our hair.

One time, we brought our Barbies and Kens to the funeral parlor. Beth got the idea to snitch some tape from the secretary’s office so we could stick Barbie’s little sister Skipper to Ken like they were kissing. When everybody was arguing about who would bring what food for lunch after the cemetery, I snuck the kissing dolls into Great Uncle John’s coffin because he liked young girls too much, especially Beth. The grownups whispered after they noticed, and we didn’t get yelled at or swatted, but one of them stole our dolls and we couldn’t ask who, or else we’d admit to doing it, and we didn’t want to, even though just about everybody must have known it was us.

A long time without a funeral made me miss Beth. I missed her even more than our parrot I accidentally let fly away when I wanted to train her to poop outside because nobody cleaned the stinking cage. I was about to turn eleven, and Beth thirteen, before the next funeral came around. She sat in the back row of chairs polishing her fingernails. I tried hard to think up games, but she rolled her eyes at all my ideas and gave me this pathetic kind of look. I thought she was the pathetic one. She crossed her fishnetted legs like a model, had on enough blue eye shadow to scare a raccoon, and wore a black skirt with a tight sweater that showed off the boobs she got all of a sudden. I refused to let her polish my nails because of the bad taste when I would chew them, and got bored sitting there, so I went off with my other cousins. We played Red Rover Come Over in the dark
parking lot but it was no fun, not without Beth. I just had to get
her to play.

I searched all over and couldn’t find her. When I was
going outside again, I heard a girl’s giggle coming from inside the
secretary’s office. I crouched down low and opened the door real
quick. It made a slash of light in the room. In a corner, I saw Beth
lying on the carpet, like she was dead in a coffin, and Uncle Paul,
who was way too old for games, kneeling to play one with her,
his hand under her sweater, making her boob look like a claw had
grabbed it. Uncle Paul jerked around like I scared the bejesus out
of him, but Beth put a “shhh” finger over her lips, smiling behind
it, and then waved me inside to play, too.
After the Fall

Why did I miss that bottom step?
Carrying laundry
the twilight
my house sandals?
ER doctor asked if I’d been drinking,
*A glass of wine & a half with dinner.*

A lightning strike from my eyebrow scar,
shoulder muscles hard, contracted.
My neck asks support again,
nerves impinged.
Does my brain remember
two past whiplash injuries?

Familiar physical therapy:
muscle “stim”
deep tissue massage
beach ball pushups. Theraband stretches.
My eyes itch behind the lids.
I reach for hand rails,

I lose names, sometimes the first name
or I mix up
Elizabeth when it’s Kathleen.
A blank.
Six weeks of pain and
poetry is a puzzle process.

Write a sentence a day suggests a friend.
I smile, *I’m fine.*
Pace conversations, talk so much
low level static.
Purple, red, yellow facial bruises &
chin scar fade under makeup.
Film Noir

With a mug of honeyed tea, 
Vivaldi’s autumn and winter on the stereo, 
I settle on the sofa 
behind a proscenium wall of glass 
that lures me out but holds me in.

Beyond the rectilinear deck 
a backdrops of woods: 
trees gleam sharp in December drizzle, 
upper branches lattice black 
bannister posts intersect.

I dread the loss of leaves: 
the sky’s stainless finish reflects on 
oily, wet timbers dead for human use, 
a mirror dulled that hovering fog waits to smother. 
With Vivaldi’s spring and summer, I start dinner.
I Danced on the Day She Was Born

At five, what is better than the careen of it, the breathlessness?
Dressed in bedsheets and sunglasses, I danced around our living room, breathing hard, absorbed in the twirl.
My father told me to stop:
_Get out of the way._
I saw: the waiting, the dark damp head between my mother’s legs, covered in blood, in shit.
I helped with her first bath. Warned not to finger the bruises on her head where she’d crushed herself against my mother’s pelvis.
Later, her tiny body broken and tender during our father’s rages, her head shoved into my chest as he gripped her face in one hand.
Something had set him off, a broken toy, an unwalked dog.
I stumbled into the fridge, bruises on my back matched my chest / her chin.
Shoop Shoop Hula Hoop

I wrap it in pale pink and lime green tape, careful not to leave gaps in the shape
\textit{shoop, shoop, hula hoop}

Two hours, three hours, it clatters round my body, falls to the floor, flies across the room. I’m groggy
\textit{shoop, shoop, hula hoop}

Soreness starts in my back, creeps up my side, itching as it goes—hands and wrists collide
\textit{shoop, shoop, hula hoop}

Welts start to form, blooming over my skin. I never tried this hard as a kid, even when I was thin
\textit{shoop, shoop, hula hoop}

Back then my father’s hands like wooden lathes: “I’ll wipe that smile off your face”
\textit{flip flop, belly talk}

Slip your fingers in the gap, twirl it high, bearings, bearings, ball bearings to the sky
\textit{shoop, shoop, hula hoop}

The neighborhood kids all think I’m cool. Shoop, shoop, hula hoop, can we play too? \textit{Tuesday, Tuesday, right after school.}
Monaca, PA

I know black,
the cold Western Pennsylvania sky
no stars
my grandmother’s
two-and-a-half bedroom house
in a too-grubby-
to-be-something steel town
with dive bars
where you can get
a Miller Lite for $1
and Pabst for $3
if you’re feeling fancy.
Where my dad’s
a member
at the Sons of Italy Club
and he takes me there to drink
well-gin and tonics
while he flirts
with the bartender.
Doesn’t come to my defense
when the men in the bar
try to take me home.
My grandmother calls him an idiot
and if there’s a hell,
she’s sure he’s going.
But couldn’t hell be right here
when the sun sets above
the long abandoned paper factory?
My ex-lover still
parks across the street
when he picks me up
and still smiles when I get in the car.
We get high before he drops me off again across the street and we make plans we may or may not keep for when I come home again. At no later than 11 pm my grandma goes to bed. With a cigarette between fingers, I watch TV through the window while she sleeps upstairs in a blue fleece nightgown, electric blanket on.
Your Dead Mother’s Ring

Imagine what it looks like at the bottom of the Chicago River:
onyx and diamond
gold band.
You said:

*There’s no one else I’d give this to—*
the stone combination
that cools off love.
And think about us—
cooler than
a couple cucumbers, an orange push pop.
Two icewomen
not in love, but in something.
You, so unhappy and hard to touch.
Me, in love with someone else I couldn’t,
and still can’t, have.
Your dead mother’s ring
could’ve paid a month’s rent,
now at the bottom of the Chicago
chucked off a tourist boat
on a dare:

*Do it, K, you won’t do it,*
*you know you don’t love her.*
The ring bounces off the side of the boat,
one *plink* and it’s in the water—
my *Titanic* moment—
the lightness I feel with it gone—
but I never got rid of your books
They’re still in my oven.
Deconstructing the Nude

in response to a photograph by Andrea London

Her stretched tricep shadows her lower arm
as her left hand hugs her neck.
She guards her elbow with her chin.
She is holding herself
away from the photographer.
“I am not ready,” she says,
“but I’m not leaving.”
Any mystery could still appear.
Perhaps one breast
is larger, or missing. She
will show this when she’s ready.
Her hands know she is beautiful.
Photographer’s pose interpreted
by her right hand’s caress,
she holds her shoulder like holding a full bowl,
carrying a chalice.
Her left hand soothes a sore shoulder.
Her chin nuzzles the hand.
She knows you see it,
her breast beneath her right arm.
You could pretend she doesn’t,
turn yourself into a voyeur,
except that her eyes
look straight at you.
They see you pretending.
she is not
a person,
face to face,
staring back.
I’m Still Trying

My dead sister faces me everywhere in my mother’s house. Photos arranged so Kellie meets the eye from every chair.

Above the couch she swims freestyle, six years old. Beside Mom’s computer, she rises from the water laughing. Behind it, she stands in a doorway, face shadowed, young woman in a flowered yellow sundress.

In a photo from a wedding, Kellie dances jaw slack, eyelids drooping. Her last picture beside the couch at Mom’s right hand. Kellie at eye level stares, smiling, jaundiced skin stretched tight across her cheeks, brow.

A painting she made in some rehab hangs above her computer, now used by guests: black circle of pines pressing on a clearing, a small girl surrounded by dark.

To its right, photo of a teenage Kellie, her profile, hair shorter, darker falls forward, hiding her eyes. Beside it, in her angled script:

*Me trying to figure this out.*
Mile Marker 36, U.S. 1

The Atlantic doesn’t swell
at Sandspur,
sea grass gathers in the shallows
between reef and shore.

From Calusa,
we walk the steel span rail-bridge,
see all the way down
to the Gulf’s crushed coral floor.
South End, U.S. 1

The air is different here,
island-thick with salt and jasmine.
Chickens peck the buttressed roots
of a Kapok tree.

Here, there’s only two miles
between ocean and gulf;
we’re closer
to Cuba than the nearest Walmart.
Absence

One arm lives with my family in Oregon.

The other arm is with a couple in Missouri.

I am transparent. Clingy. My eyes are gravel gray.

One leg is in California with my daughter and her sons.

The other leg lives with my central Pennsylvania family.

My skin is tread-bare tires. My hair, porcupine branches. My turnpike lips, worn thin.

My eyes are missing the image of their faces.

My legs are dead lamps not able to lead me to them.

My arms are pale, frayed rope unable to join with their hands.

I want to see them, regain my body.
The Finals

The tree shadows a ginger colored wall.

I am planning The Big Trip
where I meet the I and the You.

My files are filled with
hymns remembered, named/selected.

Peace is just a thought away.
It said to me: Here. I am here.

I fly west to see the kids and take the train,
the southern route, home.

My final photos are chosen, the obit
written, the will, annuity benes,
the pyre garments.

So young, I smelled like new flip flops.
I was kissed and kissing.

Like a bridal gown, I went from innocent void
to an uncorrupted path, then huge crashing trees,
wild freedom, doing things, as if only they would save me,
then like a prom queen, to a proper path
as expansive as a mid-west plain.
Divine Movement No. 6:17

At 6:17 in the afternoon, the tide has come out right here to this Aegean spot.

The sun is done with its burning. The crowds are gone but a few souls remain in the water. Some float on rafts, others on their backs. I hear their laughing rise then fall. I hear the rhythm in their tongues. Now in warm Dutch tones, now a joking Greek command, now Chinese, there Russian, an invitation in Italian.

6:17

Here, now, stray dogs bound breathlessly by me toward them into the water — 6:17 p.m. passing—

Hier! Tora! Benvenuto! Woof!

The call to join this body right this minute right this second.
My Wool Coat

Pulling stuff out of pockets:
gray lint, last year’s crumpled tissue,
no surprise $10s or $20s
only a nickel, two blackened dimes,
a penny.
The scribbled note you last left:
_Bread, brie, toothbrushes (3 bottles—the best)_
_Burgundy, passport pix—_
the wants of that day, but
none of the wide-eyed devotion,
the weight of the work to fix
the fine details, the thrill
of well-woven, get-away plans that snagged
back-to-back months
when buttoned, belted, breathed then.
Dear Lee Bontecou

I think you are my favorite artist because you’re a woman living in rural Pennsylvania, hiding out forty years with bent metals and burlap, building black holes. I imagine you work in a barn, wear overalls and know the names of all the plants in the woods behind your house. You could teach them to me if I were to visit, only living two hours’ drive from you. I’d need to borrow some boots for our walk, would probably arrive overdressed in my excitement to meet you and be so close to your epoxy, leather, and wire.
One Boat To Be Caulked, Rose Lake

The leaves have appeared,
making the trees more obvious
along the blue mountains’ line
sloping down to lakeshore.
I’ve been up here, nicely alone,
four, maybe five days.
One boat
to be caulked, another
painted, the canoe unvarnished.
Wild and tame flowers
pop up,
things smell good.
The leaves make the trees
more obvious.
Coverings

If you and I stand naked together, what will cover us? The Constitution? The rain? A baby’s mouth upon our exposed mammaries

reminding us of our miraculous and vulnerable status: animal? Will we be weak-kneed or chest forward, or maybe a bit of both?

I once cut a time-shriveled woman with my collegiate scalpel, her breasts flaccid and her pubic hair thinning.

I cut beneath her loose skin and found—what else? Fascia, arteries, veins, nerves.
 My teacher shook his small head, called her arterial pathways an anomaly;

but I found her just woman, her insides unshaken and unadultered by the world,

hidden undercover of integumentary grace, protected—‘til death—from man’s anatomical dictate.
So the Trade Tool Has Become the Weapon…

I write with a boxcutter
from the inside out
until the walls are windows,
until the light sneaks in,
until I don’t fear myself at all.
The Color of Black

It depended on the percentage of African ancestry, observed in many states by the “one drop rule.” The blood, not skin colors or tones, matters. Black is white, yellow, brown and black. Mulattos, the light-skinned, are classified on a higher level than brown and black pigments. The coloreds in South Africa are light complexioned, near white but segregated from the blacks, exclusively. Black is white, yellow, brown and black. Colored USA signs in southern towns, segregated facilities for water, food, bathrooms, where to sit or stand. There is the race of “Passing”: skin and hair blends into the white race, many afraid of discovery, so do not bear children.

Black is white, yellow, brown and black. Blacks are visible, known by many names. The N’s, the Negro, Afro American. African American, many undesirable names, but we know, the racial blend prevails when the color is Black.
The Night the Singing Stopped, 1960

We had reservations at the Americana Hotel, family dinner show at the Copacabana. It was announced: *James Brown is ill, cannot perform tonight.*

In the hotel lobby, crowds encircled Mr. Brown for autographs. My husband told him, *I brought my family from Pittsburgh to see your show.* James said, *I'm not sick man, but not tonight man, not tonight.*

He said, *They wanted me to sing man, without my band accompanying me, unfair man, we singers refused to sing anymore, without our Black Bands. Not tonight man, no house band for me!*

This was the night the singing stopped, as James manned up, for equality, fair pay for Negro musicians and their bands. He turned to my son, gave him his autograph. *I am doing this for you, little man, for you, stay in school.*
1936 Vacation.

*How about going to the Ozarks for vacation this year, Dad says. It’s a short drive.*

Brother and Sister yell *Swell,*
*we can fish, ride horses, and swim.*

But Mama who’s scared of horses,
can’t swim and hates gutting fish

wants to go to Callander, Ontario.

*Whatever for? Dad asks. It’s so far.*
*Yeah, what’s there? The kids want to know.*

*Quintuplets.*

*You want me to drive two thousand miles just to see five babies?*

Crowds of tourists from all over America
view through one-way glass

five toddlers wearing frilly pink frocks
on display in a zoo-like enclosure;

Two ride a tricycle, two play in a sandbox
and one cuddles a doll—a clone of herself.

Souvenirs and postcards can be bought
in a shop run by proud Papa Dionne.
Stay At Home

My sister left home to join the ballet in Monte Carlo on the Riviera. Mama said, “Go, my child, dance a la Anna Pavlova.”

Uncle Sam’s poster “I WANT YOU” spoke to my brother, not me. Mama bade a proud goodbye, “Slaughter *les Boche!*”

I was no dancer, with toes double-jointed, no soldier, for lack of a penis. Mama said, “Stay home, cook, keep house, walk the dog, make me happy”

She flared when I dared to apply for a wartime job at Curtiss-Wright. Patriotism—not praiseworthy. Room and board—gladly accepted.
Love for the Undertaker

Under the white hot light of the mortuary, turned over and over on the gurney, my daddy’s body lay naked alone with the undertaker in that windowless room.

He prepares his first corpse. Rite of passage for a boy not yet a man, but by a trade inherited he must touch the most tender parts of skin.

Does he do it gently? Glide his hand over the hollow cheeks, caress the bed sore bruises before inserting the embalming tubes? Does he hold my daddy’s hand the moment he turns cold?

It’s been a long time since I’ve been held by a man. Perhaps, I’ve never been.

My daddy used to lift me to his knee. I pulled on his nose and rubbed my baby skin against his scratchy cheeks those days he wore a beard.

The undertaker lifts him now, ties the edges of his jaw tight, slides the crevice of his eyelids closed without words.
I want to grasp the undertaker’s forearms, feel the fierce force his shoulder blades need to get deep inside, puncture the artery that runs straight to the heart.

To have his weight cover me under the heat of so much light.
swing

eventually, everyone leaves
behind a pile of glass, green like the color his eyes never were.

lit by eyelash whips, i never knew how to notice constellations,
but if i look long enough in his eyes i see stars falling.

striking a match twice just to get the flint to flame.

it’s all about composure. we position ourselves in the midst
of all these revolutions; we carry revolvers to save our heads from
exploding.

all the mis-hammered nails, now the walls in here look like
gallows.

i point out his flaws, hold grudges like pails of water,
metal chipping at the handle, digging lead into the cracks of my
fingers.

i just want the gentle rocking, but i only get the swing.

it is the rest that does the damage or his black curls clogging the
drain.
it’s always me, bent over something, wiping it clean.
Furious Bread

The yeast wakes up, faster than sourgrass after the rain.
I warm the old bowl on the pilot light, as my grandmother did,

scrape level the measure of flour using a knife’s flat back.
There is no end to stubborn in this world. Even flour

fights like it would rather be grain again, recoils after every stretch,
the dough thick and heavy as a lump of potters’ clay.

I push hard, throwing my weight behind each stroke,
arms stiff, lifting on my toes. Flatten, fold, turn, flatten, fold.

The newspaper on the table shows a senator. Resolved,
he says. One man, one woman. His God will not be swayed.

I pound the kneading board, knead until my wrists ache,
my skin crusted with salt, slowly will yield, will suppleness.

I round the dough to rest in the deep glazed bowl,
wait for rising, baking, food for those who sit at my table.
CHRYSS YOST is the author of two fine press chapbooks: *La Jolla Boys* (Mille Grazie Press, 2000) and *Escaping from Autopia* (Oberon Press, 1998). Her poems have appeared in journals including *Askew, Crab Orchard Review, Hudson Review,* and *Solo* and have been widely anthologized. She has co-edited two major poetry anthologies: *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present,* with Dana Gioia and Jack Hicks (Heyday Press, 2003); and *Poetry Daily: A Year of Poems for the World’s Most Popular Poetry Website,* with Don Selby and Diane Boller (Sourcebooks, 2003). In April 2013, she was appointed poet laureate of Santa Barbara, California.
About the 2013 Patricia Dobler Poetry Award Judge

PATRICIA SMITH is the author of six volumes of poetry. *Blood Dazzler*, which speaks in the voice of Hurricane Katrina, was a finalist for the 2008 National Book Award, and was named one of NPR’s Top 5 books of 2008. *Shoulda Been Jimi Savannah* (Coffee House Press, 2012) was a finalist for the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America. Smith’s book, *Teahouse of the Almighty*, was a National Poetry Series selection and winner of the first-ever Hurston/Wright Award in Poetry. Her other poetry books are *Close to Death; Life According to Motown*; and *Big Towns, Big Talk*. *Life According to Motown* was recently re-released in a special twentieth anniversary edition. She is the winner of the Rattle Poetry Prize, the Chautauqua Literary Journal Award in poetry, and two Pushcart Prizes.

Smith has performed around the world, including Carnegie Hall, the Poets Stage in Stockholm, and the Sorbonne in Paris. A four-time individual champion on the National Poetry Slam—the most successful slammer in the competition’s history—Smith has also been a featured poet on HBO’s *Def Poetry Jam*. She has served as a Cave Canem faculty member, a Bruce McEver Visiting Chair in Writing at Georgia Tech University, distinguished writer-in-residence at both the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center and Sierra Nevada College, and a fellow at both Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony. During a ceremony at Chicago State University’s Gwendolyn Brooks Center, Smith was inducted into the National Literary Hall of Fame for Writers of African Descent. In 2008, she was awarded a Lannan Foundation residency in Marfa, Texas. Smith teaches in the Stonecoast MFA program at Sierra Nevada College and is a professor of creative writing at the City University of New York/College of Staten Island.
About the Patricia Dobler Poetry Award

This contest is open to women writers over the age of 40 who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents, currently living in the United States, who have not published a full-length book of poetry, fiction, or non-fiction (chapbooks excluded). Current Carlow University students or employees are not eligible.

The winner receives the Patricia Dobler Poetry Award, valued at $2,500, in the form of round-trip travel and lodging as a participating guest of Carlow University’s Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing residency in Pittsburgh, Pa.; publication in *Voices from the Attic*; and a reading at Carlow University in Pittsburgh with the final judge.

Poems must be unpublished, up to 75 lines or fewer per poem; up to two poems, of any style, per submission.

All entrants receive a copy of *Voices from the Attic*.

For information on the Patricia Dobler Poetry Award, or Carlow University’s Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program, please visit www.carlow.edu or contact Jan Beatty, Director of Creative Writing, at 412.578.6346.
About the Madwomen

LISA ALEXANDER holds an MFA in poetry from Drew University. Her work has been published in various journals including *Bloom*, *The Burnside Review*, *Girls with Glasses*, and *Pittsburgh City Paper*. She is a sound engineer for *Prosody*, NPR-affiliate WESA’s weekly show featuring the work of national writers. Her manuscript, *throttlebody*, is being submitted for publication.

MADALON AMENTA is the author of *Kandinsky and the Stars*, a chapbook published in 2010 by Finishing Line Press. Her poetry has appeared in Salon.com, *Pittsburgh City Paper*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Signatures*, and *Stories about Time*. She has also published over 80 clinical and academic papers, manuals, newsletters, research reports, and books, one of which won an *American Journal of Nursing* Book of the Year Award.

LAURIE ARNOLD is a registered nurse who also leads writing groups. She lives in Pittsburgh.

EILEEN ARTHURS is the author of a novel, *Lorelei’s Family*. She holds a BA from George Washington University and an MFA from Carlow University. Her short story collection, *Stories in the Key of XX*, is forthcoming.

TESS BARRY holds an MA in English from the University of Pittsburgh and an MFA in poetry from Carlow University. She was a finalist for *North American Review’s* 2012 James Hearst Poetry Prize. A semi-finalist for the Tucson Festival of Books Literary Awards 2013, Barry was also long-listed for the 2013 Fish International Poetry Prize.

GERRY ROSELLA BOCCELLA is an educator, designer, and arts advocate. She graduated from Carlow University (then Mount Mercy) in 1958. In 1994, she received the Carlow Alumnae Service Award in the Arts, followed in 1996 by the Carlow Woman of Spirit® Award for her work in the arts with at-risk youth. Her poetry has been featured on the WESA radio show, *Prosody*, in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and in the *Pittsburgh City Paper*.

DORALEE BROOKS, a Cave Canem fellow and a teacher-consultant with the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project, teaches in the Developmental Studies Department at the Community College of Allegheny County. Her poems have appeared in the *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *The Dos Passos Review*, and *Callaloo*.

DANIELA BUCCILLI earned an MFA in fiction from University of Pittsburgh in 2001 and is a fellow of the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project. Her poems have appeared in *Main Street Rag*, *The Fourth River*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream*, *Dionne’s Story*, and *Pittsburgh City Paper*. Her work is forthcoming in *Italian Americana* and *Eye Contact*. She has taught high school English since 1994.
JENNIFER BURNAU teaches in the Pittsburgh Public Schools and has an MA in musicology from the University of Pittsburgh. She has studied poetry with Jan Beatty and Nancy Krygowski.

KAIT BURRIER writes poetry, drama, and entertainment journalism in Scranton, Pa. A graduate of Duquesne University, she is a candidate in Wilkes University’s low-residency creative writing MFA program. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in Dionne’s Story; Duquesne University’s :Lexicon; and the NAP Literary Magazine e-chapbook, #GOODLitSwerveAutumn: An Anthology of Independent Literature About Kanye West.

TINA CALABRO is a writer specializing in disability issues. Her column, “Breaking Down Barriers,” appears regularly in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. She holds an MEd in language arts from Wright State University and an MFA in creative writing from the University of Pittsburgh.

BEVERLY CARMO is a professor of English at Community College of Allegheny County, South Campus.

GAYLE REED CARROLL has been writing poems for 18 years, and has studied with poets including Stephen Dunn, Heather McHugh, and Jan Beatty. Poems have appeared in The Innisfree Poetry Journal Online, Poet Lore, and Pittsburgh City Paper. She has won or placed in national contests such as the Thomas Merton Institute Poetry of the Sacred Award and the Robert Frost Foundation Poetry Prize, both in 2009. She has also taught art and calligraphy in public schools and in programs for children and adults in Pittsburgh.

LAINY CARSLAW is working on her memoir, Phasing In, as well as on other personal essays. She was a poetry major at the University of Pittsburgh and was published in the 2000 edition of the Writer’s Review.
SHEILA L. CARTER-JONES is the author of *Three Birds Deep*, selected by Elizabeth Alexander as the 2011 winner of the Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Book Award for African American writers (Lotus Press, Inc., 2012). She is also the author of a chapbook, *Blackberry Cobbler Song*. Her poetry is published in *Crossing Limits, Pittsburgh Quarterly, Riverspeak, Flights: The Literary Journal of Sinclair Community College*, and *Coal: A Poetry Anthology*. She is a Cave Canem fellow and a fellow/teacher consultant for the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project at the University of Pittsburgh.

CJ COLEMAN was a 2000 Western Pennsylvania Writing Project (WPWP) Fellow, and has worked for the Pittsburgh Public Schools since 1990. She currently teaches fifth and sixth grade creative writing at the Pittsburgh Gifted Center, and has co-directed the WPWP Summer Institute for Teachers since 2003.

REBECCA COLE-TURNER is a spiritual director, retreat and pilgrimage leader, and dragon boater. Two of her poems were published in *HungryHearts*, a quarterly journal focused on spirituality, and several others were published on the Progressive Christian channel of Patheos.com on her blog, *Musings of a Meandering Pilgrim*. She is in the Masters of Divinity program at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

KAY COMINI is the author of a chapbook, *The Picking Room*, which placed second in the White Eagle Coffee Press contest. Her poetry has been published in *Poet Lore, Pittsburgh City Paper*, and *The Pittsburgh Quarterly*; in the anthologies *Dark Side of the Moon* and *Voices from the Parlor*; and in the Sandburg-Livesay anthology, *No Choice But to Trust*. She is a certified Gestalt therapist, a retired welfare caseworker, and an energy healer.
LOIS CONWAY is a 2010 graduate of Carlow University’s MFA in Creative Writing program, where she concentrated in fiction writing. She also holds an undergraduate degree in creative writing (poetry) from Carlow.

ANGELA CORNELIUS studied creative writing at George Mason University in Virginia and at the Richard Hugo House in Seattle. As an educator, Angela was a public high school art teacher, and a nonprofit art instructor at Seattle 911 Media Arts and Pittsburgh Filmmakers/Pittsburgh Center for the Arts. She is an adjunct professor in web and interactive media at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh and runs her own interactive media company. She has also worked in the intelligence community, corporate marketing, business, and education.

ANN CURRAN is the author of a chapbook, Placement Test (Editor’s Choice, Main Street Rag). Her poetry has appeared in Rosebud, U.S. 1 Worksheets, Blueline, Notre Dame Magazine, and Ireland of the Welcomes; as well as in the anthologies Along These Rivers: Poetry and Photography from Pittsburgh, Motif 2 Come What May (MotesBooks), Thatchwork (Delaware Valley Poets, Inc.), and Surrounded: Living with Islands (Write Wing Publishing).

BARBARA DAHLBERG retired as an art teacher after 20 years of teaching in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. She is a 2001 Fellow of the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project and has studied with Stacey Waite, Ellen Smith, and Joy Katz. She is an artist and poet living in Squirrel Hill.

CHRISTINA DEKA grew up in Cambridge Springs, Pa. She received her MFA from Chatham University in 2011 and works as an adjunct instructor at the Community College of Allegheny County.
ELISE D’HAENE is a novelist, screenwriter, and editor. Her first novel, *Licking Our Wounds*, won the Small Press Book Award at Book Expo in Chicago. She won the Hemingway Award for her short story “Married.” D’Haene is a former psychologist and earned her PhD at the University of Southern California. She has published several short stories and co-wrote a four-book series of erotica, *Red Shoe Diaries*, for the Penguin Group. She teaches at Point Park University in Pittsburgh.

JUDITH DORIAN is the author of *A Tiny Little Door*, a collection of children’s poetry, which she also illustrated. Her poetry has appeared in *Omega 2000 Clusters*, *The Higginsville Reader*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Lilliput Review*. She has narrated poetry at the Bedford Springs Festival and at Mellon Institute, and taught an Osher course at the University of Pittsburgh on poetry and music. With Frederick Dorian, her late husband, she wrote the program notes for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. She received her doctorate in musicology from the University of Pittsburgh.

VICTORIA DYM is a graduate of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College. She earned an MFA in creative writing (poetry) from Carlow University and a BA in philosophy from the University of Pittsburgh. Dym’s work has appeared in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Pittsburgh City Paper*, *Pearl Magazine*, *Writers at Work*, and *Euonia Review* online. She is a certified Laughter Yoga Leader, an improviser at Steel City Improv.

ALICE FUCHS, a Madwoman since the mid-1980s, has worked towards an MFA at the University of Pittsburgh. She has published three novels as e-books and is working on a fourth. She has also published three poetry chapbooks: *Morning in Agrigento*, *Blood Poppies*, and *god L*. She lives on a farm in Washington County, Pa.
CELESTE GAINEY’s new book, *The Gaffer*, is forthcoming from Arktoi Books in 2014. She is the author of *In the land of speculation & seismography*, a chapbook published by Seven Kitchens Press in their 2011 Summer Kitchen Series. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Columbia Poetry Review*, *BLOOM*, *Wild Apples*, *Madroad: The Breadline Press West Coast Anthology*, and *Writers at Work*. She has had a long career as a lighting designer for both film and architecture. She holds a BFA in film and television from New York University and an MFA in creative writing/poetry from Carlow University.

ROBIN GEISLER has poems published in Penn State Greater Allegheny’s literary and arts journal, *ABSENCE*. She graduated from Carlow University’s MFA in Creative Writing program, with a concentration in poetry. She is a professional English tutor for Penn State Greater Allegheny. She has a BS in secondary education and a BA in English from Duquesne University.

LOIS I. GREENBERG is the author of *Willing to Lie*, published in 2012 by MadBooks. Her poetry has appeared in *Paper Street*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *HEArt* (Human Equity Through Art), *Pittsburgh City Paper*; in the anthologies *The Electric Fire* (National Book Foundation), *Along These Rivers* (Quadrant), and *Alternatives To Surrender* (Martin Willetts, Jr. Ed.); in e-zines: *hotmetalpress*, *paperstreetonline*, and *writersalliance*; and on a *YAWP* CD. She was a finalist for the 2007 Patricia Dobler Poetry Award. She is a member of the Pittsburgh Poetry Exchange and the Advisory Board of Paper Street Press.

AMY LEE HEINLEN has poems published in *Punkin House Digest*. She is pursuing an MFA degree in poetry from Chatham University, where she works as a librarian. She also holds degrees from The Ohio State University and the University of Pittsburgh.
In early 2012, she, along with Marguerite Sargent, started Lefty Blondie Press, publisher of Jan Beatty’s chapbook, *Ravage*.

**DARYLN BREWER HOFFSTOT** worked at Poets & Writers, Inc. for 17 years, launching, with poet Linda Corrente, *Poets & Writers Magazine* in 1987. She wrote the “Where to Find It” column in *The New York Times*, and compiled 125 of those columns in a book of the same name, published by Clarkson/Potter. In addition to many other articles and essays in the *Times*, she has written for *House & Garden*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*.

**JANET INNAMORATO** received a BA from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1977 and a Juris Doctor from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law in 1980.

**SHEILA KELLY**’s recent work appears in *Brief Encounters: Ekphrases from the Spinning Plate Gallery*. Three of her plays received staged readings at the 2009 Pittsburgh Three Rivers Arts Festival. She has worked with gifted middle school writers, and published the annual, *St. Bede’s Quill*. She is a member of the Pittsburgh Poetry Exchange and the Pittsburgh Writers’ Studio. A retired psychotherapist, she received her MA in psychology at Duquesne University.

**JILL KHOURY** is the author of a chapbook, *Borrowed Bodies* (Pudding House Press). Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in numerous journals, including *Sentence*, *MiPOesias, Wordgathering*, and *Hayden’s Ferry Review*. She has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize twice by *Breath and Shadow: A Journal of Disability Culture and Literature*. She earned her MFA from The Ohio State University. She also blogs about poetry, disability, and art.
GAIL LANGSTROTH spent 38 years in Europe as an international lecturer and eurythmy performer. She is the 2011 winner of Carlow University’s Patricia Dobler Poetry Award. In 2012, her poem, “Calla Desire,” was awarded an honorable mention in the Passager Poetry Contest. In 2011, she received her MFA in poetry from Drew University, Madison, N.J.

PHYLLIS LINK’s flash fiction has appeared online in Antithesis Common.

LAUREL MCMAHON teaches in the Homewood section of Pittsburgh, and also coaches swimming.

MICHELLE MAHER’s poems have appeared most recently in The Georgetown Review, The Atlantic Review, Pittsburgh City Paper, and U.S. 1 Worksheets. Her poem, “At the Brera, Milan,” won the 2012 Patricia Dobler Poetry Award. She is a professor of English at La Roche College in Pittsburgh, Pa., and she has two master’s degrees and a PhD in English from Indiana University, Bloomington. She lives in Wexford, Pa.

CHRISTINE DOREIAN MICHAELS is a licensed psychologist. Her work can be found in Only the Sea Keeps: Poetry of the Tsunami, Along These Rivers, the Exchange, No Choice but to Trust, Pittsburgh and Tri-State Area Poets, Taproots, Songs for the Living, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and Signatures.

LIANE ELLISON NORMAN is the author of *Breathing the West: Great Basin Poems*; two chapbooks, *Roundtrip*, and *Driving Near the Old Federal Arsenal*; and *The Duration of Grief* and *Keep*. Individual poems have appeared in the *North American Review, Kestrel, The Fourth River, 5 AM, Grasslimb, Rune, Hot Metal Press*, and *Come Together: Imagine Peace*. She has also published non-fiction: *Mere Citizens: United, Civil and Disobedient* and *Hammer of Justice: Molly Rush and the Plowshares Eight*; a novel, *Stitches in Air: A Novel About Mozart's Mother*; and many articles, essays, and reviews.

HARRIET PARKE’s novel, *Agenda 21*, was a fall 2012 *New York Times* bestseller. She is writing the sequel to be published in late fall, 2013. Her work has been published in the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, the *My Dad Is My Hero* anthology, and *Pittsburgh Magazine*. Her contribution to this anthology volume, *Daddy’s List*, won an honorable mention from Women on Writing’s flash fiction contest.

CHRISTINE PASINSKI is the author of *Rustlings of Regret*, published in 2011. She has read her work at Hemingway’s, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, and Barnes & Noble. She served on the Advisory Council of the International Poetry Forum for 36 years. She is a member of the Pittsburgh Poetry Society. She also taught secondary English at West Mifflin and supervised student teachers for Penn State University.

KATHRYN KATAFIASZ PEPPER completed her MFA at Carlow University in 2009 with a novel titled, *Storm Dreams*. She also holds an MSEd from Duquesne University, and received life coach training from Guiding Mindful Change. She teaches meditation and cognitive-behavioral skills to inmates at the Allegheny County Jail, and continues to write fiction and nonfiction. Her classes on compassionate self-discipline for
writers, Write Now: The Other Side of Someday, have been offered at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts.

ANNE PICONE’s poem, “Duets,” won a prize in the Ava Maria University Arts Festival Poetry Competition. A member of the Naples, Fla., Writer’s Forum, she is a retired English teacher with degrees from Duquesne University and the University of Pittsburgh. Her poetry has appeared in The Loyalhanna Review and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

TIFFANY SANTOS’ poetry, essays, and short stories have been published in Backbone Mountain Review, and Dionne’s Story: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose for the Awareness of Relationship Violence. She graduated from St. Mary’s College of Maryland with a self-designed BA in women, gender, and sexuality studies and a minor in Asian studies. She teaches writing classes for summer programs, colleges, writers’ retreats, and community schools.

KAYLA SARGESON is the author of the chapbook, Mini Love Gun (Main Street Rag, 2013). She earned an MFA in poetry from Columbia College Chicago, where she was the recipient of a Follett Fellowship and served as an editor for Columbia Poetry Review. Her work has been anthologized in the national anthology, Time You Let Me In: 25 Poets Under 25, selected by Naomi Shihab Nye, as well as in Dionne’s Story. Her poems also appear or are forthcoming in 5 AM, Columbia Poetry Review, and Chiron Review. She co-curates the MadFridays reading series and is the poetry editor for Pittsburgh City Paper’s online feature, Chapter & Verse.

WENDY SCOTT’s new book, Soon I Will Build An Ark, is forthcoming from Main Street Rag in 2014. She has published work in The Pittsburgh Quarterly, Loyalhanna Review, Daughters of Sarah, Pittsburgh City Paper, and Affilia: Journal of Women and
Social Work. She has an MFA from the University of Pittsburgh, and has taught writing at the University of Pittsburgh, Geneva College, Carlow University, and La Roche College.

ERIKA SIMILO is a graduate of Bucknell University and the Duquesne University School of Law. Her poetry has appeared in Pittsburgh City Paper and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. She has been a guest poet on Prosody, WYEP’s weekly radio show featuring poets and writers.

M.A. SINNHUBER’s new book, The Leaving Field, was published by MadBooks in 2013. She is published in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and Pittsburgh City Paper. She has worked as a visual artist for over twenty years, while teaching art and opening her studio, Art by M.A. She previously worked in public television for many years.

GEORGIA TANKOSICH’s poetry and fiction have appeared in children’s publications such as Spider and Pockets. As a contributor and former editor at Pittsburgh Magazine, her feature articles covered the arts, literary, and lifestyle scenes of Western Pennsylvania. She teaches English at Community College of Allegheny County.

BERNADETTE ULSAMER’s poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in Pittsburgh City Paper, Main Street Rag, Ophelia Street, Girls with Glasses, and Cossack Review. Work is anthologized in Along These Rivers: Poetry and Photography of Pittsburgh and Dionne’s Story. Ulsamer was featured in July 2006 on WESA’s Prosody, a radio program of contemporary poets and writers. She earned a MFA from Carlow University.

CHRISTY VALENCHECK is a graduate of Chatham University.
BEATRICE W. VASSER is the author of Circle of Life: Verses From My Journey (Pneuma Publishing, Inc., 2008). Her book was featured in Pitt Magazine’s winter 2009 Bookshelf, at the Annual Book Fair at the Pittsburgh History Center, and on the Victorian Ministries website. Her poems have appeared in Dionne’s Story, Volume II and Pittsburgh City Paper. She has read poetry for the Pierian Art Group at Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts School, Alpha Wives, and the Aurora Reading Club at the Carnegie Library. She has attended workshops sponsored by Cave Canem and the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts.

LUCIENNE WALD has been published in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the Leader Times, an edition of the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. She has been attending the Madwomen in the Attic workshops for more than 25 years and is a member of the Pittsburgh Poetry Society.

LAURIN B. WOLF has an MFA from Kent State University and BA from the University of Pittsburgh in poetry writing. Her poems have appeared in Scholars & Rogues, PMS, Pittsburgh City Paper, and Two Review, and her book reviews have appeared in Whiskey Island. She is a guest host on the WESA weekly radio show, Prosody. She co-hosts the monthly reading series, MadFridays. She teaches writing at Duquesne University and Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh, Pa.
Madwomen History

The Madwomen in the Attic Writing Workshops were named after the groundbreaking study by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar on the 19th century woman writer. The beloved poet Patricia Dobler directed and developed the Madwomen 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.

On a 1979 campus visit, the writer Tillie Olsen was mobbed by women with stories, poems, and questions, and it became clear that there was a hunger and a need for women’s stories to be told. The Madwomen Workshops were formed by Dr. Ellie Wymard and originally taught by the esteemed fiction writer Jane Coleman. 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.
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 four books of poetry, all published by the University of Pittsburgh Press: *The Switching/Yard*, 2013; *Red Sugar*, finalist for the 2009 Paterson Poetry Prize; *Boneshaker*, finalist for the Milt Kessler Award; and *Mad River*, winner of the Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize. Her new chapbook, *Ravage*, was published by Lefty Blondie Press in 2012.

Beatty’s limited edition chapbook, *Ravenous*, won the 1995 State Street Prize. Awards include publication in *Best American Poetry 2013*, 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 19 years, she has hosted and produced *Prosody*, a public radio show on NPR-affiliate WYEP-FM, featuring the work of national writers.

JOY KATZ is the author of *All You Do is Perceive*, a National Poetry Series finalist, forthcoming from Four Way Books in 2013. Her other two poetry collections are *The Garden Room* (2006) and *Fabulae* (2002). She also is co-editor of the anthology *Dark Horses: Poets on Overlooked Poems* (2007). Honors for her writing include a 2011 NEA fellowship, a Pushcart prize, a Stegner fellowship, and the Nadya Aisenberg fellowship at the MacDowell Colony. Her poems are anthologized in three volumes of *The Best American Poetry*, among other places, and appear in such journals
as *American Poetry Review, Notre Dame Review, Ploughshares,* and *Cincinnati Review.* Her prose has appeared in *The New York Times Book Review* and *The Village Voice.* She was recently the visiting writer at the University of Pittsburgh and has taught literature and poetry at The New School and NYU. Currently she teaches in the graduate writing program at Chatham University. She is an editor-at-large for *Pleiades.*

NANCY KIRKWOOD teaches the Madwomen in the Attic nonfiction workshop. She holds a BA in creative writing from the University of Pittsburgh and an MFA in creative writing from Carlow University. She is an adjunct faculty member of Carlow University’s English department and also works as an independent editor and writing coach. Her honors include the Schuylkill County Arts Fellowship Award, and publications in *Literary Mama, Pittsburgh City Paper,* and *Girls with Glasses.*

NANCY KRYGOWSKI is the author of *Velocity* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), winner of the 2006 Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize. She is an adult literacy instructor and co-director of the Gist Street Reading Series. Her poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner, River Styx, Southern Poetry Review, 5 AM,* and other magazines. She is the recipient of a Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Individual Artist Grant and awards from the Academy of American Poets and the Association of Writers and Writing Programs.

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.

ANNE M. RASHID is an assistant professor of English at Carlow University. She has published poetry in *Adagio Verse Quarterly, Lit Candles: Feminist Mentoring and the Text, The Metro Times, Pittsburgh City Paper*, and has poetry forthcoming in the *Paterson Literary Review*. She and her co-translator Chae-Pyong Song have published translations in *New Writing from Korea, list, The Gwangju News, Azalea: Journal of Korean Literature, Illuminations*, and *Women’s Studies Quarterly*.

KAYLA SARGESON is the author of the chapbook, *Mini Love Gun* (Main Street Rag, 2013). She earned an MFA in poetry from Columbia College Chicago, where she was the recipient of a Follett Fellowship and served as an editor for *Columbia Poetry Review*. Her work has been anthologized in the national anthology, *Time You Let Me In: 25 Poets Under 25*, selected by Naomi Shihab Nye, as well as in *Dionne’s Story*. Her poems also appear or are forthcoming in *5 AM, Columbia Poetry Review*, and *Chiron Review*. She co-curates the MadFridays reading series and is the poetry editor for *Pittsburgh City Paper’s* online feature, *Chapter & Verse*.

ELLEN MCGRATH SMITH teaches at the University of Pittsburgh and in the Carlow University Madwomen in the Attic program. Poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The American Poetry Review, Cerise, Kestrel, Cimarron, 5 AM, Oxford Magazine, The Prose Poem, Southern Poetry Review, Descant* (Canada), and others. Flash fiction has been published or is forthcoming in *Weave, Switchback, Thickjam, Thumbnail*, and *Atticus Review*. Her poetry has been recognized with an AROHO Orlando Prize, an Academy of American Poets award, a
Rainmaker Award from Zone 3 magazine, and a 2007 Individual Artist grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

SARAH WILLIAMS-DEVEREUX teaches poetry for the Madwomen in the Attic. Her work has been published in Sampsonia Way Magazine, Pittsburgh City Paper, The New Yinzer’s Pittsburgh Love Stories anthology, and the online journal SubtleTea. She has been a featured poet on Prosody, the WESA radio program dedicated to the work of contemporary writers. She is the co-author of the research monograph Our Stories, Our Selves: A3P: The African American Arts Project: A Study of African American Young Adult Arts Participation (PITT ARTS, University of Pittsburgh, 2006).

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CELESTE GAINEY’s new book, The Gaffer, is forthcoming from Arktoi Books in 2014. She is the author of In the land of speculation & seismography, a chapbook published by Seven Kitchens Press in their 2011 Summer Kitchen Series. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Columbia Poetry Review, BLOOM, Wild Apples, Madroad: The Breadline Press West Coast Anthology, and Writers at Work. She has had a long career as a lighting designer for both film and architecture. She holds a BFA in film and television from New York University and an MFA in creative writing/poetry from Carlow University.

LIANE ELLISON NORMAN is the author of Breathing the West: Great Basin Poems; two chapbooks, Roundtrip, and Driving Near the Old Federal Arsenal; and The Duration of Grief and Keep. Individual poems have appeared in the North American Review, Kestrel, The Fourth River, 5 AM, Grasslimb, Rune, Hot Metal Press, and Come Together: Imagine Peace. She
has also published non-fiction: *Mere Citizens: United, Civil and Disobedient* and *Hammer of Justice: Molly Rush and the Plowshares Eight*; a novel, *Stitches in Air: A Novel About Mozart’s Mother*; and many articles, essays, and reviews.

**JUDE WALDO** is an undergraduate creative writing major at Carlow University, with a concentration in poetry, and is the emcee for the Hungry Sphinx Reading Series. Waldo is involved with and has performed in Pittsburgh's slam poetry league.
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:


BY CELESTE GAINEY:

— In the land of speculation & seismography, chapbook,
  Seven Kitchens Press, 2011.

BY JOY KATZ:

— Dark Horses: Poets on Overlooked Poems, co-editor,

BY NANCY KRYGOWSKI:

BY LIANE ELLISON NORMAN:


BY KAYLA SARGESON:

— *Mini Love Gun*, chapbook, Main Street Rag, 2013.

BY ELLEN MCGRATH SMITH:


BY SARAH WILLIAMS-DEVEREUX:
