

The Write Place at the Write Time

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"How It Ended" by Christopher Woods; <http://christopherwoods.zenfolio.com/>

About this image: "This photograph is something of a mystery. I know nothing about this house or the people who lived there, or who owns the car. The image is like the final scene in a story. No one knows what happened earlier, or what happened to the people. I invite viewers to make up their own story about the image." —Christopher Woods

Poetry

The Blackest Crow

by Carole Mertz

Strutting solo
in storm's aftermath
the blackest crow,
all glossy

Men grapple
with urge to war,
as the good earth turns,
and men weep

Bio: Carole Mertz has poems at *Voices on the Wind*, *Every Writer*, *Pyrokinecton*, *Indiana Voice Journal*, *Voices de la Luna*, *Prairie Light Review*, *WestWard Quarterly*, and at *The Write Place at the Write Time*. She won the Wilda Morris Poetry Challenge, August, 2017. Carole also reviews poetry collections, with work forthcoming at *MER*. Her review of Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* is in the 2017 (annual) *South 85 Journal*. Carole lives with her husband in Parma, Ohio.

Drought

by Richard Luftig

Out in the back of farms,
dead, rusted tractors wait,
impatient for a winter bath.

It has been dry so long
that even ducks have forgotten
how to tilt back their heads

and drink from the skies.
There is little left that is
not ash-gray dirt, dust

cross-hatched with tracks
of long-gone sparrows,
and these parched, fallow

fields are left to eke
out a life on their own.
They sit; scarred, seed-

to-sedge. Sand-blasted,
erased, year-in, year-out,
like some ignored spinster,

who wants, waits, wishes
for more but is always
too afraid to ask.

Luck

by Richard Luftig

Don't push it or press it,
as if it were some button
that would open a trap door,
No, better to be boring, but safe,

remain in its good graces.
Don't take more than you need,
try too hard, overextend your reach.
Never brag when you have it,

whine when you don't.
Better to choose a few stars
from an August sky and thank
them, or pick up that penny

from the pavement—heads up
to give you good fortune—
and stick it in your pocket
for a rainy day that may never come.

Most of all, never screw with it,
jinx it, piss it away, dare it
to leave. But now when I think
on all those things I have lost;

land, lives, luck, love,
with shoulder to wheel,
nose to stone, head above
water, perhaps it is fate

that should not tempt me,
as my odds grow longer
than these winter shadows
day after shortened day.

Bio: Richard Luftig is a former professor of educational psychology and special education at Miami University in Ohio now residing in California. He is a recipient of the Cincinnati Post-Corbett Foundation Award for Literature and a semi-finalist for the Emily Dickinson Society Award. His poems and stories have appeared in numerous literary journals in the United States and internationally in, Canada, Australia, Europe, and Asia. Two of his poems recently appeared in *Realms of the Mothers: The First Decade of Dos Madres Press*.

The Sunflower Field in Yellow Springs

by James Croal Jackson

was full and yellow in summer
but we arrived in autumn
when the sunflowers were withered
and drooping brown
to the ground
stem necks snapped perhaps slowly
and knowing nothing of summer
we lost our sense of fall
and we joked maybe someone
came to kill them all
but the local bookseller said
it's just too late to grow
so we wandered past closed
shop after closed shop
thinking about the lovely things
we heard this town would offer
but knowing the dead sidewalks

with each lonely step
it was only talk

Bio: James Croal Jackson is the author of *The Frayed Edge of Memory* (Writing Knights Press, 2017). His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *FLAPPERHOUSE*, *Rust + Moth*, *The Bitter Oleander*, and elsewhere. He edits *The Mantle* and is a former winner of the William Redding Memorial Poetry Contest. Find him in Columbus, Ohio or at jimjakk.com.

Down

by David Anthony Sam

"Down is a good place to go, where the mind is single." —Annie Dillard

Leaves launch as brilliant wind,
abandoned by limb, falling in
startled color—flame orange,
veins of red streaked with black—
succumbing at the right time.

Seeds spill in profligate prayer,
catkins whirring—burs knitting into
animal fur—nuts thumping to earth,
carried off into a squirrel's hutch,
buried, forgotten, gestating darkness.

Apples bruised in pungency,
falling ripeness, rotting drunken
fumes in cold blue air, fermenting
into oozing brown—the knowledge
of spring one eternal season away.

Down at last, a glide of geese
dropping with the mist into
the still summer-warm water—
falling like brown leaves into
twilight, disappearing in sea smoke.

Down where the frost settles
when it has quit congealing air.
Down as dance and celebration,
knowing the end of falling
in the white and the silence.

Down where the mind's singleness
centers at last in simplicity
of center, and the mind meets the eye
of a dark pilgrim who sits in drunken
fall beside the still, misted lake.

He seeks the quiet, comprehensive
grace of the yellow season,
of the cold frost, of the dropping
clouds, leaves, winds, seeds and
other things who fall from the sky.

Biography: David Anthony Sam lives in Virginia with his wife, Linda. Sam has four collections, was featured poet in *The Hurricane Review* (2016), and his poetry has appeared in over 70 journals and publications. *Finite to Fail: Poems After Dickinson* was the 2016 Grand Prize winner of GFT Press Chapbook Contest.

Terminal Moraine

by Bob Meszaros

Here, where the glacier stopped,
its ice melt equal to expansion, and its harvest
fell, all afternoon, on the trail before him, in the wind
and rain, the pebbles and the sea shells shudder,
as if the world were growing cold.

From the moraine's observation platform,
he watches her harvesting the day, collecting stones
and shells for backyard, attic, cellar. Harvesting
today what they will throw away tomorrow.

And then, suddenly, inside him, again the ice
begins to move. He becomes an erratic, a petrified

tree trunk, unable to recapture the sound of wind and rain,
unable to recapture the purpose of this day.

In this season of forgetfulness,
his hands and lips begin to tremble. He can only
stand and wait.

A canvas bag across one shoulder,
through the wind and rain she's coming.
She smiles up at him and waves.

Now in his eighty-second year,
every rock and tree, every name and face,
every memory is sediment, unsorted,
the only bedrock here her smile.

Bio: Bob Meszaros taught English at Hamden High School in Hamden, Connecticut, for thirty-two years. He retired from high school teaching in June of 1999. During the 70s and 80s his poems appeared in a number of literary journals, such as *En Passant* and *Voices International*. In the year 2000 he began teaching part time at Quinnipiac University, and he began once again to submit his work for publication. His poems have subsequently appeared in *The Connecticut Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Concho River Review*, and many other literary journals.

Holocaust Museum

by John Grey

Now there's a museum.
Horror in black and white.
What can no longer be excused by silence
is hung on walls in gallery after gallery.

Here, you don't just view the dead
but become part of a makeshift trial.
Stiff pale bodies, hills of bones,
are called as witnesses.

For patron after patron,
the dock is an uneasy place.

Photographs sit in judgment.
More jury are born every day.

Bio: John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in the *Tau*, *Studio One* and *Columbia Review* with work upcoming in *Leading Edge*, *Examined Life Journal* and *Midwest Quarterly*.

Re-writing

by Robert Joe Stout

Ghosts
swirl
around me

as I type
the who-I-am
as I write now

creating
others
I might be:

Edmundo
laughing
tales

he never
told
—but tells because

I give him
words
(or someone

writing
through me
does)

tweaking
truths
born not from facts

but what
I feel
to truths

I sense
or want
or steal

collaborators
changing me
as I change them

knowing
as I do
that life

accrues
each word
each thought

each scheme
and churns out
new

while in
our minds
we fight

to stay
the same.
I'm not

the me
I was
when I wrote

this
nor who
I am

as I
revise
nor who

the words
and thoughts
conceive:

cells
re-divide
and multiply

create
new memories
new beings

and new
dreams

Hitchhiker

by Robert Joe Stout

Against hills grayed by lack of rain,
sky grimed by clouds of burning straw,
liquid amber and transplanted oaks
thrust vivid scarlets, flagrant golds,
along the highway's rise towards snow.
I braked to let a pickup pass and saw him,
jacketless despite the frost, look up
and shrug, his thumb half-lifted in mute need
to get to the next town. My six-year-old,
hand raised to wave, asked who? and why?
I said I didn't know. But lied. In hopes
he'll never feel that much alone. And cold.

Bio: Robert Joe Stout is a freelance journalist, fiction writer and poet who lives in Oaxaca, Mexico and whose latest book is the volume of poetry, *Monkey Screams*. Previous books include *Hidden Dangers* and *Miss Sally*. Mexico, its people and its problems, continues to be the focus for both his non-fiction and other writing.

Clara Peeters Speaks: Still Lives *(some line length appears altered due to layout limitations)*

by Jan Zlotnik Schmidt

How foolish these men. They see garlic bulbs bruised, lemons half peeled.
Skeletal fish stripped of their flesh, tankards tipped, drained of ale.
They paint empty oyster shells, pomegranate seeds, bursting forth from rotting skin,
browned rose petals, tulips, carnations next to a skull.
I see spiked artichokes, leaves gloss green.
Grapes and cherries touched with sunlight. A warmth inside out.
Yes, the fish die—slick, slithered on a plate, scales still wet with the sea.
The eyes glare as if to say, “I know my place. My worth in your world.”
Yes, the peregrine falcon stares at his kill: kingfisher, finch, a parrot.
A dread of colors. Reminders of the real.
Lustrous celadon bowls rest next to pink crab and crayfish. Clustered ready to be devoured.
A hunk of Gouda, a pewter tankard. No hints of a dessicated world. Just my bearing, my sight.
My profile haunts. Reflections in a goblet, shadows in wreaths of silver on a decanter.
A trace of myself in a claret glass.*
I smile, place my signature P in twisted bread. Just a little secret.
His earthbound universe mine. This earthbound world unbound.

**Clara Peeters (active 1607-1621) inserted self-portraits in her still life paintings. One of them had seven hidden self-portraits.*

Punta Mujeres: A Land of Grief

by Jan Zlotnik Schmidt

This is a land of volcanic
remains, pumice, and flame,
charred lava rocks that lead down to the sea

This is a land where old women
shuffle slowly and look directly
Into cloudless skies

And they beckon to us
point to small green and purple figs
offerings wrinkled as they are

This is the land of old women
who mince their steps
mouth words through the gaps in their teeth

Their words betray no doubt
No shame in aging
or keening

They birth ten or twelve
Gather them in the folds of their dresses
like lost letters

They know the power of tides
the tormentas, the calima
The power to destroy

And they walk in
their own shadows
forsaken angels.

I am a dutiful daughter

by Jan Zlotnik Schmidt

I am a dutiful daughter.
These words are carved on my flesh.

I will wash crusted sleepers
from your eyes,

clip the whiskers
on your chin.
Cool your skin
with rose water
in summer's heat.

And I will enter
the dark swamp
of your unwashed dreams.
Pull your
neck shoulders
torso toes
from the muck.

I will preserve
your quiet
like peaches
glistening in a jar,
and smooth out the wrinkles
of knowing and unknowing
at your behest.

As your eyes
glaze into forgetfulness,
I will settle
next to your bones
your breath
your empty breasts
as your secrets
spill into my dreams.

Bio: Jan Zlotnik Schmidt is a SUNY Distinguished Professor of English at SUNY New Paltz. She has been published in many journals including *The Cream City Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Home Planet News*, *Phoebe*, *Black Buzzard Review*, *The Chiron Review*, *Memoir(and)*, *The Westchester Review*, and *Wind*. Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Press Prize Series. She has had two volumes of poetry published by the Edwin Mellen Press (*We Speak in Tongues*, 1991; *She had this memory*, 2000). Recently her chapbook, *The Earth Was Still*, was published by Finishing Line Press and another, *Hieroglyphs of Father-Daughter Time*, was published by Word Temple Press.



Illustration by Beatriz Vöx Menendez to accompany her piece "A calendar of nights."

A calendar of nights

by Beatriz Vöx Menendez

After death life is still inevitable.

The predictable tension
follows the curve of your chin like a barber's open razor.

My memory's strewn with the pulp of words
that have been taken out of their vesicles,

the private language of loss and waste.
I have touched the flesh of shade and

like a praise to the white noise of stillness
I have carved my name on a trunk

hiding the voice of guts
in the bulging face of a scar.

Façades bask under the fireworks
of ammunition discharged for the last time.

Darkness next
and then the full moon,

the white flag of the night.

Bio: Beatriz Vöx Menendez is a visual artist and writer whose work has appeared or is upcoming in *The Bohemyth*, *Roadside Fiction*, *The Referendum Rant* and *Foliate Oak Review*, among others. In 2016, she published her first book of poetry, entitled *Excepciones Universales*, with Impronta Press, which won the Asturias Poetry Prize. In the same year. Short stories of hers were also included in the Manuel Nevado Madrid anthology. She currently lives in London, where she's studying for the MA at UCL.

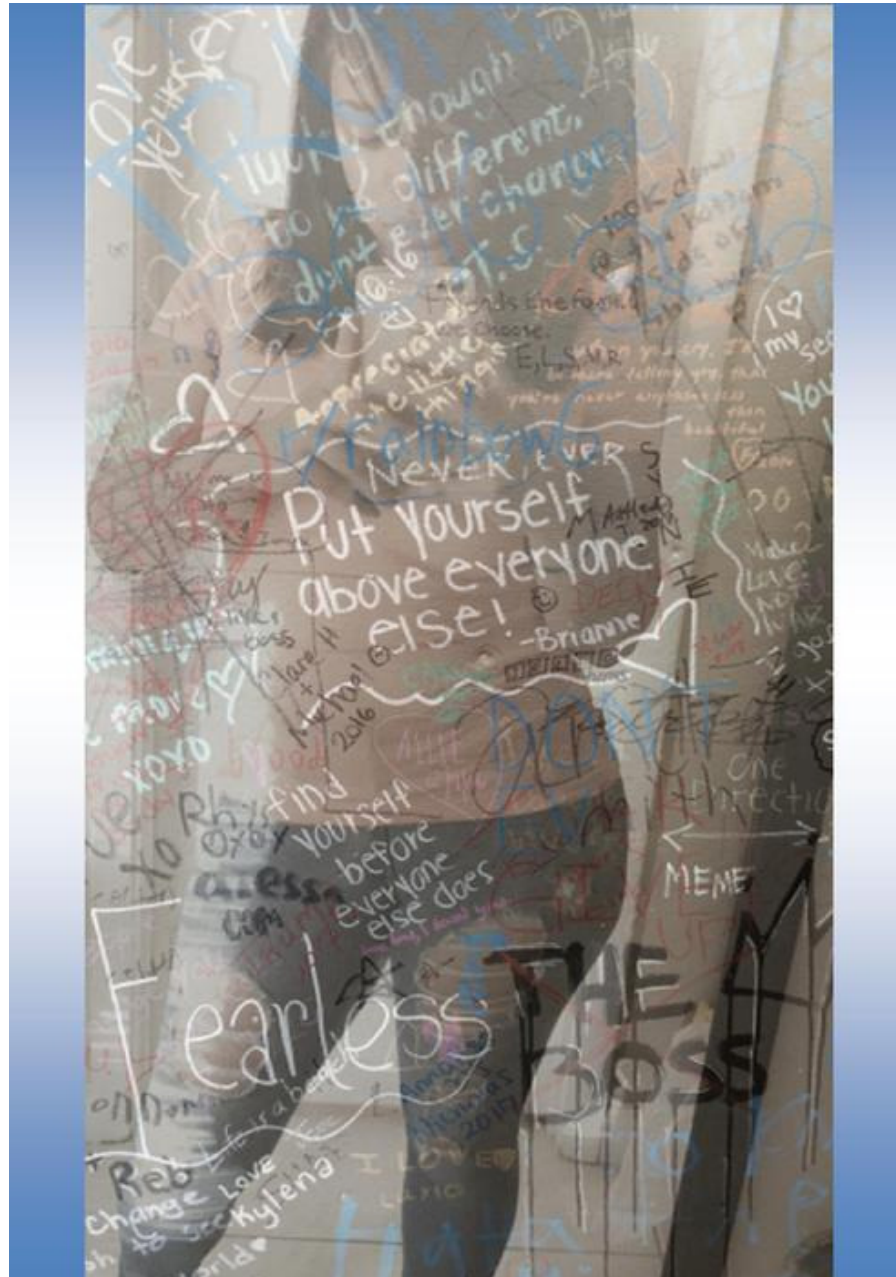


Photo taken and provided by Carl Scharwath to accompany his piece "A Poem Never Read."
Model Credit: Cindy Pimentel

A Poem Never Read

by Carl Scharwath

My words
Composed and forgotten.
Created like
A dewdrop
That vanishes
In the
primordial
Morning
Sunshine.
Evolving into
The loudest silence
Never heard.

Bio: Carl Scharwath, has appeared globally with 100+ magazines selecting his poetry, short stories, essays and art photography. Two poetry books *Journey to Become Forgotten* (Kind of a Hurricane Press) and *Abandoned* (Scars.tv) have been published. Carl is the art editor for *Minute Magazine*, a dedicated runner and 2nd degree black-belt in Taekwondo.

New Mexico Visions: Prayer for Pulse Victims

by Mary K. O'Melveny

Reverence rises with the light.
The gleaming subtlety of it
stays constant even as it shifts,
heightens and falls back
with every turn of the high roads.
Each orange rose copper Mesa surprises us,
as if its raw radiance was whispered
in a secret code language
known only to the ancient ones
who shapeshift our route as we go.

Fragrant piñon and Russian sage
fill the dry air. A spirit kindling.

Pale mauve, indigo, gray-green
mountains shadow us like
incandescent talismans.
They stand watch over sloping hills,
guarding our day dreams,
inspiring flute windsongs.
Their burnished afterglow follows us
like the spark of a new idea.

So it is, as each burst of brightness
arrives to tempt and tease us along
curvaceous high desert roads,
we say our prayers for those souls
cut down as they danced, laughed, sang,
kept the faith of youth and love.
Perhaps they are Raven now
or Buffalo or Corn Maiden.
Or delicate Cactus flowers, left to dazzle us
with their resplendent illuminations.

Poet's Note: This poem was written approaching the anniversary of the tragic murders at Orlando's Pulse nightclub. It is intended to pay homage to those lost in that horrible event but also to express hope that beauty has a transformative power to help us heal from such tragic losses.

Bio: Mary K. O'Melveny is a retired labor rights lawyer and "emerging" poet. Mary lives in Washington, DC and Woodstock, NY. Her work has been published in various on-line and print journals including *The Write Place at the Write Time*, GFT Press, *Into the Void* and *The Offbeat* as well as blog sites such as *Writing in a Woman's Voice* and *Women at Woodstock*. Mary's poem, "Cease Fire," won First Prize in the 2017 Raynes Poetry Competition sponsored by *Jewish Currents Magazine* and appears in the anthology *Borders and Boundaries* published by Blue Threads Press.

Three Days

by Susan P. Blevins

you told us, three days,
in which we were to lay you out

according to Tibetan ritual, washed, oiled,
anointed with sacred, fragrant unguents

And so we did, after your soul fluttered away
like a silent bird, up and away, leaving behind your body,
an empty husk, while we who loved you wept and
clung to one another, mourning our loss

We laid you in your study, on your nap-time bed,
now your bier, wrapped in purest linen shroud, covered
in your favorite blue blanket, candles lit, photos of your
loved ones close by, flowers, your beloved sister's

paintings hanging above you keeping vigil, and
windows open to let in cold mountain air, ice tucked
beneath you to preserve your earthly remains, and
we kept watch, ourselves swaddled against the deathly cold

Three days

in which so many came to sit in silence with you,
talking to you, listening to the response
they desired from you, bidding respectful farewell
one last time, grateful tears engraved their cheeks

Three days

all that was left to keep you close, yet each day you shrank
into your essence, departing swiftly, now more like pharaoh than
man, your bones holding together the architecture of your once
powerful body, contracting as your ample spirit expanded

Now you are free to roam the great interstellar silence,
to understand all mysteries, answer all questions,
while we who love you see you always in our heart's eye,
but are left with only aching, un-responding silence

A Hollowed-out Life

by Susan P. Blevins

My island of sanity, my known world, is
beginning to dissolve, eroded by a sea of
grief which threatens to drown me in a
tsunami of desolation, a tidal wave of despair.

The Maldivo Islands are sinking beneath the
rising waters of global warming, and I am
shrinking and sinking beneath Noah's
flood of anguish as you slip from me,

into the arms of Kali, the devouring goddess,
who uses cancer to feed her insatiable appetite,
chewing people up then spitting them out, and
now she has you in her greedy grasp.

Perhaps after all oblivion beneath the waves
would not be such a bad thing, my surrender
preferable to living a hollowed-out life
without you, without you, oh my love.

Luminosa

by Susan P. Blevins

Drawn by the exquisite sounds of music I cannot identify,
I peer discreetly through the partially open door and
behold a beautiful young woman with long blonde hair,
sitting naked on the floor, legs folded beneath her,
bathed in a puddle of late afternoon sunlight,
shafting through the window,
violin tucked beneath her chin,
absorbed in playing out the grief which holds her in thrall.
She plays the pain out of her heart, and
hot tears run unheeded down her cheeks.
The notes are her own, divine composition of the moment,
unburdening her troubled soul, and connecting with inchoate pain in
my own unquiet and questioning spirit. I stand a while unseen, and
submerge myself in the river of her pain,
my tears mingling with hers in the soul-felt music,

comforted in my own existential angst,
for just a moment, no longer alone.

Bio: Susan P. Blevins, an ex-pat Brit, lived in Italy for twenty-six years, traveled the world extensively, and has now settled in Houston, Texas, where she is enjoying writing stories based on her travels and adventures. She had a weekly column on food in a European newspaper while living in Rome, and published various articles on gardens and gardening when she lived in northern New Mexico, before moving to Houston. Her passions are classical music, gardening, nature, animals (cats in particular), reading and of course, writing. She has written a journal since she was about nine.

Witness

by Laura Hampton

Across the dinner table,
Driving home from a movie,
Leaning against the sink, as he sits on the edge of the tub
Taking his shoes off.
Today it is a rant about the mis-parked neighbor's car.
Yesterday, a reflection on an old '80s song.
Sunday, how could those idiots lose that game?

Sometimes all that is required is an attentive expression,
Murmurs at the appropriate moment.
I've heard his opinion on GMOs before, at least once.
They can send a man to the moon, but can't make socks that stay up.
That client is never going to be happy, no matter what I do.
Half an ear cocked, noticing the grey hairs at his temple.
Did I pay the electric bill? Do we need milk and eggs?

It is the sound of his voice, more than what he says
That registers, a comfortable routine.
He doesn't really want a response to his latest running route.
Just an acknowledgement. He speaks, I hear.
I am a witness to his life, he to mine.
This is the pact we've struck.
Hearts grazing, together.

Bio: Laura Hampton lives in Houston, Texas. She has had numerous poems, short fiction and nonfiction pieces published in both print and digital publications. In addition to writing, she is a Master Instructor of Pilates.

It Changes All the Time: The Suicide Disease

by Catherine Marie

Oh mother,

Did you shoot me in the head by mistake?

You threatened your whole life to blow your brains out. Did you finally try, miss, and hit me instead?

Oh no, I'm waking up now. You know, out of that in-between deep sleep and trying to come back in to reality thing.

Half of me fights hard to stay asleep, the other half fights hard to awaken. I'm there now.

The pain is unbearable. I awoke with a fever blister on the right side of my lip. It's painful, but the real torment is coming from something far worse, far more debilitating, far more complicated, far more difficult to explain.

But, I will try. It is sometimes called the "suicide disease."

The only good thing I can say about this, is it changes all the time.

Just like the seasons: fall, winter, spring, and summer. Just like the great bellows of fire that finally subside, just like the great floods eventually recede, just like the cloud that resembles a dragon and the dark cloud behind it that swallows the dragon up, just like the raging ramblings of a lunatic finally stop.

At 32, I was diagnosed with this amazing disease, with no computer or technology to look up anything, I thought I would surely die.

The first few years were like a terrible migraine, just on the right side of my face. I found comfort by holding a pillow on my head and leaning over to one side.

But, as everything in this life we have changes constantly, it didn't stay the same. It branched out and decided to dance with other parts.

Kind of like live wires falling into the water and electrocuting people as they walk about in the aftermath looking for animals or loved ones.

Trigeminal Neuralgia is the same at times. An electrical wire that has lost its insulation and decides to electrocute my face every few seconds, with no mercy, even though I try to duck the pain. No compassion, the lightning has always been quicker than my ability to dodge it.

Angry killer bees pinned to the right side of my face. And, so it changes it again. Like my mother threatening me or slapping me across the face because I didn't believe her beliefs, the stinging unbelievable, the rage unstoppable.

So, who stuck a hot iron to the right side of my face? I didn't. But, it's there, hot, dreadful, and damning. Was it her? No, but again it was change. Change that still is a long way from comfortable, but consistent for a while.

Someone shoved a 2x4 up the side of my face. It's hard now and feels like wood. I keep lurking in the mirror of the bathroom, trying to see if my face looks funny, hard and like a piece of firewood is underneath it. It's not. I hope this feeling goes away soon. It's heavy and tiring...

I finally turned to meditation: I focused on the latest attack of the "suicide disease." The pain has been with me so long. I thought about all the changes and thought about the teaching of Buddha: "This existence of ours is as transient as autumn clouds. To watch the birth and death of beings is like looking at the movements of dance. A lifetime is like a flash of lightning in the sky, rushing by, like a torrent down a steep mountain."

It's like listening to "The End" by the Doors. Sometimes my mind forgets about the changes that will come and I think this might be the end. Like my mother is sane for a few moments a week, I can handle it, but when she goes insane, I sometimes lose my cool and cannot come back to an understanding for a few moments, hours, or days. This disease takes its toll,

but it makes me realize change, impermanence, metamorphosis, transformation, whatever the hell you want to call it.

I am challenged by this condition and so far, I've stood up to the fight and won.

Focusing on the constant, transient, transitory things in my life and the life of all things as we quickly pass through this world, I have finally discovered the meaning of change, through pain.

My understanding is so much greater than before.

Bio: Catherine Marie is a published poet and writer of nonfiction, living in the southwest part of the United States. She has been using personal experiences about her life and others as a source for her poetry, which is sometimes very dark, but sometimes the light shines through as well. Catherine Marie is always delighted to have her work published in *The Write Place At The Write Time*.

Some Halloweens Ago

by Katie O'Sullivan

You and I, some Halloweens ago,
camped in a western parkland amid
a forest of creaking trees and
rustling critters while a Harvest
Moon's beams played tag with
a night of dark clouds.

Around a campfire, with knees pulled
to our chins, our faces eerily lighted by
flames, we whispered stories of moaning
ghosts seeking lost ancestral lands, of
ghastly massacred pioneers and
never-found abducted children.

Scaring each other half to death, we
stamped approval of every tale with
shrieks and another drink. We saw a
pale specter floating towards us from black

shadows that sent us scrambling to our tent.
You needed me.

Until the following morning
when a park ranger explained to
a cooler you and a disappointed me
that the apparition was just a weary
camper asking for the racket
to be kept down.

Bio: After many years abroad following her husband's career, Katie, her husband, and large family, returned to Houston, Texas where she found a place and a time to write. Her poetry, flash fiction, and one short play have been published in print and online journals, magazines, and anthologies in the United States, Canada, Ireland, and Damascus, Syria.

A Comic Vision

by Gale Acuff

On Friday evenings we go out to eat,
Father, Mother, and I, to the Red House
Cafeteria. I choose what I want
as we move through the line. What Father likes
I usually like—prime rib, if they
have it that evening, and boiled potatoes,
and a salad, but no dessert; slices
of pear on cottage cheese on lettuce tastes
better than it sounds. And I like iced tea
because it will keep me awake all night.
I have some serious reading to do:

comic books. After dinner, they give me
my allowance. It's 1966,
so a quarter goes far, and Vietnam
and LBJ and Tricky Dick haven't
destroyed the country yet. Two bits gets me
two comic books at twelve cents each, plus a
penny for Georgia state tax, just four cents
on the dollar. I ask to be excused

and they say yes. I'll meet them in one hour
at the fountain in front of the Rich's
department store. Father will be sitting
on the concrete bench there, smoking Camels
and surveying the parking lot as if
the cars are stars in the asphalt's dark and
the people coming in are meteors
and the ones leaving are rocketships. At

the Rex-All Drug Store next to the Red House
they arrange the comics like magazines,
and I mean on the wooden racks and not
in the kind you spin around. They respect
what they sell, or I like to think so. I
look forward to coming here—I love my
four-color heroes even more than I
love a visit from my cousins over
in Alabama twice a year, and now
that I'm ten and know there is no Santa
but what your parents make him to be and
what I will make him for my own children

I come to the comics like I'm in love
and I haven't seen her for a whole week.
Tonight, Justice League of America
—I get several heroes for the money
—and The Flash. Boy, that guy can flat-out run
circles around any of his arch-foes
and they're all good bad-guys—Mirror Master,
Captain Cold, Heat Wave, Captain Boomerang,
Pied Piper, Trickster, Reverse-Flash (also
known as Professor Zoom), and my favorite,
Super-Gorilla Grodd. Barry Allen

stows his uniform inside a ring on
his index finger. When he touches it
his uniform pops out and expands on
contact with the air. I never learned how
he stuffs it back in. I don't really care.
But he's the fastest man alive so there

must be a logical explanation.

I meet Father at the fountain. Mother
joins us and we sit in front of water
that leaps and leaps but never escapes. Where
does it all come from? Where does it all go?
The fountain never fills with water. It's
like the cup that's full but never empties.
Where did I read about that? The Bible?
The Brothers Grimm? An Aquaman comic?
We track down the car—it's an almost new
'65 Chevy Nova, not the best
of the line but Father's a principal
so he has to show the community
that he's reasonably conservative.
He likes to drink beer. But only at home.
Whenever we go out he wears a tie.
People he knows never see him smoking.
He obeys all the rules of traffic and
never runs a stop light and always yields
and never gets a speeding ticket. He's

probably more super than Superman
but a lot less exciting, and Mother's
no Lois Lane but she's just as pretty
or used to be. I've seen the photographs.
By the time we get home it's dark enough
to yawn. I go to my attic bedroom
—twelve steps to my Fortress of Solitude
—and start reading about the Justice League

and their battle against the Shaggy-Man.
He's got long hair, like most teenagers now,
and he's big and tough, like football players
or pro wrestlers or guys who build houses
or work on road-crews. And mean, like monsters
or Nazi prison guards in the movies.
Tomorrow's Saturday, so I can sleep
late. I stop halfway through the story so
I'll be sure to have something I can dream

about. I'll finish it tomorrow—then
I'll start The Flash and finish him Sunday,
maybe before church to keep me awake
while Reverend Brown tells us some more
about who God is, and what He wants, and
what He's going to do if He
doesn't get it. First He gave us Eden,
which we got thrown out of, at least Adam

and Eve did. Then He gave us Jesus but
we killed Him, or the Romans did and so
did we, somehow. But that's okay because
if Jesus hadn't died we'd all be darned.
I don't know how what's bad can be good, too
—that's not how it works in the Justice League

—but when I'm older maybe I'll get it.
I make good grades in school, and always do
my homework, and keep my shirttail tucked in.
I'm the principal's son—I have to be
a role model, and make a good impression
and be a hero, come to think of it.
After all, the world is full of evil

and I hope to meet with my share one day
so I've got to get ready for it now.
I don't want to die but I'll give my life
if I have to. I have to anyway
but I mean not faster than I have to
but anything can happen so I hope
that if I die young I'll live forever
and if I should live to be a hundred
I'll never die at all. And that's justice.

Bio: Gale Acuff has had poetry published in *Ascent*, *Ohio Journal*, *Descant*, *Poem*, *Adirondack Review*, *Coe Review*, *Worcester Review*, *Maryland Poetry Review*, *Arkansas Review*, *Florida Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *South Dakota Review*, *Sequential Art Narrative in Education*, and many other journals. He has authored three books of poetry: *Buffalo Nickel* (BrickHouse Press, 2004), *The Weight of the World* (BrickHouse, 2006), and *The Story of My Lives* (BrickHouse, 2008).

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