

# VERSE WISCONSIN

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## FEATURES

INTERVIEW WITH **KIMBERLY BLAESER**  
BY **WENDY VARDAMAN**

**BRUCE DETHLEFSEN**  
POEMS FROM *UNEXPECTED SHINY THINGS*

**JEFF PONIEWAZ**  
MUSINGS OF AN ECO POET

To those who'd deny that eco poems that tackle environmental issues are truly poems, I say: okay then, don't call them "poems." Maybe they're a new genre: eco-poetic wake-up calls. Whether you grant they're poems or not, they're saying something that urgently needs to be said: clearly, eloquently, powerfully, poetically.

—Jeff Poniewaz

The Wisconsin Poet Laureate is more than just a symbolic appointment. The poet laureate plays a crucial role in keeping the arts accessible and vital—to all age groups—and acts as a statewide emissary for poetry and creativity.

—Margaret Lewis

For me, what distinguishes ecopoetry from nature poetry is the embedded understanding of responsibility. Or response-ability, as I like to characterize it, so that the word suggests a relationship. That relationship involves a spiritual vision, being responsible by being engaged in the life processes.

—Kimberly Blaeser

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# Editors' Notes

We were simultaneously humbled and buoyed to learn earlier this season of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets' vote to continue supporting *Verse Wisconsin* in our various endeavors. This continued financial gift means a very great deal to us, both from a business perspective and personally. And it got us thinking more about the nitty-gritty business side of things, and the very real benefits of partnerships.

No one gets into poetry publishing for the money. As you know, *Verse Wisconsin* has worked for the past two years to build the poetry community throughout the state, and beyond. To this end, we have managed to keep our subscriber base steady, while making sure that copies of *Verse Wisconsin* find their way to prisons, classrooms, festivals and conferences both around Wisconsin and further afield. For instance, we mailed 120 copies of the summer issue to the National Book Festival in Washington, DC, to be given away at the Wisconsin booth. More copies made their way to Reedsburg, Wisconsin to participate in the Fermentation Festival's "Farm Art DTour."

Though we fervently believe in sharing *Verse Wisconsin* at events such as these (and everything in between), it's true that no one pays for these free copies, nor the postage involved in shipping them. That is why a gift such as the WFOP's means so very much. It's this support that allows us to continue sharing the work of so many poets, so widely.

This past year, the Wisconsin Poet Laureate's funding was cut at the state level by Governor Scott Walker. For a while it was unclear what would happen to the position itself. Happily, the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters offered itself as a new home. Wisconsin will continue to have a Poet Laureate for the foreseeable future. We encourage you to support the Poet Laureate fund, and our homepage has the link to follow to make a contribution. (See pp. 20-21 for more on the Academy and the Poet Laureate.)

The short story? Nobody's got much money these days, and the arts often get depicted as an "extra," easy to cut. We're preaching to the choir when we say that there are many of us who know the value of a healthy, vibrant arts community. Economists can translate it into dollars, but we know the value of the arts goes beyond generated business, beyond attracting investments and workers. The arts encourage imagination, empathy, complex thinking. They take us out of our own mundane lives for a few minutes, an hour or an evening, restore something vital to our souls and remind us that we are, in the end, part of the larger picture, the infinitely vast fabric of life that has quilted this planet for millennia. Yup. That's what your ten or fifteen dollar donation—to us, to the PL fund, to your local theater troupe—does. Thank you.

Thanks to Judy Kolosso, CJ Muchhala & Alice Pauser for volunteer proofreading help. Lingering errors are, of course, the responsibility of *VW*'s editors.

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## Books Received May-August 2011

Publisher & author links available online

- Seth Abramson, *Northerners*, New Issues, Western Michigan U, 2011  
Ellen Wade Beals, Ed., *Solace, in So Many Words*, Weighed Words, 2011  
Richard Broderick, *Rain Dance*, Parallel Press, 2011  
Lynn Domina, *Framed in Silence*, Main Street Rag, 2011  
Moira Egan and Clarinda Harriss, Eds., *Hot Sonnets*, Entasis Press, 2011  
Fabu, *Journey to Wisconsin: African American Life in Haiku*, Parallel Press, 2011  
Richard Fein, *The Required Accompanying Cover Letter*, Parallel Press, 2011  
Jessica Goodfellow, *The Insomniac's Weather Report*, Three Candles Press, 2011  
Shelly L. Hall, *Alum*, Popcorn Press, 2011  
Scott King, Ed., *Perfect Dragonfly, A Commonplace Book of Poems Celebrating a Decade & a Half of Printing & Publishing at Red Dragonfly Press*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2011  
Kim Nelson, *Woman's Evolution*, Finishing Line Press, 2011  
Thomas R. Smith, *Wisconsin Spring, Poems and an Essay*, Lost Music Press, 2011  
Bianca Spriggs, *How Swallows Become Dragons*, Accents Publishing, 2011  
Jeanine Stevens, *Caught in Clouds*, Finishing Line Press, 2011  
Matthew Stolte, *D10J11Po* (Visual Poetry), eMTeVisPub #5, 2011  
Jeanie Tomasko, *Sharp as Want*, Art by Sharon Auberle, Little Eagle Press, 2011  
Marly Youmans, *The Throne of Psyche*, Mercer University Press, 2011

Submission guidelines can be found at [versewisconsin.org](http://versewisconsin.org). Please send us a review copy of your recently published book or chapbook! Join us on Facebook for announcements & news.

## Books Reviewed Online

- James Babbs, *Another Beautiful Night*, LuLu, 2010, by Ramona Davis  
Linda Benninghoff, *Whose Cries Are Not Music*, Lummo Press, 2011, by Julie L. Moore  
B.J. Best, *Birds of Wisconsin*, New Rivers Press, 2011, by Sarah Busse  
Richard Broderick, *Rain Dance*, Parallel Press, 2011, by Judy Barisonzi  
Julie Carr, *Sarah—Of Fragments and Lines*, Coffee House Press, 2010, by Sarah Busse  
Camille T. Dungy (ed.), *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry*, University of Georgia Press, by Wendy Vardaman  
Rebecca Dunham, *The Flight Cage*, Tupelo Press, 2010, Two  
Reviews: by Linda Aschbrenner, and by Sarah Busse  
Adam Halbur, *Poor Manners*, Ahadada Books, 2009, by Linda Aschbrenner  
Shelly L. Hall, *Alum*, Popcorn Press, 2011, by Zara Raab  
Tim Hunt, *Fault Lines*, The Backwaters Press, 2010, by Elmae Passineau  
Maggie Jaffe, *Flick(k)s*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2010, by Judy Barisonzi  
Allison Joseph, *My Father's Kites*, Steel Toe Books, 2010, by Melissa J. Lindstrum  
Noelle Kocot, *The Bigger World*, Wave Books, 2011, by Athena Kildegaard  
Caryn Mirriam-Goldbert, Marilyn L. Taylor, Denise Low, & Walter Bargaen, (eds.), *An Endless Skyway, Poetry from the State Poets Laureate*, Ice Cube Books, 2011, by Linda Aschbrenner  
Andrea Potos (ed.), *Love and Lust, an Anthology*, Parallel Press, 2011, by Zara Raab  
Chuck Rybak, *Tongue and Groove*, Main Street Rag, 2007, by Sarah Busse  
Edith Rylander, *Dance with the Darker Sister*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2010, by Linda Aschbrenner  
Nic Sebastian, *Forever Will End On Thursday*, Lordly Dish Nanopress, 2011, by Sherry Chandler  
David Scheler, *Casting for Meteors*, Finishing Line Press, 2011, by Mark Zimmermann  
Lynn Shoemaker, *A Catch in the Throat of Allah*, Parallel Press, 2010, by Kathleen Serley  
Martha Silano, *The Little Office of the Immaculate Conception*, Saturnalia, 2011, by David Graham  
Sandy Stark, *Counting on Birds*, Fireweed Press, 2010, by Sarah Busse  
Paul Terranova, *This Small Breathing Coincidence*, Parallel Press, 2011, by Lisa Vihos  
Jeanie Tomasko, *Sharp as Want*, Art by Sharon Auberle, Little Eagle Press, 2011, by Zara Raab  
Marine Robert Warden, *Beyond the Straits*, Presa Press, 2010, by Linda Aschbrenner  
Gail White, *The Accidental Cynic*, Prospero's World Press, 2009, by Susan McLean  
David Young, *Field of Light and Shadow, Selected and New Poems*, Alfred Knopf, 2010, by Alice D'Alessio  
Tracy S. Youngblom, *Driving to Heaven*, Parallel Press, 2010, Two  
Reviews: by Bobbi Altreuter, and by Linda Aschbrenner

## Unexpected Shiny Things

by Wisconsin Poet Laureate

Bruce Dethlefsen

Sixty-one

monday I crossed off cowboy  
tuesday fireman  
wednesday president  
thursday I couldn't find the list  
friday my own fishing show  
saturday catching for the cardinals  
sunday I took a nap  
sorry  
I had to  
the moons flew by too soon

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## Books Received January-April 2011

Publisher & author links available online

- Sherry Chandler, *Weaving a New Eden*, Wind Publications, 2011  
John Dubord, *The Marvelous Mister Toad* [children's book], Toadybooks Press, 2010  
Dave Etter, *Dandelions*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2010  
Eric Greinke, *Traveling Music*, Presa Press, 2011  
Eric Greinke, *The Potential of Poetry, Essays*, Presa Press, 2011  
Maggie Jaffe, *Flick(k)s*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2010  
Daniel Khalastchi, *Manolera*, Tupelo Press, 2011  
Noelle Kocot, *The Bigger World*, Wave Books, 2011  
James P. Lenfestey (ed.), *Low Down and Coming On: A Feast of Delicious and Dangerous Poems About Pigs*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2010  
Christina Lloyd, *Territories*, Finishing Line Press, 2011  
Dimitris Lyacos, trans. by Shorsha Sullivan, *Poena Damni 2213: Exit*, Shoestring Press, 2010  
Caryn Mirriam-Goldbert, Marilyn L. Taylor, Denise Low, & Walter Bargaen, (eds.), *An Endless Skyway, Poetry from the State Poets Laureate*, Ice Cube Books, 2011  
Richard W. Moyer, *58 Collected Poems*, Infinity, 2010  
Richard W. Moyer, *The Selected Poems*, Infinity, 2007  
Andrea Potos (ed.), *Love and Lust, an Anthology*, Parallel Press, 2011  
Edith Rylander, *Dance with the Darker Sister*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2010  
Nic Sebastian, *Forever Will End On Thursday*, Lordly Dish Nanopress, 2011  
Joyce Sutphen, *First Words*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2010  
Lester Smith (ed.), *The Hungry Dead*, Popcorn Press, 2010  
Paul Terranova, *This Small Breathing Coincidence*, Parallel Press, 2011  
Tony Trigilio, *Historic Diary*, BlazeVOX [books], 2011  
Marine Robert Warden, *Beyond the Straits*, Presa Press, 2010  
Diana Woodcock, *In the Shade of the Sidra Tree*, Finishing Line Press, 2010  
Timothy Young, *Herd of Bears Surround Us*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2010  
Tracy S. Youngblom, *Driving to Heaven*, Parallel Press, 2010  
Mishka Zakharin, *The Spleen of Fiery Dragons*, Infinity Publishing, 2010

## Hear the Sea From an Ear

When the girl that longed  
to go to the Ocean  
While listening to a conch  
hearing the sea  
Went to the Ocean at last  
and played on the beach  
And swam all day  
in the sound of the sounding surf  
Later at home miles away  
sound asleep on her bed  
If her dog or cat lies next to her  
and puts their ear near the girl's sleeping ear  
Do they hear the sea? Do they fall asleep  
near the sleeping girl's ear  
Lullaby'd by echo of surf—  
for aren't ears shells?  
Isn't the inner ear  
the same as the inner conch  
The way it curls from pink to darkness  
as it spirals around itself?  
And when the girl puts her ear to the shell  
and the echo of the sea from her ear  
Meets the echo of the sea from the shell  
do the two echoes become friends?

—ANTLER, MILWAUKEE, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## In a Rain I Hit Root

Sometimes I forget why I'm here,  
it being, for one, to mop contents  
of a newly bought bottle of Woolite—

its top not on tight—promptly dropped.  
But all's right, far from life's last  
mishap, groundwater no worse off

when, through a bit of ingenuity  
and engineering on a shirt box,  
I scraped, scooped, sent soap

on a slow though slick descent  
to the wastewater treatment plant that,  
as if studying a turned back clock,

I've thought about a lot of late,  
thought on the walk I take  
of a route I used to jog with the dog.

The dog's gone, wrapped in a green  
fitted sheet three feet down  
where near dawn in a rain I hit root.

Sometimes I remember why I'm here  
when I'm there, mud up to my ankles,  
just off the path back of the house,

seeing Wade, brow hidden by his bowed head,  
shuffling toward, cradling that green bundle.  
Surely it's not shame turning me again

from this recurring rain of grief,  
but that morning we did not hug,  
we did not touch, as though to do so

might undermine an unspoken belief  
whatever a son is tall enough to carry  
a father ought not but shallow bury.

—KARL ELDER, HOWARDS GROVE, WI

## Conch Shell Filled With Snow

Little did the conch on the Ocean floor  
Know or comprehend after its death  
It'd be washed up on a shore  
(never heard or saw one)  
And have an echo  
(never heard or saw one)  
A human child would hear  
(never heard or saw one)  
On a terrestrial sphere  
(never heard or saw one)  
Where winter would come  
and on a picnic table  
on a cottage patio  
facing Lake Michigan  
it would rest  
pink opening facing upward  
completely filled with snow.  
When you put your ear  
to the conch filled with snow  
you can still hear  
the echo  
filtered through the designs  
of each flake.  
Scatter purple thistle seeds  
on the snow around the shell  
and in the pink opening  
so goldfinches come to feast  
in the aura of the echo.  
How many birds ever heard  
the echo of the sea  
from a conch shell  
filled with snow?

—ANTLER, MILWAUKEE, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

# Musings of an Eco Poet

by Jeff Poniewaz

I grew up on the working class South Side of Milwaukee on “a block where the sidewalk ends.” Right across the street from where I lived was a grimy building where trains underwent repair and maintenance. All through my childhood that building and an oil-marred parking lot for semis existed side-by-side with a field that ran along the top of bluffs overlooking what we kids called “the crick.”

I often went to the field alone and looked under rocks for grass snakes while grasshoppers hopped and dragonflies flew around me, and down to “the crick” to look for turtles or mudpuppies. Even then, the good smell of all the green growing from the field on down the bluffs became, as you got close to “the crick,” tainted with the combined smell of sewer gas and gasoline. A few years later I learned “the crick” was the Kinnickinnic River. In 1997 it was formally designated one of America’s most endangered rivers.

I wrote my first poem when I was 14. Titled “Escape,” it began with a series of observations of sad aspects of city life. Inspired by the wilds I glimpsed during my family’s annual August week vacation “up north” near Eagle River, my poem ended:

Distant valley and teeming streams  
Pave the way for comely dreams  
Of lands untarnished, free of stain,  
That vanish thoughts of earthly gain.  
In the midst a shout of glee:  
“Here at last a place for me!”

This fledgling poem foreshadowed my eventual intense love of wilderness, and of Nature in general. “Pave” was the fledgling poet’s awkward word choice considering its steamroller connotation, but it ironically foreshadowed the fact that a year later my boyhood home was torn down to make way for the I-94 freeway.

My attraction to wild Nature really took off when I became friends with Antler, who also felt “the call of the wild.” Over the years we explored ever wilder wilds: from Kettle Moraine to Upper Peninsula Michigan to the Quetico canoe wilderness of Ontario to the mountains of Colorado and California. Our love of Nature grew alongside our love of Poetry. And so it was only natural that Nature figured frequently and prominently in the poems we loved by others as well as in the poems we ourselves came to write.

Nature and the environment loomed large in my Poets-in-the-Schools visits to high schools and junior highs across Wisconsin during the 1970s. A surefire way to coax kids into poetry was to read them a variety of animal poems by a variety of poets with a variety of styles and then ask them to write an animal poem of their own and bring it to our next day’s class meeting. I carried my poetry books and show-and-tell items from classroom to classroom in the same backpack I used on wilderness adventures.

I’m often referred to as an eco poet, but I write poems on all the other subjects poets write about and am open to whatever kind of poem wants me to write it. Eco poems just came to me with increasing frequency. All poets write about what they love and what interests them. Well, I dearly love and am completely fascinated by this planet and its plethora of life-sustaining biodiversity. The more I learned about the environment the more I became concerned about and focused on it—and the more eco poems I found myself writing, realizing this isn’t just another subject in the spectrum of subjects but rather an urgent planetary emergency situation.

By “eco poem” I mean any poem that honors, praises, celebrates, explores or enhances our appreciation of, some aspect(s) of the natural world or the natural world in general. “Eco poem” can also mean a poem that confronts some environmental problem or comes to the defense of some part of the natural world or the natural world in general. A good example of the first kind would be Wendell Berry’s “The Peace of Wild Things.” A good example of the second kind would be Allen Ginsberg’s “Friday the Thirteenth,” written a month before the first Earth Day:

What prayer restores freshness to eastern meadow, soil to  
cindered acres, hemlock to rusty hillside,  
transparency to Passaic streambed, Blue whale multitudes  
to coral gulfs . . .  
Earth pollution identical with Mind pollution,  
consciousness pollution identical with filthy sky . . .  
What can Poetry do . . . when 60% State Money goes to heaven  
on gas clouds burning off War Machine Smokestacks?

## Kinnickinnic River Elegy

Behold the Kinnickinnic River K-Mart  
sprung up along the Kinnickinnic River  
I sprung up along in the post-war ‘40s.  
Behold the Kinnickinnic River K-Mart  
that killed the Kinnickinnic Riverbank wilderness  
vestige I played in as a child and boy,  
the field with creek cutting through it  
across Chase Avenue from the field where  
the carnival sprang up for a week each spring.  
Behold the Kinnickinnic River K-Mart  
that along with the Freeway and Freeway Industrial Park  
hogtied and crucified the little that was left of  
the wilderness that was this place, the K-Mart  
that paved the banks of the Kinnickinnic River  
so it wouldn’t flood the basements  
of the built-too-near houses  
of the workingclass South Side  
and would more truly resemble  
the open sewer it had become.  
Behold the Kinnickinnic River K-Mart  
I unthinkingly walked into this afternoon  
(while my father waited for me in his car)  
to buy myself blue flannel pajamas from China,  
100% cotton for \$10.95, while mothers & fathers  
half my age walk the aisles of merchandise  
with little offshoots of themselves in tow,  
loading them aboard the little endangered species  
merry-go-round outside the K-Mart entrance.  
Every item of merchandise inside that K-Mart,  
including my pajamas from China, killed  
the Kinnickinnic Riverbank ecosystem.  
The whole planet fast turning into one vast K-Mart.

©JEFF PONIEWAZ, 1983

## Message from the Deep

Strolling the shore of Lake Michigan  
I discover a cuneiform tablet  
hieroglyph'd with fossilized  
remains of tiny lives, shell lives,  
clams smaller than my little-finger nail  
embedded side-by-side,  
tossed up by Lake Michigan  
knowing I needed it, some special miracle  
to re-alert me to the miracle of Life,  
this tablet the size of my hand  
not "Thou Shalt Not"s lightning'd  
by biblical epic special effects,  
this tablet written by the only God there is,  
this tablet written in shell language  
tinged with rust-color'd sand,  
all-in-all in my hand, this gift from the Sea,  
this sea-whispered-me geological whisper,  
this whisper-echo of the conic Earth,  
this heirloom from greatgreatGrandmother Earth,  
this oracular telegram from the Deep,  
this Deep Image washed up to my feet  
as if directed specifically to me,  
this many-million-year memento  
from the ocean that was here  
before Lake Michigan existed,  
this enigma this ancient rune  
this cosmos mandala this inevitable whatever-it-is,  
this rosetta-stone translating the past  
into the present and present into the past,  
this wordless dignity, this compact cemetery  
of lives whose tombstones are more immortal  
than the tombstones of humankind.

©JEFF PONIEWAZ, 1987

that tackles environmental issues on the grounds that poetry should be a process of discovering what words come through you, not of putting preconceived sentiments into words. Some even dismiss it as a form of propaganda, even though they may agree with the sentiments expressed. All I can say is: I don't start out wanting to write a poem on a particular aspect of the environmental crisis and then try to come up with words to express my feelings about it. I'm just intensely focused on environmental matters, and therefore such poems just come to me. When I write them down, I feel as much a rush of spontaneous inspiration as any poet feels writing about any other subject.

Then there's the charge of "preaching to the choir." Of course, ideally Nature poems would be heard/read by and beneficially affect those who don't love Nature, just as ideally poems in general would be heard/read by and beneficially affect those who don't love poetry. You just have to beam what you have to say in the best poetry the muses deign to bless you with and let those beams fall where they may. Besides, even if eco poems were only "preaching to the choir" (and I do think they're more than that), that's important too, because the choir needs its spirits lifted—needs anything that can cheer them up when they get discouraged because the transformation to an eco-friendly civilization isn't happening fast enough or sufficiently enough.

Some poetry aficionados begrudge the acceptability of the second kind of eco poem, dismiss such poems as polemical or, worse, sermonizing. Some of Allen's poems are sutras—the Buddhist word for sermon—as in his "Sunflower Sutra." As someone who sat through countless horribly boring sermons when I was growing up Catholic, I wish I had ever heard sermons as moving and beautiful as "Sunflower Sutra" and "Who Be Kind To."

Some object to eco poetry

Poets have been in the vanguard of every compassionate progressive enlightenment cause. They are catalysts of the positive evolution of human consciousness. Shelley said poets were the "unacknowledged legislators of the world," and I'd say they're doing a better job than the official legislators who court the bribes of lobbyists. Poets were in the vanguard of opposition to the Vietnam War. Any poem against war is an eco poem when you consider that war inflicts many of the most drastic environmental impacts. Poets were in the vanguard of eco-consciousness, and still are.

Beat poets were in the vanguard of cetacean appreciation. At the legendary 1955 Six Gallery reading at which Ginsberg read "Howl" for the first time, Michael McClure read his poem denouncing the machine-gunning of a hundred orcas by bored GIs stationed off the coast of Iceland. And amid his zany poem "Marriage," in his 1960 book *The Happy Birthday of Death*, Gregory Corso tossed off these lines:

And when the mayor comes to get my vote tell him  
When are you going to stop people killing whales!

In 1974 Gary Snyder's Pulitzer Prize winning *Turtle Island* came out with many now classic eco poems, including "Prayer for the Great Family" and "Mother Earth, Her Whales." The latter, written while attending the UN Environmental Conference in Sweden in 1972, praised the whales:

The whales turn and glisten, plunge  
and sound and rise again, ...  
Flowing like breathing planets  
in the sparkling whorls of  
living light

but also indicted the rampaging human impact, not only on the whales but on the environment in general. He alluded to the mercury poisoning via fish eaten in the city of Minamata, which hit the news that same year, 1972:

And Japan quibbles for words on  
what kinds of whales they can kill?  
A once-great Buddhist nation  
dribbles methyl mercury  
like gonorrhea  
in the sea.

Amid an old-age love poem he wrote to his wife titled "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," William Carlos Williams held a flower up to the atom bomb and later in the poem declared:

Every drill  
driven into the earth  
for oil enters my side  
also.

How powerful and prophetic those words in the aftermath of the BP Gulf oil disaster, as they were after the Exxon-Valdez. Dr. Williams felt the wounds being inflicted on the planet, which were and still are far worse than the "pain at the pump" so bemoaned in the news nowadays. His empathy with the Earth foreshadowed a "Deep Ecology" concept expressed by Gary Snyder and others: the need to identify so closely with some wild place or species that one feels its suffering and becomes the voice of what is unable to speak on its own behalf in our legislatures and courts.

Williams' "Asphodel" poem was published in 1955, the year Ginsberg wrote "Howl" with its comparable confrontation of The Bomb and lines such as:

Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! . . . Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks! . . . Moloch whose fate is a cloud of sexless hydrogen!

To those who deny that rants can be great poetry, I say: tell it to Ginsberg's "Howl" and "America." "Howl" is the cry of our mammal soul caught in the steel-jaw trap of the military-industrial complex. Poets sometimes need to express themselves in outcries of outrage and not just in psalms of praise.

As Czeslaw Milosz said in a poem he wrote in Poland after World War II:

What is poetry which does not save  
Nations or people?  
A connivance with official lies . . .

Somebody said that poetry doesn't save the world. I disagree. I think every poem saves the world to some extent. Milosz meant that among all the poems that all a nation's poets are writing, there ought to be some that respond to war and injustice in all their forms, whether between peoples or between humans and the rest of the Natural World. If it's okay for some poems to be frivolous or totally unintelligible, it's certainly okay for some poems to spring eloquently to the defense of what needs to be defended.

To those who object to "political poetry," I say: tell it to Lorca weeping over New York from the top of the Chrysler Building, lamenting the Hudson River "drunk on oil" seven decades before a hijacked plane full of jet fuel followed the Hudson to the World Trade Center. To those who'd deny that eco poems that tackle environmental issues are truly poems, I say: okay then, don't call them "poems." Maybe they're a new genre: eco-poetic wake-up calls. Whether you grant they're poems or not, they're saying something that urgently needs to be said: clearly, eloquently, powerfully, poetically. Such poems can be poorly

or well written, inspired or not, just like poems on any other subject or in any other mode.

Coming right after the poems in *Turtle Island* is Snyder's seminal eco-essay "Four Changes," which he had first published anonymously in 1969. In it he called for a "revolution of consciousness" which "will be won not by guns but by seizing the key images, myths, archetypes, eschatologies, and ecstasies so that life won't seem worth living unless one's on the transforming energy's side." What he invoked was a nonviolent Ecological Revolution that could provide an antidote to the malignant aspects of the Industrial Revolution. Thoreau fired the first nonviolent, non-gun shot of the Ecological Revolution, not on Concord Bridge but at Walden Pond. It burst into full flower with the first Earth Day in 1970, in the wake of which many dynamic environmental groups were formed.

John Muir, Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson were catalysts of that revolutionary love of the Earth that could save the world. And so were many poets. Though I'm open to the full spectrum of possible subjects, as it becomes more and more urgent to respond to the environmental crisis, I'll never refuse the Eco Muse. May more and more poets help inspire the love of the Earth that could save the world! It was never more "now or never" than it is now, and it gets more "Now or Never!" with each passing day.



Between 1989 and 2009 Jeff Poniewaz taught a course he devised called "Literature of Ecological Vision" via UW-Milwaukee. His 1986 book *Dolphin Leaping in the Milky Way* won a PEN Discovery Award. Allen Ginsberg praised it for its "impassioned prescient ecological Whitmanesque/Thoreauvian verve and wit." "Message from the Deep" and "Kinnickinnic River Elegy" are included in Jeff's chapbook *Polish for Because*, which can be ordered for \$6 (plus \$2 postage & handling) made payable to Inland Ocean Books, P.O. Box 11502, Milwaukee, WI 53211.

The full-length version of this essay, along with more prose about ecopoetry, can be read online at [versewisconsin.org](http://versewisconsin.org).

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## Instructions Found After the Flood

Let the red fox quicken the seasons.  
Let the zebra buck and clatter in the cage of his skin.  
Leave the glass lagoons to the blue heron, whose eye is steady.  
Let jungles whisper jaguar, whose paw is velvet.  
Let the worm explore the globe, his apple.  
Let the spider embroider the air.  
Let tongue and belly be called reptile.  
Let the bat acrobats tumble till dawn.  
Let the lowly slug pearl the footpaths of Asia Minor.  
Let seagulls snow down the harbors of the East.  
Let the panther surround the quiet panic she has made.  
Let the hippos squat and the antelope lope.  
Let the rhino bully the bush.  
Let the turtle be.  
Let the snail nod in the hush of her mushroom room.  
Leave the deserts to the one- and the two-humped emperors.  
Let the black kite brown the morning mustard fields.  
Leave afternoons for music, the bees drilling in the lindens.  
Let owls be your night lanterns, geese your compass,  
skunks your caution.

—J. PATRICK LEWIS, WESTERVILLE, OH

## Town Criers

In the evenings  
the Town Criers gathered.  
From their vantage points  
concealed in wetlands,  
ponds and marshes,  
frogs and toads send shrill peeps,  
gruff croaks and grunts  
calling through the night.  
They are the stewards of the land,  
these amphibians,  
whose piercing chorus splits the dark.

In the evenings,  
new dwellers gather now  
within a gated space.  
From your vantage points  
beside cemented pools  
or on patios of country clubs,  
when you hear only the surrounding silence,  
will you know what it means?

—PEG SHERRY, MADISON, WI

## The Prairie Tonight

I can feel it sighing from here—  
collecting the rain like coins in a jar,  
enjoying the delicate slapping on its leaves:  
all black and orange  
reflecting the light from windows nearby.

Trails melt back into the grasses,  
tired of being penciled in.  
Frogs restlessly bring the ponds to a boil:  
tadpoles ripple beneath like drops of ink.

And from some unknown corner  
my blue heron steps out, sliding his feet into the water,  
shrugging his wings up around him like a trenchcoat.

—ELIZABETH COOK, MADISON, WI

## Reappraisal

They say we have no view.  
Assessors come in summer  
when birch and beech  
canopy the swamp below  
and wetland beauties hide  
from all but rugged hikers.  
But each October when the leaves  
let go, we see a high rim from our prow  
of windows. The horizon spreads to hills  
on either side of famed Niagara bluffs  
that make a doorway in Lake Michigan.  
Our land was once a bay  
before the Great Lakes were named.  
We know because the water left  
its calling cards of caves and fossils.  
Now it harbors only forest creatures,  
teems with browns of bark and deer  
greens of pine and hemlock,  
greys of limestone  
carved by water long ago  
to form an ample bowl.  
And having seen the winter rim,  
we always feel the presence  
of that long curve  
beyond the trees.

—ESTELLA LAUTER, FISH CREEK, WI

## Sitting at a Window on the Lakefront in December

Mendota's waves slush sluggishly by with the burden of ice.  
Steam rises and runs over the water towards the shore,  
like a marathon of ghosts that dissipates before the finish.  
Time could be moving at a million miles a minute,  
but not here, where it's run by the slow  
hypnotic sway of the waves. The sky's deceptively blue.  
A couple of seagulls struggle in the subzero winds.  
They should've gotten out of here by now. I should've too.  
A few brown leaves linger in the trees. Like them, I'm stuck,  
late for work, because my car doors are frozen shut,  
waiting for the starting gun of the rising sun  
to go off and defrost.  
I go to my car, prop the passenger door open,  
slide to the driver's side, and turn the key. The car won't run.

—JOEY GOODALL, ST. PAUL, MN  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Bridge

Your river is wide and braided with sand,  
isles and eagles, ice floes and snow—  
and only one passage across.

I face you like a firing squad each night—  
you with your cone of oncoming cars and massive trucks.  
Whose unflinching wheel will I meet  
halfway across?

But *you*, it is not you who chooses sides.  
You hold both sides as best you can—green ribbon of steel,  
unspooled across this wide expanse.

You are a fretwork of iron and grace,  
so quietly here and becoming  
only in solitude  
a harp, a song, a swirled shell  
in the wind's hand.

I think of this when your mouth  
organ opens at the edge of the night,  
when a train of cars behind me growls at my pace,  
and I scan your current cargo for a truck.

It's then I try imagining your song,  
ignoring that which lies behind, ahead, and noticing  
only you. But there is no music yet.

You wait for the last car to disembark, to disappear.  
You wait for the clear air and then you wait  
for the emptiness between the stars: just space *now* and dark enough  
to sing.

—MARY MERCIER, MADISON, WI

## The Grip Of Snow And Ice

There are nine trumpeter swans persevering on a nearby pond.  
In the bitter cold, I could freeze the image for later warmth.  
A frozen lake lies on one side of the road,  
spring fed open water on the other. I locate half  
a parking spot, where winter drift conceals a sloping ditch.  
I pull forward, sliding, to where snow and ice can claim me.

I don't like getting stuck. "Cars aren't always superior to sleds,"  
I tell my freeloading dogs, half-wishing they could pull me free.  
Rocking the car, teased by the frugality of motion, gives false hope.  
A kind woman driving past stops and says,  
"My daughter drove off this road into the lake.  
Lucky it was frozen. The county should do something about it."

Stuck! I don't like getting stuck. Did I already say that?  
The county should do something about it.

At least they could put up a sign.

*CAUTION: DON'T DRIVE INTO THE LAKE*

But I need another kind of sign.

*CAUTION: CLEAR THE COBWEBS OUT OF YOUR BRAIN*

When I take my pictures, the snow white swans  
are all gripped by the snow white ice.

It's like the cold air is pushing their long necks  
and slender heads tight to the tops of their bodies.

*CAUTION: IF YOU ARE A SWAN, MAYBE YOU SHOULD  
CONSIDER FLYING SOUTH FOR THE WINTER*

My hands were cold, the pictures without distinction.

*CAUTION: NATURE MAY NOT PERFORM ON REQUEST*

A good man with a pickup truck and chain  
rescued me from my signless bog in the nick of time,  
before I was forced to abandon my sled  
and eat my dogs. I shook his hand a little too hard.

*CAUTION: A MAN WHO SHAKES YOUR HAND  
TOO VIGOROUSLY MAY BE  
SHAKING OFF THE GRIP OF SNOW AND ICE.*

The county would never put up that sign.

Way too many words. Someone might  
drive into the lake just trying to read it.

—JIM PRICE, DRESSER, WI

## Arabella at the Bird Mound

She nestles in the wing-curve  
of the effigy mound  
as twilight falls,  
still as death  
while her husband calls.

She'll answer soon  
but not just yet.  
Fireflies are flitting,  
the grass is wet,  
evening dew settling equally  
on the ground, the ancient mound,  
and on her.

If she could just drink a quench of dew,  
salt her eyes with a sprinkle of stars,  
inhale the exhalations of a mountain bog.

In her heart, the hubbub of the heronry  
at hatching time—  
sea wrack and driftwood, frogs and toads,  
voles and minnows,  
dragonflies, jet-black crows.

She does not know why at dusk  
the fibers of herself go so alarmingly slack.

Now he has a flashlight from the truck,  
a beam of light piercing the dark,  
a lighthouse beacon sweeping  
the saltwater cove.

She rises, preens her dress's folds,  
answers at last,  
striding barefoot across  
the cold, wet grass.

She is what he seeks;  
he who she consoles,  
confused and baffled in his bulk  
of bone and flesh.

His arm around her,  
a cloak, a curtain, a screen,  
his muscles strong  
as rope.

—TIMOTHY WALSH, MADISON, WI

## Birds, Wintering

Fat breasted doves bob  
on wires strung from yard to yard.  
They teeter, tails up,  
heads down, tails down, heads up,  
until the lines are stilled.

Barred owls, wing shadows  
circling wide and slow,  
scour the soybean fields for mice.  
All things colored in earth tones,  
brown and rust, ochre and cream.

Frenzied starlings pluck  
and swallow, ingest lipids  
from dogwood berries,  
food sought by migrating birds.  
But starlings refuse to leave.

—ANNA BELLAMY LUCAS, MADISON, IN

## Winter Crows

They are impatient, pacing  
in their silken topcoats,  
and eyeing the snow field  
picked clean as a martyr's skull.

They've spent the brief winter day  
discussing Lizzie Borden's funeral  
arrangements, and now it is darkening.  
But in July, the green corn

will be endless, and there will be only one  
mad painter, with only one ear left,  
to hear their wings  
scythe the air.

—RICHARD HEDDERMAN, WAUWATOSA, WI

## Wait for Spring

In January the unburied dead  
Stacked in their coffins  
God knows where  
Wait for spring.

So, don't hurry.  
Watch the squirrels and the cardinal.  
Let the aide wheel you down to the atrium  
Where sun pours through high windows  
And visitors come in, stomping off their boots.

Sip from your mug.  
Breathe deeply.  
Sleep soundly.  
Call me daughter.  
Wait for spring.

—ESTER PRUDLO, FITCHBURG, WI & MONTGOMERY, AL

## One... or The Other

*Anyone who spends time around them knows  
how feisty and pugnacious hummingbirds are, and if they were  
much larger we'd probably be in trouble if we got in their way.*

— Ohio Department of Natural Resources

*One:* Of hummingbirds,  
loveliest of the summer,  
beauty of the free  
flying within the space  
of their so little life,  
I sing.

Wanderers of  
the very clear, clean,  
purpose of the  
nature of themselves...

*The Other:* ... pugnacious wee ones,  
battering and battling  
down a course of sure intent  
to displace, turf, and set upon,  
launch against and fight,  
no respite. If they were big  
as life...

## Hummingbird

“... my child a gift, a grace of short measure.”

The large cage of my garage holds you puzzled.  
Always before up has equaled out.  
Again and again you bump your muzzled  
will against the hard cloud of ceiling, route-

wrong, though my grief wills you home. A bouquet  
meant for the guest room all I can think to try—  
something of your world, scent and sway,  
I hope will lead you past panic to your life.

Resting on wires for the electric  
door opener are your precise, small parts:  
folded parasol of wings, needle beak,  
smallest motor of your heart.

So like the child once caught in a hospital  
room. And for the next hour I move the vase  
from car to garbage can to ladder's tall-  
est tread because I could not save the baby.

My fear: so slight a life will spend all  
its energy trying to get out. Then  
after endless bumbling, you find the wall  
of air and are gone for home again.

—PAULA SCHULZ, SLINGER, WI  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

*One:* ... the very miracle  
and mystery of it,  
the perfect touch of  
splendor upon the landscape life of it;  
the glory burnished in  
the zuzzun flight of it...

*The Other:* ... the nastiness of beak,  
the proboscis most ferocious,  
the tune and tenor of a fractious flight  
— all worthy of a bad child's  
book of beasts.

In this our time,  
they are a hot pepper warning  
to our kind; nasty little warriors,  
with their snarled habits  
running down the heart's  
cramped flow.

*One:* Come now.  
Some things are better left  
to the unspoken,  
and to the forever caught  
of the forever flying  
in time's hover;

the way the hummer  
stays itself in stilly flight,  
a beauty—

*The Other:* — or aggression's ugly truth.

—BARBARA LIGHTNER, MILWAUKEE, WI

## Their season together

The pair of pelicans  
swiftly skim the surface  
of the calm Gulf seas,

holding their wingspans  
rigidly horizontal,  
as they soar along

in perfect sync with  
each other in search for  
fish for their offspring;

they rise up together  
riding high  
on the warm thermals,

the male of the two  
dives down,  
plunging into the water;

resurfacing to the top,  
stuck in the muck  
of our crude oil mess.

The female circles  
around and around,  
seeing the struggle below,

finally, she seals her fate  
by diving down  
to join her troubled mate.

—CHARLES PORTOLANO, FOUNTAIN HILLS, AZ

## History VI

wrens are kings  
*los hacendados*  
rule the woods  
cardinals scarlet  
knights slashing snow-  
tapestries over pines  
gone in the winds  
no one knows  
who I am  
briefly  
been

—ROBERT SCHULER, MENOMONIE, WI

## The eagle in the red pine watches

The eagle in the red pine watches  
two fishermen on opposite sides  
of the Rainbow Flowage feel a tug  
on their lines

A thirty-inch Northern  
its sides flashing in sunlight

They don't realize that they are fighting  
the same fish

who leaps high above the roiling water  
spits both hooks and disappears  
into the rapids near the rocks

—ALAYNE PETERSON, GREENBUSH, WI

## We Gave You to the Wind

You did not break the string  
but when we let it run  
you bounded for the clouds  
with such joy we vowed  
we would not reel you in,  
you would not feel a tug.

We gave you to the wind,  
Mother, let you soar—  
stick, string, bones, flesh,  
offered to a gust for ferrying  
to where, presumably, your  
life began and ran to.

We did not cling to you.  
Would you have wanted  
that? We each thought not,  
your one foot always  
stepping off the earth, the  
other thinly rooted here.

I miss you, though it's hard  
to grasp vapor. Sometimes,  
briefly, I feel your hand on  
my forehead. Rarely, you  
call my name. Actually, that's  
plenty, Mother. Thank you.

—GEORGIA RESSMEYER, SHEBOYGAN, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## The Breath of Houses

The breath of houses is often sweet.  
Sometimes, at dusk, they exhale

a waft of laundry, baking, woodsmoke.  
A lone walker sees through their lit windows

a family at table, an old man reading,  
a woman kneeling to lay logs in a fireplace,

a middle-schooler practicing the piano.  
The walker sees her own breath on the air.

At nightfall other people's lives seem so inviting,  
so untroubled, so secure. Although perhaps

the girl stumbling through a tinny "Für Elise"  
is losing herself the only way she knows how.

The old man is reading his oncology report.  
The woman kneeling has quarreled with her son

and has arthritis in her hands, which hurt.  
The husband texted his lover before dinner.

Still, the central heating purrs. Meals occur.  
There is milk. There are beds to sleep in

and clean clothes, in these our only,  
our miraculous, our onion-scented homes.

—CATHERINE JAGOE, MADISON, WI

## Home

is the next threshold  
Useful for rotating art  
For changing bathroom tiles  
For constant cleaning

Evanescence four walls  
and multiple beds  
A storage place for memories  
A haven of possibility  
A faulty refuge from terror

It is a declaration  
Permanent as a cloud  
Swayable as subway straps  
As grasping hands swing  
at each stop or  
sudden start.

—E. O. LIPCHIK, MILWAUKEE, WI

Worms threaded themselves,  
Through the clay in my garden,  
Small excavators.

—WENDY SCHMIDT, MADISON, WI

## Birdbath

Tonight, you chat as you splash,  
so pleased to break away,  
away from the thicket,  
beyond branches and brush,

far from the forest  
and the tiresome back and forth,  
to this basin. Your bib beads  
with water, your black cap drips

as you dip, and while you bathe,  
your body pitches with pleasure.

*Dee-dee-dee*, you whistle.  
Your feathers flutter, carefree

you call, *chick-a-dee-dee-dee!*

Tonight, you escape  
gaping beaks  
for a moment or two.

—JEANNIE E. ROBERTS, CHIPPEWA FALLS, WI  
*visit VW Online for audio & more work by this author*

## One Bird Flapping

One bird flapping outside the window  
Of a high rise apartment  
Music desperately contained in one room  
Where nearby the train whistles  
Restless in the morning sun rays  
While cars crisscross the matrix of streets

I am not wrong.

It matters that I stand in relation to the prism  
The city high in the air  
The sky with fair weather  
Coffee in my steady hand  
Steam lifts the landscape  
Busses are regular  
Across the hills so green

While the sun glints the freeway  
An immigrant is in his room  
Noting the bronze décor  
Slowly slips on a white sock on the left foot  
The tea steams to hold up the morning air  
Last night's mahjong game is still fresh in mind

Someone won, someone lost  
Someone's room inflates, another's deflates

—KUN WUN, SEATTLE, WA

## Basket Case

She's going to hell  
in a balloon of hot air, staring down  
at the ants on the ground,  
the pound of palms  
on the edge of the basket.  
Sandbags filled with bottles and pills  
drag her down, up,  
her heart on her tongue, with her fire  
above, and her rapture beneath.

Aerial earthquakes shake  
away her thoughts,  
leaving the liquid thirsty in her head--  
misplaced, this brain,  
this crane, dominion.

—NICHOLE RUED, WISCONSIN RAPIDS, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Window Strike

I picked up another one, this time a Hermit Thrush  
or was it a Wood? The dapples point to the first,  
splotches of here and there that assist in survival

but not against  
windows.

Not the first, nor the last. Soft in my hands, warmed by the sun  
a loaf from the oven ready for the dinner table. No invitation necessary.  
No formal attire, no knives or forks. Let the mandibles, the decomposing saliva  
do their work. Free meal for heaven and earth.

The skulls of others rest on my cabinet, directly above mythology and fairy tales.  
I just honored two more: a goldfinch and a redstart. Last year was a house sparrow who  
now resides on an empty bottle of Amontillado.

The sizes of the skulls haunt me, splotches of here and there.

The thrush now rests, neck snapped and beak bloodied, under a cluster of shrubs.  
She fades in recesses of the dying sunburst leaves, amongst the mandibles and decomposing saliva.

One eye shut, one open.

I felt it important to keep her open eye upward, black as pitch but reflecting what is above.  
Time ticks past the wren, now the bluebird and blackbird  
and onto meadowlark to complete the cycle.  
The thrush is no longer keeping time.

She will join the mythology as winter approaches, after heaven and earth.

—JAMES REITTER, SHEBOYGAN, WI

## The Moth

And when we returned  
And the dark and dank collided  
With the timeless light of buzzing  
Florescent tubes above honeycomb screens  
Mottled by the litter of summer's excess

And when we returned to  
Our unlit, unvented home  
Stale with the garlic, onions, and curry  
Last cooked the night before we left  
And we left our home available  
For an unexpected guest

And when we returned  
And returned light and air  
With a shuddering leap and frantic flight  
Powder wings, sticky feet and all  
Hurtled intermittently at you

And when I thought I had halted its flight  
And signaled the all clear  
And when we returned to our normal life  
Out from the dust bunnies erupted our dun guest  
Sputtering abruptly in an abortive leap  
Landing quick in the dark beneath the chair

And when I went again to halt its life  
And searched in the dark and shadow  
Swatting bat blind with a hand towel  
Stooped supplicant before the chair, a  
Slight shadow arced fretfully behind

—SEAN BUTNER, GREEN BAY, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## On My Daughter Falling Asleep While Gripping My Shirt

Her fabric-filled hand holds fast  
grasps the front of my shirt as she falls  
into sleep. Why can't we leap into sleep?  
Or climb and find ourselves  
exposed on the great face of Everest  
where I am the legendary Sherpa, Tenzig Norgay  
lying alert at 29,000 oneiric feet?

Even in this thin breath  
the central air (set in the seventies  
for the summer) threatens to blow us off  
the mattress—sheets, pillows, bedframe  
crashing down toward base camp, a dream  
avalanche smothering crampons and rope  
house pets encased in gortex cocoons.

Extreme heights call for extreme care  
an anchored heart keen to hang  
upside down from the firmament  
so when you save your little Edmund Hillary  
she will glimpse your hands above her  
reaching down, amazingly, *toward* the clouds  
to pluck her from a crevasse of clamor, cold monsters.

I have things to do on the world's first floor—  
write poems, read books, map out the treacherous terrain  
professed to excess in my other life as a guide  
pay bills, craft lists, check the silent boxscores of games  
played in distant time zones, open my pores  
to the news of men who leave other men  
to die and petrify while racing to their own summits—

yet here, upstairs, sleeping child to my chest  
high on the mountain of the east people  
I am Tenzig Norgay, who at this height  
ascends to patron saint of parenthood  
moving wide awake through adult life at altitude  
mere feet from a canopy of nightlight-cast galaxies  
conqueror of bad dream edema.

The rewards of the summit come easy  
but dropping down, the descent into nightmare  
is a guide's true work, earned inch by shuffled inch  
over archetypal fears deliberate as glaciers  
in their upheaval. Child, you will lift the snow's eyelids  
and walk into the pitched sleep of warm tents  
you will dream the warm tea you have yet to taste.

—CHUCK RYBAK, ONEIDA, WI

## A Watched Pot

At times I am an egg in a pot,  
submerged in the screams of a child,  
sometimes more than one child.  
In the crying heat I feel  
my agitated atoms begin to shake  
their rattles at the wolves of wild fever,  
the gargoyles of pus-pouring ears,  
night terrors begetting terrors.  
In the bubbling dark of steaming screams you  
learn matter without mortar, what seemed  
a sealed border, a wall, widens enough  
for a legion of you's to file through,  
armed to the clenched teeth in a lawless state.  
There, boiling, the unthinkable  
confides in you like an old friend,  
borrows your voice to say I understand now  
how a parent pounds their child, shaking  
*shut up I love you shut up I love you*  
until molecules hush.  
Stable, cradled peace.  
For a moment this all makes sense,  
as clear as a commandment from the old God:  
*Thou shalt keep your children quiet.*  
But that is just the mind bouncing  
in its thin shell, the jostle and tap  
against the pot's conductive metal.  
Minus all this meditation the physics are basic:  
I boil quick and hard and through,  
so when you peel my skin  
I retain my human shape.

—CHUCK RYBAK, ONEIDA, WI

Air fern grows in glass  
on laminated table  
Dirt-stained green carpet

—ELLARAINÉ LOCKIE, SUNNYVALE, CA  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Mountain Man

Hiding in the crags of my being,  
warmed by the silt of its caves,  
a new upheaval of raw earth unlikely  
as a shadow crosses the face of the mountain  
on her way to bed.

—TIM HAWKINS, ROCKFORD, MI

## The Museum of Gradual Decay

Nobody comes to visit us  
the way they used to,  
to admire the great ruins of our kitchen table,  
the fallen-down-at-the-center counters,  
the ash of piano-competition smiles.  
The black spot left by a dinner jacket,  
the rubble of an early afternoon breeze,  
the gray pebble that was once an anniversary—  
all of them aching absent-mindedly, awaiting their patrons.

The Museum of Gradual Decay is open,  
but even the press hardly bothers us anymore.  
The roofless apartment blanched by the sun,  
the couch weathered limp at its center,  
the table where so many sat,  
only wear their loss and shiver empty with the hours.  
Echoes congregate with the wind.  
Sometimes a stray visitor stops by  
on his way to the Great Machine, or between shows,  
to hear the old spectral aura, the particular silence  
that can only exist in a place like this.  
Today, a man in a gray trench coat:  
his head lowers, filled just now  
with a sorrow so big no poem can contain it.  
He sits for a long time in the curtained dark;  
emerges, as a moth beating out its bulk.  
His features contort to a gambler's smile,  
his arms ease as if sensing their weight.  
This, he knows, is the way it's always been...  
So he nods, slips in a few tattered bills.  
Straightens his uniform, and returns to the warehouse.  
He avoids the eyes of two women passing  
as he descends the stairs.

That night, the stars are too noisy to sleep.  
The windows of his room open up to an endless sun-drought,  
which he enters—he winds out to the street.  
Secretly taken, emptied out of words,  
he goes barefoot into Prospect Park  
where seagulls' wings beat their own small darkness  
and the just-flood of Lake Michigan touches and leaves its sand.  
For hours he waits there, unmoved  
with the trial and rigor of daily expense,  
or the movement of politics along its Ouija board,  
or the sundry articles of self-perfection:  
against it all, among so many absences,  
a whole universe of lost and unfinished things,  
how he wades out, knee-deep into the blankets of water,  
and stares out long at the vacancy of the moon.  
Comes back simply as a folk-song.

Walking blankly, light over the squares and cobbles—  
he begins his song, of how everything goes.

—DAVID LURIE, MILWAUKEE, WI

*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Mutual

In a big muddy field two sorrel Belgian mares  
stand shoulder to shoulder in early spring sun  
the wind cold out of the northwest  
great yellow teeth bared  
clacking in time as each  
scratches the other's  
high withers  
eyes closed  
finds just  
the right  
spot

—ALAYNE PETERSON, GREENBUSH, WI

## Strong Mustard

The sudden smoky burst  
of bitter sweetness clarifies

my taste, for a believing  
moment, the way our words

make dolphins happen  
if we let them. One night

on the beach, they came  
surprising, splashing in the sunset

waves. We couldn't hold them,  
only watch; the sharp taste

of the sea opening our eyes,  
so gladly burning.

—NORMAN LEER, MADISON, WI

## No Slants of Light

So I have this friend  
who thinks that windows  
are morbid. She built  
her house without any,  
just lots of bare bulbs,  
hanging like dejected suns  
waiting for moths to kiss them  
and flame out. I asked her  
why once.  
We aren't close, but she  
still answered, said  
she didn't like how  
windows show that there is  
so much more.

—CHLOE CLARK, NEW LISBON, WI

## Sight Lines

Whenever we get together, my sister goes on  
about the beauty of rapids, puddles, ripples. She speaks  
of a thunderstorm that *announces a rainbow*  
or of a *sprightly* trout run behind her barn. If a cold autumn  
kills her young sycamore, it doesn't matter  
because the stream remains a *fisherman's paradise*.  
During droughts, the brook becomes a *rivulet* connected  
to Lake Oneida, where she and her husband spend  
the summer months. My sister welcomes  
thaws as *water scrawls*, calls a drop of water  
*courageous* for opening an ice dam to light.  
She refers to hot springs as *vapor prayers*, to runnels  
as *infant waterfalls*, and to a month of drizzle  
as an *April shower*. Water-soaked Communion wafers  
she describes as *doubly holy*. Lovely enough stuff,

while a few yards from my cabin on this slough of the Hudson  
silt and slime and sludge congeal into a beige paste  
that settles behind abandoned backwater shacks.  
Last week I wrote my sister about the snapping turtle I found  
upside-down at the edge of a jetty, claws gnawed, stomach  
gutted by hovering buzzards. The odor of the swamp  
across the road causes my eyes to water. Marsh grass  
strangles lily pads that used to float on the surface.  
Three miles north, the river unfolds into a pastel fan. But here  
the channel narrows, slackens, spawns a greasy sheen.  
Every Easter I vow to visit a pastor. Always, a sheath  
of fog sets down, like a swarm of black flies.  
I could drive through the darkness to Mass,  
though, as I tell my sister, I never go. When she asks me why,  
I remember the bloated carp in the shallows. *It's the things I see*, I say.

—RICHARD MERELMAN, MADISON, WI

## Soul Pane

The window to his soul  
is small, soot covered  
and very hard to open.

Its counterweights broke long ago;  
he meant to fix them but  
it was easier to leave the window shut.

Every time someone opens it  
they see the real him  
so he slams it on their fingers.

The drapes are drawn  
most of the time  
shut to the sunlight of others.

His soul resents the isolation  
and wishes a pane would break  
or the drapes would catch fire.

—JIM LANDWEHR, WAUKESHA, WI

## Personal Ads

I like people with scars,  
she tells me, matter of fact  
as one plus one. I  
like people with half  
moon flecks in their finger-  
nails, I tell her, trying  
to bluff with some  
innocuous attraction.  
She rolls her eyes,  
vitamin deficiency is  
so yesterday but scars are  
forever like diamonds,  
like dirt, like the edge  
of the world in paintings.

—CHLOE CLARK, NEW LISBON, WI

## Reparation

You owe me,  
now that you're gone.  
So I'm going to capture that day—  
that hot afternoon we got lost  
on a gravel county road  
I couldn't find on any map.

When I'd given up all hope,  
I looked over at you,  
your face covered with a fine  
powder of dust from the open window,  
your hands slick with sweat as you clutched  
the wheel. And just then

you gave in to  
that suprising urge  
to stop the car  
to wander in some stranger's field  
of sunflowers, ignoring black clouds  
in the distance that soon  
trapped us by the fence  
with its rusty barbed wire—

In the end,  
I'll shelter there  
with you again  
under the plum tree,  
its late summer leaves  
leaking rain in our hair.

—NANCY JESSE, MADISON, WI

## To Market

A silver cattle rig, zephyr  
out of November's darkness,  
rolls quietly past my car,  
belying squalls of fear churning  
inside its captives.  
The smell of manure  
swells the air,  
ends my hope  
the transport is empty.

All the cattle I've ever known  
and those who have graced my plate  
begin to low into the night.  
A raw wind rides in,  
reduces me, once again,  
to making solemn promises.

—JUDY KOLOSSO, SLINGER, WI

## Lightning

Behind the eyes its lingering flash,  
and on the arms small hairs  
rising without permission.  
The bowling ball bangs down  
a dozen wooden steps, crashes  
and something splits apart.  
The grandfather pine sizzles now  
in hard drops that fling themselves at us.  
The ghost in the family tree, the rumors  
the old fury searches us out again.  
A siren winds itself up and unspools its long wail  
along the hill toward that house that looks down  
on the rest. Self-important small ideas  
cross themselves out and my poise,  
like an outfit brand new, falls away  
as in one of those dreams where I show myself—  
naked, tender, weak, mortified.

—GINNY LOWE CONNORS, WEST HARTFORD, CT  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Lushlife

*I need the old-time density...the dirt...  
the noise through the floor.*

Robert Creeley

I'm accustomed to this life: skyscrapers,  
rooftop ballrooms and cemeteries  
full of gangsters and poets.  
With all the beauty of the country—  
alfalfa's greening breath, wheat's golden sash,  
dawn—a blank canvas—  
I'm too far gone. I need drawn boundaries:  
war memorials, cheap cafeterias,  
and smoke stacks from the iron works.

A quiet hush in late hours, I savor  
all that background noise: the tired waitress  
locking up for the night,  
the welcome click of radiators,  
the whirl of electric fans,  
the growl of gutters in a sudden storm.

And in winter, I expect soot,  
grime, pink cinders on sidewalks,  
cold engines warming in narrow garages,  
streetlights outlining dreams  
on frozen glass. Late, drifting to sleep,  
I crave my torn shade,  
the blue crunch of tires on snow.

—JEANINE STEVENS, SACRAMENTO, CA

## Still

In a pottery class, a boy made a blue-green cup handle  
without the cup.

Now I have it  
in my kitchen to hold a cloth my cousin wove  
from ruby-grass,  
one lupine neatly shattered in.

How far our imaginations have taken us.

How far  
the path of a bee from that of a search engine,  
but still both as delicate as  
unruly sparks in the brain.

~

How different would we be though  
if each night we still had to light a lamp?  
We might really be hungry,  
and want to sketch in our journals  
if we had to walk through the hemlock woods  
to arrive at a little store.

I would take notes in perfect penmanship: *When I was out collecting wildflowers  
to press, I saw the same indigo bunting I saw yesterday in my Emerson.*

I would know linotypes better than my nieces' names,  
touch the paper as if I were  
pouring flour back into a canister.

~

I think of poems  
that can still be written, inventions near the greats,  
like couplets with every other word as *leaf*,  
or *violet* permeating each line, blossoming through the poem like ink  
that once brimmed from our uncontrollable fountain pens.

But I still want stanzas that can be counted on,

that can not be removed easily. I feel

there is something like linen in the formal,

the long skirt barely touching the river.

~

I like the blurriness of the bathroom mirror  
at my age, and its steam.

~

A girl in a painting class is burning her lines with a stick of incense  
inside her still life.

—NANCY TAKACS, WELLINGTON, UT

## history XXII, bearded in the mirror

on various occasions I've feared  
I looked like Lenin or Tennyson  
the grizzled Franz Hals  
hoped maybe Monet  
at best the anarchist-artist Pissarro  
my grandson says Marx

—ROBERT SCHULER, MENOMONIE, WI

## 🌀 The Nightmare School Where You Taught

The principal looked  
like Alfred Hitchcock and the  
Copenhagen Tobacco Factory  
next door exported its heavy  
cloying odor to every classroom  
in the building. It was like going  
to your grandmother's on  
Sundays where your Uncle Phil  
sat sunken on the couch with  
doilies at the back of his head  
puffing on a White Owl Cigar  
sending rivers of curly smoke  
rolling your way. He'd open  
his cardboard cigar box, run

his fingers over his treasure  
each with a paper band—an  
owl printed on it—and there it  
would be, the heavy, leafy,  
sweet aroma that years later  
you'd stumble into at the school  
where every December the  
factory sent over boxes of toys  
and mothers stood in front  
of the gym-turned-into-assembly  
distributing dolls or model  
airplane kits as if that would  
make up for the lost cause of  
taking a deep breath of clean air.

—KAREN LOEB, EAU CLAIRE, WI

## Shiny Things

I hide coins for my son to find  
 drop nickels 'round the playground swing  
 seed quarters under sawdust by the slide  
 place dimes beside the whirlawheel  
 I act surprised when he discovers  
 a penny along the woodchip trail  
 delight in the excitement on his face  
 his lucky smile finding unexpected shiny things

I seek objects that shine  
 collect and hold them in my hands  
 assorted coins that shimmer  
 crows so bright they start  
 the fire burning in the sky  
 my son his brilliant eyes  
 I turn them in the light  
 then hide them in my heart

## Missing a Spot

I wipe and dry the casserole dish  
 that fancy one with the see-through glass cover  
 and as I reach to put it in the cupboard  
 I discover I remember aunt nancy

now she's been gone forever  
 yet there she was  
 in the kitchen telling me  
 I missed a spot

they never really ever  
 go away do they

one touch recalls a thought  
 a thought a notion  
 the notion a feeling  
 the feeling an emotion

so then we cry or not or smile  
 mostly somewhere in between

and when you go  
 waterfall everything  
 will remind me of you

# BRUCE DETHLEFSEN

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## WISCONSIN POET LAUREATE

## Gone to Ground

it takes a patch of soil  
 some water and the sun  
 to raise a plant  
 you make decisions  
 how much this and that  
 you feed the youngster  
 clear the weeds  
 you tend to pay attention

now there he lies my son  
 fenced in and covered in the bed  
 his bandaged head  
 gauze white and crusted red  
 his eyes taped shut  
 a glut of tubes  
 around his nose and mouth

I make my three decisions  
 first no more resuscitations  
 save your breath stand down  
 go call the donor folks  
 it's almost harvest time  
 and last at ease  
 unplug all those machines  
 please stop that awful hissing sound  
 what's grown so loved is gone to ground

I try to find a place  
 a somewhere on his face  
 to plant my final kiss

**Bruce Dethlefsen** was born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1948 and moved to Wisconsin in 1966. He is Wisconsin Poet Laureate for 2011/2012, under the sponsorship of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. Bruce's poems have been featured on Garrison Keillor's *The Writer's Almanac* and *Your Daily Poem*, where he was Poet-of-the-Month. Bruce also performs original music with Bill Orth as *Obvious Dog* on Cathryn Cofell's CD, *Lip*.

His new collection, *Unexpected Shiny Things*, is now available from Cowfeather Press ([www.cowfeatherpress.org](http://www.cowfeatherpress.org)).

# THE WISCONSIN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, ARTS & LETTERS

The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters announced last summer that it will steward the Wisconsin Poet Laureate position and provide staff support for the Poet Laureate Commission. “The Wisconsin Poet Laureate is more than just a symbolic appointment,” says Wisconsin Academy executive director Margaret Lewis. “The poet laureate plays a crucial role in keeping the arts accessible and vital—to all age groups—and acts as a statewide emissary for poetry and creativity. The Wisconsin Academy will support the Poet Laureate Commission for the foreseeable future in order to ensure the survival of this meaningful program.” As part of the new stewardship arrangement, the Wisconsin Academy will provide space for Wisconsin Poets Laureate both past and present and related Poet Laureate Commission information on their website, provide publicity for the current poet laureate, and aid in the search and selection of future poets laureate. In addition the Wisconsin Academy will act as the Poet Laureate Commission’s fiscal sponsor, accepting charitable contributions on behalf of the Commission in order to pay expenses related to Wisconsin Poet Laureate activities as well as to enhance the Commission’s growing endowment. “The Poet Laureate Commission is extremely pleased that the highly respected Wisconsin Academy stepped forward as steward of the Wisconsin Poet Laureate program after Governor Walker discontinued the State’s stewardship,” says Poet Laureate Commission co-chair Jane Hamblen. “The program has selected four distinguished poets laureate over the last decade. The relationship with the Wisconsin Academy will allow this celebration of poetry and creativity in Wisconsin to continue for many years to come.”

**About the Wisconsin Academy:** Founded in 1870, the Wisconsin Academy applies the sciences, arts, and letters to bring context, civilized discussion, and meaningful action to the most important issues and ideas of today. It creates spaces—public forums, art galleries, publications—where citizens join together to examine the challenges of our times, suggest solutions, and look at the world in new ways. It celebrates and preserves Wisconsin’s human, cultural, and natural resources. In this way the Wisconsin Academy connects people and ideas for a better Wisconsin. Wisconsin Academy programs include the James Watrous Gallery at the Overture Center for the Arts, a gallery by and for Wisconsin artists; Wisconsin People & Ideas, a quarterly magazine about Wisconsin thought and culture; Academy Evenings, a statewide series of public forums; and the Wisconsin Idea, a public policy program—the most recent of which focuses on “The Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin.” For more information on programs and events, or to become a member of the Wisconsin Academy, visit [wisconsinacademy.org](http://wisconsinacademy.org).

**About the Wisconsin Poet Laureate Commission:** The Wisconsin Poet Laureate Commission is the volunteer selection and support body for the Wisconsin Poet Laureate. Governor Tommy Thompson created the commission on July 31, 2000, and Governor Jim Doyle renewed the Commission’s charter during his term. Five statewide organizations—the Council for Wisconsin Writers, the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, the Wisconsin Regional Writers Association, the Wisconsin Humanities Council, and the Wisconsin Arts Board—were directed to appoint members to the Poet Laureate Commission. The Commission’s duties are to plan and conduct the poet laureate selection process, assign responsibilities to the new poet laureate, and assist that individual in performing official duties. The Wisconsin Poet Laureate is asked to contribute to the growth of poetry in this state, plan and attend at least four statewide literary events each year, and perform in at least four government, state, and civic events as requested by Wisconsin school systems, libraries, and literary organizations.

## Anniversary

I punch in contacts  
and dial up my dead  
son’s phone number  
as I drive by  
his house on admiral  
where of course he doesn’t  
live there any more  
but cell phones are after all  
miraculous devices

I park my car  
and admire the lawn  
green smooth clean cut  
mown grass the smell  
of grass just mown  
the phone rings and rings  
the edges of the lawn  
are perfectly trimmed  
how neat  
how awfully admirable

## Wealthy

after my reading  
a very serious sixth grade girl  
asked me if I was wealthy  
well I said I have twenty-two  
dollars in my wallet right now  
my purple truck has two hundred  
and thirty-five thousand miles on it  
I’m wearing clean and mended clothes  
I’ll sleep in a warm bed tonight  
I’ve got my health my hands my eyes  
my family and friends who love me  
and I can come here to sennett middle school  
to read poetry to you guys for free  
so yes I’m very wealthy  
wealthy indeed

## Varanasi

1.

In the city of death  
the smell of burning bodies  
wasn't like I thought it would be—  
not like burning flesh at all,  
benign smoke.

Corpses sheathed in saffron shrouds burn  
over the wood of mango trees,  
sandalwood for the wealthy.

Those bodies from families who cannot afford the wood  
burn only half way before they are slid into this river.

Pregnant women, lepers,  
those bitten by snakes, do not  
get burned at all—  
their corpses weighted down by bricks,  
are thrown into the Ganges—

The day we arrived we looked down the Ghats  
and saw the multitude—  
colors and shapes in the river,  
splashing wildly, scrubbing vigorously,  
rubbing holy water through their skin  
into their blood.

2.

At the bus stop today  
as I hunched over in the rain, a  
taxi sped by and sent a wave of brown  
gutter water crashing on me like a sea wall.  
I did not move stunned, I looked over  
and saw a father and daughter who were splashed too  
Except they were laughing, so I laughed,  
and I remembered,  
the ecstasy on the faces of those souls  
as they were purified in impure waters.

—KELLY MCNERNEY, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

When the cracks become  
so deep the earth splits in two,  
we're no longer whole.

—LIZ RHODEBECK, PEWAUKEE, WI

## Chronoscope 32: Wisconsin Lovesong

Birds dusk disappear.  
My mailing address heart  
lives somewhere remote,  
not even on a rural route  
where barbed wire horses  
chew into the tall grass  
burn marks and hoof patterns  
like mathematical symbols  
for processes yet discovered.

—JOHN WALSER, FOND DU LAC, WI

## Treeless

You lied to me about trees...  
now, no branch will hold me  
the way it used to because I know  
the brittleness of limbs, which was never  
so clear before falling came true  
and the snap of timber was heard.  
Long before there was a break  
and the tiniest crack of a twig  
had gone unnoticed.

But I was already stranded by then,  
perched high in this grace of leaves  
deceptively sheltered, soon  
to be shaken by the sound  
of wind, unaware you were capable  
of lying. Even the tree is feeling betrayed,  
weakened by loss of trust in what  
was never promised. A gaggle  
of winged things is flying overhead...

I'm not sure but something you once  
called a breeze is causing us to lean  
ever so slightly.

—CAROL LYNN GRELLAS, EL DORADO HILLS, CA  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Flophouse

Knowledge is a dangerous  
thing: like this morning—  
when he heard the door  
slither open, only  
the evil hiss of air  
behind her to  
confirm another  
empty place  
in his life.  
He is that mansion  
with many rooms,  
none of them occupied,  
each a mute  
testimony  
to the guests  
who once  
slept here.

—G. A. SCHEINOHA, EDEN, WI

## Escape Artist

In mid-sentence, before  
she could finish, I stopped  
listening, my mother's  
rambling tale of where  
she had traveled since  
my last visit, her escape  
from air tainted by an odor  
of stale urine, faint as her  
memory, hanging between us,  
between this visit and last,  
her journey in a past  
that never existed, that  
she creates, as real as  
her paintings moldering  
in damp basement corners,  
as my desire for her to stop,  
wink an eye, and let  
me know she still controls  
these visions she creates.

—RICK DINGES, LINCOLN, NE

## Anniversary Poem

Snaking in between the rocks with his family  
in a creek somewhere in Virginia, my office-mate  
let his hand drift, half-open, and the current  
pulled at it, so gently he didn't notice when  
his wedding ring dropped off, and he swam  
back upstream in consternation, peering into  
crevices, till finally, miraculously, he saw a glint,  
deep under the sparks and riffles of the surface,  
and what was effortlessly lost was found more easily  
than expected. I remember that day 7 years  
ago, and how we'd found it and lost it and  
found it many times already by then, and have  
done so many times since, sinuous and  
buoyant in the current and forgetful, the band  
gleaming in the water and waiting for us to see.

—MOLLY WEIGEL, PENNINGTON, NJ  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Winter Coat Heavy

Around the middle of November  
here where the pale sunshine makes  
the sky the color of Chinese pottery,  
willows, streams, weeping cranes

and the green grass gives way  
to the bend and swirl of deerhide water  
and exploded cattails —  
the upper Midwest, the place where waters meet —

we gird ourselves  
(a funny word, gird,  
not that often used, especially in warm places):

thermal socks, longjohns, t-shirt, flannel shirt,  
sweatshirt, wool sweater, wool jacket, scarf, parka,  
headband, earmuffs, balaclava, scarf, mukluks —

when I was little,  
we put our feet in grocery bags inside our snowboots —  
I was not sure why —  
so that we tromped with a plastic crinkle  
that muted the crunch of the snowcrust —

and it all weighs on us,  
like wet rooftop snow, the shovel,  
icicles as long as grown men,  
the sunset at four in the afternoon,  
the walk from closed space to closed space,  
until pink thighed

but at night it all comes off,  
naked to the steam of a shower,  
to the dry heat of a thermostat pegged high  
just so I can feel a little sweat,  
and like in April my body sloughs off in flakes,  
in pine needles and cedar boughs.

—JOHN WALSER, FOND DU LAC, WI

Gust of wind strips leaves  
from ash tree in autumn  
Third chemo treatment

—ELLARAIN LOCKIE, SUNNYVALE, CA  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Truth in the Night

Out from the laundry  
of dreams—  
tossed from the dirt  
and gunk of all you think

you've known and done,  
there it is—  
flapping on the clothesline of your mind—  
sun-tipped, whole.

—ANDREA POTOS, MADISON, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Walter's Failing Memory

Looking for dolphin tracks high above Wellington Harbour  
Walter remembers not the splashing humps of actual dolphins  
spotted one morning years earlier in an arctic fjord,  
but a drier flatter time in south London prior to that accidental sighting,  
a time when young Walter played ball, closed pubs,  
touched basketball hoops without using a step ladder.

There, Walter knew a woman who flirted with him shamelessly.  
He, in turn, was appalled. She flirted at the gym,  
and Walter was appalled. She flirted in sandwich bars  
near Catford dog track, and Walter was appalled.  
In restaurants by Elephant and Castle, at the Thames barrier,  
cornering her MG on Kent country roads:  
appalled, appalled, appalled. It was particularly appalling  
when she flirted on her motorcycle, and Walter behind  
held on round her waist smelling carefully the black  
leather jacket she claimed to wear strictly for protection.

Puzzled by timing and place, Walter wonders  
why on a hiking trail a half-globe away  
he remembers this litany of London flirtation.  
Sheer absence of dolphins fails  
to explain it, and alone on these tree-covered cliffs  
not a woman's in sight, not a hint of flirtation.  
The air is clean and nothing in this steep rocky topography  
or the climbing residential avenues of Wellington itself  
recalls the warrens of Southwark and Lewisham streets  
where Walter suffered chronic, long-term attention.  
So like lemming migration or dinosaurs' fall,  
dolphin speech and dance language of bees  
the workings of memory puzzle Walter and elude understanding.

—THOMAS LAVELLE, STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

Not until these stars began to cluster

did the first heart stir—even now  
the sky rising and falling  
brushing against just my finger.  
I almost start a fire, almost not.

To point has always been dangerous  
—even the firing squad needs protection  
and I cover your eyes  
—already one star stopped moving  
no longer passes through your heart  
falling from one place another  
backwards into how far everything is,

the glove is useless, not yet wet  
or cold or the morning whose light  
was once a seed deep inside the Earth  
—one finger still remembers the North Star  
the exact distance and from your eyes  
their vague breeze still climbing  
taking the stone away from your stone  
till nothing is left but the darkness  
that used to be the sky on fire

—more than ever now  
I walk at night as if I could  
with just a simple touch  
and from your heart a great morning  
—all these stars—in a pack  
and from my hand the sun  
lifting you into mountains, wolves, flesh.

It takes time. Winters.  
And the glove I left for you  
somehow is blowing away.  
They take so much time.

—SIMON PERCHIK, EAST HAMPTON, NY

## Truth Is Short

Truth is short.  
It points the way  
Through breakers into port.  
The lie is lengthy, serpentine, jabbers and prattles all day.  
Truth is short.

—Don Thackrey, Dexter, MI

## Questions

Picked out by a bus driver in  
the rain of Iceland  
an emigrant from  
Canada my God who  
emigrates from Canada? we  
a political Mecca  
drove past Haldor Laxness' house  
Nobel laureate

I wanted  
to stop, see it, my  
camera out of film couldn't even take a photo

\*

what I cannot keep in my  
head is better lost If I  
cannot remember it I  
should forget

\*

drove to fields of geysers  
woman in a screaming red dress  
late back to  
and we were on such a tight

\*

I live my life like this  
IrunIrunIrun  
I can't see it all the time  
is too  
I will die

\*

Be sure to order the lamb soup I  
did, folks, the lamb soup  
though I am more or less a vegetarian  
But when in Iceland  
was worth the, etc., headlong, headland,  
ice, glaciers at a  
distance

\*

Back home: or in : I say  
to the innkeeper Thorey Bjarnadottir isn't that a  
he never talked about the glaciers  
melting  
I wanted to know

\*

Perhaps because it is a sensitive subject, Thorey said.

\*

There have been in my life  
far too many  
sensitive  
too many questions not asked.

—MARIE SHEPPARD WILLIAMS, MINNEAPOLIS, MN  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Clouds Speak

Clouds speak to me,  
a low murmur I am sure  
others can hear, grumbling  
about something I failed  
to do long ago, a sound  
of a ladder sliding across  
a tin roof, down clapboard  
siding, that tattered rumble  
as two ends slip toward  
coincidence while I watch  
distant detail rise into  
focus until I can almost  
touch them, and then  
nothing. I have been  
falling ever since, listening  
for messages from above.

—RICK DINGES, LINCOLN, NE

## Memory

The moonlight, at dusk,  
seeps out of the earth's lip  
touching my empty fall field,  
my feet stumble over  
yellow stubs still holding  
the crinkling sound of cornstalks  
that stood tall in the summer heat.  
I sidestep through soft manure  
spring lambs gone to market  
begin to play in my memory.

I rewind my inner camera.  
Sounds buried beneath my feet  
start to murmur inside my head;  
I hear deer skin drums  
beat out the dance of the hunt,  
a thundering sound of giants  
being felled with a logger's ax,  
and the snap of the wet sheets hung  
by the farm wife's red raw hands,  
the images unfold slowly reel by reel.

—NANCY PETULLA, MERRILL, WI

## Darkness

darkness  
starts pouring in  
through the hole  
broken in the light  
I hear the trees  
shivering in the wind  
imagine  
hundreds of beautiful women  
running naked in the night  
their laughter  
floating through the air  
now  
doesn't that sound  
more interesting  
than the man  
sitting at his desk  
staring at the phone  
because  
it shows him the time

—JAMES BABBS, STANFORD, IL

## everasps (20)

another wing of light  
hurls across potato field  
that holds pinkness  
of a busted up china set.  
time falls flat  
on quartz, showing how  
simply moments can shred us,  
once lasting so fervently in  
the field of wont,  
& we somehow can't acknowledge  
the broad sense within  
as the silver clock  
brokers with time;  
its spoon handles trembling,  
yet consistent in  
its measured beat.

—GUY R. BEINING, GREAT BARRINGTON, MA

## Visible to the Naked Eye

What I remember from  
the night we looked,  
searched, hunted the  
October sky for Halley's  
Comet was not disappointment  
in the blanket of clouds  
over the stars no telescope  
could penetrate, not the  
waste of time the drive  
turned out to be coming  
from our home in concrete  
Milwaukee to farm country  
which could've been Mars  
for all we knew, or cared.

No, what sticks out is  
when mom turned the dome  
light on in our station  
wagon, I realized that  
outside our car we were  
the outsiders, that night  
time was live or die for  
creatures out there  
among the kettles & moraines,  
that our annoying trip  
would just remind them  
of the road where you  
could die or not trying  
to cross.

That's all that mattered,  
matters, out there.

—JOSEPH BRIGGS, MADISON, WI

## October

I drank  
cheap red wine  
from a plastic cup  
outside  
near my front door and  
I watched the dust  
rising up  
from the fields  
harvest was over  
all the crops were gone and  
everything  
had been plowed under  
waiting now  
for the first snow to fall  
it was getting late and  
I felt drunk  
I shivered  
because the wind was cold

—JAMES BABBS, STANFORD, IL

## October 22, just after dawn

wreaths of mist  
over the Mississippi  
slivers of river islands  
pale yellow-leaved  
black-boned trees on shore  
steep dusty hill prairies  
sheltered by wind-scarred boulders  
where I want to plant a tent or hut  
to watch the world  
move  
above  
below

—ROBERT SCHULER, MENOMONIE, WI

## The Hangers-on

Last apples cling to a hibernating tree,  
nature's Christmas bulbs:  
so round and red they'll burst.  
They're pretty, but I worry.

Some will stick it out until they shrivel,  
sweetness turning acrid,  
fermenting, becoming ruddy and drunk.

But eventually, the angry little tipplers  
will get bitter, lose their grip,

and fall.

—JOEY GOODALL, ST. PAUL, MN  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Mapmaking

This page, rough  
and full of teeth,  
collects our dust, our wisdom,  
and like fools we trudge ahead,  
blind lovers, led  
by a fate  
we can't quite give into.

I trace our path,  
that crazy route that took us  
into the depths, black  
and full of scars. Scar tissue  
doesn't give, you said,  
we'll never tunnel through.

Looking back at the light,  
our shadows led the way,  
like the westward traveler  
at seven a.m. on an early  
June day. The water's  
just ahead, we said, black  
and full of scars. Scar tissue

floats, you said, and we built a raft  
so no one could follow us.  
We've left no tracks, and a page  
shouldn't shimmer the way an ocean  
does.  
How can I map this, I ask.

—CHRISTA GAHLMAN, MADISON, WI  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## At the Vernal Equinox *For Robin*

Winter's end. The time of year  
when nearly everyone I know  
is still going away: the Florida Keys,  
Cancun, St. Bart's, Belize.

Places now warm  
because of the pitch of the earth.

But I love the honey of you,  
the bee-smoke of your skin,

and this equinox between us,  
toward which we tilt and shudder.

—RICHARD HEDDERMAN, WAUWATOSA, WI

## On the Road

the two of us  
humming down  
a wet road  
first snow  
falling  
from  
the dove  
colored sky  
Sibelius  
adding  
his melancholy  
to the day  
*what else  
is there  
to believe in?*

—SHARON AUBERLE,  
SISTER BAY, WI

All this ocean and still more thirst

—the Earth longing for rain  
the way trees have never forgotten  
the sun wants its leaves returned

--it's natural you number these stones  
to dampen your lips, count the nights  
it did not rain --your fingers kept open  
so  
drop by drop in your small, red pail.

What you collect from this beach  
surrounds the Earth that sees itself  
in the rain still on its way  
still further than the stars

--before the first rain  
those stones already gathered  
must have known their clouds  
would settle on your lips  
as drought :the dim breath  
that welcomed you and season.

—SIMON PERCHIK, EAST HAMPTON, NY

## Marilyn Hacker the Water-Carrier

All day, her head is full of thoughts of her,  
spilling like nectar, pencils, papers, keys,  
rolling like berries, neighborhood a blur  
back of the idle window blinds. The bees,  
as busy as they are, when polled, concur  
a warmer spring is carried on her breeze  
and sweeter flowers make her hive of rhyme.  
Taste it now or in your own sweet time.

You write her. She writes you. Some thus and such  
exchanged, until the emails reach an end.  
For everything, you thank her very much.  
It seems she isn't looking for a friend,  
or misses what she cannot see and touch.  
There are no sentiments you didn't send  
(perhaps some foolishness that you'd take back)  
where health and wealth crisscross in Zodiac.

—MARY MERIAM, EAGLE ROCK, MO

## Judy Grahn the Goat

Slowly the hour hands begin to creep  
to dike o'clock. The Queen of Wands awaits,  
there where the lowly workers herd the sheep.  
She taps each top and lets them through the gates,  
there with the drinks of joke and coke. Then leap  
to taxi-driving, streets of wheels and weights,  
there where the hungry no ones wander past,  
there where the lost in me finds you at last.

She who by the seaside did get smitten  
rides a coded boat in sailor prose.  
On every little fishy it is written  
what every flying fisher lady knows:  
if by a damsel dally you are bitten,  
press daily with the petals of a rose.  
Oh foolish common woman in the sky,  
you are the Venus apple of my eye.

—MARY MERIAM, EAGLE ROCK, MO

## The Dwindling Fish

A couple days ago when I was down  
in the General Store buying an  
overpriced diet Coke, Laura drew my  
attention to the turtle tank stocked  
with goldfish. I witnessed one of the snappers  
in action, chomping off the tail  
of an already injured fish. This  
early evening I stopped again to  
have a laugh with the pretty & good-natured  
Laura. All afternoon she camps  
out on the radiator in the window  
working her number puzzles. Miscellaneous  
young men come in to chat,  
though she's made it known that  
she has a boyfriend. The turtles  
seem to be getting bigger.  
The dwindling fish  
huddle at one end under the lamp  
supplying poor heat on this cold night.

—PETER J. GRIECO, BUFFALO, NY

## Left Astray

today like rain, fell quiet and cold  
again,  
from first splinter of grey light  
forging its way through dust-cracked window  
to this moment unbalanced, where  
we live between heart beats  
restlessly searching the sounds of the day  
for one that does not  
stab or wound, but  
is warm enough to hold  
finding none "oh well" we say  
and for an instant attempt to fool ourselves  
into diets of sodium free thought  
but it doesn't work  
anymore  
than the scarecrow works  
to save the cornfield from its sadness  
and so we pause to count the droplets falling, and  
with only our wet shadows watching  
game birds take flight  
and we are left astray

—JOE "PEPE" OULAHAN, MILWAUKEE, WI

## December

days of wrapping each spoken word in twinkling white lights  
every day a limited-time-only special-priced day, days that  
crumble into the next gingerbread-squared day of the calendar  
every day a shirt box day needing to be wrapped in  
memories scented with cinnamon and cardamom  
baked into our brains so that the days seem one brightly red  
event day a gold bow day so snowflake-intricate and crisp, days  
rolled into a yule tide log of tightly packed tightly packaged days

—CAROL BERG, GROTON, MA

## November

Night-month, you are turning toward the solstice  
of widening light. You, the month of disquieting  
verbs. You, the flickering wish held then  
exhaled. Your breath is a cinnamon  
moment, a confection of witch hazel, pinch of  
brambles. You the month of trembling  
erasures, month of mourning trees.  
Relentlessly, you let the days fall and fall.

—CAROL BERG, GROTON, MA

## Fall Back, Fall's Back

There comes a day in autumn once each year  
when we must take up every clock and watch,  
recall the move's an hour to the rear,  
and set their metacarpals back a notch.

The motive is to save the light of day,  
resource the season lacks to some degree  
(compared to sunny summer, anyway)  
and short of which it's fairly hard to see.

The task is not a simple one; I mean,  
with time displayed on every kitchen range,  
each bedside table, wall, computer screen,  
it takes concerted work to make the change.

And then before we know it—we're such sheep—  
we'll have to deal with springtime's forward leap.

—EMERY CAMPBELL, LAWRENCEVILLE, GA

## The Time Comes

1

Opening your night shade,  
you see the season's end  
and your pulse quickens.

You feel your house,  
cozy, clean, inviting  
and you see the world  
through sparkling windows.

A dour passerby  
sees you and smiles.

2

Your love is at your side,  
children sleep upstairs,  
the dog is in his house,  
cats are on warm beds.

At a moment before sleep  
you know what the day forgot.

3

A doctor says that  
he has seen people  
who know without grief or doubt  
that the time has come  
just before he knows.

—LENORE MCCOMAS COBERLY, MADISON, WI

## Found Poem

With a quarter cup  
of cherry brandy,  
a half cup  
of peach schnapps,  
a cup of banana liqueur,  
and a jigger or two of Irish Mead,  
Aunt Mary's *Fruitcake Surprise*  
was mostly surprise.

—JANET LEAHY, NEW BERLIN, WI

## Snail, Bird, and Worm

*Snail, snail, glister me forward,  
Bird, soft-sigh me home,  
Worm, be with me.  
This is my hard time.* --Theodore Roethke

Snail, bird, and worm,  
be my consorts, architects  
of my tomorrow.

Guide me down  
your trails of light and air,  
open me to earth and sky.

This time, I will listen  
not with my ears  
but with my pores.

Sanctify my very life,  
this ground of me  
you care for.

—LISA VIHOS, SHEBOYGAN, WI

## Oblivious

Up in the Great North Woods  
They sat, engrossed, over  
The PC Gamer magazine,  
Discussing video drivers,  
Quad-core processors, and  
Raving over the graphics  
In the latest video game,  
How real the trees looked  
Bending in the breeze.  
All around them, birds sang,  
Wind whispered through pines,  
Sunlight glinted and  
Sparkled on dewy grass.  
Still they sat engrossed.

—HARLAN RICHARDS, STANLEY, WI

## A City Wife Looks at a Country Churchyard

This sod is all so strange to me—  
the rolling hills and monumental stones  
are unfamiliar granite woods  
that spring from bones long grown cold.

We will lie together here some day,  
not like our marriage bed, cocoon  
and warm, but separate in our quilts  
of steel, over us new stones to spread  
the forest growth.

—YVONNE YAHNKE, MADISON, WI

## OBITUARY: BUCK, Bruiser B.

*(For Bruce Foster)*

On November 21, first day of the Wisconsin deer season,  
by a hit and run slug.

Longtime resident of Big Swamp.

Son of Big Buck and Sweet Ol' Doe.

Survived by wives: Doe, Doe-Doe, Doe Rae Me, Do-Si-Do, Doeminique,  
and Doe Hickey.

Offspring: Dough Boy, Buckaroo Two, Spikey, Four Point, Daisy, Doelanda, Doeta,  
Fawny Mae, Fawnsy, and Four-score more.

Mates: Racko, Stud, Points, Neck, Buckaroo, and Rutman.

Member: Loyal Order of Men, Homo Sapiens II, Stag Club, Hat Rack Society,  
Saltlickers of America, Does Forever!

Veteran of Deer Wars I, II & III, The Big Drive, I-94.

Bruiser was a loyal friend, awesome stud. He enjoyed pawing the ground, snorting,  
shadow boxing, alcoholic apples, playing chicken with semis, and staring into  
headlights with his pals.

He rubbed antlers with foreign dignitaries including Cow, Beefalo, and Longhorn.

His favorite song was "Blood on the Tracks" by B. Dylan.

He will be truly missed by all poor shots.

In lieu of cards, flowers, corn, apples are preferred.

May He Rut in Peace.

—RICK McMONAGLE, EUGENE, OR  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## A Little Story of Death

The husband sits straight in the paisley chair,  
neighbors hushed in the kitchen preparing the dishes  
brought in for the relatives.

When the first guests come into the living room,  
the man will stand and thank them and hope they disappear soon.  
His voice is filled with all the despair he feels  
in this third day without her.

A small cricket has come from behind the radiator  
and sings his song to the husband who only hears his wife's voice  
telling him they have to find the cricket  
before it eats holes in his socks.

He smiles, a small grimace, as he remembers  
how he chided her that crickets don't need to eat—  
they live forever on the dust of the world. Now that she has become dust,  
the irony of his words hangs in the air.

—JACKIE LANGETIEG, VERONA, WI  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Death

*For life and death are one...Kahlil Gibran*

She was a tree shedding  
leaves, amber, bone, and rust  
tall and short limbs  
trembling with the wind  
elbows and cheeks  
rough bark and smooth  
hair long, tied in back  
knots throughout the wood  
sad melodies in song books  
buds burst into blooms

the tree transformed:  
house, yachts, floors, bureaus,  
shelves, boxes, books,

the girl in our thoughts—  
a whistle, the wind, a recycled dress,  
time shared, a song,  
a mother's caress.

—MARYELLEN LETARTE, LUNENBURG, MA  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

Listen,  
when my brother and I were target-shooting in the woods,  
we found the hole where the highway department dumped all the carcasses  
they scraped off the roads. Mostly deer, their bodies an autumn brown,  
bellies swollen, even the bucks looked ready to fawn. In the sky  
turkey vultures swept a long, low arc, waiting  
for us to leave. The air was thick with blue-bottle flies  
like strings of lights in the sun, the constant din  
of their eating and shitting and egg-laying in the paradise  
of that hole. Before we left I tossed a few  
good-size rocks into the pit. For a moment the deer  
stirred, the thunk of the rock  
knocking loose hundreds of maggots  
that rose gently a few inches, then settled back down,  
lovely like the snow  
we were waiting for.

—C. KUBASTA, OSHKOSH, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Blood in the Treads

The squirrel doubled back,  
a broken-field runner  
juking first left, then right  
to the end zone,  
evading phantom tacklers,  
dashing from the curb  
back to the middle of the street.

I felt the crunch  
under my left rear wheel;  
nothing I could do about it,  
even if I could stop,  
traffic charging behind me  
like a horde of linebackers.

I thought of the Jains,  
their legendary remorse  
for killing any living thing,  
their holy men committing  
the act of *salekhana*,  
fasting to death,  
literally not hurting a fly,  
and I wondered  
if I were too tender-hearted.

I also remembered  
my colleague's pronouncements  
about the Muslims:  
"I say, kill them all  
and let God sort them out."

—CHARLES RAMMELKAMP, BALTIMORE, MD

## Stones and Poems Struggle to Agree

Scrambled out of backfield quarry and piled  
By color texture and face  
Arranged in patchwork walls by the mind's  
ceaseless feng shui

Poor Herman! (Mrs. Melville said)  
He wrote a book about fish no one wants to publish  
Now he's gone back to poetry

What concern to a stone  
The pencil lead's wet dirt smell  
Its shifting point and its willingness  
to give anything away

--DAVID STEINGASS, MADISON, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

### Rhino Attack

- Rhino –  
land mammal, second in size to an elephant
- Rhinovirus –  
Picornaviridae family, thirty billionths of a metre long
- Rhino –  
five species with a 14 to 18-month gestation period
- Rhinovirus –  
101 serotypes with a one to three-day incubation period
- Rhino –  
found in certain areas of Africa and Asia
- Rhinovirus –  
resides and replicates in the respiratory tract
- Rhino –  
battles hyenas, lions and tigers
- Rhinovirus –  
assaults the immune system
- Rhino –  
produces one offspring at a time
- Rhinovirus –  
sheds 1,000,000 infectious virions / mL of nasal washings
- Rhino –  
one of the Earth's most endangered species
- Rhinovirus –  
causes the common cold; impossible to eradicate
- Rhino –  
its formidable physique inspires respect
- Rhinovirus –  
a nuisance that just makes you sick

Which rhino attack is worse?

--FERN G. Z. CARR, KELOWNA, BC, CANADA  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*  
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## The Horror

*Wong has enciphered "It's a Small World  
After All"...in a strand of DNA, inside a  
bacterium resistant to all kinds of  
inhospitable environments.*

As if the ride weren't enervating enough, Disney  
can now inject the song into your veins.  
When you return to Boston, Mainz, Beijing  
it travels with you. Impervious  
to your desire to forget, it issues  
from your mouth at odd and inappropriate  
moments, at a business meeting, or when  
you are about to make love to your wife.  
Your dreams are overwhelmed by singing dolls.  
You shoot them down like tin ducks at a  
carnival game, but they pop back up, smile-pasted  
mouths still singing about the shrinking earth,  
which you are convinced will implode  
any second, sucking you down  
into the black hole created when  
Walt Disney left the real world behind.

--LAWRENCE KESSENICH, BOSTON, MA  
*visit VW Online for audio & more work by this author*

### Frank Hurley, Photographer of the Imperial Trans- Antarctica Expedition Shoots Shackleton's Men

near The Endurance ensconced just before  
the Final upheaval, the fatal resounding  
crack of boat crush, of drowned sailors  
released from frozen, open crypts; near  
the vise-gripped ghost ship, masts white-  
coated bone stripped of sails, riggings  
bare sinew exposed, ligaments frostbitten,  
immobile, unwavering as sculpted marble,  
polished stone, amid ice rock; near the ending,  
crew members skating on rudely fashioned blades,  
make-shift poles for hockey sticks, cask bungs  
for pucks, a rare moment of levity here,  
marooned perhaps for all time, games to be  
played to clear conclusions; this far from  
civilization and no clear way home, why not?

--ALAN CATLIN, SCHENECTADY, NY

## On Not Writing Nature Poems

for Jonathan Liebson

Because I'm always wearing the wrong shoes, I rarely stray from the path.  
There's *recollect*, there's *tranquility* and the way the trains punctuate each hour, shrill the shaken fields. Let's bide a bit here, thinking why we love them—the tracks, the transit, *a train's a metaphor for so many things in life* Like me, too busy eyeing up the buffet from the back of the line to consider a phalanx of phlox, the tabby stray cavorting in the hedge. I don't see a cow meadow as any kind of invocation. Am drawn to the satellite dish disrupting the view. To the one swatch of sky where the haze hangs. Because, truly, the one time I tried, the saddled mare extended an answer. The hoof on my foot a fine form. Because the genius of the place can drop a scroll of sycamore bark at my feet and I still can't translate his tongue. Slow study. What happens in the ditch, the dun. Because a cicada's buzz in the topmost branch is all the intel left to get, trilling, a telling: *here, here, I am here...*

—JANE SATTERFIELD, BALTIMORE, MD

### tampons

they are packed in their box like a rack  
of fireworks, each ready to bloom red streamers  
of light. or else they are mushrooms: strong stems,  
spongy caps to sop up the spores. my wife

tells stories about tampons: the crimp  
of a cramp, the creepiness of cotton, her life  
and the rusty chains of its cycle. but it's not  
a curse, she says, just like a drought

isn't a blessing. so i watch for other cycles:  
cartwheeling cumulus, a swallow's flight  
cut into arcs, the calendar's curious compartment  
of days. then there's the way the moon

is white as a host overhead, but slowly  
steeps in earth's blood as it sets.  
you never want to run out of tampons, she says,  
bringing home another carton for the cabinet,

like a box of matches i'm too blunderbussed to light.  
but i like when the forecast for our bedroom  
is sex, and the ninety percent chance of conception,  
i like that, too—the fallen flowers of all those years

of tampons risen as the plastic-smooth skin  
of a newborn, crying and petaled with blood.

—B.J. BEST, WEST BEND, WI

### Bovines on the Green

Cows, like statuary in the grass.

I love their faces.

The way they chew and switch their tails.

Their calves lay upon the sun-warmed earth like little nativity pieces,  
scattered across the field.

—ALICE PAUSER, FITCHBURG, WI

### peeing

today, i stood at the edge of a rock and unzipped,  
and suddenly, i was throwing my own party: a firework  
of phosphates from that measly mortar, a confetti

of gemstones from a pummeled piñata. girls, we know,  
do it differently: my mother's dog, for example,  
squares her hips over a splotch of lawn,

but can't stop wagging because she's excited  
to see me. sure, we all carry around our little pouches  
of gold, but it's nothing to write home about,

especially when there's weather and women  
and wine. but maybe i should do just that:  
—dear mom, today i stood at the edge of a rock

and peed. thank you for teaching me the difference  
between water and acid; thank you for saying  
thunderstorms are not god's way of doing

his business. i have learned about clouds,  
and the tannins of grapeskins, and how to love my wife:  
thank you for teaching me the way to do right things.

—B. J. BEST, WEST BEND, WI

# Wendy Vardaman Interviews Kimberly Blaeser

**Kimberly Blaeser**, a Professor at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, teaches Creative Writing, Native American Literature, and American Nature Writing. Her publications include three books of poetry: *Trailing You*, winner of the first book award from the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas, *Absentee Indians and Other Poems*, and *Apprenticed to Justice*. Her scholarly study, *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition*, was the first native-authored book-length study of an Indigenous author. Of Anishinaabe ancestry and an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe who grew up on the White Earth Reservation, Blaeser is also the editor of *Stories Migrating Home: A Collection of Anishinaabe Prose and Traces in Blood, Bone, and Stone: Contemporary Ojibwe Poetry*. Blaeser's current mixed genre project, which includes her nature and wildlife photography as well as poetry and creative nonfiction, explores intersecting ideas about Native place, nature, preservation, and spiritual sustenance.

WV: Tell me about ecopoetry. How is it different (or is it) from nature poetry?

KB: For me, what distinguishes ecopoetry from nature poetry is the embedded understanding of responsibility. Or response-ability, as I like to characterize it, so that the word suggests a relationship. That relationship involves a spiritual vision, being responsible by being engaged in the life processes. This aligns with a Native idea of reciprocity, a give and take relationship. And this active involvement with an alive world space—our responsive action, fuels our growth—our abilities. The more we pay attention to the natural world, the more we understand it; the more we understand it, the better able we are to act appropriately in a fashion that will help sustain all life. As fellow inhabitants of this world space, we live implicated in the state of the universe. A poetry that proceeds from or reflects this understanding is, in my view, ecopoetry. Now the poetry might be engaged in a simple act of attention or it might be involved in a more activist endeavor—critiquing dangerous practices or inciting involvement in political endeavors, but ecopoetry as I define it arises from an awareness of the entwined nature of all elements in our world, has as philosophical foundation an understanding of the interdependence of universal survival, and carries within it a sense of accountability.

And, of course, it alludes to or embodies this awareness through or within the aesthetically charged language of poetry.

WV: With respect to your own poetry, do you prefer the term *ecopoetry*, or are you writing *nature* poems or *post-pastoral* ones?

KB: Of course, not all my poetic work is of the same tenor, nor do the various pieces succeed to the same degree poetically. But I

do strive towards writing that voices respect for the natural world and that attempts to incite a similar response in the reader/listener. Although I don't weigh this in the writing of each poem, overall I think it fair to say I aspire to create poetry of spirit and witness, and many times the focus involves various kinds of survival, including ecological survival. On the journey toward that vision of sustainability, I think the writing wanders through several dimensions, crossing literary boundaries of what is being called post-pastoral, ecopoetry, and spiritual poetry (maybe also sharing some qualities of the contemporary metaphysical tradition).

WV: Do you think of ecopoetry as primarily an artistic/aesthetic movement, an ethical one, neither, or both? Does being an ecopoet require activism?

KB: Both/and. You knew it wouldn't be either/or! Seriously, coming out of a Native literary tradition which includes ceremonial songs and song poems, I always expect poetry to "matter." Indigenous literatures often have what I call "supra-literary intentions." The writers/performers want their works to come off the page and do something in the world. In articulating this aesthetic that involves both art and activism, I often invoke Seamus Heaney's discussion in *The Redress of Poetry* in which he claims a vision of poetry as both affective and effective, seeing it as "joy in being a process for language" as an "agent for proclaiming and correcting injustices." I also love Linda Hogan's expression of this duality in her poem "Neighbors" in which she writes both "This is the truth and not just a poem" and "This is a poem and not just the truth."

So I do think it involves activism. The range of what this might entail is vast. It could be demonstrating, cleaning up natural sites, doing animal rescue, writing letters, voting. And it is important to remember that in some circumstances even to speak is a revolutionary act. Indeed, writing political poetry in an environment that sees that as an anachronism might also be considered activism.

WV: Does ecopoetry demand activism from its readers, too?

KB: I think ecopoetry asks of its readers/listeners for change. Some works demand more specific or greater activism. Allison Hedge Coke's recent book *Blood Run* asks readers to participate in various ways in

protecting a snake effigy mound in South Dakota and a portion of the book proceeds go to the cause. Linda Hogan's work often rhetorically incites the readers in phrases such as "Get Up, Go AWOL!"

On the most basic level, I think all ecopoetry asks for change. Poetically it works to alter the reader's vision or understanding. Such heart change should bear fruit in attitude and action. I remember a poem by Mary Oliver called "Red." The poem is a simple narrative in which the speaker confesses her longing to see a gray fox. In separate incidents she

## Angles of Being

It's all angle after all.  
What we see  
and miss.  
The leaf bird  
limed and shadowed  
to match  
every other  
green upturned hand  
blooming on the August tree.  
Indecipherable  
even when wings flutter  
like leaves in breeze.  
Or the silhouette  
dark and curved  
on the bare oak.  
Beak,  
parted tail,  
each mistakable  
for knot  
branch  
or twig.  
Only if they exit the scene  
unblend  
isolate themselves  
against too blue sky  
does the game  
of hidden pictures  
end.  
Ah, angles.  
Tell all  
or tell it slant.  
What we  
dream  
appear  
or inverted  
seem to be.

encounters two, each hit by a car, each dying as cars continue to flood by. Hence the gray fox becomes the red of the title, red like the spilled blood of each. As the narrator witnesses the death of the fox, the reader witnesses her soul change—from one who desires to “collect” the experience of seeing a gray fox to one who mourns the callousness with which they are being destroyed.

So perhaps the poet becomes the “seer,” (and I mean that in both senses of the word).

Through the images and detail of the poetry we can see in all their wondrous beauty places, elements, cycles, and creatures of the natural world.

And the poet might also become the vehicle by which we can vicariously learn to see differently, they may become like the prophetic seer of ancient times who reveals, unveils, predicts, or even warns. Eco-poetry asks that readers take heed of the re-visioning they are offered.

WV: Are there particular themes or images that characterize eco-poetry? I’m thinking of the dissolution of boundaries and the permeability of boundaries, for instance, in much of what I’ve read—there’s a lot of transformation, as well as an exploration of the boundary between human and non-human.

KB: Thinking of this tradition in poetry, I believe the ideas of transcendence and transformation both play a key role in the philosophy. In my own work, the notion of correspondence is equally important as is the understanding of time as a limited linguistic construction. I think all of these suggest the permeability of boundaries you have alluded to. They suggest a comingling, and invoke or become a strategy or pathway for discovering the eternal, the ephemeral, the immaterial. And, although some works do set up a kind of human/non-human dichotomy, I most admire works that tend to undermine the supremacy of the egocentric and individualistic. I think of a slight poem by Chinese poet Li Po. In the translation I have, the title is “Zazen on the Mountain” and the last two lines read: “We sit together, the mountain and me, / until only the mountain remains.”

WV: Are there any forms, structures, or aesthetic elements that characterize eco-poetry? (The haiku, for instance, seems particularly important.)

KB: Just as in the Li Po poem the ego disappears, in haiku even the language of the poem dissolves into experience, or some would say into enlightenment. I have a great affinity for haiku and I love to write them, but I have to say—and this is not false modesty—I am by no means a master of the form. But because I am so enamored of the practice, I do often write haiku. Poetically, that striving after simple image is a wonderful

discipline; and the spiritual discipline of Zen often associated with haiku also enriches the haiku quest.

In regards to other themes and forms, I think the object poem and the ode have also been used to good effect by eco-poets. We find fruitful predecessors in some of Neruda’s odes, odes that center on the chestnut or a yellow bird but, in so doing, gesture to much beyond, to the order and chaos and larger beauty and mystery of the world, to the smallness of the chestnut, the bird, and, yes, to our own smallness. Other times (as in the “Red” poem mentioned above) the narrative form is used as the speaker of the poem relates an experience that leads to personal change. And I would point to similarities shared with naturalists or natural history writers. In this vein, the listing poem is sometimes employed, as a catalogue or accumulation of details provides, for example, a feeling for the essence of a particular place.

WV: A few of the names I often see mentioned in connection with eco-poetry nationally include Mary Oliver, Wendell Berry, Joy Harjo, W.S. Merwin, Gary Snyder, Pattiann Rogers. Which poets do you think of or particularly enjoy, and who would you recommend to a reader that wants to get an idea of what eco-poetry is?

KB: I’m a bit eclectic in my gathering of poets. I am a great fan of Mary Oliver and Joy Harjo, both of whom you mention and

## On Climbing Petroglyphs

### I.

Newly twelve with size seven feet  
dangling beside mine off the rock  
ledge, legerdmain of self knowledge.  
How do I say anything—magic  
words you might need to hear?  
With flute-playing, green-painted nails  
your child’s fingers reach to span the range  
of carmel-colored women in our past.  
Innocently you hold those ghost hands:  
each story a truce we’ve made with loss.  
How can I tell you there were others?

Big-boned women who might try  
to push out hips in your runner’s body.  
Women who will betray you for men,  
a bottle, or because they love you  
love you, don’t want to see you disappointed  
in life, so will hold you, hold you hostage  
with words, words tangled around courage  
duty or money. When should I show you  
my own flesh cut and scarred on the barbs  
of belonging and love’s oldest language?

### II.

No, let us dangle here yet, dawdle  
for an amber moment while notes shimmer  
sweetly captured in turquoise flute songs—  
the score of a past we mark together.  
No words whispered yet beyond these painted  
untainted rock images of ancients: sun, bird, hunter.  
Spirit lines that copper us to an infinity.  
Endurance. Your dangling. Mine.  
Before the floor of our becoming.  
Perhaps even poets must learn silence,  
that innocence, that space before speaking.

whose styles differ quite dramatically. But I am entranced by both. Oliver’s *West Wind*, for example, blends so lovingly the intricacies of nature and the poetic calling, sometimes aching and almost in the ecstatic tradition. Joy Harjo is often a poet of grit and, as she says, of “truth telling.” She is one of a handful of Native poets whose work has had an influence on the direction I’ve taken in my writing over the years. I don’t think I could aspire to the wild unfettered range of her imaginative vision, but I love the way she welcomes story and mythic reality into the everyday world, and the vigor with which she carries forth stories of injustice.

## Dreams of Water Bodies

Muskrat—*Wazhashk*,  
small whiskered swimmer,  
you, a fluid arrow crossing waterways  
with the simple determination  
of one who has dived  
purple deep into mythic quest.

Belittled or despised  
as water rat on land;  
hero of our Anishinaabeg people  
in animal tales, creation stories  
whose tellers open slowly,  
magically like within a dream,  
your tiny clenched fist  
so all water tribes might believe.

See the small grains of sand—  
*Ah, only those poor few*—  
but they become our turtle island  
this good and well-dreamed land  
where we stand in this moment  
on the edge of so many bodies of water  
and watch *Wazhashk*, our brother,  
slip through pools and streams and lakes  
this marshland earth hallowed by  
the memory  
the telling  
the hope  
the dive  
of sleek-whiskered-swimmers  
who mark a dark path.

And sometimes in our water dreams  
*we pitiful land-dwellers*  
in longing  
recall, and singing  
make spirits ready  
to follow:  
*bakobii*.\*

\*Go down into the water.

Other poets: David Wagoner visited Notre Dame while I was a student there and I have been grateful to follow his fine work. I admire the writing of Linda Hogan in every genre in which she works. Her life and her creative work are both filled with a dedication to the earth and all its inhabitants. There is an attention to detail and an overriding awareness of timelessness that I appreciate in the writing of Robert Haas. Like many people, I am fascinated by Coleman Barks' translations (and performances) of the poetry of Rumi and much of this writing is filled

with a kind of spiritual search interwoven with an evocation of the lushness of nature.

Because poets tend to address multiple subjects, in addition to following the work of particular poets, I find it helpful to keep my eye out for thematic anthologies. One that I found and have used in teaching several times is *A Book of Luminous Things*, edited by Czeslaw Milosz (who I was also lucky enough to hear at Notre Dame). *Poetry Comes Up Where it Can*, edited by Brian Swann, is an anthology of works published first in *The Amicus Journal* and all the works deal with nature and the environment. Another anthology, *Poems to Live By In Uncertain Times*, edited by Joan Murray, includes among its larger gathering a couple of sections of works we could call ecopoetry.

WV: Does ecopoetry mean the same thing to a Native and a non-Native poet? Perhaps that's a too broad and binary way to frame the question, but I'm curious in general about the extent to which the interest in "eco" right now is driven by Native sensibilities, and whether it is a co-option of them in any way?

KB: I've partially characterized the Native understanding of ecology when I spoke about the philosophy of reciprocity and responsibility. Whether for some practitioners the current literary eco-trend involves any kind of "co-option" of Native sensibility or a stereotypic amalgamation of complex and varied tribally specific systems of beliefs, I think the more interesting tension involves a divergence in origin or function—the crossover between acts of resistance and the literature of resistance.

Let me elaborate. Because historically Native people have faced destruction of homelands, removal, and land theft, I think the undertones in Native works often involve conflict and loss. Also, given the ecological devastation witnessed over the years from clear-cutting of forests to the decimation of animal populations like the buffalo to the pollution caused on tribal lands by mining and industry, the inheritance of oppression has fueled the need to assume a role as defender of the earth and of sacred lands. It might be fair to suggest that the literary eco-tradition in Native communities has arisen largely from political need while the eco-tradition in non-Native communities originated more as an aesthetic movement. I believe the two have come closer together in recent years and that important alliances have formed. A recent multi-genre collection, *Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World*, explores these separate and overlapping traditions and stories.

## Copper crane bodies ride impossible stilt legs through fields of June.

The published work of Native writers such as Marilou Awiakta, Haunani Trask, and Elizabeth Woody includes examples of poetry that had its origin in ecological activism. In this complicated terrain, let me offer a specific instance of a poetic work that explores this eco-warrior stance as it pertains particularly to America, Native America, and the land that is home to both. *Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land*, by Acoma writer Simon Ortiz, was published in commemoration of the Pueblo Revolt that took place 300 years earlier, but it also explicitly deals with uranium mining in the Grants region of New Mexico and the fallout from the atomic bomb detonation at White Sands. Although covering much other ground in these poems, Ortiz underscores the need for Native peoples to "fight / to show them" and for America to "give back" so "the land will regenerate."

WV: Many of your poems about the natural world have strong narrative and spiritual components, and they tend to include people or animals that are sentient creatures. I'm thinking, for instance, of "Memories of Rock" or "Seasonal: Blue Winter, Kirkenes Fire." Is that a fair way to characterize your approach?

KB: Yes, that seems an accurate representation. I admit I find it hard to characterize my own approach, because as artists and spiritual beings, we are always in a process or search for insight. I may ask or imply a similar question across a range of several poems, not only because I want a reader to contemplate the philosophical territory, but because I am treading there beside you, wondering too.

One tack I do recognize is my attempt to break down various classic demarcations. For example, the class line between what is alive and what is supposedly inert matter. Even science no longer backs up the "dumb matter" assumptions.

Sometimes I use narrative in service of defamiliarization. Mythic depth or dimension allows us to imagine or admit an "other" range of realities. Perhaps it turns or changes the hierarchy, the power structure. Perhaps it allows for different ways of knowing, employs alternate languages, or dis-orders sense data. If we come back from such a linguistic journey with one small cog liberated from the "must-be machine" of our everyday, our experience of "reality" will change.



*This is the beginning of Wendy Vardaman's interview of Kimberly Blaeser. Read the full interview & more poems at [versewisconsin.org](http://versewisconsin.org).*

## Kantele

*kantele, n. : a traditional Finnish zither originally having five strings but now having as many as thirty. —Merriam-Webster*

Take the glitter on a snow bank.  
Take a harp and take a mouth.  
Shape a song far from the miters  
and the masses of the south.

Glitters from no votive candles  
light the day—and day is short,  
briefly blinding, then the darkness  
we expect.

The notes' retort,  
sweet in riposte, like a flower  
blooming in the melting frost  
can't deny that life is frozen  
on the whole, and quickly lost,  
fading like a note's decaying  
lost in sudden chill, and grace  
stays unearned.

No sultry languor  
touches melody or place—  
here, the beauty's of December,  
hope a ghost, the distant sun,  
sheets of ice above a river,  
though we guess the waters run  
ceaselessly—where we can't see them.  
We can't be the thing we're not.  
Creation is both spring and winter.  
Cold is lovelier than hot.

—QUINCY LEHR, BROOKLYN, NY

## Gladness

It's all about gladness,  
while the stinkweed  
keeps right on stinkin'  
and being stinkweed

and the skunk cabbage  
trundles on and on  
as skunk cabbage

and we have always held  
the pathways of our earth  
in cupped palms,  
passed from one  
shaman and magician  
to the next without  
a drop of being lost.

—AYAZ DARYL NIELSEN, BOULDER, CO

## Lake for All Seasons

The water doesn't care  
Whether it's April, or August, or October—  
So long as it isn't actually frozen,  
And the sun is shining:  
It sparkles, just the same.

—PHYLLIS ANN KARR, BARNES, WI

## The Peace of Neighbors

It happens many places, I guess.  
A half moon hangs in the blue morning sky  
and there, beyond the woods, cumulus rise  
over the sea as fishermen finish untangling  
*rödspätta*, flat sweet fish, from their nets.  
At the *loppis*, the second hand store, Swedes  
and one American sift respectfully through  
relinquished treasures—a *keramik* tea service,  
white with blue flowers and brick-red rim;  
clear glass *äggkoppar* where quail wings  
hold boiled eggs aloft; woolen *halsdukar*  
to warm necks through winter; oriental  
rugs for the feet. And in the east,  
surely people look up at their own Iraqi  
or Indonesian or Filipino skies and  
similarly long for the peace of neighbors  
shooting the breeze while listening  
to their children play fotboll. These Swedes  
know how good things are easily lost.  
Every fall they wave goodbye to their sun,  
live with daylight squeezed into a skinny  
rectangle of hours. So when summer comes,  
they say you should eat each meal  
on your lawn or the outdoor patios of eateries  
and pubs. Have *kaffe* parties, with no fewer  
than seven sweets, under apple trees.  
Every morning you should dip in the sea  
with the ducks and terns. Even in winter's  
thin sunlit hours it is best to bake in the sauna,  
then drop buck-naked into stunning seas.  
You must build for summer. Your heart must pound  
and lungs burn for it. When those precious long days  
come, you should sit with your back to the house,  
maybe with good people, good friends,  
lift your face sunward and absorb peace  
right across your skin.

—MARY LINTON, FORT ATKINSON, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

# Contributors' Notes

**Antler**, former poet laureate of Milwaukee, is the author of *Selected Poems, Ever-Expanding Wilderness, Deathrattles vs. Comecries, and Exclamation Points ad Infinitum!* His work appears in many recent anthologies including *Best Gay Poetry 2008* and *Wilderness Blessings*. p. 4

Besides poetry, photography and paper arts are **Sharon Auberle's** passions. She is the author of two books: *Saturday Nights at the Crystal Ball* and *Crow Ink*, and has recently recorded a CD of her poetry with some fine Door County musicians, entitled *Something After Burning*. p. 27

**James Babbs** is not a real writer but he plays one on TV. He thinks poets should be treated more like rock stars and have swarms of beautiful groupies chasing them wherever they go. His books are available from [www.xlibris.com](http://www.xlibris.com), [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) & [www.interiornoisepress.com](http://www.interiornoisepress.com). p. 26

**Guy R. Beining** has had six poetry books and 25 chapbooks published over the years, and appeared in seven anthologies. Recent publications include *chain, epiphany, perspective* (Germany), *New Orleans Review, The New Review of Literature*. p. 26

**Carol Berg** has poems forthcoming or in *Fifth Wednesday Journal, Pebble Lake Review, Rhino, garrissiluni, Melusine*, and elsewhere. She has an MFA from Stonecoast and an MA in English Literature. p. 29

**B.J. Best** is the author of *Birds of Wisconsin* (New Rivers Press), *State Sonnets* (sunnyoutside), and three chapbooks from Centennial Press, most recently *Drag: Twenty Short Poems about Smoking*. He is related, distantly and through marriage, to the 1986 Miss Wisconsin. p. 33

**Kimberly Blaeser** is a Professor in the English Department at UW-Milwaukee. Her publications include three books of poetry: *Trailing You, Absentee Indians and Other Poems, and Apprenticed to Justice*, as well as the edited volume *Traces in Blood, Bone, and Stone: Contemporary Ojibwe Poetry*. pp. 34-6

**Joseph Briggs** has been on the Capitol tour seventeen times. Okay, it's more like five times. Ask him a Wisconsin question. He dares you. His poetry-only twitter feed is at <http://twitter.com/joewbriggs>. p. 16

**Sean Butner** currently lives with his wife and son in Oshkosh, Wisconsin where he is pursuing an M.A. in English. His work has appeared and is forthcoming in *nibble, vox poetica, Midwest Literary Magazine, Indigo Rising Magazine*. He maintains a blog at <http://seanbutner.blogspot.com/>. p. 14

Born in Monroe, **Emery Campbell** graduated from UW-Madison. He is the author of a book published in 2005 of his own poems plus translations of French classical poetry. In 2010, his second book came out: *Selected Fables and Poems in Translation* (La Fontaine, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud). p. 29

**Fern G. Z. Carr** is a member of The League of Canadian Poets, lawyer and teacher. She composes poetry in five languages and has been published extensively as far abroad as India, Finland, South Africa and New Zealand. For more information, please visit Carr's website at [www.ferngzcarr.com](http://www.ferngzcarr.com). p. 32

**Alan Catlin** has published over sixty chapbooks and full length books of poetry and prose. Among the more recent chapbooks are, *Deep Water Horizon* from Pygmy Forest Press and *Effects of Sunlight in the Fog* from Bright Hill Press. p. 32

**Chloe Clark** grew up in north central Wisconsin and is currently a creative writing major at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She's had poems published in a variety of publications including previous issues of *Verse Wisconsin*. She is the Assistant Editor-In-Chief of *Women in REDzine*. p. 17

**Lenore McComas Coberly** has served as President, Credentials Chair, and Calendar editor of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets. Her poems have appeared in *The Sow's Ear, The Formalist, Wisconsin Academy Review, Nimrod*, and other publications and anthologies. p. 29

**Ginny Lowe Connors** is the author of *Barbarians in the Kitchen* (Antrim House Books, 2005) and a chapbook, *Under the Porch* (Hill-Stead Museum, 2010); the editor of three poetry collections, she has won the Atlanta Review's International Poetry Competition Prize and the 2010 Sunken Garden Poetry Prize. p. 18

**Elizabeth Cook** was born and raised in Madison, WI and cannot contemplate living in any other state. She went to Carroll College in Waukesha, WI where she discovered her love of poetry. She especially enjoys writing about the beautiful Wisconsin landscape. p. 8

**Bruce Dethlefsen** plays bass and sings in the musical duo *Obvious Dog*. He is the current Poet Laureate of Wisconsin. His new collection, *Unexpected Shiny Things*, is available from Cowfeather Press ([www.cowfeatherpress.org](http://www.cowfeatherpress.org)). pp. 20-1

**Rick Dinges** has an MA in literary studies from University of Iowa and he manages business systems at an insurance company. *Tulane Review, Cortland Review, Barnwood, Roanoke Review, and Gihon River Review* have most recently accepted his poems for their publications. p. 25

**Karl Elder** is Poet in Residence at Lakeland College near Sheboygan, where he also facilitates Sheboygan County's Mead Public Library Poetry Circle. His series of essays in response to prompts from Creative Writing Now appear online at <http://www.creative-writing-now.com/large-poetry.html>. p. 4

**Christa Gahlman** was born and raised in rural Wisconsin with a great appreciation for the intimacy of the woods, wide landscapes, and textured fields. She is the mother of two incredible daughters and one amazing son. She now resides in the city of Madison, and writes...and writes. p. 27

**Joey Goodall** lives and works in St. Paul, Minnesota. Along with back-issues of *Verse Wisconsin*, his poetry can also be found in the *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, and he sometimes blogs about pop culture at [joeygoodall.wordpress.com](http://joeygoodall.wordpress.com). p. 9, 27

**Carol Lynn Grellas's** most recent chapbooks are *Breakfast in Winter* (Flutter Press 2010) and *A Thousand Tiny Sorrows* (March Street Press 2010). She's also published two electronic chapbooks from Goldwake Press and Victorian Violet Press. Carol Lynn serves on the editorial panel for *Triggerfish Critical Review*. p. 22

**Peter J. Grieco** is a native of Buffalo, New York where he studies mathematics at Buffalo State College. His dear friend Sasha hails from Madison and is, of course, a Packers fan. p. 28

**Tim Hawkins** currently lives a short ferry trip away from the shores of Wisconsin. His writing has appeared most recently in *Four and Twenty, Iron Horse Literary Review, The Pedestal Magazine* and *Shot Glass Journal*, and is forthcoming in *Blueline, The Literary Bohemian*, and *The Midwest Quarterly*. p. 15

**Richard Hedderman's** poems have appeared in *South Dakota Review, CutBank, Eclipse*, and elsewhere. His chapbook, *The Discovery of Heaven* was published by Parallel Press in 2006. He is the Senior Educator at the Milwaukee Public Museum and a Lecturer in Theatre at UW-Milwaukee. p. 10, 27

**Catherine Jagoe** works as a translator. Poems from her chapbook *Castling Off* (Parallel Press, 2007) were featured on *The Writer's Almanac and Poetry Daily*. Her translations from Spanish include two novels, *That Brings a Woman* (1996) and *My Name Is Light* (2003). p. 13

**Nancy Jesse** grew up on a dairy farm in Barron County, Wisconsin. Creative writing became one of her favorite courses during a thirty-year career teaching English at Madison West High School. She has published both prose and poetry and lives with her husband Paul. p. 18

**Phyllis Ann Karr** moved with her parents to Wisconsin in 1977. She married a native Wisconsinite a decade later and moved farther north, to a lake in Bayfield County. p. 37

**Lawrence Kessenich** grew up in Wisconsin and still has a large extended family there. His poem "Angelus" won the Strokestown International Poetry Prize in Ireland in May 2010. And his essay about his Waunakee-bred father has just come out in the anthology *This I Believe: On Love*. p. 32

**Judy Kolosso** divides her time between a home in southeastern Wisconsin and the farm she grew up on in Neenah. She has been published in *Wisconsin People and Ideas, Echoes, Fox Cry Review*, and several anthologies. She has two books: *Aubade*, a chapbook, and a full-length collection, *In the First Place*. p. 18

**C. Kubasta** teaches literature and writing at Marian University and UW-Fox Valley. Her poems and translations have appeared in numerous journals, including *Stand, So To Speak*, and *The Spoon River Poetry Review*. She currently lives in Oshkosh with her partner John, cat Cliff and dog Ursula. p. 31

**Jim Landwehr** was born and raised in St. Paul, MN, and now lives and works in Waukesha as a Geographic Information Systems Analyst. Jim writes creative non-fiction, memoir, and poetry and is currently enrolled at AllWriters' Workplace and Workshop ([www.allwriters.org](http://www.allwriters.org)). p. 17

**Jackie Langetieg** has three books of poems: *White Shoulders* (Cross+Roads Press), *Just What in Hell is a Stage of Grief*, and *Confetti in a Silent City* (Ghost Horse Press). She is a member of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets and regular contributor to the annual calendar. p. 31

**Estella Lauter** is Professor Emerita at UW-Oshkosh. Her first chapbook, *Pressing a Life Together By Hand* (2007) was nominated for two Pushcart prizes. Her poem "Gaza, January 2009" tied for first prize in the 2009 Barbara Mandigo Kelly Peace Poetry Contest; it appears on [www.wagingpeace.org](http://www.wagingpeace.org). p. 8

**Tom Lavelle**, a native of Pittsburgh, lived in Milwaukee between 1981 and 83. Since then he's visited sporadically. He lives today in Stockholm, where he teaches and writes as he has done since 1992. It's not colder than Wisconsin, but darker. p. 24

**Janet Leahy** is a member of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets. Her poems have appeared in *The Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*, in *Wisconsin People and Ideas, Verse Wisconsin*, in the anthology *Empty Shoes*, and other publications. She is a teacher in Milwaukee and lives in New Berlin. p. 29

**Norman Leer** is professor emeritus of English at Roosevelt University in Chicago. He has published a critical study of the novels of Ford Madox Ford, a chapbook and two books of his own poetry: *I Dream My Father in a Song* and *Second Lining*, both from Mellen Poetry Press, 1992 and 1997 respectively. p. 16

**Quincy R. Lehr's** poetry and criticism have appeared in numerous journals and e-zines in the U.S., UK, Ireland, Australia, and the Czech Republic. His first book, *Across the Grid of Streets*, appeared in 2008, and his second, *Obscure Classics of English Progressive Rock*, will appear in 2011. p. 37

**MaryEllen Letarte's** father was born in Pepin, WI. MaryEllen lives and writes in Lunenburg, MA where she's developed and now directs the Louise Bogan Chapter of the Massachusetts State Poetry Society. p. 31

**J. Patrick Lewis's** first book of poems—*Gulls Hold Up the Sky*—has just been published by Laughing Fire Press. His poems have appeared in *Gettysburg Review, New England Review, New Letters*, and many others. He is the current Children's Poet Laureate of the United States. p. 8

**Barbara Lightner** has been published in works by Grey Fox Press, IOBA, Wisconsin Light and others; her poetry has appeared, or will appear, in the *Table Rock Review, New Verse News, Come Be a Memoirist*, the Zocalo Press' chapbook series, and the feminist anthology *Letters to the World*. p. 11

**Mary Linton** lives in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. She is a wetland biologist and loves mucking about in Wisconsin's wonderful waters. Mary finds the combination of teaching, wetland research, and writing perfect for mental health. p. 37

**E.O. Lipchik** lives and writes in Milwaukee. p. 13

**Ellaraine Lockie's** chapbook, *Stroking David's Leg*, was awarded Best Individual Collection for 2010 from *Purple Patch* magazine in England, and her chapbook *Red for the Funeral*, won the 2010 San Gabriel Poetry Festival Chapbook Contest. Ellaraine serves as Poetry Editor for the *lifestyles* magazine, *Lilipoh*. p. 15, 23

**Karen Loeb's** writing has appeared in such places as *Phantasmagoria, Pinyon, Wisconsin People and Ideas*, the UK print journal *Flash*, and the on-line journals *New Works Review* and *Verbsap*. A collection of her stories, *Jump Rope Queen* won a Minnesota Voices award and was published by New Rivers Press. p. 19

**Anna Bellamy Lucas** is a member of Green River Writers, based in Louisville, KY, founded by her beloved mentor, Mary (Ernie) O'Dell. She and her husband once bought contraband cheese curds from a couple selling Wisconsin cheese out of the trunk of their car. **p. 10**

Though **David Lurie** grew up on the East Coast, he's spent the last three years bouncing between Milwaukee and Chicago. He's taught in two high-need Milwaukee Public Schools, taught test prep for wealthy Chicagoans, and sold fitness equipment, all while writing and making plans for PhD programs. **p. 16**

**Rick McMonagle** was born and raised in Pittsburgh, PA. His parents honeymooned at Lake Geneva. He lived in the country outside of River Falls, WI from 1996 to 2008. His poetry lineage includes John Haag, his first poetry teacher at Penn State, and Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman at Naropa Institute. **p. 20**

**Kelly Mc Nerney** lives in San Francisco where she serves as Editor-in-Chief for *Fourteen Hills: SFSU Review*. She is working on her MFA in Poetry at San Francisco State University, and just finished a collection of poems entitled *Peripheries*. Her work has appeared in *Red Wheelbarrow* and *Metonym*. **p. 22**

**Mary Mercier**, native to Milwaukee, now lives 77 miles west of that Cream City, with her husband and two wily cats. She is the author of one chapbook, *Small Acts* (Parallel Press). In 2005 her poem "Snow Geese" was included in Martha Glowacki's exhibition, *Starry Transit*, staged at the UW's Washburn Observatory. **p. 9**

**Richard Merelman** writes poems because language is the only medium through which he can hope to achieve beautiful expression. Recent poems have appeared in *Bumble Jacket Miscellany* and *Verse Wisconsin*. He taught political science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison until 2001. **p. 17**

**Mary Meriam's** poems have appeared in the *NY Times*, *Poetry Foundation*, *American Life in Poetry*, and *Rhythm*. She's the author of *The Countess of Flatbroke* (Modern Metrics, 2006) and *The Poet's Zodiac* (Seven Kitchens, 2011), and editor of *Filled with Breath: 30 Sonnets by 30 Poets* (Exot, 2010) and *Lavender Review*. **p. 28**

**Ayaz Daryl Nielsen** attended Blair Public High School from '62 - '65, and earned a BA in English over a nine-year period from the U of WI - Eau Claire. **p. 37**

**Joe "Pepe" Oulahan** was born in Mexico City, raised in many different parts. Now he lives in Milwaukee with his wife, Chris. He has two beautiful, grown children—Amalia and Kylie. At the moment, he's very concerned about extreme right-wing agenda being played out in our nation. **p. 28**

**Alice F. Pauser's** inspiration is drawn from Nature and dream journaling. Her recent collection, *I Follow the Red Road* is based in the dreams of Ancient Shamanic Women. She hopes to publish the collection in 2012. Alice teaches dream journal writing and how to craft it into other genres. **p. 33**

**Simon Perchik** is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. For more information, including his essay "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" and a complete bibliography, please visit his website at [www.simonperchik.com](http://www.simonperchik.com). **p. 24, 27**

**Alayne Peterson** is an associate professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Fond du Lac. Her poetry has appeared in *The Front Range Review*, *INK*, *Into the Candy Shop*, and the *Hiram Arts Magazine*. She lives near a bend in the Ice Age Trail with her husband Tony and their two children. **p. 12, 16**

**Nancy Petulla** is a retired minister who lives in a 150-year-old farmhouse. She has lived there for 34 years. **p. 25**

Raised Catholic, **Jeff Poniewaz** now considers himself eco-spiritual like John Muir. His recent chapbook *Polish for Because—Meditations of a Former St. Josaphat Altar Boy* (available from Inland Ocean Books, P.O. Box 11502, Milwaukee 53211) traces his spiritual evolution. **pp. 5-7**

**Charles Portolano** started writing poetry 14 years ago to celebrate the birth of his darling, daughter Valerie, and to preserve the memories. Valerie was born with many obstacles to overcome. Writing soon became his way of saving his sanity. Valerie is doing great now; she is quite the young writer. **p. 12**

**Andrea Potos** lives in Madison with her husband and daughter. She has a collection from Parallel Press titled *The Perfect Day*. Her book *Yaya's Cloth* won a 2008 Outstanding Achievement Award in Poetry from the Wisconsin Library Association. **p. 24**

**Jim Price** retired to Osceola Township in Wisconsin over a year ago, after a 30-year career in human services. He's written a lot of poetry over the years, and feels maybe it's time to share with a wider circle than friends and family. *Verse Wisconsin* #102 included his first published poem. **p. 9**

**Ester Hauser Laurence Prudlo** has lived away from the state for some 28 years, but she returned two years ago for summers. The author of three children's books, she has published a few poems. A retired counselor to soldiers and inmates, she is mother of 4, and grandmother of 4, and lives with her husband, Tony. **p. 11**

**Charles Rammelkamp** edits the online journal, *The Potomac*, <http://thepotomacjournal.com>, and has a chapbook of poems forthcoming from MuscleHead Press entitled *Mixed Signals*. **p. 31**

**James Reitter** earned his BA in Creative Writing, his MFA in Poetry, and his Phd in Folklore. He's spent the past four years as an Assistant Professor of English for UW-Sheboygan and lives in Sheboygan with his fiancée, two cats, and a bearded dragon. **p. 14**

**Georgia Ressimeyer** has twice won grants from the Wisconsin Arts Board, and is the author of two short novels. Her poetry has appeared widely in journals and magazines. Her chapbook, *Today I Threw My Watch Away* (Finishing Line Press, 2010), placed 2nd in the WFOP's 2011 chapbook contest. **p. 12**

**Liz Rhodebeck** is a poet and freelance writer from Pewaukee, where she is active in the local arts community and co-edits the project, "One Vision: A Fusion of Art and Poetry in Lake Country." She published her third chapbook, *What I Learned in Kansas* (Port Yonder Press, 2010). [www.waterwriter.com](http://www.waterwriter.com). **p. 22**

**Harlan Richards** grew up on the west side of Madison and came late to his penchant for poetry, having not begun to write until his mid-50s. He has had poems accepted by *Love's Change Magazine*, *Shepherd*, *Samsara* and *Italian—Americana*. He is currently living in Wisconsin's Belly of the Beast. **p. 30**

**Jeannie E. Roberts** is an award-winning poet, a lifelong visual artist and the author and illustrator of *Let's Make Faces!*, a children's book ([www.RhymeTheRoostBooks.com](http://www.RhymeTheRoostBooks.com)). Her poetry has appeared in *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*, *Goose River Anthology* and elsewhere, including the mixed-media show *The Vision and the Word*. **p. 13**

**Nichole Rued** is a student at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Her works have appeared or are forthcoming in *Sheephead Review*, *Underground Voices*, and *Verse Wisconsin*. **p. 14**

**Chuck Rybak** is a professor of creative writing and literature at UW-Green Bay. He is the author of three collections of poetry, the most recent being *Tongue and Groove* which was published by Main Street Rag. Chuck lives in Green Bay with his wife and two daughters. **p. 15**

**Jane Satterfield's** most recent book, *Daughters of Empire: A Memoir of a Year in Britain and Beyond* appeared from Demeter Press in 2009. Her second collection, *Assignment at Vanishing Point*, received the 2003 Elixir Press Poetry Prize. She's received an NEA Fellowship in Literature and three Maryland State Arts Council grants. **p. 33**

**G. A. Scheinoha** never imagined he'd follow in his father's tracks: a series of blue collar jobs. He's written a million words over thirty years, some of which have recently appeared in *Avocet*, *Bellowing Ark*, *Bracelet Charm*, *Echoes*, *Floyd County Moonshine* and *Verse Wisconsin*. **p. 23**

**Wendy Schmidt** is a Wisconsin native who has written short stories and poems for the last 10 years. She enjoys gardening, animals and collecting odds and ends. Cold weather survival supplies include a writing desk, computer and her mewing muse sleeping nearby. **p. 13**

**Robert Schuler** has been trying to write for fifty years. His fifteenth collection of poems, *The Book of Jeweled Visions*, has recently been published by Tom Montag's MWPB Books, PO Box 8, Fairwater, WI 53931. Price: \$12.50 plus \$1.50 postage. **p. 12, 19, 26**

**Paula Schulz** teaches 20 Kindergarten students and writes at every opportunity. "Hummingbird" was written for her daughter, who died of an inherited illness. **p. 11**

**Peg Sherry**, a "closer" writer for years, invested her energies in family and academia: four children, Masters' degree, teaching regular and gifted students at all levels, including college. Her work is in local and state magazines and in her books of poems and essays. **p. 8**

**David Steingass** is the author of six books including *Fishing for Dynamite*, and *Great Plains* (RedDragonfly Press, Redwing MN) which won the 2002 Posner Award from the Council of Wisconsin Writers. He is interested especially in technical and stylistic possibilities among lineated poems, prose poems, and flash fiction. Besides reading and writing at his Madison home, Steingass presents writing workshops and residencies in schools. **p. 32**

**Jeanine Stevens** has three Pushcart nominations and first place awards in poetry from the Stockton Arts Commission, the Mendocino Coast Writer's Conference Contest, and the Maggie H. Meyer, and Clifford Wolfe Awards. She has five chapbooks and her poems have appeared widely. **p. 18.**

**Nancy Takacs** lives in Wellington, UT, and in Bayfield, WI. Her third book of poetry, *Juniper*, was published by Limberlost Press: [www.limberlostpress.com](http://www.limberlostpress.com) A former wilderness studies instructor and creative writing professor, she has done poetry workshops in prisons, schools, and senior citizen centers. **p. 19**

**Don Thackrey** likes Wisconsin so much that he has asked his wife to launch his cremation ashes into the West Wind, which will carry him to, and sprinkle him over, that great state. **p. 24**

**Wendy Vardaman**, [wendyvardaman.com](http://wendyvardaman.com), is a Co-Editor of *Verse Wisconsin*. **pp. 34-6**

**Lisa Vihos's** poems have appeared previously in *Verse Wisconsin*, and in *Free Verse*, *Lakefire*, *Wisconsin People and Ideas*, *Seems*, and *Big Muddy*. She is an associate editor of *Stoneboat*. She resides in Sheboygan with her 13-year-old son. <http://www.lisapoemoftheweek.blogspot.com/>. **p. 30**

**John Walser** is an associate professor at Marian University in Fond du Lac. He is a founding member of the Foot of the Lake Poetry Collective ([www.lakepoets.com](http://www.lakepoets.com)). He has lived most of his adult life in the upper Midwest, where he has loved the fruits and flowers that grow in our backyards. **p. 22, 23**

**Timothy Walsh's** awards include the Grand Prize in the *Atlanta Review* International Poetry Competition. He authored *The Dark Matter of Words: Absence, Unknowing, and Emptiness in Literature* and two chapbooks, *Wild Apples* (Parallel) and *Blue Lace Colander* (Marsh River). He is an Assistant Dean at UW-Madison. **p. 10**

**Molly Weigel** is a previously unpublished poet and fairly widely published poetry translator with recent versions in the *Oxford Book of Latin American Poetry* and *SIN: New World Poetics*, among others. She also writes poetic essays that use floods as a central organizing principle or motif. **p. 23**

**Marie Sheppard Williams's** mentor for poetry is Thomas R. Smith, a WI poet and essayist. She has had poems published in *The Sun*, *Poetry East*, in Ted Kooser's newspaper column, and in another issue of *Verse Wisconsin*. She has published seven story collections, and has won the Pushcart Prize twice. **p. 25**

**Koon Woon** has published two full-length books of poems from Kaya press in New York, NY. He was born in China and has been an advocate of Seattle poetry since the 1980s. He was a frequent contributor to *Free Verse*. **p. 13**

**Yvonne Yahnke** has published two chapbooks with Fireweed press. Her poems have appeared in local publications and in almost all of the WFOP calendars. She is on the shady side of eighty and is constantly surprised that her heart still has something to say. **p. 30**



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