ESSENCE '88

Kutztown University
Fine Arts & Literary Magazine
### Contributors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson, Tim</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aubin, Elaine</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank, Tim</td>
<td>11, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brodsky, Helena J</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown, Maryjo</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceena, Drew</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colburn, Michelle</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordia, Karen Ann</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corbett, Theresa</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Del Guidice, Carol</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flanagan, John</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garland, Suzanne</td>
<td>15, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinderliter, Leslie</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jankowsky, Patrick</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Beth</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kovacs, Garrett</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larsen, David</td>
<td>13, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazor, Lisette Milana</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moro, Lisa</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearhouse, Angel</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonnemaker, Buck</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penwarden, Barbara</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petro, Elizabeth C.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillips, Tracy</td>
<td>10, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protchko, Scott J.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ransavage, Doug</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond, Mary</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redding, Keith</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reimer, David</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinhold, B.</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schober, Vicky</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shearer, Laurie Joann</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleboda, Irma (Granny)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spradlin, Rebecca A.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strasser, Brendan D.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai, Bhong</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrush, Amy</td>
<td>8, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsagawa, Mika</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitehead, Susan M.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William, Brian</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilmarth, Sandra</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Seasons in the Field

Beyond the forsythia hedge at home stretches a nine acre field of feed corn where I used to play as a child. My mother tried to keep me on our side of the hedge by telling me scary stories about the ferocious ground hogs that lived in the field. However, these stories were powerless against my sense of curiosity. I knew that there were adventures waiting for me among the stalks of corn. So, with my rebellious nature, I eventually travelled to wonderful, far away lands beyond the forsythia hedge.

During the spring months, I soon found something more ferocious than ground hogs in the field. The wind in spring screamed like an angry giant. It would dance through my hair and always push me in a direction that I did not want to go. Sometimes I ran with outstretched arms and allowed the wind to carry me at random across the muddy field. It felt like flying, and when the wind slowed, I dropped to the ground in fits of laughter. My body shook with weakness from the ride.

In summer when the ground was dry, almost dusty, and I could play in the field without soiling my clothes, I found something more beautiful than the forsythia hedge. I used to believe the summer sun was a giant butterscotch candy, melting in the 90 plus degree weather, and painting the numerous rows of corn with its warm golden color. The summer evenings were beautiful as well. Every evening, when the sun sank into the horizon, the clouds paraded across the sky like a rainbow of cotton candy. My imagination turned the parade into a carnival and the stars were the fireworks. On such nights, I often wanted to camp out in the field, but this met strong disapproval from my mother.

Fall was the most exciting season for me. Before the stalks of feed corn were cut by the local farmer, the field was a maze of corridors and secret passages. The stalks were gray and dry, and rustled when someone brushed past them. The rustling sounds added to the excitement of playing tag and hide-and-go-seek with my friends. Then we would shell buckets of feed corn for the annual tincturing night, held on the Thursday before Halloween. When the farmer came to cut the stalks of corn that had withstood the forces of nature, and the havoc of children, I began to understand the strength of these willowy plants.

In winter, a hush fell over the barren field. No animals stirred, except for a few geese that stopped, pecked at the scattered corn cobs, and then returned southward. I spent my time scanning the cloudy sky, anticipating the first flurries of snow. When the snow finally came, it drifted into the ground hog holes, covered the mounds of frozen ground, and blanketed the remains of corn stalks and husks. Only after the snow stopped falling was I allowed to go out and make tracks in the powdery field. No other feeling was more calming to me than the snow covering my sled runners and whispering "shush—shush—shush—" as I glided down the hill. When the ride ended, I would lay on my sled and listen to the silence that enveloped the whole countryside. Exhausted from breathing the crisp air and listening to such stillness, I would venture indoors and fall asleep with ease.

The seasons of the corn field guided me through my childhood. The repetition of spring, summer, fall, and winter provided security and tradition for me. The time I spent playing and exploring in the field shaped me into the person I am today. I will always treasure the seasons in the field.

-Lisette Milana Lazor
Gray

Gray
Everything gray
The buildings
The land
The air
Even
The people
DIRT,
DECAY,
ABUSE.
The cities
Choked
With smog so thick
Nor even
The sun
Shines bright

Except
In one corner
A ray
Reaches
D
O
W
N
And forces
Some green to show
That green
Call it...
HOPE...

-Gems of Managaha Island
Pua Lani
arched her back
stretching the long tawny arms
into the air
toward the Wedgwood sky
She squinted into the relentless sun
crystal clear waves
splashed her slender legs
and blue sarong
around her small waist
She stooped over
and filled the cup of her hands
with snow-white sand
and a single jellyfish
The plumeria above her left ear
drew and drifted ashore
among shells like bridal lace

-Helena J. Brodsky

-Mika Tsugawa
Sandra Wilmeth

Reaching
open-armed
I'm going down
for the third time
in a turbulent sea
of false hopes
and
salty-sweet promises
while the sharks
of my own introspection
circle tirelessly

Just throw me
a life-like line
enough to pull me through

Float with me awhile
rocking rhythm
of the waves
salty spray
of sweat
as we rise
and fall
as one

Still
Shards of glass
lay on top of the garbage:
Resting
in pieces
between the folds of a
brown paper bag.

Scattered
amongst chunks of carrots
and cigarette butts

There is still a little rum left
in the bottom ring of my glass:
I praise it
and it damns me.

I consume it
and it wastes me.

and still
he’s gone.

- Karen Ann Concordia

Hold on...
Why?
Near life is not enough.
Vague realities.
Night descending
knives you

Flighty day shadows
slip away
baring soul and center.

Life mask torn.
Winds parching life and legend
wear away my granite constitution.
Alone, without
in silence void
I stand
to lose
my mind.

-Mary Jo Brown

-Tim Blank
On February 13, 1988, the United States will follow, with watchful eyes, as this nation's best athletes compete for perhaps one of the most prestigious of all achievements, the Olympic gold medal. My adventure into greater Olympic understanding began three weeks ago as I found myself on a week's vacation in Lake Placid New York, home of the 1980 Winter Olympics. Tucked snugly away in the vast Adirondack Park, Lake Placid is a simple town with a definite commercial flair that comes unexpectedly after having been driving through what seemed like absolute "boone-dock" country.

But before that, while the two lane sinuous road is still finding its way through the immense pine trees so thick that one never can see more than five feet into the woods in either direction, there is an unusual serenity and sense of excitement in the vastness before one discovers the first hint of the Olympic grandeur, and feels the chill that accompanies it as a break in the forest reveals two majestic towers standing solo in a quieter corner of New York state. It is upon closer examination of these towers that one is able to set aside all images of the Wide World of Sports and former Olympic coverage. It is now that one is able to see just how high the 90 meter and 70 meter ski jumping towers really are and the sheer bravery and dedication that is necessary to attempt to even climb to the top, let alone jump, ski down, and jump off.

Much to my surprise, the sleepy town of Lake Placid seems as if it could never house the hundreds of athletes and the thousands of spectators that it did in 1980. The speed skating rink is in front of the local high school and looks no different than any other outdoor skating rink. The same sense of Olympic mortality hit me as I stood atop Whiteface Mountain on my humble 160 centimeter skis and followed the course of the men's and women's giant slalom runs. It all seemed as ordinary as any other beautiful mountain, with the exception of the glorious view, that was, of course, until the athletes arrived. Suddenly the mountain was not just a mountain anymore, it was a hum of international activity as young people from the United States and Canada struggled to improve their times and techniques on the slopes. The same sense of excitement rose as the World Cup freestyle competition started underway and I found myself in the lodge with Russians, Germans, Swedes as well as many other people from a variety of other places. No one acted any better than me, and they seemed as pleased to be on Whiteface Mountain as I was to be there next to them, everyone had a smile and a pleasant nod as they soared past me on the slopes and on one occasion, as they practically jumped over me as I lay uncertain on one of the expert slopes.

The Olympics have brought immortality to a few great athletes, but it was during my week that I learned more about the many who work day in and day out, through sub-zero temperatures, strained muscles, and intense competition only to be told that they do not ski fast enough, jump far enough, or skate gracefully enough to make the Olympic team.

It is in these many athletes where one can find the truest sense of the Olympics, not in the cameras, not in the commercial appeal, not even in the few who make it to number one, it is in the hundreds of these young people who give up their youth to strive for a chance to compete without any guarantee of ever making it, of even being considered, but who none the less are dedicated to trying.

These are the people who will be too soon forgotten after Calgary, but they will not be gone. Somewhere they will find the snow or ice needed to continue to practice. While the rest of us will be lounging on the beaches under the hot summer sun, they will be preparing for 1992 when they will again be remembered for another short sprint of time.

-Elizabeth C. Petro

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Dilatoire

the metal spiral coils
cold on my wrist
I am a flood
an avalanche of flashes
my body
penetrable, swirling, alive
pelleted, ravished
discharged intaker of the Outside
mind twisting what the eyes see
into what they can't see
on the Inside

The guitar riffs echo
through a jellied head
brain sending whimpyspark
through blue arms
arms blue
with stillness
resting on a cool,
blank notebook page

-Brian William

Mute

Plagued with silence,
I lie calmly beside you.
Again, I am vainly seeking
that unknown serum;
the remedy that would force
my repressed emotions to my lips.
Again, my heart is incessantly
flooded,
filled with lyrics of love...
...lyrics that I long to share with you.

They remain, instead,
within the depths of my mind
playfully dancing.
Yet never coming forth.

I look into your eyes,
and softly smile,
wanting so desperately
for you to somehow be able to read
what I'm striving to say
with my own.

-Elaine Aubin
Sprouting Red in Union
She repeats in her mind, the words like lemons sting, become beets, turn into bongo drums, they grind while rolling, growing loud, raising red -
carnations explode raw-hides rip then the school-girl is stretched in an urban neighborhood where Catholics wake from afternoon naps to sounds like skins snapping -
she's green, translucent, dangerous, devout repeating still from eyes, if not from mouth: "Pray in church, Pay the usher. Baptize the babe. (Pay, the mother.) Bless this curse."
-Carol Del Guastie

Brownie-Scent Memories
Chocolate brownie-scent reaches my nose.
"I'll help Mommy!" Tiny hands grasp the thin cardboard box of brownie mix.
"I need eggs and milk..."
"I'll get the eggs!" Again, baby hands outstretched.
"Be careful, don't drop it..."
"I won't, I promise..."
Fragile confidence cracked, tears ooze down porcelain cheeks to splat on the linoleum floor.
Brownie-scent memories clutched in a little girl's heart.
-Laurie Joann Shearer

Song
With shadows you oppose my first movements, positioning yourself around the light, raising your back, splashing darkness across the floor. I follow your lines with my eyes - the gentle descent of shoulder into arm, outward curve of nipple, open my mouth to taste the telling of this dance, you lift your hand to cover the light. -Anonymous
Should a stable manger cradle the world's hopes in so fragile a form?

Should a maker of worlds become a carpenter's apprentice?

Should a king become a servant to the least of society?

The humility of God Incarnate was no disguise of a majesty too unlike us to be recognized.

-Barbara Penwarden
Myself In Lyric

Looking in at myself, I’m glad to be alive.
Nature, love and happiness are things upon which I thrive.
My eyes have seen great beauty and been blurred by tears of joy.
But seldom show the sadness since taught not as a boy.
My ears have heard sweet music and birds that sing up high.
I love the sound of laughter and a new born baby’s cry.
My mouth has caused some trouble but never too much pain.
I speak my mind when angry, though most times I’ll refrain.
I dream a lot and fantasize of peace on earth and such...
But people living in harmony, is it really asking too much?
I guess that I’m quite normal though, at times, I think I’m weird.
I find that major problems turn out as silly fears.
I’ve got a girl that loves me and who needs more than that.
Life is treating me greatly and I owe it so much back.
And so, as I count my blessings, I’m content with who I am.
I wish this joy upon the people of the world.
God bless all of them.
-Buck Noenemaker

The Peacock’s Rainbow

The peacock flatters himself with his feathers of brilliant colors.
The female is not impressed.
She sees past his rainbow that surrounds him.
Flashes of gold, green and blue are hypnotic to most.
Blinding.
Not her, never her.
She turns away from the peacock and his rainbow.
Her gaze to the river beneath her.
White and pure, like the soul she once had, it passes,
rushing, never stagnant, always moving.
-Mary Raymond
The Angel

"Lady. Lady!"
I looked down into the bright blue eyes of the little girl tugging at my coat. Her blond curls and rosy cheeks gave her an angelic appearance. Her curls bounced on her tiny shoulders as she furiously shook her head.

"What’s wrong?" I asked.
"Mommy’s lost. Can’t find her."
"Do you remember where you lost her?"
"We were near Santa," explained the child. "I wanted to talk to him, but she wouldn’t let me. Said we didn’t have time. Said she had things to do. I talked to him anyway. Lady, do you know why?"
A single tear formed in the corner of her left eye.
"Did you tell him what you want for Christmas?"
"Yes," she sniffled. "Told him I wanted Mommy to get something real pretty for Christmas. Mommy never gets anything. I don’t have a daddy. Santa brings me toys, but Mommy...she never gets any presents."

The tears now dripped from her cherubic face onto her soft white sweater.
"Honey, Mommy is probably very happy just to have you. Let’s find her. What is your name?"
"My name is Julie. Can...can I show you something?"
As she held up a beautiful intricately detailed glass ornament - an angel, her frown changed quickly to a smile as only a child’s could.
I told her to stay there, and I turned to the cashier so that I could buy the angel for Julie and her mother.

When I heard the slapping sound of skin against skin and the small weak cry of a child, I swung my head around in time to see Julie sprawled out on the floor.
"You are a brat! What the Hell do you think you’re doing? I told you to stay with me! I don’t have time for you or your games."
I didn’t want to watch. I looked away. I heard another slap and another cry...then silence. It was complete silence - the kind of silence that always surrounds trouble.

A few moments later I felt another tug at my jacket.
"Lady," Julie whispered as she held out her hand, "I need my mommy’s Christmas present."

For the first time I noticed the scar where Julie’s bangs had been pushed back from her sweating forehead. I gave her the angel, and she ran toward the door, innocently following the only love she knew.

-Vicky Schober
The Sun, the Lady, and the Gas Station

To Nathanael West, to whom the title must have meant something

It was hot that day, and I was out in the middle of the Mojave Desert watching the sun play tricks on me as the horizon danced before it stretched into a blure off in the west. The wind kicked dust in our faces, just to let us know it was there, and I leaned back against the Coke machine, the only cool spot for miles. Henry Porter, the hitcher I had picked up about fifty miles back and who hadn't said a word since, was on the phone in the small public booth at the edge of the parking lot. The pole next to it threw a shadow across his face, so I couldn't read his lips. What I could see of his eyes, however, was anger.

I had left Simi Valley early that morning after spending most of the week living out of my car in little coastal towns, sweating. The thermometer had inched up past ninety about ten days earlier, just when getting out of town seemed like the thing to do before they found out too much. I owned little and wanted even less of it, so I had packed what I could—mostly blank canvas and my easel—in the back of my car, a '62 Ford, like me, more dead than alive, and made straight for Route 1, which cuts a line down the coast for hundreds of miles and is good for staying away from whatever you need to. Now I was on my way out—out goes on for years sometimes—on Interstate 15, which curves up through the hills behind San Bernardino, heads north into the Rodman Mountains, and levels off for several hundred miles of scrub brush, ghost towns, and wasteland with names like Coyote Lake and the Devil's Playground. I like the names of places because they tell me things and I feel like I can touch them and they are good because they something behind them. Usually when I move on, I end up somewhere slightly better than the Mojave Desert, but life is life and sometimes there's not a whole lot you can do and now it was still a long way to the Nevada line.

We were somewhere north of Victorville skirting the Spanish Trail, and I knew this only because I was studying the map—there were no road signs anywhere, almost as if God and the California State Highway System didn't want people making it across that lonely place.

Henry Porter limped up to me—an old football injury, he might've said, if he had talked—and said he'd wait here, that he had called some friends and they were going to drive him up north to some other friends, where he'd stay until he knew what else to do. I nodded and stuck out my hand and he looked at it the way you look at whiskey the morning after, then he grabbed it and gave it one swift pump and lurched off into the shade under the filling station roof to wait for whoever was coming. Against the macadam, his boots sounded like shots from a revolver. I had the feeling he'd be waiting a long time.

The gas station had a sign out front promising this was the last stop before Nevada, although I found out later that they had lied and that there were stops at Barstow, Baker, and some other places, but that's part of the story.

Connected to the filling station was a little diner in that sun-bleached hacienda style that everything in southern California seems to have. I went in for something to eat, which I hadn't had for a day or two, and the bell above the door tinkled and the waitress looked up and acted almost interested in the new face, four-day growth and all.

I ordered a burger and coffee and pulled out a pack of cigarettes and before I even got one to my crinkled lips, a band reached around me and gently snapped it. She was older than me—or had lived more, it was hard to tell—but still attractive in the way that brick walls look better after the ivy has begun to scale them. Her hair, limp from the desert winds, I guess, hung around a freckled face. Her boots were scuffed and the backpack propped back in the booth where she had been sitting bulged with a lot of stuff. She didn't ask for the cigarette, but smiled her thanks just the same and turned back to her booth.

Offering her a ride east was no big deal on my part: it's only what anyone would have done. And that she took it was only what anyone in her situation would've done. She talked a little about some people back in "the city" (I guessed she meant L.A.), but that was about all. Maybe it was the way she slid into the car or maybe it was those eyes the color of bourbon, but I felt then like I was living through something Sam Shepard had written. I didn't ask her personal questions because I didn't want to answer any, so we sat in silence for a while as the road crawled along and it got hotter and heat shimmered melted the distant mountains into Jell-O. Once she put a hand to her side under her left shoulder and her face squinched into a nastiness that Picasso might have drawn. I hoped not to see that look again.

Soon she must've tired of staring out the window into nothing, so she started to talk. I don't remember most of it, which isn't unusual, but I tried to listen, anyway, because it took my mind off the sun. She said she had come up from Brownsville, but I didn't know where that was and neither did she, but it was something to say, and the way she described it made me think I'd been there a thousand times. Then, as all things come in their turn, she explained why she was no longer there, and it involved a man. I went back to thinking about the sun, instead.

"...but he said he'd go away for awhile because he couldn't stand all the time I needed by myself, just me and 'that damn little notepad,' called it. He doesn't understand that I have to be alone most of the time, he—just doesn't understand." Then she was quiet again.
Later she pulled what I supposed was "that damn little notepad" out of her pack and leafed through a few of the tattered pages. She cooed like a morning dove when she found what she was looking for.

"Listen to this—see what you think. If you want to," she said. I must've nodded. "You're my first audience, you know.

"The house is dark and the sounds I hear are far away. It is cold though it shouldn't be and the shadows sink deep on the sidewalk and I am, maybe for the first time, alone. Up until now he has seemed the sort of person you might listen to and perhaps even learn something from, but now I want nothing to do with him and I despise myself as much as I hate him. He always said we hated each other too much to drift apart. Now all I know is that I lived when he loved me, I died when he left me, I felt a small gladness in his arms." She stopped. "Do you like it?"

I thought I'd heard those last lines, or some nearly like them, long ago in an old Gloria Grahame movie, something about loneliness or—but I wasn't sure. The way she looked at me, I could tell it mattered what I said, but sometimes you can't say what you have to.

"I think it's fine," I offered, keeping my eyes on the road because I didn't know what I'd find in hers.

She smiled a strange smile then, as if she were deciding something. I don't know to this day what it meant.

It was late afternoon when we pulled into a gas station somewhere north of Cave Mountain around the Mojave River Sink that fell away to the south with only a few Joshua Trees to mark it. This was one of the places that the other station said wouldn't be here. I fit four quarters into a machine for two cans of soda and by the time I got back to the truck, she was at the payphone outside the restrooms and I wondered why everyone but me seemed to have someone to call. She kicked her foot against the glass a lot and ran her hand through the hair that hung down over her face and looked out across the desert while she spoke.

I squinted even through my sunglasses into whatever lay ahead and finally flopped back in the driver's seat. I thought of a girl in a wheelchair in a field of waving grain and the sun poking from behind black clouds—like Wyeth's Helga, perhaps, just before a thunderstorm. Then the girl stood and took a toddling first step and then another and another, and then she started to run right through the grain and the sun burned through the clouds and she was crying and then I woke and I was crying and she was bent over me, the girl in the wheelchair and this girl who was smoking my cigarettes, looking at me with a question in those deep eyes that cut deep. The phone receiver was still dangling in the booth.

"Let's get the hell out of here," was all she said.

By dusk we were heading up the Clark Mountain pass that descends into the cutoff with Route 66, which heads off into Nipton and finally across the Nevada line into Crescent Park, a place with scenery so beautiful you're ashamed to look at it. We were headed nowhere fast, though, and didn't stop. The mountain road wound back on itself as it climbed and it grew cooler as we got higher and I pulled off to the side and we looked back onto the desert we had crossed, now fading into twilight with a redness that was almost unnatural. The stars were soon out and we counted them and she said with a sad face that she didn't know why things always happened the way they did and why everyone she knew had turned out to be a bastard. Everything I thought about saying didn't seem to fit and morality is no good if it has to stand in line. We slept for a little while under the moon that hung over the cooling sands like God's eye.

The first I saw of the big truck was its headlights just before the windshield shattered.

I thought I heard sirens, but wasn't sure if it was really sirens, the screech of brakes that still rang in my ears, or myself yelling as loudly as I could for something that never happens. I felt white under me though I couldn't see and I heard voices talking about hairpin turns in the mountain pass and tasted blood and it tasted good because it meant I was somehow alive. I was alert enough to matter something about the hell of it being hit head-on while stopped dead along the highway, then someone told me to be quiet in words that sounded dirty as they came off her tongue. I did. I caught a glimpse of the eighteen-wheeler smoldering against a cliff, water dripping in the glare of searchlights. That is about all I remember, and maybe there isn't much else. They stitched me back together and later asked lots of questions about the girl that had been with me—their "had been" said all it needed to—but I couldn't even give them her name and they weren't interested in what I knew about her soul. I don't know if they ever found out who she was. They did find out, however, who I was and the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department extradited me back to the scene of the crime.

Now I think often of another old movie I saw long ago. I don't remember much about it, either, except a phrase about all memories, good or bad, becoming precious with time. Now I know what that means. It's a lonely place here, and the palms whisper to me all day about the sunlight, how good it feels. I try not to think about anything, but late at night, when the city lights cast long shadows on the ceiling, thoughts are all the company I have. Then I think about how, like she said, things never work out quite the way you have them planned and how she came and how she left, and how I was brighter for an instant in the brilliance of her going.

-Brendan D. Strasser

A child left alone
not knowing what to do
his parents don't care
that there's three instead of two.
His speech is slow
he doesn't color well
all he wants is love
but it's hard to tell.
Jesse is his name
and he takes a stand
my heart overflowed
the day he took my hand.

-Angel Nearhouse

Susan M. Whitehead
Pain is present
Resistance is low
Existence is vital
Struggle is necessary
Stress is high
Unease feelings arise
Reluctance is at hand
and you’re
eager to survive.

- Tracy Phillips

A-HA
I had to LAUGH
Because
All this time
The THING
I was tripping
OVER
Was my EGO.

-David Lanfair

Through a pane of glass I watch you.
And see my reflection cast upon you.
And remember the things we shared,
and how
we cared, and what we did, and what
we said
Through a pane of glass I catch you
walk, and wonder why you don’t see
me. Did you leave me to be you
or leave me to be me.

Through a pane of glass I see you
leave, arm in arm with someone
else, I wonder what happened to
the years we shared. And where
the love has gone.

Through the pain of glass,
I watch you

-B. Reinbold

Two Lives to Life
The student is a schizo-type,
One person pooped, the other hyped.
The physique gets all slumber starved
From hours out of night-time carved.
The brain, immersed in knowledge
sauna,
Engorges critiques, co-sines, fauna.
Result? Sweet cerebral juice
Flows down life’s hypotenuse!

- Irma (Granny) Sloboda
An Excerpt from: The Diary of Arion Teares

What is this hemlock, we call blood, pulsing through my veins? It shows me scarecrows tearing my brains from my skull as if made of straw. They laugh and tell jokes. I fall down like a puppet cut from its strings. Drowning, like a fish out of water can be said to be “drowning” in air. Like the relentless pounding of a hammer upon a nail, I throw myself from side to side hoping ... trying to grab those strings.

-Drew Cerria

Frozen Leaves

Crimson edged leaf shimmering beneath the glass
Helpless, anxious, cold.
Water pools along the surface,
The strong rays penetrate the ice.
Crimson edged leaf flows quickly with the current, Prisoner again.

-Lisa Moro

Sitting on the Porch Swing
One August Afternoon
Contemplating the End of the World

If one day as the ivy like
Mother’s curtain flutters nervously in the still air while the kitten plays with a grey locust shell I see the orange mushroom rise above the apple tree I won’t close my eyes

-Beth Jones
To Mom

She danced,
And they danced with her;
To each day a new song
Accompanied by progressively
better routines.

To the blues she danced,
Just as gracefully—
Even more so,
Pausing patiently to quell the static.

She sang,
And they sang with her;
She set the rhythm when possible,
And when not,
she softly harmonized.

She cried,
For they grew — without her
But never without her song
in their hearts.

-Theresa Corbett