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# WEST SIDE POETRY WORKSHOP

2017 ANTHOLOGY



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# WORKSHOP LIMERICKS

*Fred Schraff*

I

All poets should know how to spell  
But some do not do it so well  
For such word abuse  
There is no excuse  
They ring in the eye like a bell.

II

Some think good poems don't rhyme  
This notion is heard all the time  
Some poets can't do it  
That's all there is to it  
Their rhymes clank rather than chime.

III

For visual loudness perhaps  
A poet wrote all words in caps  
To throw out precision  
One foolish decision  
Caused points made therein to collapse.

IV

Our meetings would often be better  
If long-winded comments we'd fetter  
Too much said by one  
Would never be done  
If courtesy ruled to the letter.

# MERGE AHEAD

*Fred Schraff*

Alerted by signs  
each driver makes a choice  
to get into line  
or drive aside ahead  
to the pinch point  
feigning helpless stupidity  
or asserting rude entitlement  
to be let in ahead  
of people more inclined  
to wait their turns  
on the road  
and in life.

# IT'S BEEN SURE NICE (TALKING TO YOU DAD)

*Fred Schraff*

Words from an old song  
haunt me in the night  
Harry Chapin's message  
told the story right.

I had a little son one time  
he didn't ask for much  
even less was what he got  
when I got out of touch.

Divorce broke up our home  
he was not to blame  
but he and I lost plenty  
apart was not the same.

I worked whatever job I had  
he spent his years in school  
we saw each other weekly  
but I was such a fool.

Grade school flew by quickly  
high school faster yet  
he later lived and worked with me  
through years I most regret.

We had some time together  
we didn't use it well  
he met a girl at his next job  
and fell beneath her spell.

He moved to an apartment  
his girl became his wife  
kids came quickly then  
so busy then his life.

We see each other even less  
five children night and day  
have got a better father  
than me in every way.

He may have heard the song  
taken the time to see  
he's learned from my mistakes.  
He's grown up not like me.

# THE CIRCLE OF LIFE PERSONIFIED AS A PHILOSOPHER

*Andrea Kleinhenz*

Yesterday the wild cherry trees stretched  
tall with dried up flames of flowers, tulipped and  
mocking the cold. There's a beige fragility, tipped,  
pointed petals, recognition scattered like paper cut constellations

set in papier mache or Gaudi rolling in the soul of peeling  
sycamore bark, winnowed streams frozen, bunched  
up against the elephantine roots of a felled oak.

But acorns still fall, bloated from too little blood, plant juice  
mixed with the yearning patience of mulch and humus  
the richest distillation of the soul. Narrative is elusive  
when a life is lived in fits and starts, as impressions, gasps,

spooned into the night sky, a slighted lopsided moon,  
was it waxing or waning? The metallic disc, wanton clouds  
and the burnt orange bleed a challenge and so bright.

Was it an answer or question? Maybe Neptune's cousin  
or the gossip of ancient tales, Shakespeare's reconciliation  
with Love and the brutality of language, whittled  
down soft visions and softer thorns.

# THE EYES OF THE MOON

*Andrea Kleinhenz*

Slung in the night sky,  
A lopsided moon  
Waxes and wanes  
Beneath wanton clouds  
That gently cover a challenge so bright.

But likely Neptune's cousin caught  
In the overripe gossip of ancient tales  
Seeks a volley of reparations when  
Love and the brutality of language is  
Whittled down in amazement as  
Visions soften thorns and  
Curry favor from those angers and resentments.

What remains? The aphids on a willow branch,  
Lined up like blind soldiers, their gold spun chariots  
Flash low, seeking gravity, seek to rein in the  
Flailing of wars, angling toward destruction.

# FOR WHAT ARE WE THANKFUL?

*Lorene O. Bowles*

For what are we thankful?  
For the sweet breath of life,  
For the comfort of friendship,  
For freedom from strife,  
For trees in their glory,  
For rainbows above,  
For a meaningful story,  
For the privilege to love,  
For the home where we live,  
For the work of our hands,  
For the joy when we give,  
For the flag that still stands,  
For the hope of tomorrow,  
For the path that we trod,  
For the blessings of family,  
For the love of our God.

And why are we thankful?  
We are thankful because  
We have known many valleys,  
We have known how it was  
To have tears in our eyes  
And to then have them dried,  
To have had broken hearts  
To which love was applied.  
We have learned that the valleys  
That take us so low  
Can lead up to the mountains

Where joyful times grow.  
We have learned through our sorrows  
That blessings are stored  
When we place our tomorrows  
In the hands of our Lord.

And when are we thankful?  
When we hear voices sing,  
When we rise from our bed  
And give praise to the King,  
When we hear a child's laughter,  
When we hear from a friend,  
When we feel health after  
We've been on the mend,  
When we look all around  
At the world that we see  
And we know that our country  
Is the best place to be,  
When we open the good book  
And read of His love,  
When we know that in heaven  
We'll see God above.

A rich girl from the city  
Was suffering from self-pity  
For she couldn't make her only dream come true.  
A book she brought from school  
Had stated one plain rule:  
All that's needed is to do as it says "Do."

She lifted up her window,  
Looked up high and down below,  
Searching for a special star or maybe two.  
All she saw were many neons,  
Many groups of many peons, and  
Planes that to their destinations flew.

Her nose began to crinkle,  
And her brow began to wrinkle.  
The tears welled up and filled her hazel eyes.  
She was feeling quite bedroogled  
For although she just had Googled,  
Even that had failed, and all she had were sighs.

She then called upon her driver  
And instructed him to drive her  
For an hour or two, and so he drove around.  
He passed all the city highlights,  
All the bright lights and the low lights,  
But nowhere was there a star that could be found.

He could hear her softly crying  
As her special dream was dying.  
His heart was breaking for his little ward.  
He drove out into the country side,  
Where hills and vales were far and wide,  
And darkness fell about them like a cord.

When he stopped, the blackness stunned her.  
Then her eyes were filled with wonder.  
She pierced the quiet with her happy cries.  
Her nose forgot its crinkle,  
And her brow forgot its wrinkle,  
As the stars begin to "twinkle" in the skies.

# RAIN

*Lorene O. Bowles*

And then the rain came—  
Softly, gently, quietly, silently,  
And then harshly, violently,  
Moving brazenly through the sky,  
Crashing through the leaves of the shaking trees, and  
Flattening the blades of grass and the fields of flowers  
Before storming into the windows of the houses  
Of the people who left them open  
To listen to the rain fall softly.

# NATURE'S MUSIC

*Marilyn Schraff*

The ocean roars  
the river rages,  
sounds they've made  
through the ages.

On mountain peaks  
echoes ring.  
Frogs croak.  
Robins sing.

Night owls hoot  
while wolves howl.  
Birds roost on limbs,  
making trees bow.

Breezes whisper.  
Strong winds blow.  
Sounds they make  
we all know.

Tides come in and  
make melodic splashes.  
The deer's hooves beat,  
as it dashes.

During rains  
it often thunders,  
soothing rhythms  
for my slumbers.

When nature speaks  
I do not fear.  
It makes music  
I like to hear.

# GRACEFUL AGING

*Marilyn Schraff*

Flat heeled shoes for aching backs,  
leg cramps, glasses, cataracts,  
misplaced items, pension checks,  
Medicare cards, far less sex,  
benefit from homestead tax,  
stretch marks, wrinkles, sags and droops,  
blue pill hard-ons, flaxseed poops,  
white haired women, balding men,  
wattles flapping under chin,  
graceful aging, senior groups.

# BIRTH OF SPRINGTIME

*Marilyn Schraff*

On a crisp spring morning  
grass blades were emerald green  
with dew drops reflecting sunlight  
in miniature rainbows.

At the far side of the meadow  
limber young saplings swayed slowly;  
no breeze with their dance.

Near the edge of the trees  
stood a small deer, all alone,  
rubbing her lean body against the trunks  
as her back hunched up and down to  
the rhythm of the waving branches.

As her front hooves dug into the earth,  
a spotted fawn emerged from under her tail,  
Front feet first, next the head, then the hind legs.  
The doe relaxed and the trees stopped swaying.  
Delivery completed, labor had ended. She was calm.  
The doe cleaned her baby.

It arose, leaned into her side and nestled against her nose;  
new life, springtime, Mother Nature's tender touch.

# MY TENNIES

*Nancy Welsh Kristofik*

I stare down at my new shoes  
Summer footwear  
That I call my 'tennies.'  
It must be confessed  
That none of mine  
Ever saw time  
With a racket on a court.  
No, but the young girl  
I used to be  
Wore them in summer  
Once I learned how to tie them.  
The early pairs were red or blue  
According to Mom's preference.  
But at the grown up age of seven  
I insisted on white ones,  
The first of many like pairs.  
I climbed trees, ran races,  
Pedaled my bicycle  
With those sturdy rubber soles.  
Messy was my youthful goal,  
Add a few holes.  
There was perfection  
When the white turned gray  
From frequent washings.  
Then at thirteen, clean seemed best  
To wear in spring

To school with skirts.  
They went to college,  
Made hikes in the woods,  
And peace marches.  
But canvas shoes  
Were not proper office apparel.  
They were banished to weekends  
And housework.  
Then they were out of style;  
High priced sneakers reigned.  
This summer  
The child in me remembered  
The comforts of her youth  
Hello again, tennies.  
Let's get going.

# MASCARA MANIFESTO

*Nancy Welsh Kristofik*

Another morning, put on mascara.  
Countless rituals of my daily life.  
Why do I open my mouth to apply it?  
More. Less. Enough. Too much. It's up to me.  
I make a poor judge before my coffee.

But why postpone the inevitable?  
Brush, brush, brush – swish on another black coat.  
Is leaving the house worth all this trouble?  
Stay at home. Wear no mascara at all.  
Go out, eyes bare as nature intended.

No, I am such a creature of habit,  
following the rules and regulations  
arbitrarily set forth in high school.  
Like 'Never be seen with a naked face,'  
Is etched forever in my cranium,  
The vain anthem of my adolescence.

Now I'm older – make that really older –  
so who is there left for me to impress?  
Philosophical about mascara...  
What next, a Lipstick Conundrum?

*I can't stand up to myself and my rules.  
Coward, just do it! No, no, not today.*

*Color in the lines! Think inside the box!  
Do not turn your back on your traditions!*

I could save myself some time and trouble,  
be to the store and back in just minutes  
and go on with the rest of my morning...  
if I could skip the makeup entirely.

BUT if I meet up with someone I know –  
what if they don't even recognize me  
with naked eyes, dark circles and thin lips.  
Is that good or is it bad? I'm perplexed.

Here I am, a prisoner of my past,  
Is it vanity or am I afraid  
That I will disappear into the crowd  
Of the old, the forgotten, the unloved.

# IN A MAELSTROM

*Nancy Welsh Kristofik*

Holding on in a maelstrom  
Of unpredictable change.  
The words carved in stone  
Have been stripped of their meaning.  
Declarations of freedom  
Slam into an expiration date.  
Can thoughts be pronounced  
When tongues are paralyzed?  
When someone else makes the choices  
And the rest of the nation complies?  
Sanity has lost its grip  
Where brutes and bullies reign  
Their armies of desperate masses  
Clinging to unfulfilled promises,  
Dwelling only on our differences,  
Missing the oneness of mankind.  
When does the shock wear off  
And the nightmare fade into day?  
From where will come our heroes  
Prepared to meet the embedded enemies  
In the perilous battlefields of our nation?

# THE BODY

*Jeremy Jusek*

Richard made his peace with God,  
then crammed guilt into his suicide note  
for the survivors. He fell twenty-two stories.

The first-floor tenants included young Jack  
who watched for ten days. The chalk outline's  
white dust seemingly melted away.

# RICHARD'S REMAINS

*Jeremy Jusek*

After the accident, fresh asphalt was poured  
over bits of crusted flesh.

The gods fought God  
to tether Richard  
on the manicured lawn  
near his apartment.

Buried incomplete,  
Richard wandered  
without some minor memories.

He couldn't remember  
his wife's middle name,  
for example. Of his three  
kids, only one still retained  
their name. The other two  
he glanced at through the window  
of his ex-wife's apartment  
calling them you,  
and you them, too.

Names are  
easy examples.  
He also forgot about his  
ingrown toenail.

Every time a deer  
disturbed his ghastly  
routine he was surprised  
to see it there.

# SHADOW ART

*Susana W. Antal*

There's a doorway, to a magical realm that time has forgotten  
known as the Shadow land.

A place of unique mystifying forms of shadows  
of grays, and blacks with the texture of chalk  
of every shade that has painted this world of colors.

The landscape of this realm is like nothing you have ever seen,  
and the feel of serenity as you look out at the distant hills.

Soft gray rays of sun light bathe hundreds of black, silver,  
and gray butterflies that blanket the fields of the low lands.

In the far distance, I hear the sound of thunder.

As I walk towards the sound I stand frozen, in awe  
at the sight of an eagle soaring with no effort  
high above the roar, of this magnificent Water Fall  
of melted shades of grays, and blacks that become liquefied,  
and shimmer in the late afternoon sun.

And the most beautiful realm to me is that of the night sky  
filled with millions of glittering stars, and the moon that  
appears

as a large silver pearl that cast a mirror reflection on to the  
ocean,  
and becomes a canvas of Shadow Art.

# TICKING OF THE CLOCK

*Susana W. Antal*

I hear a faint echo  
Of a clock ticking all around me,  
As I gaze at the distant sky  
I see a storm coming.  
Dark thunderous clouds roll in,  
Like the turbulent waves of the sea.  
I am drawn to the storm,  
Like a moth to a flame.  
I stand frozen,  
Watching the lightning strikes  
That creates a show  
Of breathtaking colors and lights.  
Then the finale, I am in awe  
As the clouds burst and rain, sleet,  
And snow blows with an unforgiving fury,  
Then the sky clears and the heavens fill with stars.  
I feel all my emotions from the year deep within my soul,  
Then I hear the clock strike midnight,  
I know now that the storm was the New Year coming.

# SHRILLS IN THE NIGHT

*Susana W. Antal*

I stand in the doorway, of the Eve of Halloween.  
I see in the sky the Headless Horseman, on his black steed  
As he rides against time on a beam of moonlight,  
In search of his head.  
Fear overtakes me, as I watch the fog  
Roll over the landscape  
With a life force of its own.  
Figures emerge from the fog,  
Of witches, ghosts and all forms of demons.  
In the distance, I hear howls, cries and screams,  
That chill the heart and souls of those that hear them.  
I have heard of horrors so fearsome,  
That it can turn the young, old,  
Then they wither to dust never to be seen again.  
I hide under my covers like a child,  
Shivering of fright, fearful of night,  
That brings nightmares to my dreams.  
I await Dawn's caress  
For only then will my dreams fade away  
And not return till the next  
Eve of Halloween.

# WHILE ON FORNEY RIDGE TRAIL

*Jennifer Heilman*

Mud-caked boots sink softly into mossy green.  
Meandering, I fade into the forest dense.  
The steady cadence of cicadas accompanies me.

Immersed in stillness.  
Smitten by its quiet splendor.  
This tonic intoxicates.

While a distant whippoorwill serenades,  
I pause.

Inhaling evergreens, I want to remember.....  
rows of ferns,  
entangled roots rising from the path,  
and the towering canopy  
dancing with the wind.  
I hasten on.  
Night soon falls.

## MISSING A LOVED ONE

*Valerie Hoegler*

You know that not seeing that dearly-departed face  
Her heart pill  
That Mom took after our Smallwood Center workout class.  
In the store last month, a child was so cute!  
"I'll call Mom"  
I said to myself, "When I arrive home and tell her."  
Oh, I can't call her now, I realized!  
She's not here:  
A pang of loss suddenly filled my heart and my mind.  
Eight months ago, Larry at our church  
Lost his mom.  
"The next year is the hardest," Larry told me last week.  
"The first-time realizations are tough  
The first year,"  
Larry claimed, "but it'll get better the second year."  
I hope so.

# TURKEY RAP

*Valerie Hoegler*

Ben Franklin wanted the turkey  
As The New Nation's Bird  
Instead of the regal bald eagle—  
Now, I know that sounds absurd!

Ben was a statesman and inventor  
When streets were made of cobble.  
Ben thought that turkey meat was best  
Despite the silly gobble!

He was outvoted and The  
Nation's Bird became the eagle.  
I'm glad the Senate guys weren't sailors  
And Bird was not the sea gull!

Now this Thanksgiving Day I'll stuff  
A turkey for our dinner—  
This fowl may not be The Bird  
But, to me, it is a winner!

## COLLECTOR'S WATCH

*Valerie Hoegler*

Wearing a collector's watch can be  
like raising a troubled child.  
You try to keep it from harm.  
It's with you everyday.  
You smile when folks notice its beauty  
and you love it dearly.

One day, after many years  
of enjoying its features,  
This precious watch of yours no longer  
functions and acts like it should.  
Not only is it broken,  
but your heart is broken, too!

This watch is old enough that  
it cannot be replaced—  
You'll never have another one  
that is exactly like it.  
So you think about good memories  
and mourn no more time together.

# ROBBY'S LAST MESSAGE

*Susan Love*

This last poem touches on a problem raging like a wildfire burning across America: the opioid crisis. The problem is evident across our urban and rural landscapes alike, though rural communities often lack the resources needed to appropriately fight the crisis. For instance, the problems of Vinton County, Ohio highlight the horrible consequences of prescription opiate drugs and its street counterparts like heroin: A whopping 25% of Vinton's \$4 million annual budget is required to lock up drug offenders and care for the children they leave behind, something the local government is, unsurprisingly, unable to afford.<sup>1</sup>

This isn't a county or state problem. It is a national one. A few years back, opioid overdoses surpassed both guns and motor vehicles as the leading cause of injury death in the United States.<sup>2</sup> The CDC reported in 2014 that opioid overdoses claimed the lives of 47,055 Americans, and in 2015, opioid overdose deaths increased 11% to 52,404. In 2016, the state of Ohio saw 2.3 million people on prescribed opioids, which is almost 20% of the entire state's population.<sup>3</sup>

This fight will undoubtedly require a sustained, concerted effort by the American public and its political leaders to turn the tide in favor of our nation's embattled citizens. Yet, as lawyers and politicians struggle with the fallout of this crisis, the little guy is left footing the bill. And as the statistics and news coverage show, they often pay with their lives.

The following poem is written for the survivors out there who struggle each day to find meaning. It's for the grief-stricken parents who

continue to bury their children decades before their time. It's for the children bouncing around the foster care system because their parents trusted their doctors, who were in turn lied to for decades about the safety of opioids by pharmaceutical company sales representatives and their marketing teams. It's for those who, in the throes of addiction, left a trail of pain and tears on their road to get clean. In other words, this poem exists for a painfully large percentage of America.

This piece was written by a mother for her son Robby, who died on September 21, 2014, from an accidental overdose. Her pain lies before you. I urge you to take this poem and share with someone who needs it. Who could use it.

And if you or someone you know needs help, please do not hesitate to reach out for help. For immediate emergencies, dial 9-1-1. For information on local services, visit Cuyahoga County's Alcohol, Drug Addiction & Mental Health Services website or call their 24-hour crisis hotline at 216.623.6888.

## **ROBBY'S LAST MESSAGE**

"Can you hear me?" I wanted to shout  
As people were crying and milling about.

"Please listen, something needs to be said!"  
As I lay here cold, in my coffin, my bed.

I have another message. I feel I need to share.  
It's for all of those who loved me; for all who showed such care.

It's about this final path I chose. That turned out to be my last.  
I wish I had a presence now and not my troubled past!

Thank you for all your efforts and all the love you gave.  
My life was at my disposal, I reckoned not to save.

That nagging persistence; the monkey on my back.  
*What's in a little drink, I thought, or even a little crack.*

Let my life be a lesson to those who dare to think  
That there's any lasting pleasure in drugs or drink.

Be wary! is my warning. So to who you call your friend—  
You may be wrong this one last time and have a tragic end.

God has watched over me for many, many years.  
And again, I kept protesting, and again, He wiped your tears.

I hope that God forgives me, and I hope that you will, too,  
For all the worrisome days and nights that I have given you.

I'm so sorry, and I love you!!

Signed....

....Robby.

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