West Side Poetry Workshop

2017 Anthology

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And an extra special thanks to every member of the West Side Poetry Workshop. Your continued contributions and commitment to poetry are a part of a greater whole of the wonderful mosaic that is Cleveland’s diverse art and literature scene. Each and every month I am reminded of the tremendous creative talents hidden in notebooks and computers throughout our local communities, dormant, waiting to be shared.
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.
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.
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.
Twinkle

Lorene O. Bowles

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.
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.
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,
missplaced 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.
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.
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.
Another morning, put on mascara.
Countless rituals of my daily life.
Why do I open my mouth to apply it?
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?
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.
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.
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 whither 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!
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.
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.¹

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.² 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.³

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

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**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.¹

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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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