42\textsuperscript{ND} ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

The Poetry Workshop

October 21, 2015
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HIS NEW LIFE

Unless you’re brighter than most folks
you can’t see that some day you
will have to hunt up a new life. I did.
The first life went, starting with my wife
and ending with my patience.
I used to farm. Now I’m in the thinking trade.
Old friends started to look like potatoes
at the bottom of the winter barrel,
wrinkled eyes staring back from the end.
Like an old rose, my transplanted roots
had forgotten how to grow.
Buds on the cherry tree wouldn’t open,
stayed hard and dry. It was Ohio everywhere:
from any direction, you could see it coming.
I miss my deer browsing the pear trees.
Hornets never stung them. They shared
fallen fruit that smelled like cider
tangled in neon summer grass
near where I found winter antlers
and used them to decorate the mantel.
I set them by the picture of Grandpa’s dogs
lying high on the piled hay wagon,
grinning with their tongues hung out.
Today I think I too would like
to bring in the harvest lying in grass,
jounce a little, bounce a little,
then sink below.

Dwayne Thorpe
CARDS OF LIFE

In the game of life
cards are dealt
simple rules apply
but are revealed late

Choices are made
body trumps face
brains trump looks
health trumps wealth

Trust is risk
time is short
honesty priceless
love conditional

Fred Schraff
You find this springy thing, warm as a fever, with huge petal ears, slinking through the garden killing chipmunks or lounging in the sun, and it loves you, or tries to kill you, or both,

and at some point you call it he or she
and why not name it Musashi, or Marmalade, or Coeurl, or even Pup-dog?
It has become a person
and you court it with bits of turkey

and it sleeps with you, or suddenly bites your thumb, or both. It is now family, maybe scary, maybe good, inscrutable.
It has pretty eyes. It watches.

For a long time, it watches. It mimics being human or the most insane parts of human. It amuses itself with rubber bands, or dead philodendron leaves, or a beam of light.

This goes on for a fifth of your life: the bed-sleeping, the meowing for food or attention or unknown desires, and the watching.

But we know the truth: it's going to get sick throw up on your tax return or an expensive shirt. It's going to cost you big bucks to find out what kind of sick.

Kidney is most common, maybe cancer, but although Musashi (or whoever) now looks like a cheap fur slipper dragged through a dirty puddle,

it somehow drags itself onto your bed, somehow makes you feel bottomless pity, and longing for the original warm, springy thing.

The vet says it's how old? Oh, the teeth, the liver, the table scraps, and did YOU declaw it? It's all your fault.
You set your jaw, repress tears. You retreat to the waiting room, or you cradle the small bag of bones till it stops breathing.

And you send out emails that your cat has died, scatter ashes, write miniature eulogies, and people feel sorry, but not as sorry as when your mother died.

And you breathe freer: you can forget to refill that thyroid script, or pick up Ringer's solution, or buy that low-ash canned crap that it hated,

until one morning, on your way to the mail box, something mews at you, and it is all alone and you are the Only One.

Mary Turzillo
PONDER

My head can no longer hold the secret sounds that escape through my ears. They leak. They speak to unfamiliar themes that see ghosts. They are caught in the rhythm and can’t get away. All this exists between the clouds and the higher skies. This I see.

Below, snowflakes cake sidewalks. Below, fetid winds blow dirt past dust pans. Baby grands are played by those who can play them. When the sounds change pace I race to catch up. I want to see the pinnacle when I reach it.

M.A. Shaheed
THE BIG PICTURE

My life is not the big picture
just a tiny microcosm.
The marvel is
that it has its place in
The Big Picture

Not an add-on
but a place
perfectly carved out
meticulously planned
for me to fit into

Knowing this
can I live by faith?
Can I see it as
the substance of what I long for?
And the evidence of what I don’t see?

How long can I believe
without manifested evidence?
I’ve heard some
have gone 10 long years
One has gone 18

That in itself is a marvel
giving strong evidence that
there is a Big Picture
And that earthly life
is not all there is

Earthly life is
perhaps just a blip
on the Universal Radar
But, it is a blip
that is not unnoticed

It is, rather, held essential
by the One who notices
And He is the One
who made The Big Picture
and my place within it

So can I believe enough
to be surrounded by a hurricane,
yet notice nothing other
than the rainbow on
the bubbles in my dishwater?

Arlene Ring
TANKA

Hat slouched over his eyes, 
he misses a chord here and there—
but it's no problem, he sings loud. 
Then, suddenly, softly, one line 
and in the darkness, I am weeping.

Geoffrey A. Landis
REVISION

Just like a patient:
Something very wrong
but can’t say where it hurts.

You probe here, touch there,
fix your beam on every surface, every aperture,
move the ear of your stethoscope
right over the beat.

Isn’t it always this way?
Parts need to be excised.
You steel yourself.
Wielding the knife on a living thing,
the first time, makes your insides cringe.
You will grow colder.
Soon you’ll be seasoned,
slicing out disease,
justified in shutting out your heart.

Discomfiture is what needs cutting out—
walking in the wrong skin,
talking in the wrong voice.
The trick is getting rid of that
but letting it still breathe—
keeping in the longing and the suffering.

Afterward comes overwhelming stillness,
soft, warm anesthetic sleep.
Then the stumbling to consciousness,
eyes dazed, memory lost,
mumbling softly, terrified of the light.
Not cured,
but with a sense
that healing has begun.

And you—
run through with agony—
cannot find the wound.

Adrian Schnall
CLOUDED

When he got out of the car to hug me,
I felt like I was the only person on earth
and my troubles slipped away
like milk
spills (in a dining room, somewhere in Ohio).

It’s fresh outside.
The white buds of a bush
can barely keep their eyes open
and there might be cloud consequences in the afternoon.
For now, my face is red
from sunburn. He’s out
of his red car
with his arms around me
still. And I can’t shake the feeling that
something is wrong
and he’s not telling me.
But I don’t ask. I just wait for him to
break the silence.

Rebecca Ferlotti
I lie upon the warm, blue-black stone
    my skin
    one
    with its surface,
its ancient, star-born aura
    flowing
    into me,
    filling me.
The stars,
    the stars call.
I close my eyes to begin
    with deep, centering breaths.
I count down,
    down
    to
    zero.
My body,
    my mind,
    my soul
relaxing,
    calming,
    readying.
Gathering my energies
letting go the shackles
shedding now my body
and my earthly bonds
    into
the Universe.
I ascend

Doc Janning
WORD-EMPTY

I’ve used up all my words on you,
and you carted them off somewhere,
hid and hoarded them
so that now
I couldn’t find them if I tried.
I don’t even remember
what they looked like.

Their sounds, though.
I do recall their sounds:
some gently shushed like book pages,
some crunched like gravel under a tire,
a few screamed like a fire alarm.

Mostly they plodded away
after their master
with the faithful pad pad pad
of dog paws.

Renee Pendleton
COMING AROUND

On my annual visits to you, dad,
for the twenty years before your death,
I went to Reno to learn more of your life—early, late—and of mine.

The time was misused.
You refused to talk into the tape recorder.
You wanted to talk at me, not with me. Period.

You refused my camera.
Still, I snapped a shot of you
sprawling asleep at the dining-room table, snoring.

At breakfast, we talked of Germany, becoming American, the rush to World War II.
At lunchtime, on a halting walk around the block, you reminisced.
You spoke, I listened.

After the last dinner, wineglasses empty, you told more,
leading circuitously to the grand climax:
“… and that’s why we got that messy, damned, divorce!”

I dropped my spoon.
It rang through the empty house.
I heard you.

After breakfast with the taxi on its way,
you said, “I want to say …,” something,
but the taxi was there.

I bent, kissed your shaggy head.
You kissed me hard, with crisp lips, worn with stubble.
I was held in your wizened arms, your old plaid shirt.

You at home. Me in the taxi,
empty of words,
full of hope.

Leonard H. Seyfarth
SKY ABOVE

The sky is like a sooty fire
one that’s burned down to coal
leaving embers steaming
wisps of clouds below.

Pillowed and stacked
on the bank
insulated with quilted poufs
the clouds turned their backs.

Stealing the light
and replacing with a veil
the gap between this world
and next is another tale.

Alyson Widen
A RIGHT BRAIN / LEFT BRAIN LOVE SONG

Andy Warhol is back in my life—since January he’s been greeting me every morning from the calendar on my kitchen wall.

This month, four large red hearts on a plain salmon background, with his words “I get nervous when I think someone is falling in love with me.” February in violet block print, numbers in bold gold.

I’m pulled in by his ordered repetition of the sometimes ordinary—red & white Campbell’s soup cans, how beautiful they are—and the memories pop, pop, pop.

I’m both grounded by the presence of comfort items from my past, and inspired by his use of color—displaying even tomato soup labels—in vivid and shocking contradiction.

So, of course, I give Andy full credit for my recent order of another pair of favorite comfort Birkenstocks—this time, in outrageous, oxymoron black patent leather!

Jill Lange
WINSOME OEDIPUS

Three candles blown,
You’d fling your chubby arms
Around my neck,
My thigh, my waist—
Whatever you could reach—
And, back ten minutes later,
Gush forth in a torrent
The selfsame words of love
Forty times a day for several months,
Each time as if a primal rhapsody,
“Mommy, when I grow up, I’m going to marry you!”

Hands in dishwater,
I tried, each time,
To sound as much in love,
To equal your first rapture,
Yet never to dissemble.
“That’ll be nice,” I’d say,
Or whisper in your shell-pink ear,
“I love you too, my darling,”
And, a daughterless mother, think
“May you someday
Bring me a daughter
We can both love.”

Then, like the closing of a scene,
Poignant, ephemeral, doomed,
Your cycle ended.
And for your curtain call,
A cynic who had lost in love,
You said, once only,
“Mommy, when I grow up,
I’m going to marry Whitepaw.
That way I can have puppies.”

Joann Denko

As “Young Oedipus,” this poem received Seventh Honorable Mention, Mount Vernon (Ohio) Area Poetry Group, Ohio Poetry Day, 1982. It has been published in now in age I bud again, Poets’ League of Greater Cleveland, 1994, and, under pen name Victoria C.G. Greenleaf, in Into a Mirror and Through a Lens, Cypress House, Fort Bragg, California, 2003.
TRY IT

“Eat your poetry.”—J.L.

To write a recipe
in verse, while it may sound
like an idea as

re verse, it seems a fine
way to, like a beaver,
chew on some po-e-try …,

its meta for, of course,
in what dish is consumed,
I mean the plate of food,

to savour poetry,
from the dish, its eaten,
as choose … bon appetit.

What bones! might pick apart,
let not the mots be “juiced.”

A sigh, lens, not gravy;
what lips might knot impart,

the potatoes’ eyes wait
for the Braille edition …

the corn’s ears wait a sign!

The greens are all a go.
The waffles not in doubt.
Appetite eggs us on.
For word read—beets pursue.

Chris Franke
GRAMMY

As if she owned the city, my mom took each grandchild for his or her first trip into Cleveland on the rapid transit to experience the wonder of travel by rail, with the click clacking over the tracks. The trains arrived in the dim, twisting bowels of Terminal Tower, and Grammy and eight- or nine-year-old grandchild exited into a bright, busy train station, then trudged up the steep ramp to street level into Higbee’s, where everything new and chic could be bought. Slender in her seventies, still a natural blond with green eyes, and finally freed from the daily grind by retirement, Grammy went downtown daily, by bus or rapid transit, because it was her city. She shared the marvels of the Old Arcade, with its sunny glass atrium and many steps descending from Euclid to Superior Avenues, and dizzying tiers of shops outlined by brass rails. She unveiled the wonders of the crowded sidewalks, the smells of roasting peanuts, the hot dog carts, and many, towering department stores. They didn’t go to the main branch of the Cleveland Public Library, Federal Reserve Bank, or art or natural history museums, places I would take my grandchildren. Grammy’s trips were just for fun. They ate treats of French fries, cherry Cokes or milkshakes at drug and dime store lunch counters, nothing nutritious. And on the ride back to her apartment, she and the selected grandchild would duck under the turnstile when nobody was looking.

Kathryn Brock
FIFI

My joy comes on tiny pup paws.  
She sits looking up into my eyes and heart with tail wagging,  
Then runs in circles.

Marilyn Thornton Schraff
LAST NIGHT

She snuck into my bed
in the quiet of the night
fussing with me
cressing me with
soft inspiration

relentlessly whispering
into my ear
until finally I submitted
and took her full on

while my wife
complained
on my other side

I rolled with my seducer

writing
and rewriting
this poem.

Rick Ferris
PASSING THROUGH EIGHTY

There before me on the asphalt path,
he did the octogenarian version
of the 82nd Airborne shuffle.
I slowed my pace to follow,
breathing to his stride.

And then he was down,
sprawled at trail’s edge.
Struggling up at my step,
he gasped, Suddenly my legs stopped
and my body continued forward.
It’s never happened before.

I helped him rise.
I’m nearly eighty now you know, he said.
Me too, I said, almost eighty-one.
It’s like passing through
the sound barrier.
Weird shit happens.

At his car
he tried to unlock it with
the panic button.
That too, I said.

Rob Farmer
AND LEAVES FOR HEALING

—A mark on a stem left after a leaf or other part has become detached (cicatrice); the scar of a healed wound.

you

covered with cicatrices

and me

covered

with leaves

Dail Duncan
THINKING

All this thinking of my parents, rummaging for something I haven’t yet thought about them, but still must; that could be my life closing around them? Or, since I’m not ready, put it this way: They’ve had their deaths, I must live for mine.

Bob McDonough