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# 42<sup>ND</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

## *The Poetry Workshop*

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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**

# REQUIEM

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 dishwasher?

**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**

# ALTAR STONE II—ASCENT

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

the Universe.

into

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  
caressing 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 82<sup>nd</sup> 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**





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