



*the* MEADOW

*Don Alfonso*

*the* MEADOW  
2010

TRUCKEE MEADOWS COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
*Reno, Nevada*

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Meadow Art Award: Therese Genio, 1st place; John Knott, 2nd place; and Cara Sherill, 3rd place.

Meadow Non-Fiction Award: Kirsten Kinnear, 1st place; Caren Franklin, 2nd place; and Arian Katsimbras, 3rd place.

Meadow Poetry Award: Doug Schiemer, 1st place; Deysi Gallegos, 2nd place; and Andrew Sieracki, 3rd place.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|              |                                  |    |
|--------------|----------------------------------|----|
| Mark Maynard | An Interview with Jillian Lauren | 56 |
|--------------|----------------------------------|----|

## **Fiction**

|             |                   |    |
|-------------|-------------------|----|
| Conor Allen | The Brother Ocean | 23 |
|-------------|-------------------|----|

## **Non-Fiction**

|                    |                                  |    |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|----|
| Arian Katsimbras   | 601                              | 19 |
| Christopher Locke  | Closer to the Bone               | 38 |
| Kirsten Kinnear    | Seasons                          | 61 |
| Caren Franklin     | Eyes of a Ghost                  | 77 |
| Jerry D. Mathes II | Conception in a Time of Cold War | 87 |

## **Poetry**

|                        |                                    |    |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|----|
| Arian Katsimbras       | Vestiges and Litanies of Las Vegas | 6  |
| Adrian C. Louis        | Black Out                          | 7  |
| Nathan Sowle           | Asilomar                           | 8  |
| Teresa Breeden         | Ocean Hours                        | 9  |
| Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán | Orchard Beach                      | 11 |
| Jeffrey H. MacLachlan  | Why I Hate the Mailman             | 13 |
| Joe Crowley            | Spilt Milk is Better than None     | 14 |
| Taylor Graham          | Poem of the Day                    | 15 |
| Teresa Breeden         | Black Tulips                       | 16 |
| Jeffrey C. Alfier      | Open Range                         | 17 |
| Ellaraine Lockie       | Sand and Water                     | 18 |
| Joanne Lowery          | Robotic Love                       | 32 |
| Kyle Vermillion        | Zombie Love                        | 33 |
| John Hayes             | Lessons from the Eighth Grade      | 34 |
| Cole A. Lindstrom      | First Date                         | 35 |
| Michael Jurkovic       | Fire Outside the ICU               | 36 |
| Arian Katsimbras       | Whiskey Bar, North Reno            | 37 |
| Mark C. D. Gallegos    | Upon Hearing                       | 43 |
| Andy Sieracki          | Christopher Walken                 | 44 |
| Christie Shoupe        | The Night I Didn't Get Up          | 46 |
| S. M. McLean           | Colic                              | 47 |
| Soren Browning         | Midas                              | 48 |
| Changming Yuan         | W.E.N.S.: A Rotating Poem          | 67 |
| Dianna Henning         | Art Shadows                        | 68 |
| Arian Katsimbras       | Restoration of North Farm          | 69 |
| Deysi Gallegos         | The Women Who Glow                 | 70 |
| Mark Terrill           | Rimbaud Reloaded                   | 71 |
| Mark Terrill           | Waiting for Pernod                 | 72 |
| Joanne Lowery          | Angel as Flotation Device          | 73 |

|                       |                           |    |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|----|
| Joanne Lowery         | Angel as Paleontologist   | 74 |
| Michael Dubon         | Existential Kitty         | 75 |
| Jeffrey H. MacLachlan | Karoke                    | 80 |
| Robert del Carlo      | A Last Hurrah for L.A.    | 81 |
| Robert del Carlo      | Firestorm                 | 83 |
| Mary Christine Delea  | The Shoplifter            | 84 |
| Caitlin Thomas        | Strangled Saturday        | 85 |
| Cole A. Lindstrom     | Battle Buddy              | 89 |
| Pam Woolway           | For Lost Fathers and Dogs | 90 |
| Jessica Lee Hagar     | Lion Proof                | 91 |
| Morgan Mason          | Wake                      | 92 |
| Soren Browning        | Gloves                    | 93 |
| Doug Schmierer        | Bird Peddling             | 94 |

### **Art work**

|                       |                           |     |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----|
| Dana Oldfather        | An Audience on the Grass  | 49  |
| John Knott            | Silver Braid, Silver Fern | 50  |
| John Knott            | The Tools of the Trade    | 51  |
| Christopher Woods     | The Girls, Saturday Night | 52  |
| Christopher Woods     | The Booted Mustache       | 53  |
| Therese Genio         | 2                         | 54  |
| Cara Sherill          | Untitled                  | 55  |
| Contributors Notes    |                           | 95  |
| Submission Guidelines |                           | 100 |

# VESTIGES AND LITANIES OF LAS VEGAS

*Arian Katsimbras*

*“Take this white Cadillac and go find the American Dream, it’s somewhere in the Las Vegas area.”*

— Hunter S. Thompson

Saint Paul the Apostle’s Church; silver fields and springs; nickel slots and dimes shine like small pools of mercury or pupils of our eyes under casino lights in late August; alfalfa and alkaline flats; tire tracks like America’s stretch marks across the Mojave; Hoover Dam; neo-pointillism in carpets of Caesar’s Palace; U.S 95 at 6:40 A.M. after a cold cup of burnt coffee; a vermilion dusk driving south through the Armargosa Valley; Las Vegas Strip cutthroats, card sharks, symphony of the slot machine, concert of the quick dollar; drifters gallop terribly against Boulder Highway; Paradise Road’s cardboard city residents standing under a heavy sky with tongues like children hoping for drops of rain or salvation; used car salesmen sprout like dry weeds from cracks in almost vacant lots; white and serrate bayonet leaves of Joshua Trees; casinos and hotels tear up from the playa like marbled headstones, marred and shining like the first twenty-six graves in Nevada; Yucca Flat; sheets of synthetic morning flame burning mad beyond the city’s horizon; glassed sand; downwinders, downtowners, down and outers travel the fumbled lexicon of oasis between boulevard and windswept dune, walk for fear of darkness or all the emptiness; chalk white signs and lines dot exits and entries in and out of nowhere and everywhere; knots of faithful speed mad in smoking Buicks like ashtrays to 24 hour wedding chapels, Elvises draped in Presbyterian white suits peppered with rhinestones and cigarette burns, holding bible and guitar; Dionysus writhing somewhere deep in the southern expanse in an orgy of dancing fluorescent lights and screaming car horns; night owls with eyes black like onyx or cancer at all night coffee shops devouring \$3.99 steak and egg specials, and the American Dream.

# BLACK OUT

*Adrian C. Louis*

Black out.

My headlights scare up  
two pitiful cedars, gnarled  
& loitering upon the snow.

On these plains, the wind  
can rape all trees & minds.

Swirling flakes backlit make  
me cry like a motherless child.

*We all eat clichés in this universe.*

If we lie to people we do not even  
know, then we will lie to ourselves.

Half of mourning, the darkest part  
is that fearing for our own deaths.

Before me lies a mound of dirt &

I could layer lie upon lie & say  
that in this instant I smell beans

& ham hocks, hear her laughter,  
hear clinking glasses & rez dogs

courting a quaint red moon,

but I don't. I hear nothing—

nothing in this American nowhere.

# ASILOMAR

*Nathan Sowle*

I desecrate an exoskeleton graveyard  
as I run toward the jagged rocks strewn across shallow  
water. Tide pools fill natural craters.  
Their watery surface like portals  
to a pure world of starfish and anemones.

In the break, white clouds of water  
crash against a boulder spraying salty mist  
over a colony of barking sea lions.

The sea around me a resting place for the ghost  
of my uncle who still dives for abalone and mussels  
that have been long extinct from populated shores.  
Crawling over the horizon a fishing boat  
filled with martini conversations  
about where they will hang their catch.

Canner row is in the distance, a monument to industrial  
glory; now a hollowed carcass stuffed with Ghiradelli  
Chocolate and Bubba Gump Shrimp.  
It's a place my great grandfather helped build  
as he raised his children on the Tortilla Flats.  
A knoll now whitewashed in million dollar houses.

I pull a hermit crab from a tide pool.  
He stands proud outside his shell,  
his legs trying to learn how to fly in a foreign place.  
I lift him to my face. We stare into our eyes.  
I ask him, *What would Steinbeck think now?*  
He thinks, *Where am I?*

# OCEAN HOURS

*Teresa Breeden*

We lie here, dusk lapping at the feet of day, arms  
flung wide without grasping, thoughts lost  
in the quiet space between headboard and wall, fluttering  
from book to upturned book, following,  
for a moment, the shaft of light  
prying through draperies, where the sun too  
has stretched one soft arm in sleep.

Our breaths rise beyond the ceiling,  
lift like prayers into the cold day,  
looking for solitude or perspective,  
looking like one hawk wheeling  
into the sun. They will drift there  
until dusk sweeps in,  
shatters the horizon with rain.

We lie here at the end of dreaming  
and the beginning of blood, our hair damp  
with promises. We lie so lightly our bodies  
leave no imprint, two small wishes  
separated from voice.

Sometimes we try speech—  
send shards of ourselves into the air  
to be what they might be.  
Those that drift west are burned quickly  
by the glowering sun. Those that drift east  
we follow with our sky-eyes for a day  
and a half at least, until they too  
are lost, devoured by the shadows  
of impassive mountains.

We lie here at the corner of worlds—  
Tomorrow hovers in your eyes, a pale wash of night  
spreading into today, the color of a thought just lost.  
In my arms I hold the setting sun, each finger  
too bright to look at directly, each palm  
a bonfire of need. Where we meet  
the sky is sharp and dangerous, like  
this moment and the last.

Some expectation has slipped between  
the cracks of us, and we lie here, caught  
in the ocean hours, unwilling to slip into sleep,  
two tides fighting the moon.

# ORCHARD BEACH

*Akimsa Timoteo Bodhrán*

Mother headed north to create me.  
*this place of thundering waters*

He collected things from riverbeds.  
Watched deer trackings in snow.  
Rabbit droppings.

I am taught what to eat:  
*strawberries blackberries dandelion*  
I am raised in a family of women.

I remember Grandfather  
working in steel, balancing from heights  
that frighten me.

*places of shells, i gather against*

men have sex here. brown  
and white  
come to re-enact  
upon seaweed

*barter*  
this has become a place of exchange

*each of these men  
looking for themselves*

i came here for the land, not the men

but it is the men i found, mother  
and all the while  
here  
i was looking for you,  
trying to avoid their gaze.

feasted upon like fish from rock

*where are you  
in the tangle  
of men around me?*

*how  
the way back  
through briars  
and so much sand?*

we remember when the islands were two.

# WHY I HATE THE MAILMAN

*Jeffrey H. MacLachlan*

The empty mailbox is filled with paper wasps. I believe he fears them enough to withhold your letters from me so I now spend my afternoons waiting to catch him but there's always a suspicious phone call or a smoke detector and he's gone in a flurry of air. Otherwise I spend my days mouthing your rating again and again. *Hospital Corpsman. Hospital Corpsman.* That's when I knew I had to get out.

Laura, the girl at the deli, asked me to join her and the husband home on leave. We waited at a college bar with strings of lights hung like candy necklaces. It was a renovated industrial building and the girls in soft make-up beamed at their lanky boys. She told me in a drawl that his hair was full of grace but when he arrived I knew she meant *grease*. He had a gurgling in his throat like a fryer and after a quick kiss bent his thumb under her chin which produced a buzzing stinger of Zippo light.

# SPILT MILK IS BETTER THAN NONE

*Joe Crowley*

So I'm an optimist.  
A friend who mixes metaphors  
says I see a silver lining  
in every sow's ear.

I do connect with pessimists.  
They help me keep things  
in perspective,  
preserve the precious balance

nature needs,  
find, when times demand,  
the dark cloud lurking  
in every silk purse.

# POEM OF THE DAY

*Taylor Graham*

Instead of writing it, I walk down  
to get the mail. Sun's out after rain,  
sheep browsing in the shade.

In the mailbox, no poems taken,  
none rejected. Only a bill, a pizza ad.  
Lay them in the grass and set off

down-creek. Yellow scepters  
in flower, wild mustard's calling.  
Tramp through grass, stamp

on stones to warn snakes.  
Leaf by leaf I snip tangy greens –  
just enough for a sesame-oil saute.

Up the hill I stop for Indian lettuce,  
last of its tribe, end of season,  
still good for a salad.

I arrive home, arms full of paper  
nothings; a georgic of mustard greens,  
a lyric of wild lettuce.

# BLACK TULIPS

*Teresa Breeden*

Stand like stone, unblinking  
Even the air  
Holds its breath, awed

By such stillness until  
A long exhale from the west  
Bends them to its sigh.

I listen as though blind  
The voice of the wind a line  
For me to follow

Twelve bowing sentinels mark my path  
Each the color of a fresh bruise  
Rising toward the light.

# OPEN RANGE

*Jeffrey C. Alfier*

Daylight comes warm against the rust  
of a thresher. Runoff from storms  
lies shadowed in the mesquite grove.  
Night's coyotes scatter like spies,  
slinking off to recondite shade.

The day's too dust-laden for speech.  
Wind sings through what falls out of use,  
a refrain of discordant notes  
threading rusted pump rods, fencing,  
a screen door beyond the back porch.

# SAND AND WATER

*Ellaraine Lockie*

Sadie Farrel saw it all  
from her parked '86 Impala  
Where she watched the action  
through binoculars  
and soap opera obsession  
on the only paved street in town

Decades of gunmetal grey history  
support one block of commerce  
Where part of the sidewalk  
was recently annihilated  
Reconstruction compliments of the Mint Bar  
after Angus McFee had a few too many  
and drove through the post office

Sadie will tell you Angus  
stumbled out of the Mint at 8:06  
Took a piss in the alley  
Passed out in Southern Comfort  
with a foot dead-weighted on the gas pedal  
And smashed ass-backwards  
into the town's only branch of government

Her goldfish eyes swim in a seventy-five year  
pool immersed with images  
Of street dances, homecoming parades  
traveling carnivals, funeral processions  
And teenagers flipping head-lighted U'ees  
before settling on the dark of dirt roads

The pavement darkens too  
A deeper shade of gloom  
gradual with each commercial death  
Kaste's closed and inventory  
becoming vintage

Two grocery stores marked down  
to one mini-mart  
Movie theater brought to a standstill  
Pharmacy and dry cleaner dissolved  
by the solvent of bankruptcy

Even the Big Sandy Creek all but dry  
has filled in with cottonwoods

*Arian Katsimbras*

**3rd Place Meadow Non-Fiction Award**

*“There were also those rare times when some local citizens formed a ‘601,’ a western term of disputed origin referring to vigilante groups that undertook to administer justice themselves. Oddly, vigilante organizations thrived in the period after official law enforcement became available.”*

— Ronald M. James, *The Roar and the Silence*

*“My horse shied out to one side and would not pass a clump of several juniper trees along the road. I finally forced him back into the road and then discovered why the horse had shied. From each of these small trees was suspended a man with a rope around his neck, and on each of their chests was pinned a notice from the Vigilance Committee. You should have seen the clearing out of Virginia City after that lynching bee.”*

— Colonel Henry E. Dosch, written in a late winter night, December 1865

In 1871, arson fires spent days dancing from one sun-bleached rooftop to another, crippling imported architectural styles, exotic furniture made from not yet endangered woods, children’s toys, families, and lives. Homeowners spent countless tears and hours blackening their calloused hands as they sifted through small hills of ash and charred remains of a life attempted and scorched on the steep hills of a high desert basin, the embers that breathed deep below the thickening of ash-burned hands as they shook and reached for wedding rings or porcelain dolls with their hair singed under the blaring heat of the desert sun. These fires prompted the search for and arrest of a man responsible. While little or no evidence suggested a particular perpetrator, doors nonetheless swung open with ferocity, water stopped rushing down flumes, whiskey bottles remained corked as swaths of citizens raked the streets and mines and bars in search of a man with hands scarred from the lapping flames of betrayal and threat to a city that operated with feverish intent for gold and silver.

After the people took to the streets on search of an arsonist, a handful of them stood in an empty, echoing room in a building that was eventually lost to the Great Fire of 1875 and roared their individual votes to form Virginia City’s 601 with the intention of apprehending the arsonist and stringing him from a juniper tree or at the throat of an active mine where its end was swallowed by blackness and the searing heat dehydrated dead men and donkeys hauling loads of ore and other dead men. The local police force had recently arrested Arthur Perkins Heffernan outside the swinging doors of a saloon for shooting a man at the faro table at the far end of the bar; cards and chips rest in the corner, a man shot in his cheek and eye. Because the 601 had just recently been formed, they must have felt in necessary to make a lasting impression on the

timid community and establish standards of justice that if not adhered to meant capital punishment by way of dancing at the end of a rope.

On March 14, 1871, an alcoholic, rumored wagon robber, and notoriously violent resident of South B Street's Barbary Coast staggered out onto the 40 percent grade he built his rickety porch on and lit a dried and fraying cigar that dangled haphazardly out of his mouth. Even though spring hid just around winter's corner, March nights still ushered in cloudless, freezing skies that captured the hardened hills and shivering people in its frigid grip. The water that would rush down flumes and pipes in the clamber of the day's chaos, rest suspended in wait for the morning when picks and chisels would chip away at the top layer of ice to allow for the water to continue its journey into dark ore pollution and washed into a refining process that would poison its purity. William Masters wobbled on his porch under the weight of the cold sky and light of the blue moon and listened to the faint voices whirl around one another in small white puffs and dissipate one block down the hill on C Street. A line of lanterns bobbed and shook down the wooden sidewalk; some held proudly above their greasy heads where the thin white clouds met the heat and light of the lantern's flame, some held them at belt level, rigid in the night, not skipping around in the cold dark like the others.

The 601 had assembled in the late hours of the night and marched in a determined formation toward the local Guard Unit's armory. From where Masters watched on his porch, he could barely see the punctuated silhouettes of some of the men standing outside the armory, arms crossed like muskets on a wall, shivering the night's bitter vacancy, watching the North side of C Street for the possibility of vagrants or passersby stumbling across the mob. Inside the armory, tiny bullets of candle flame darted by the windows from one side of the room to the other, darkness caught in the crossfire. Whispers between friends were not audible from where Masters stood. Only when a man spoke up could Masters hear of the intent of the mob; to exact justice the Western way and lynch Arthur Perkins before sunup. Gaining access to the armory allowed for the men to procure rifles and muskets and pistols and bayonets that supplanted their rusted shovels and picks and dull knives. After shelves had been emptied, the front door of the armory burst at its hinges and exploded like the head of an anthill, members of the 601 poured out of the armory and gathered in a collective mob, swirling in on itself like a violent river current, discussing the coming hour when they would pull Perkins from his cold rock cell and walk him to the Ophir Mine.

Just north of the Armory, the saloons whined with emptiness, the girls in the brothels were slung over hitching rails and out of half-cocked doors in attempts to catch any lumbering saloon patron on his way home or to another girl, the red lights washing over anyone within reach, bleeding into the muddy gutters and reflecting off of windows across the street. While the typically bustling nightlife of north C Street was not entirely devoid of activity, there was an uneasy absence in its occurrence. Some of the pianos had stopped playing their out of tune and high pitched numbers, cabaret girls could not be heard swooning the dizzy saloon au-

diences, the laughter from the faro tables were kept at a low hum instead of a distant roar. A large majority of Virginia City's men had marched from their homes and regular saloons down the street to the Guard and had temporarily abandoned their posts in search of lady justice laying in the brick and mortar jailhouse, behind cast-iron bars and the stench of inmates' excrement that had not been cleaned up for days and would not harden in the pools of urine and mud that lay in the corner. Arthur Perkins stood in his cell and watched waves of men splash past his window, each silhouette temporarily blocking out the omniscient light of the moon. His room was empty save for two rigid and thick wool blankets crumpled up in a mound on his metal cot, some paper and a charcoal stick by which he sketched pictures of his mother and daughter on nights when the moon invaded his room and illuminated his tiny parcel of imprisonment.

William Masters had watched as the mob divided and the majority of it walked back to the central part of Virginia City and lined the sidewalks and merchant fronts like a regimented armed force establishing control in a rioting metropolis. A dozen other men walked from the Guard to the county jail and seized control of it. When the 601 opened Arthur Perkins' cell door, he was sitting directly under the window, drawing a self-portrait of himself perhaps as a younger man, a hat cocked curiously on his brilliant blonde head, a mustache lined his boyish smile, dimples like parentheses at the corners of his mouth, capturing his words like secrets that no one would hear. He sat his portrait down on the ground beside him and stood up as the men opened his cell door and advised him to step out and onto the scales of justice to have his crimes weighed, his life hanging in the balance.

The 601 escorted him down the south side of C Street. The men that stood in the shadows of the casinos, brothels, and saloons abandoned their temporary duties and began their walk down C Street to the Ophir mine where Perkins was to be charged and judged. Masters slowly stumbled down a weathered path from his house up the hill from C Street in the cutthroat Barbary Coast district, down onto the road behind the crowd of men. As he descended from the path onto the road, Masters stopped and looked down at the sprawling valley that lay asleep just beyond the beaming light and torrential noise that spilled out of the buildings behind him and mouths of the crowd of men in front of him. Just behind his left shoulder, the small flames of yesterday's fire receded more into the night, more into memory. Small black boards of the west-side window shutters shook against the early morning breeze and ashes ascended up and out of the exposed roof, coalescing with the sky, with the noise parading down the corridor on the heels of the lynching mob, with the smoke that spilled over the hilltops and out of the valley. The men walked for no more than ten minutes before the sound of tired, dragging boots stopped and the lanterns came together at the center of the crowd to light up the mine. A rope dangled from timber at the mouth of the mine shaft, swaying in a breeze that swam through the noose, trying to escape.

Masters stood on the outskirts of the crowd, outside the reaching arms of lantern light that flickered across the boots and faces of the 601. A tall member of the 601 walked Arthur Perkins to a pine plank that bridged the gap of the mine's gaping mouth. Perkins did not move from his spot, did not fight, or curse his captors and accusers. Rather, his piercing blue eyes skipped from face to face, his head moving 90 degrees left then right, drinking in the stoic faces that were shielded from his glance by their hats and the blackness that divided the space between them. Masters watched as the tall man placed a massive black hand on his shoulder and advised him to give a tall jump straight up and into the air as to ensure that he doesn't die by slow strangulation. Perkins nodded his head and flashed a chipped and missing-teeth grin, adjusting his posture to look above the crowd's heads and into the laughter and cries of the city in the morning hours. He swept one last glance into the blackness behind the crowd and licked the tears and dirt from the corners of his mouth and screamed, "Turn her loose boys!" He leapt into the air and dropped with the sound of thunder cracking through a vacant valley. He swung back and forth in short circles like a pendulum, toes dragging small piles of soft dust in the dirt below him. Some of the heads looked down at their own feet, some looked at Arthur's, most smiled.

The boom of a canon signaled the end of the siege and the rifles and pistols were returned to the armory. The crowd thinned and walked back to their homes, their saloons, their apartments above casinos. Doors slammed, saloons grew louder, piano music traveled down C Street's corridor, the moan of miners and prostitutes bounced off of the floors and ceiling of their rooms. Masters stood for a long time, watching the weight of Perkins' body sway under the timber, his neck broken and elongated, his face blue already, eyes swelling out from the sockets, blood trailing like tears from the corners of his swollen eyes. Masters choked on his fear, coughing up his sadness, as if he had been hanged instead. He stood at the entrance of the mine, still, skin raised in the cold air, hair tussled in the wind. He stood at Perkins' front, facing his friend, and reached into his front coat pocket to search for his wallet or perhaps a cold flask of whiskey. The sun had begun to peak over the east side of Nevada, yawning over the rolling hills in the distance, washing Virginia City in its golden beauty, rinsing away the darkness that had enveloped it an hour ago. As he reached into his coat pocket, Masters noticed a placard pinned to Perkins' lapel. It read, "Arthur Perkins No. 601." William Masters walked back up to his home in the Barbary. The music from the Delta played with veracity and moved his feet all the way to his porch. He didn't glance back over his shoulder when he closed his door; the sun was warm on his back, the placard held loosely in his right hand, the creaking of the rope as it swung back and forth in the mouth of the mine, back and forth through Virginia City's history.

# THE BROTHER OCEAN

*Conor Allen*

I still remember the night David met Bryn, the year I turned twenty one. We were at an underground art opening in Brooklyn, about a week before Christmas. It was one of those nights where we weren't sure if it was worth it to go out, seemed everybody else was likely in Vermont or Wisconsin or wherever people who live in New York were once from. David was in graduate school then at NYU studying film, and I had been visiting him for a week. We were both calling it an extended east coast winter vacation; the reality was I had come out to blow off a little steam after being fired for smoking a joint behind the Dumpster during my shift at a Starbucks in San Francisco. The majority of my savings and a box of used CDs paid for the plane ticket.

I was the one who spoke to Bryn first. She was leaning against a lamp post outside the gallery smoking a cigarette, right arm tucked under her left to fend off the wind. I pulled a pack of Camels from my pocket and stepped towards her.

"What do you think of the art?" I asked. She blew smoke out of the corner of her mouth and adjusted her coat. My heart did that little thing it always did when I met a beautiful woman, kind of a pitter, patter, like a stroke was on its way.

"I think they're all shit," she said, looking directly at me. I nodded and took a hit off of my cigarette. My left hand was shaking, so I stuffed it into my pocket. I hadn't been with a woman in 387 days.

"Shit huh? Well..." The wind picked up a little and tickled the back of my neck. I swallowed and felt like I had to belch out an enormous amount of tobacco. Bryn glared in my direction for a good five seconds, and I thought she was going to slap me. I knew no clever comeback for 'they're all shit.'

"Ha! I'm fucking with you." She grinned finally, and I felt like I might wet my pants. A car on the next block blasted its horn into the cold.

"No, you know what? They're alright. I mean, I have a preference for landscapes, like Turner? But I like it. That piece with the purple bubbles? Pretty amazing." I nodded and smiled, had absolutely no idea what painting she was talking about. Her brown eyes watched me from beneath her pink beanie cap. She was older than I'd originally thought, and skinnier, but not anorexic skinny. She looked like the kind of woman who could really clean up in a 5K.

"What about you? What do you think?" she asked. I wasn't ready for the question, and I didn't have an opinion. I'd spent most of the night drinking free red wine out of the same miniature plastic cup and looking at all the females. It had been a long time since I'd tried to hit on a woman who had a preference for figurative art. Actually, it had been forever. I suddenly wanted to return to San Francisco and see if there were any eighteen year olds who liked to shoplift Crown Royal and play laser tag on

mushrooms. At that point in my life, those were the only women I'd ever had any luck with.

When my brother appeared, pushing his way through the gallery's front doors and pulling on his coat, I was suddenly relieved. David would have an opinion.

"I don't know," I said, turning toward him. "What do we think of the paintings, Dave?" My brother put both hands in his pockets and looked past Bryn and up the street. He furrowed his brows and licked his lips, mock concentration squishing his face into a tight pucker. The cold crawled up through my pants and I tried not to shake.

"I think they're shit," David said, at last. He smiled at Bryn, and in spite of herself, it looked like her eyes were going to shoot out of their sockets. For a minute the two of them stood looking at one another, and I wanted to give my brother a hug. I might have looked like an asshole trying to hit on an older woman, but goddamn if he wasn't going to keep things cool. Eventually, Bryn smiled. What I remember most was her teeth. They shone white in the Brooklyn black, so shiny I wondered if I could see my reflection in their surface.

"Kidding," David said after a minute. "I love them. You know, I was a square for a long time. I thought all modern artists were a bunch of rich kids with too many bottles of spray paint and not enough classical training."

I nodded like I knew what he was talking about, and Bryn flicked her cigarette into the street.

"I still think that," David said. "But this stuff is a lot more interesting to me than what they tell you you're supposed to like in high school."

"Well put," Bryn said.

My brother extended his hand in her direction. "David."

"Bryn," she returned. I tried to smile, but my face felt like it was weighted down with thirty pounds of ice.

"I know you," David said.

"You do?"

"I've seen you do comedy at the Birch Street Café open mic night."

"Guilty," she said, holding up her right hand. I shifted my weight and coughed.

"You tell the best cock jokes of anyone I've ever seen in New York," David said as if he were talking about a brand of cola.

"Well, thank you. I'm working on some political commentary right now that blows all my cock stuff out of the water." Bryn laughed and folded her arms against the cold. Her face was suddenly softer. David put his arm around my shoulder and ruffled my hair.

"My brother here is from San Francisco, and he's not used to the cold. Are you, Jack?"

"No," I said. "Well...yeah, I guess not." I finally extended my hand. "I'm Jack, by the way."

"Right, got that," Bryn said, returning the shake. "You two are brothers, huh? Wow, so nice to meet a pair of men who appreciate fine art."

"Yes, that's us," David smiled. "We're definitely appreciative."

It was done. They would be living together within two months. I tried to stay in the conversation, but the cold started to play with my ability to concentrate. Mostly they talked about painters I didn't know, and the art of the cock joke. Eventually I went back inside and found the painting Bryn said she liked. I stood next to it with another cup of wine and observed. It was gigantic, a swirling mass of purple circles pushing their way across a camouflage background, with yellow lines that looked like worms inter-spliced throughout the painting. I honestly didn't know what was to like or dislike.

The wine kept coming and the music got louder. None of it mattered. After about five glasses I was suddenly aware that flying all the way across the country hadn't solved any of my problems. David was outside with Bryn, where I wanted to be, but where they were was too cold. The gallery, on the other hand, was like Florida in August, minus the water. There just didn't seem to be anywhere comfortable to go.

I drank until my body didn't care. In the G street gallery I forgot about all the women I wanted to seduce, I forgot about David and Bryn, and I forgot about my lost job at the world's greatest coffee empire. I simply moved from painting to painting, hoping, until my brother told me it was time to go home, that I'd find something to like.

I would not see Bryn again for a number of years. Time separated my brother and me with its hands, and our lives continued. I returned to San Francisco and couch-surfed for a few weeks, looking for work and smoking pot with friends who had too much time on their hands and too many zeros at the end of their trust funds. Like them, David and I came from wealth. My father was a primary care physician in Berkeley for many years. My mother, though she certainly didn't have to, worked in real estate. Because I'd decided not to go to college right out of high school, they weren't interested in helping me with money. David, they gave whatever he wanted. He had a talent, an 'artistic calling,' as my father called it. They considered the money he was given as a kind of guide, a force in the story of his destiny. I had no talent. I didn't even have a C average in gym class.

My brother remained in New York, finished at NYU, and fell in love with Bryn. The two of them found a place to live together in Brooklyn, and began to dig into their careers. David wanted to make documentaries, and in a relatively short period of time, he managed to make many. First, there was a piece about the homeless. Then he did one about New York graffiti artists. There was always some project in the works about playground basketball stars. Then one day he realized he was making the same kind of documentary every documentary filmmaker in New York had ever made.

I'm thinking about switching to experimental, he wrote one day. Everybody in New York is an asshole. None of them are even original. Homeless people? They're just assholes. I don't care how many obstacles they've overcome or football scholarships they used to have. And I don't know why I thought it would be a good idea to make a film about graffiti artists.

Want to know something about graffiti artists? They're assholes. I don't think anybody really thinks graffiti is an actual form of art. And anyone who does...is an asshole.

Bryn continued to perform stand-up, and graduated from open mic nights to the club circuit. Her act became very popular.

Bryn is blowing up, David wrote. I mean I don't know how else to put it. That's the term everybody uses out here. She's got a fucking agent now, and he's working on getting her auditions for movie parts. I told her if she gets a big role, she's buying us a loft in SoHo.

I managed to land a number of illustrious jobs: Hot Dog vendor in the parking lot of a Home Depot; dishwasher at a pizza parlor; gas station attendant during a time of night when only vampires and serial killers were out. Eventually I landed at a place called Burgermeister. My duties there were to smile at drunk customers and persuade them to get curly fries with their order. I spent my days smoking a lot of weed out of a glass bong I affectionately referred to as 'Glassmerelda,' and had a place on Twenty-third Avenue with a guy from work named Len, a thirty-nine year old heavy metal drummer who once flew planes in the Air Force and liked to stash cigarettes in his beard hair.

Over the years I'd come to realize I had obsessive-compulsive disorder. It had begun in high-school with excessive hand washing. I could often spend up to an hour in the bathroom, scrubbing until I felt satisfied. My bathroom breaks at work were treacherous. Often I had to force myself to step away from the sink, lest somebody thought I was in there shooting up or conducting a symphony.

Door-ways were a problem. I had to cross myself every time I passed through one. But since people who openly cross themselves when they walk through a door are considered freaks or religious zealots, I had to disguise this ritual by jabbing my fingernails into the palm of my hand. Problem was, if it didn't hurt enough, I'd have to pass through all over again. What would happen if I didn't do this correctly? I never knew, because my mind never let me take the chance. That is the nature of obsessive-compulsive disorder; none of the rituals you perform make any sense, yet the need to perform them is like the desire to breathe.

For three consecutive fall semesters I enrolled at City College, and for three consecutive falls semesters I lasted a month. Right around mid-terms my rituals would take over. All I had to do was think about writing an essay on the history of socialism, and I'd be by the sink, scrubbing.

Once, after a particularly bad session left my hands bloody and raw, I called my parents. I'd made up my mind that I was going to tell them about my problem. I was going to tell them, and then ask if they would help me with the cost of finding a doctor who could help. But when my father answered the phone, I couldn't do it. I couldn't even speak.

"Hello?" my Dad asked. He hated to answer the phone, was forever convinced that every call was a sales call. On the other end of the line I stood with the receiver cradled in my ear, breath tight in my chest.

"Hello?"

I knew my place in the family. I hung up the phone with a gentle 'click,'

and then stared at it as if some kind of solution would drift out like a plume of smoke. Then, suddenly, I threw the whole device across the room, where it bounced off the wall and shattered into useless bits.

When Bryn came out to do a few shows on the west coast one summer, it had been nearly three years since the night we'd all met at the art gallery. David did not make the trip out. At that point he had an editing job at a company that produced low-budget Christian education films disguised as murder mysteries. It's about as fucking stupid as it sounds, he wrote.

That June, Len and I were in the middle of a two week drinking binge that had begun after I'd somehow managed to win a thousand dollars off one of those grocery store bought scratch lotto tickets that have cherries or leprechauns or other random shit on the front. A smart person would have put that money into savings, but to me, a thousand dollars seemed like an amount of money that could never completely disappear, no matter how much of it I threw at malt liquor.

Bryn got us on the guest list for a set she was doing at a place called Cobb's Comedy Club in North Beach. Drinks were on the house. I can tell you that no two men in the history of time have ever laughed harder during a comedy performance. Free drinks, jokes, and a winning scratch ticket were about all it took to amuse a couple of guys like Len and I. When Bryn's set was finished, we were waiting for her, buzzed and grinning.

"Jack!"

"Bryn!"

She'd grown even more beautiful than I'd remembered. The highlights in her brown hair shone under the club lights, and her eyes gleamed. She wore success well. I opened my arms and invited her into a hug.

"What do you think of the art?" I asked. She laughed. There was no glare this time. For a second I thought I might have somehow managed to become at least a little smoother since we'd last spoke.

"So, twenty four hours and I'm back to Brooklyn," she said. "I'm counting on you two to keep me entertained." I bit my lower lip. The night before, Len and I had bought a couple bottles of Schlitz and rented the movie *Waterworld*. We'd come up with a game where we had to drink every time there was a clip in the film that had the ocean in it. I didn't know if this kind of thing would be anyone else's idea of entertainment.

"Bonfire," Len said.

"What?" Bryn asked.

Len nodded at me and repeated, "Bonfire."

"He's right," I said.

"Bonfire? Like at the beach?"

"No fog," Len said.

"Yes," I said.

That month, it was as if Mother Nature thought San Francisco was part of southern California. Every day in June was warm, and every evening was clear. Living out by the beach, Len and I saw a fair amount of fog. Ac-

tually, we were blasted with it on a daily basis. Its un-characteristic disappearance seemed to have begun shortly after I'd won my scratch prize, and we'd come to believe that the two events were connected. Our job was to thank Mother Nature by drinking at the beach as much as possible.

"You don't understand," I said to Bryn. "Here on the west coast, we have something called fog. It's this thick, misty substance that creeps in from offshore and it can easily ruin an otherwise beautiful day."

"Or night," Len said.

"Or night," I agreed. Bryn laughed.

"O.K.," she said. "I think I get it."

"We haven't had any in like..."

"Weeks," Len said.

"Weeks," I repeated. "It's a gift from Mother Nature. Please help us celebrate this gift with alcohol and fire by the ocean."

Bryn pulled on her coat and smiled.

"All you had to say."

We took Len's old Mustang out to Ocean Beach and before my toes even touched the sand, I knew I was in trouble. We'd had a couple of beers before the club and a couple of Martinis during the performance. On the way out I sipped from a tiny bottle of tequila, and at some point Len fired up a joint and passed it clockwise.

Bryn wasn't holding back either. David had mentioned to me once or twice that she could drink him under the table, but aside from that night in New York, I'd never seen her with alcohol. She had her own little bottle of Jameson's tucked away in a brown paper bag that fit neatly in her coat pocket, and as we blasted down Fulton Avenue toward the ocean, she sipped liberally and laughed at Len's ability to play the drum beat to every Led Zeppelin song in his tape deck on the Mustang's steering wheel. As drunk as I was, I thought I might have been falling in love.

By the time we made it to the beach, my ability to stand was becoming a challenge. I stumbled out from the strand-way onto the sand and did a dramatic collapse that wasn't meant to be funny, but that drew uproarious laughter from my companions. Len pulled off a cart wheel that was really smooth right up to the finish. That is, until he lost his balance and went tumbling downward, legs and arms flailing like palm leaves in a rainstorm.

The air was cool and clear, a light breeze leaving tiny fingerprints in my hair. The sand felt good, it was almost cold, but not unpleasantly so. I lay on my back and watched as the stars above spun round and round like a million electric mosquitoes.

"Yoooooou're wasssted!" Bryn said, dropping to her knees in front of me.

"Not," I said. "No. Not."

My mouth felt like it was filled with peanut butter. Bryn pinched one of my cheeks and leaned in so close I thought, for a minute, she was going to kiss me.

"Waaasted," she confirmed, and gave me a light slap. I could smell the tequila on her breath. Suddenly my tongue was out, and I was propelling

my face toward hers. She turned away at the last minute and I sloshed against the side of her hair, tasting shampoo and conditioner. Behind her, Len stood looking down at me, and even though I couldn't make out his face in the dark, I knew what he was trying to do.

"You need a time-out, old Jack?" he asked.

One of the best things about being friends with Len was that no matter how many narcotic substances were in his body, the man was perpetually sober. He'd saved my ass many a time when good judgment had set sail on a weekend fishing trip. I don't know how he did it, as hard as he drank.

"Shit," I mumbled.

Bryn got slowly to her feet, nearly falling herself. She was frowning when I looked up. I thought for a second she would kick me where I lay.

"Jack neeeeds a time-the-fuck-out!" she declared at the top of her lungs, and once again there was laughter. As she scampered off toward the ocean, I motioned for Len to come closer.

"Shit," I spat under my breath.

"Jack," he said. "What is it with you and your economy-size bottles of tequila at the beach? It's a horrible combination."

"I fucked up, man," I said.

"Don't worry about it."

"Len!"

I grabbed his shirt collar pulled him to me.

"Len, I think I'm fucking in love with that girl," I said.

"Is that right, Jack?"

"Len, I'm a fucking asshole. I want you to bury me right here."

"Sure, man. I'll bury you. Let me go back to the car and get my shovel."

"You don't fucking understand."

Len sighed and plopped down next to me in the sand. He snatched the tequila bottle out of my pocket, and took a small sip, running his tongue along the bottom edge of his moustache. I propped myself up on my elbows, and we stared out at the ocean. A couple was out walking their bulldog along the water, and Bryn had stopped to pet it a few yards down the beach.

"Love this no fog," Len said finally. I nodded.

He looked at me and passed the bottle back.

"I'm gonna take a piss. You OK here?"

"Yeah," I said.

I stretched out and looked up at the sky, which lurched a little to the right. I dug my fingers into the sand, as if to stop myself from being pushed right off the side of the planet. I wanted to stand up, but that didn't seem like an easy accomplishment; instead I held on and tried to count all of the yellow suns blinking back at me from several lifetimes away. I might have dozed, if only for a minute.

"Bryn's in the water."

Len kicked my sneaker and I sat up, feeling my stomach clench.

"Get out of there Bryn!" he shouted.

I pulled myself up and followed him to the shoreline. My brother's girl-

friend was far out, bobbing up and down in the waves in her underwear. Her coat and skirt lay crumpled before us in the sand.

“Bryn! The rip current!”

She couldn’t hear us, or didn’t want to. She waved and flopped onto her back like a happy piece of driftwood. I pulled off my shoes and got ready to enter the water.

“The fuck you’re gonna do that,” Len said, nearly tackling me from behind.

“She doesn’t know!” I said. “She doesn’t fucking know!”

“You won’t be able to get back in either,” he said, voice flat. I put my hands on my knees and puked.

“Bryn,” Len called, cupping his hands. “Bryn, swim back now! You have to swim back!”

A wave dug its nose into the shore and exploded, drowning out his voice. The water rushed up the beach and foam gushed in my nose as I wretched. I watched as the waves snatched my vomit from the ground and pulled it out to sea like the whole chunky mess was on a lever. Len turned and grabbed my shoulders.

“Keep calling her,” he said. “I’m going for my phone.”

I watched him disappear into the night and then whirled around. For a minute I couldn’t see Bryn at all and then suddenly she was out there, even further out. I think by then she understood what was happening, because she was trying to swim back. The ocean was black, crackling foam, and it carried her south. I waded out to knee level and sucked all the air into my chest that I could manage to try and shout her name, but what came out wasn’t even human.

Before I could move a wave knocked me on my back so hard I saw colors. For a moment, I thought of my brother back in New York. I could see him strolling through Greenwich Village in the grey tweed coat he always loved to wear, the kind of jacket anybody else would look like a pretentious asshole in. He’d called me the day before Bryn had come into town and asked me to show her a good time. I told him I would, and then he thanked me, because, as he said, if I hadn’t gone up and spoken to her first, the two of them would never have met.

“I can be kind of shy around women,” he said. “You’ve always been really good at that, Jack. You’ve got a big set of balls.”

My stomach turned a little when David told me he was shy. I’d never thought of him as such. I’d often imagined him sitting in a café, engaged in some harmless flirtation with a blonde co-ed simply because he could, relaxed in the knowledge that his girlfriend, being a stand-up comedian, would find the whole thing funny.

Once on my feet, I undid my belt and dove back into the water. It was suddenly very cold. In the years since I’ve only tried to go into the ocean a few times, but I’ve never been able to let the water cover anything above my feet. It’s the cold that won’t let me do it. The cold will worm its way in between my toes, and remind me that human strength is not enough.

There was nothing spectacular about the way Bryn drowned. She was above the surface of the water for awhile, and then she wasn’t. She was

calling to me the whole time, trying to say something, but I couldn't hear. As hard as I tried to swim, I couldn't get anywhere near her. The waves played with me, slapped my body around, and made my alcohol soaked muscles work for every inch of progress. Then, mercifully, when my bony arms where unable to paddle any further, they carried me back to shore. Even as I lay exhausted on the sand, wracked with chills, I promised myself that I would go back out. I promised my brother that I would bring Bryn in, that all I needed was a little rest. But then Len was beside me with a blue beach towel. He wrapped it around my shoulders and held me as I shook. I thrashed and coughed in his arms, and he told me that it was going to be alright, told me it was time to get warm.

# ROBOTIC LOVE

*Joanne Lowery*

Four-armed you glided across a barren sphere  
into my six-armed welcome, detectors  
allowing us to hinge and braid  
until what could be called bodies  
were adjacent, winking and buzzing.  
Oh, we were full of sensors  
to photograph and measure, to analyze  
chemical by chemical, to weigh and transmit.  
With my extra pair, more data  
was mine, the better to appreciate  
your secrets, the ancient history  
that propelled and sculpted you  
for my clanky perusal.  
Since then the tabloids claiming  
you once had water, once bore life,  
have yellowed in my rusty chambers.  
Rust needs water, and when you left  
I made my own, all six arms engaged  
in wiping tears and dust  
from two unblinking cameras.

# ZOMBIE LOVE

*Kyle Vermillion*

You're walking to the grocery store,  
Alone with no one in sight.  
You cut through a dark alleyway  
That goes straight to the store.  
A curious figure shuffles in your direction.  
You think it's just a bum, nothing  
That's going to bother your journey.  
The figure sprints toward you like a kid  
Who lost his mother in a store  
And sees her down aisle two, debating  
On ground beef or chicken.  
You run away. The figure catches up  
Easily. It smells like rotten red roses,  
Coagulated chocolates, and bad morning  
Breath. It's your girlfriend from two years ago.  
The one with the bad shopping habit  
And addictive personality. Shit.  
She's going shopping, too.

# LESSONS FROM THE EIGHTH GRADE

*John Hayes*

MONDAY

She twirls her long red hair.  
In Nebraska, they grow corn for export.  
Will that be on the test?  
Without conservation, water will leave the Earth.  
She turns her head and smiles at him.  
He swells against his fly.  
Lake Erie is larger than Lake St. Claire.  
Will that be on the test?

After class she asks him to walk her home.  
She touches his arm and smiles at him.  
She invites him in.  
She kisses him.  
Then her tongue inside his mouth.  
She pulls his zipper down  
The Himalayas are very high.  
Will that be on the test?

She takes his hand beneath her skirt  
leads him up her thigh.  
Is Lake St. Claire a great lake?  
Will that be on the test?

TUESDAY

He watches her  
smile at another boy.  
Nebraska is north of Kansas.  
Will that be on the test?

She turns her head.  
Her eyes are cold  
she scowls.

Gibraltar is a rock  
Will that be on the test?

# FIRST DATE

*Cole A. Lindstrom*

Through cigarette lips  
and your chemical tongue  
the orange glow warms the room  
and stings my eyes.

I inhale, choking on your dare  
then quickly wash it away  
with alcohol induced romance,  
garnished with lemons.

As we drink more, I continue to fall deeper,  
imagining the white picket future.  
Backyard barbeques with neighbors and kids.  
Maybe a dog or two.

We grow until the kids are gone and it's just us  
smiling and laughing into silver years,  
going on cruises, dancing to the oldies  
before walking in our matching sweats.

One day you go first,  
and it's too much to bear,  
without that orange glow and bitter smoke  
it's not the same.

Then one lonely day I fall,  
laying in a bloody pool and counting  
the ticks until the end.  
We burn then scatter to the sea.

As I lean in again for another taste of your  
chemical tongue and sweet perfume,  
our windows lock together.  
We must have shared the view.

Beautiful, yes. But I wasn't ready to see  
the path that you must have seen too.  
Because you never called  
and neither did I.

# FIRE OUTSIDE THE ICU

*Michael Jurkovic*

Love and grievance  
Mingle ash and flurry

Softly falling harder  
On this wintry day  
Outside the ICU.

Those letters from Los Gatos  
After you split the band,  
The mogul you met  
What was his name?  
Alfonse,  
With the sea otter eyes.

Recall the poems  
I'm holding  
Inches from the fire

Angels of ash  
Drafting from  
A rusty drum

Keeping just the label  
From the champagne  
I poured over your ass  
New Years, 1974.

# WHISKEY BAR, NORTH RENO, SHORTLY AFTER MY MARRIAGE TO ANNA MARTENS

*Arian Katsimbras*

Opaque laughter swims from your mouth to rest in that place between the bar's harlequins who in their reveries sit a short distance behind us and reach between our shoulders. Your cobalt eyes are heavy, much the way early morning fog lights are, tired from the strain of thick, cold nights. Our silhouette is masked by expanding smoke from discarded cigarettes that hang over the lip of an ambered ashtray. Your right hand taps out the light drums of a late Lennon song, the left swings back from your sideways smile to the anatomically incorrect heart carved deep into the walnut stained bar that holds some matches, a wallet, and an already empty wine glass, its chipped brim threatening to cut your words, our tongue.

Backed against the brick-red bathroom door you tell me that the dead have gold in their eyes and make no amends. I tell you my ring is cold and heavy in my left pocket, your beard sharp and warm against my mouth.

# CLOSER TO THE BONE

*Christopher Locke*

Around my fifteenth birthday, I discovered the power of lies. It happened quite unexpectedly. I washed dishes at a bistro in town, the kitchen a steaming commotion of sweat and clanging plates. A waitress named Candy flirted with me, and the cooks teased me about it; Candy was 30-years-old. "Hey, you should ask Candy for a ride home," they said after their shift, laughing, sipping their beers. So I did.

As I got into her car, Candy leaned over and asked how old I was. Her hair smelled like fruit gum and bar smoke. I said I was 18. She smiled broadly and rubbed her hand down my back. Two nights later I was up in her barn getting laid for the first time. The morning after, I thought I was a man.

With lying, I was excused from everything that made me feel stupid, worthless, or worse yet, ordinary. I didn't have to be that kid who dug through the snow to gather firewood frozen into icy clumps, thawing them around a woodstove that heated our bathwater and our house. I wasn't the kid who was convinced his mother was trying to erase him, one painful word at a time. But mostly, I would never be that kid whose father vanished, divorced now and living again with his own mother.

No, when I lied I was funnier, more interesting, and smarter than anyone. But what I refused to acknowledge was that most lies had a way of circling back. In Physical Science class, I told Rich I had my own drum kit and had been playing for years. We had an ongoing conversation about music and equipment, and I'd picked up the brand names he mentioned when discussing cymbals and tom-toms and said my set had those brands too. When he finally had me over to his house to play, I sat on the little black seat behind his professional set completely embarrassed and aware I was caught, gripping the sticks as if my life depended on them, mumbling that his drums were different than mine.

And after an all-day punk rock show at the nearby university, I told my friends I took acid and smoked some opium, though the closest I came to drugs that day was the half bottle of Pepsi I chugged in the parking lot. When we all ended up at a girl's house that night, I even did a little 'freak out' scene in front of my tenuous girlfriend in the kitchen, saying that I was falling, falling, trying to express true vacancy in my eyes. After that, my girlfriend wouldn't talk to me, putting her head down and walking by whenever we passed in the hallways at school.

It seemed English class was the only safe place I could lie and not suffer consequences. Ms. Smith clearly had things figured out; she was smart, sardonic even, and acted like the school needed her more than she needed the school, which was probably true. She liked to tell her class she was taking courses at Harvard 'for fun' and related all the cool parties she'd attend with her 'profs'. Our first writing assignment was draft-

ing a fictional personals ad for the local paper. For encouragement, she read her own real one to the class. With my own writing, she demanded I be as wild and creative as I could, that if it didn't make me 'afraid to show it to my parents' then it wasn't risking enough. She was the only one I trusted to show my first feeble attempts at poetry. When I purposely added a sunny ending to an otherwise dark and hopeless poem, it was Ms. Smith who told me it seemed contrived, that the dark and hopeless ending worked much better. She was the only responsible adult I knew who openly championed untidy emotions and ideas.

\* \* \*

I started stealing. Nothing big, just small items that caught my eye and that I viewed as inconsequential. Maybe a bottle of cologne off the dresser of a friend here, or a homemade mix tape from another friend there, and then denying it when asked, my friends knowing I was so full of shit. They'd just shake their heads, smile, and fade away, recede from my life like objects fading in the rearview mirror, and I started to hate myself for it. But there were a few mainstays who still tolerated me, still asked during sixth period on Friday if I could go out with them that night. Sean, Dan, Owen, or Tom wanted to know if I could go to Boston, see a show at *The Rat* or *The Channel*. And on some of these nights, if we were lucky, Sean would score a little acid and we'd just stumble through the woods, laughing, the trees breathing in and out. Or Dan would bring some shitty coke to Owen's house, and we'd snort the stuff before skateboarding down to Swazey Parkway, our throats tasting of aspirin.

Most weekends, however, we'd just drive around and around going nowhere, until we'd park and kick open the doors of Dan's *Gran Torino*, jam a tape into the player and thrash around in a parking lot to the *Dead Kennedys*, *Black Flag*, *Fear*, *7 Seconds*. I had the names of these bands scrawled on t-shirts and bleached jeans, and believed the more I catalogued them the more it proved to everyone that I belonged to something important. I even wore eyeliner to school, dark and shocking. In the stairwell, some football players took to banging me on the top of my head with their notebooks as they were going up the stairs and I was going down. I tried to glare back as menacingly as I could, sharp pain running across my scalp like boiling water.

At home, my mother and I only knew how to communicate in shouts and accusations: I blamed her for dad leaving and she blamed me for how fucked up I had become. We deserved each other, really. My little brother and sister didn't know what to make of me, but my older brother Brian, unless he was looking for a fight, ignored me. He was clearly embarrassed by how I dressed and behaved. He listened to bands like Pink Floyd and Rush, read *Muscle and Fitness* magazine, and worked part time after school in a turkey slaughterhouse. After he graduated, he was going straight into the Marines. The afternoon my mother and stepfather brought him to the airport for his flight to Parris Island, I was drunk in bed, pretending I had the flu. Brian said goodbye clumsily at the bedroom

door. I said sure, see you around.

\* \* \*

After my eighteenth birthday I finally threatened to move out, even though the idea terrified me:

“I’m going to leave and move in with Sean,” I said to my mother after another one of our epic shouting matches.

My mother looked shocked. “Try it and I’ll call the police,” she countered.

I dreamt of this moment: “I’m 18 and you can’t do a thing.”

I knew I had her, and her face went soft. “You leave this house and you can never come back,” was all she said. I didn’t respond and went into my room, realizing I had no more excuses.

So I became even more reckless, started consuming more and more drugs. I didn’t care that I came home so stoned that my mom could tell. I also began missing curfew. I even once sneaked out my window to meet a girl, Dan waiting to pick me up in his car at the end of the dirt road. When I came home, I slipped off my shoes and crept upstairs. My mother was waiting for me. Later in bed, as I tried to not shake from crying so hard, I told myself that every slap across my face and head was worth it, the girl I met more beautiful than anything I could imagine.

\* \* \*

On New Year’s Eve, I wanted to go to Owen’s house and spend the night. My mom wanted me home in time to go with the family out to dinner and celebrate. Brian was home visiting and she wanted all of us together as a family. She asked me to come home by 6:00 p.m. Sure, fine, whatever, I lied.

At Owen’s, I sat in the basement with him and drank beer after beer. “Aren’t you going to go home at 6:00,” Owen asked hesitantly. “You know, make it by your curfew?”

“Nah, fuck that,” I said, throwing a crumpled Miller Genuine Draft into the corner. I then furiously played a heart-attack rhythm on his drum set, by now pretty good on the drums.

Owen laughed, clearly amused by my defiance. We later went upstairs, his parents out for the night, and blasted some hardcore punk music on the stereo, ate some Ben & Jerry’s we found hidden in the freezer, and yelled out the window at Academy students, (even though his dad taught in the English Department).

When I finally made it home, I was almost two hours late, the house deserted. I was already pretty drunk, but broke into the half gallon of Smirnoff my step-dad kept in the little cabinet in the living room and proceeded to gulp mouthfuls. I dug through Brian’s shower kit. This’ll do, I thought: I found a medication for treating worms and ate one pill. I then placed another to my lips but balked, dumping the remainder in the toilet. I decided to write a note that said I swallowed the whole bottle.

When I finished, I heard the car coming down the road, saw the headlights fill the picture window.

Scrambling, I ran toward my bedroom, but slipped in my drunken stocking feet, landing square on my ass. I gathered myself up and made sure the suicide note sat prominently on the dining room table before I lunged into my bedroom and threw myself atop my bed, hoping to appear unconscious.

I could hear bodies coming through the front door, could hear my mother ask if I was home. Someone found the note. People grew quiet, then loud. Brian was the first in my room, flicked on the lights; I didn't move. He walked over as I breathed heavily on my stomach. "Hey, you alright? Man, you really fucked up this time."

He flipped me over on my back but I played dead. I could hear my mother in the dining room yelling, telling my step-dad I needed to pack my fucking bags. Brian then punched me in the balls. I curled up in a groan.

My step-father and Brian carried me out of my room, past my wailing little brother and sister, "We don't want Chris to die," they pleaded, and then out the front door and into the back of the car. I never once opened my eyes, content to play this out to the end.

When the emergency room doctors hoisted me onto the gurney and dragged me under the bright lights, I could hear many voices. Someone said I swallowed a bottle of pills. Needles entered me; hands pushed and pulled, someone snapped smelling salts under my nose. I turned my head and grimaced. "Chris, I know you're more awake than you're acting, I can see your eyes moving under your eyelids," a doctor said. But I wouldn't budge or give in. *I'm dead*, I thought. *I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead.*

Some time later, maybe an hour, maybe two, I gave in, cracked my eyes open to the piercing lights. A smiling nurse stared down at me. "Hey there, buddy, how are you?"

"Okay," was all I could think to say. She made me drink a cold glass of charcoal and then I wished I really were dead, gagging on almost every sip.

"Um, your mom knows you're awake but doesn't want to see you, okay?"

"Okay."

I spent the night in the hospital, a nurse waking me up every hour to make sure I was alive, an IV dripping into my arm. As I grew more and more sober with each hourly check-up, I realized I'd really done it this time.

In the morning, a nurse opened a curtain to abundant sunshine and I squinted awake. The nurse said I was to be discharged shortly. Lying in the hospital bed with nothing to do, I decided to call Owen. I told him what happened, and said I'd tried to kill myself, and that I was in the hospital. Somehow, I thought it would all come across as some cool punk rock prank. Owen just laughed nervously as I went on and on. Before the end of Christmas vacation, the whole school knew what I did.

My step-dad drove me home that day, the ride mostly punctuated by

our breathing and the hum of dirty slush whirling under the tires. When I got back to the house, my brothers and sister greeted me at the front door, hugged my thin frame. My mom sat tentatively on the couch smoking a cigarette, said hello from there.

Within minutes, I got right into my old routine, lay down on the living room floor with Brian in front of the 19-inch color television and watched the Bowl games in silence. Finally, it was dinnertime and we all sat at the table, gently holding hands as my step dad said a prayer thanking the Lord for the food on our plates. I opened my eyes before anyone else and noticed they continued bowing their heads, continued to remain in prayer.

Afterward, I went to my room and gently stretched out across my bed, hands behind my head. Through my bedroom wall, I could hear my mother and stepfather arguing, their voices muffled and desperate. They had no idea what to do; I had no idea how much I wanted to be loved.

# UPON HEARING THAT MY CHILDHOOD HOME WAS SOLD IN A FORECLOSURE AUCTION

*Mark C. D. Gallegos*

So smug, with fresh coat of lemon  
yellow and crisp linen eaves.  
Lavender window boxes stuffed  
with marigolds and paper  
whites. Pristine path flanked  
by tea roses, manicured lawn,  
and boxwoods preened into submission.

I had hoped to one day inherit  
this place. That I might smash  
its bones, crush the crowded rows  
of tulips, daylilies and daffodils  
swaying petulantly in the breeze,  
and scatter wildflowers over the remains.

My mother would demand,  
*Why would you want to be where you are not wanted?*  
I couldn't bear to tell her the truth.  
I only shrugged in agreement,  
quietly admiring the single, defiant  
dandelion gripping the sidewalk's edge  
turning its small face to the sun.

# CHRISTOPHER WALKEN

*Andy Sieracki*

**3rd Place Meadow Poetry Award**

We used to ride our bikes together  
shoveling dirt into mounds  
we shaped takeoffs and landings.

I thought it unreal  
the heights you'd reach  
front wheel freely spinning.  
Upon each successful attempt  
you directed me to move a trash can  
further from the landing.  
Until finally, it caught you  
buckling like a soda can under your weight.

Maybe that's what it was  
the moment I stopped believing  
you were Superman *and* the Easter bunny.

You left for school in fourth grade.  
I smashed up mom's office  
with a handball from the playground.  
I'd anticipate each visit  
like a cameo from your favorite actor  
in a feature far too long:  
    the years they suddenly  
    stopped loving each other.

Maybe it was your own marriage  
that made me disbelieve you.  
Standing side-by-side  
in pictures on the lawn  
I towered an inch above  
you in your white tuxedo.

I've seen your mistakes  
and you still want to tell me  
what to do.

We're riding bikes again.  
Now under a moonless sky  
and you have the only light  
strapped to *your* handle bars.

On a narrow track  
my front tire  
shares with your back.  
If you stay on your side  
this might work.

# THE NIGHT I DIDN'T GET UP TO SOOTHE NADINE

*Christie Shoupe*

I lie in my warm bed, hugging the blankets.  
Listening to her scream, the cries echo  
through the house, through two closed doors.  
I fight to keep my daughter's needs from my ears.  
I paint blue gray waves, washing  
away the shoreline behind my lids,  
straining to hear the waves crash.

Her cries grow louder.

I burrow my head under the pillows.  
If she cries long enough, she will wear  
herself out, fall back asleep.  
I groan as I hear her start to hiccup,  
I roll over and succumb to the lulling  
waves of my dream, rolling in and out and in again.  
I give in because it's easier than admitting

even to myself,

that I want to take the night back, I want  
it back to when it was just me.  
Pregnant and alone, just for one night.

# COLIC

*S. M. McLean*

The power lines hum  
low and melodic  
like Sierra Pacific cicadas  
lullabying the evening  
outside the patched up window screen  
while a block down  
the cars flutter through the streets  
drawn to city lights  
like moths to porch bulbs

beyond the warehouses  
the howl of the one forty train  
echoes late and lonely at  
the moon lost among the buildings  
and its own steam  
just before a weathered old cart crickets  
a solo in the alley below the open sill  
stifled for years by middle-man managers  
deaf to the beauty of its violin

and in the other room all the while  
our baby boy sleeps, silent as the grave  
for the first time in months,  
colic finally breaking  
along with the early morning  
of a premature tomorrow  
and the tireless summer heat  
of a yesterday already forgotten  
into the rest.

# MIDAS

*Soren Browning*

When King Midas of Phrygia spared the life of a drunken satyr  
stumbling through his village, he was granted one wish

from the god of wine, Dionysus. Without hesitation he proclaimed,  
*I wish all I touched were made to gold*, drunk by the thought

of turning stones to fortune. You were no king; though,  
your scale weighed heavy with crystalline pebbles.

I lay on the floral print couch perpendicular, watching you stuff  
tiny baggies with your jewels. Aware of my scrutiny,

your hand came down across my eyes, powdery fingers  
over eyelids, willing me to sleep. As Midas took his daughter

Marigold's hand to show her his gift, her nimble fingers  
became rigid and cold. He turned to her locked in a moment

of slumber, eyes open, trapped by his wish. My foster family  
read mythology to me before bed as I stared in the dark

captivated by Midas, wondering if you sobbed like him in prison  
begging some spiteful god to be with your daughter. I see you:

powdered gold baggie in hand, despising all you ever touched but my face.

# AN AUDIENCE ON THE GRASS

*Dana Oldfather*



# SILVER BRAID, SILVER FERN

*John Knott*



# THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE

*John Knott*

**2nd Place Meadow Art Award**



# THE GIRLS, SATURDAY NIGHT

*Christopher Woods*



# THE BOOTED MUSTACHE

*Christopher Woods*





UNTITLED  
*Cara Sherill*

**3rd Place Meadow Art Award**



# JILLIAN LAUREN INTERVIEW

*By Mark Maynard*



**A**uthor and performer Jillian Lauren grew up in suburban New Jersey and fled across the water to New York City. She attended New York University for three minutes but promptly dropped out to work with Richard Foreman's Ontological Hysteric Theater and with The Wooster Group, among others. Her memoir *Some Girls: My Life in a Harem* will be published by Plume in April of 2010. Her novel, *Pretty*, will be published by Plume in Spring 2011. Jillian has an MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University. Her writing has appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *Flaunt Magazine*, *Pindeldyboz Magazine*, *Opium Magazine*, *Society*, and in the anthologies *Pale House: A Collective* and *My First Time: A Collection of First Punk Show Stories*, among others. She is married to musician Scott

Shriner. They live in Los Angeles with their son.

Here is the synopsis of her upcoming memoir entitled *Some Girls: My Life In A Harem* from her website at [www.jillianlauren.com](http://www.jillianlauren.com).

At eighteen, Jillian Lauren was an NYU theater school dropout with a tip about an upcoming audition. The "casting director" told her that a rich businessman in Singapore would pay pretty American girls \$20,000 if they stayed for two weeks to spice up his parties. Soon, Jillian found herself on a plane to Borneo, where she would spend the next eighteen months in the harem of Prince Jefri Bolkiah, youngest brother of the Sultan of Brunei. Leaving behind her gritty East Village apartment for an opulent palace where she walked on rugs laced with gold, Jillian traded her band of artist friends for a coterie of backstabbing beauties. More than just a sexy read set in an exotic land, *Some Girls* is also the story of how a rebellious teen found herself- and the courage to meet her birth mother and eventually adopt a baby boy.

I spoke with Jillian in March about the book, her writing, and what is next for her.

**Mark Maynard: Your MFA degree is in fiction. One of the tenets of fiction writing is that an author and a narrator are two unique individuals and shouldn't be conflated. Did this have any effect on writing your memoirs? Did you feel like you were "stepping out of yourself" when telling your story? How do you think your fiction background helped you write your book? How do you think it made writing non-fiction more challenging?**

**Jillian Lauren:** The protagonist of a memoir is “you,” but that doesn’t make the writing process all that different from writing fiction. The fact that you’re writing about events that actually occurred doesn’t lessen your responsibility as a writer to create a fully realized character and then to craft a story for that character that is engaging and cohesive.

When writing *Some Girls*, I did feel sometimes like I was stepping out of myself. I had to do research, as if I was researching someone else’s story. I archived documents and mapped out events and interviewed ex-boyfriends and old bosses and anyone who would talk to me about that time. I’m a big fan of research. I do that with my fiction writing, too. But writing a memoir was an exercise in shapeshifting—I’d step out of myself to craft the story, but I’d have to step back in to access the emotions.

Overall, I would say that there are far more similarities than differences between writing fiction and non-fiction. Writing this memoir was particularly painful, because I had to mine a lot of personal material that I had intentionally kept buried for eighteen years. I did a lot of crying. But I cry for my fictional characters as well. I figure if I’m not willing to care enough to cry for them, then no one else will care either.

**MM: When did you know that you were going to write this story?**

**JL:** I suppose that I had been avoiding it for a long time. I was having lunch with my agent and good friend, Alexandra Machinist, when the story just came pouring out of me. She was sitting there with her jaw in her lap. I’m sure she was thinking *why did it take you so long to tell me this?* But she was very gentle and supportive and we talked a lot about whether or not I was ready for the emotional ramifications of publishing a story like this. I decided to give myself a few months to work on a proposal and to see how I felt about it. So that was the genesis of the book.

**MM: This book is very contemporary, yet it also reveals a hidden world that seems archaic and ancient. Are there writers of fiction and non-fiction that have inspired you or that you feel broke down barriers that allowed you to tell this story in your own way?**

**JL:** Of course. I have many influences, but I would say that my biggest influence for this book specifically would be Nick Flynn’s *Another Bullshit Night In Suck City*. That book gave me permission to assemble the narrative in ways that were more poetic and less linear. I’m not sure that it’s particularly evident in the finished product, which is actually pretty traditional in terms of structure. But it was extremely important to the process of getting to the emotional truth of the story.

**MM: Any form of writing is deeply personal – it is your own work put out there on the page for all to see. Combine that with the revealing story you tell in this book and there must have been times you felt vulnerable. How did you come to terms with this and is there anything to be gained from allowing yourself that vulnerability?**

**JL:** I felt terribly vulnerable throughout the writing of *Some Girls* and I still do. But there is everything to be gained by vulnerability and everything to be gained by radical honesty. I really believe that. And while I'm scared of the emotional fallout of book being released, I welcome that fear as part of the experience. That fear indicates to me that I've done something I care about and that I believe in. I don't equate vulnerability with weakness anymore in my life. I equate it with strength.

**MM:** When you first arrived in Borneo, did you have to sign any kind of contract/nondisclosure agreement? Did you keep notes of your experiences? Did you live in the moment at the time or were you consciously thinking about how the experiences would make a unique story?

**JL:** I didn't sign anything, but there was an implicit understanding that we were meant to keep our mouths shut, which I did for many years. At this point the story has already been in the press so much that I figured I wasn't really telling anyone's secrets. Plus, the time just came when I needed to tell my story.

I did take notes. I had detailed journals. I've always kept journals. Now that I'm a professional writer, I can't help but experience the world through the lens of my work, but at the time I was just living. Not living and writing in my head at the same time like I do now.

**MM:** Describe the process you encountered from when you had a solid manuscript to finding representation and a publisher. How long did the process take? From start to finish, how long did you work on *Some Girls*?

**JL:** I got a two-book deal for *Pretty* and *Some Girls*. *Pretty* was complete (or so I thought) and *Some Girls* was still in the proposal stage. I wrote *Some Girls* quickly. I guess it took about a year and a half, but it was an absolutely crazy year and a half. I don't want to have to write anything that quickly ever again.

**MM:** What do you hope your readers take away from *Some Girls*?

**JL:** I think it's important for women to be truthful about their lives, particularly women on the fringes of society, who often keep silent because we're led to believe that our stories are something to be ashamed of. We let our stories be told by others, usually men, and we wind up repeatedly being the bodies left behind by serial killers or the hookers with the hearts of gold. I wanted to tell my own story: how I became a sex worker and what it did to my life and my dreams. I wanted to portray the complexity of the experience and to present an emotional journey that I believe will be familiar to many women, even those to whom the events of the narrative may seem outrageous.

**MM: You have led a very full, adventurous life for someone your age (or any age) – if you wrote another memoir in twenty years, what would it be about?**

**JL:** Probably motherhood and the adoption process. Or food. I have a newfound love for food, so I'd like to write about that at some point.

**MM: Your book examines your search for your birth mother and documents the recent adoption of your own son. What other parallels did you notice when writing the book? Did you start to see things as happening in cycles, both broken and unbroken?**

**JL:** Absolutely. In many ways, writing this book was the closure of some big cycles in my life. But in other ways, the writing process taught me that closure doesn't mean you put a seal on the box and walk away. The narrative of our lives contains certain themes that are never severed entirely, and the quest for self-discovery isn't one that really has a proper and satisfying conclusion.

**MM: What are you working on now? What can you tell me about your next book *Pretty*?**

**JL:** Right now I'm scrambling to complete my rewrite of *Pretty* before the book tour for *Some Girls*. *Pretty* is a novel about a young woman struggling to shake off her demons and truly find a reason to live. It takes place at a beauty school and a halfway house. It's funny and sad and all of that stuff.

**MM: You have a performing arts background as well as a writing background. How does one inform the other? Which do you draw on more often?**

**JL:** Performing is the language of my more outgoing side. The more interior part of me finds writing to be its best vehicle. I'm way more of a writer these days than a performer, especially since being a mommy came into the picture. I was forced to prioritize and I had to move performing to the back burner for a while. But it's always great when some performing gig just falls in my lap and I'm able to put on that hat for a night. In *Some Girls*, I explore some of the ways that performing is woven into the fabric of my life. It's certainly there in my writing. I don't feel the need to draw clear lines of delineation between my various forms of expression.

**MM: What is your daily writing routine? Where do you write? When do you write? Do you have a time limit or a page count that you aim for? How have you found the time to write now that you have a young son?**

**JL:** I write six days a week from nine to one and sometimes longer, depending on my other obligations and my childcare situation on any given day. I've had this routine for about five years and before that I wrote late at night or early in the morning before my job at a hair salon. I finished my first novel that way (unpublished), but I'm so grateful that I was able to adopt the routine I have now. I never take for granted what a great privilege it is. I'm trying to find a balance right now between managing the promotion for one book while editing the next book. It's been a real challenge because writing and promoting are such different muscles. And I don't have flexibility with my schedule. It's not like I can just add a couple of hours, because my babysitter leaves and that's it for writing. I'm so exhausted by the end of the day that working simply isn't an option. I'd go crazy. I don't have any answers because it's such a new predicament. But I do know that I've learned a lot about compromise. I'm not going to be the perfect mother or ever get as much writing done as I'd like to, so that's my lesson right now- accepting compromise in every area of my life.

**MM: You had problems with your arms that really affected your ability to physically write – you even tried using voice software to rest your wrists and hands. Did that change your outlook on writing as a whole? Did that affect your writing while you were working on the book? Did you time trying to use voice software rather than writing longhand or typing out your manuscripts affect the way that you now write?**

**JL:** I tried voice recognition software when I was struggling with tendonitis in my arms, but I honestly couldn't stand it. Luckily, I was able to make some changes that eventually got my tendonitis under control. I changed my diet; I changed the ergonomics of my office; I changed the way I exercised. And I was forced to really give my arms a rest and not work for a period of about six months, which was torture for me. Not being able to write made me extremely anxious and I was forced to seek out other outlets for this anxiety. For instance, I learned transcendental meditation. I still can't write longhand as much as I used to, which is a real sadness for me. But I'm doing my best to work with what I have and to always move toward a place of healing, not only in regard to my arms but in other areas of my life as well.

# SEASONS

*Kirsten Kinnear*

**1st Place Meadow Non-Fiction Award**

Imagine my parents falling in love on black sand beaches with vibrant tropical sunsets as the backdrop. My mothers' articulate and precise speech is foreign to my father. Just as my fathers' strange pidgin bouncing into my mother's ears sound. I picture my dad showing off and diving for puka shells and sea glass. My mother is well traveled for nineteen and tells him stories of living in Jamaica, bicycling through Europe, and being stuck in a hotel room in Tehran. My father respects this; two years at the University of California San Diego drove him to the brink of insanity. My mother lies on the beach like a cat napping, and notices how my father fits perfectly into the landscape. He slips in between the waves and lightly pads on the island. I think of their laughter rolling over my dad's old property while building their house in the jungle. The old house has been stripped down by thieves to what resembles a skeletal ancient ruin. The jungle has grown into the foundation now, reclaiming its rightful home.

\* \* \*

I'm lying in my bed unable to fall asleep. I watch the snow gently fall in clumps outside. I stare at the brightly lit skyline of Minneapolis. There's a constant hum of traffic interrupted by periods of sirens passing along Hennepin Avenue below my window. I'm not used to the night being so loud and bright. I wish I could open my window and feel the breeze without freezing; fresh air orients me. I try to reconstruct the throaty sounds of the bullfrogs, and the soft patter of rain on the corrugated roof I used to sleep under. I mindlessly inspect my stuffed kangaroo. I'm in the middle of picking at a patch of glue on its head, when I hear my mother get up and go to the bathroom. I sneak past her and dash to living room. I decide to tunnel under her lacy comforter thrown on her bed. It's impossible to breath the stuffy air under the blanket, but I don't move. I have a perfect view of my mother through an eyelet in the ruffled edge. There's a small breeze of fresh air coming through, and I slowly inch my face closer. Sucking at the crisp air.

She has textbooks, pens, and notepads strewn about her. Her coffee cup with a map of the Hawaiian Islands on it, always right by her side. It's one of the few things she decided to take with us in the move across the pacific. She's wearing her maroon and gold University of Minnesota sweatshirt, the sleeve cuffs are tattered and it seems to swallow up her tiny body.

"Ils mangent le déjeuner"

She talks to herself in French as she flips through her flashcards with pictures of people eating, and playing in a park. Her dark curly hair looks like an inky sea monster piled high, and is tied up by a silky scarf. She takes the television off of mute, set's down her flashcards, and lights a

cigarette. I watch the plumes of blue gray smoke dance around the living room. The tip of her nose bobs up and down as she softly mumbles to herself, pausing absently to inhale the smoke. I know she's going to be up for a long time still.

As I burst out of my ruffled oven over she jumps and yells her coffee gets knocked over. I softly pad up to her for a hug. She's pale and looks tired, with bags under her light blue eyes. She scoops me up and carries me to my own bed. I can feel her ribs as I'm pressed up against her. She sets me down, and I watch her as she turns and walks out. I hear her giggling and cursing as she scrubs the coffee out of the carpet. I hear her talking to herself, oblivious to the rest of the world. As I'm falling asleep I imagine snow falling on my avocado tree in Hawai'i and concrete being poured on the dirt roads that stain and callous my feet.

\* \* \*

My father has flown to Orange County to meet me for our flight across the ocean. He does this every spring and fall until I'm ten. I'm holding the Pukinikini haku lei he brought for me up to my nose, the smell is gentle but powerful. My father's made of bronze and I like being tucked into him. He's warm and smells like eucalyptus leaves. His pocket next to me is filled with dried mango dusted in li hing moi powder. The tartness in my mouth gradually fades into the rubbery sweetness of the fruit. My dad takes my tennis shoes off and replaces them with a pair of rubber local slippers. He tells me I have wide feet just like him, built for surfing. I look at his golden brown feet; there are little white dashes of scar on them. My feet are pale and slightly pickled from their entrapment of sweaty boots all winter. I remember that I'm a jungle girl. Outside of the airplane window shadows of clouds fall on the Pacific, creating a splatter of tiny islands on its surface. Moisture around the wing catches the sun and makes little rainbows as I fall asleep.

\* \* \*

My mother and I have been cooped inside our apartment all day. Minneapolis has been shut down because of an ice storm that has left the city in two inches of ice. I've spent the day watching the sun reflect brilliant white, pink, and blue off of the sparkling glass trees. My mother has been warping my sense of humor with her stacks of Monty Python on VHS. The sun has set, and it's only five in the evening. My mother smokes her last cigarette. It's pitch black and forty below with wind-chill outside. There is a small bodega in the basement of an old brick apartment building down the block. We could both use a break from inside, so we bundle up. The wind catches our foyer door as it's opened, and slams it against the side of the building. The entrance is below street level, and the wind is catching the snow just right to create a small tornado of snowflakes. We are blown backwards as soon as we step off the stairs and onto the sidewalk. My mother grabs the neck of my jacket with one

hand and onto the guardrail of the steps with the other. Her black scarf wrapping her head is flailing wildly as she turns to me.

“Grab where I grab!” She is already pulling my gloved hand to the metal rail. I realize that I don’t have the choice of going back and staying home from this trip. We will be blown across town before we fight our battles alone. We pull ourselves along brick walls. My mother scrabbles across the ice when the walls run out to grab hold of the mulberry trees that line our block, her other hand stretched behind her anticipating my clutch. I can feel my face getting chapped and red. My eyes water and the droplets freeze around the edges of my eyes. We slowly make our way to the store in this fashion. We take a breath once inside, my mothers’ glasses fog over from the heat. She laughs and smiles as she rubs the condensation of her glasses. “Oofta! Humans are not supposed to live in this shit!”

\* \* \*

My father has woken me early. I can smell the faint remnants of sulfuric fog dissipating from the rising sun mixed with the night blooming jasmine my father has lined the house with. I see an outline of my father against the lush background of green jungle. I inhale deeply as the cool breeze sweeps through the screened house.

“Ey, ei nei, we get one treep today. Da ‘iniki blowing an Pete like meet you.”

As we climb into his rusty Toyota truck, I wipe the sleep out of my eyes. I stare at the little blue patch of ocean at the vanishing point of his land; he calls it his millionaire’s view. We head down the red road, which snakes through banyan and mango trees along the east Puna coast. We stop at uncle Dan’s kau kau shack for lau lau and moanapuas. My father tells me the story of Opihikau road in Ka’u as I lick the orange pork grease from my finger. Opihikau leads from Kilauea to the ocean. It’s one small stretch of land that hasn’t been destroyed, but has a small trickle of lava flow along its side that oozes to the ocean. It’s called the path of Pele. It’s believed that she wanders this road as a haggard old woman contemplating her next actions. She protects the Islands, and only destroys for the better of creation. Sometimes she will hitchhike. He says you have to pick her up and take her to where she needs to go. If you pass her by she’ll know that people are not filled with aloha and she will destroy the ama. My palms make little sweaty prints on the edge of the window. At every turn and past every hillcrest I eagerly anticipate an old woman with salt and pepper hair reaching her heels. It is not every day that a girl gets to meet a transforming fire Goddess.

My father slows to a stop at the bottom of a hill.

“Ey ku’uipo! Dats her ova in da Kukui!”

I squint in the distance; there is only a black wild boar rummaging. No old witch to judge us as human beings.

“Daaad, jus’ one pig!”

We sit in silence until I get fidgety and pulupulu from disappointment. My father shushes me and tells me to be still and keep looking around.

The car begins to creep slowly up the hill backward. Out the window to the right there is nothing but jungle. Hollow kahiko trees covered in green and orange moss. Wild orchids home the destructive bore beetle, yellow sweet peas you can nibble on, scarlet hibiscus trees, and the dense sea air. To the left my father looks at me. His hands, feet, and thick black eyebrows are raised in the air. I try to create an explanation, but my father turns the engine on and quickly maneuvers the car to face the way we had come. I'm quiet and wide-eyed on the ride home. My father explains that Pele's spirit came to meet her kiekies; that Kilauea and Pele are our piko to this world.

\* \* \*

I've just finished earning my keep by transferring all the seedlings into the ground. I've raised pumpkin, watermelon, tomato, acorn squash, bell pepper, and green bean from seedlings inside the house. I've started a compost heap by the barn, and I'm waiting for the potatoes to sprout their eyes. In about a week I will cut them up and bury them in the decomposing organic rot. I've remembered my fathers' lessons in his green house in Kea' au, and I've made sure to accumulate coffee grounds and small rocks. I put the mixture in the earth before the plants. Dirt is packed in the lines of my hands and under my nails. I light a cigarette as I look over my garden. It's twenty by fifteen feet where the climbers have gone; the sprawlers are on a small hill on the south side of the house. I grow food and clean the house. I'm fourteen and satisfied that no one knows where I am.

\* \* \*

Tom's clothes loosely drape his slender frame. There's a blotch of blood on the front of his starched white shirt that has dropped from his nose. I'm apologizing as my mother coos and dabs at his nose. I feel bad. I didn't mean to kick; I'm just very ticklish. This will give him more ammunition. I'm surprised my foot even got him. His face is flushed, and he is cursing.

"I was trying to be nice! She kicked me in the fucking face!"

As I slowly trudge to my room under mother's orders, I'm filled with a sense of injustice. He has been on a crusade to make me more ladylike for years now. I know this will be one more reason to stay in Minnesota for the summers. He complains that I'm out of control and have a smart mouth when I get back. The cocky smirk pidgin gives me doesn't fade as quickly as the cold erases my tan. It's only a few months into the school year, and I already ache for the Islands. Tom's house is immaculately clean with white carpets. The coffee cups are arranged in size and color, the whole interior sanitized and carefully designed. I stop in my mother's room. The walls are covered in bookshelves; books are overflowing and piling up in between the shelving. Her sketchbooks are laying out her pencils all kapakahi. On one of the shelves the crystal menorah that

Tom bought her a few years back is collecting dust. He grew up with my mother; they went to temple together. I remember the day he brought it to our little inner city apartment. The satisfied smile on my mother's face, because she remembered all eight blessings. The look he shot me after I informed him that we don't go to church.

\* \* \*

As I lay in the soft grass I hear the soft tinkling of bells. I look over and see Ashi strolling up to me. She's one of the older women that share the house in Hibbing, Minnesota with us. She always wears a billowing skirt and is draped in jewelry made of silver and amber. I know she's always high as hell, but I don't mind her company. She shares a room with me, my friend Shawnelle, and her mother Cynthia. She stays up late with me. Curled on my bed next to the window listening to the family of wolves that lives on the farthest outskirts of the property. She slowly sprawls beside me, and I'm aware of the Earth underneath both of us. I continue to stare at the clouds, there's one large cumulous in the sky. Ashi pulls a pipe out and smokes, everyone knows I don't smoke, so she doesn't offer. She eventually rises, she's going to go feed crab apples to the dairy cows in the pasture. It's her afternoon ritual whenever she's home, and I've watched her talk to the cows enough. I've just sent off a letter to my mother.

*Dear mom,*

*I'm fine.*

*Love me*

I didn't know what else to say. The lava has started to flow again on the island. I'm aware of the cool damp earth underneath me; keeping me from an endless plunge. I feel Ashi's eyes on me, she has been watching, and she softly lets out her husky giggle. "Hey little momma, did you know you can see the future in the clouds? Watch for the reoccurring shapes." She points up, winks at me, and twirls on towards the cows.

\* \* \*

During the winter of 1995, my father was living in Carmel, California, and Kilauea's lava tubes were drying up. Creating a violent molten build up underneath the Earth's crust. Kilauea would soon find new vents and begin rolling into the sea again. The only explosion I was aware of at the time was my father's ruby red lips. He had black high heels that matched his black scarf wrapped around his head. A blue and purple floral dress that hung just below his knees. His legs and face had five o'clock shadows. As he paced back and forth on our living room carpet, he removed his Jackie O glasses. His purple eye shadow looked fresh. He kicked off the heels, "The feds like get me! I rode one greyhound. You have to let me stay here, like one week or two."

I always knew what my father was doing when he tromped off into the jungle in his camouflage. I knew why he never brought me with him on

those afternoons. I'd heard the muffled talks turn into hushed whispers when I turned a corner. I've seen the cars riddled with shotgun holes and warnings to stay away. My cousins told me about trip line attached to shotguns at kneecap level. I didn't take my normal flight across the ocean when I was thirteen. My father had been living in the mountains of Carmel, made his money and did more drugs than an entire audience of a Grateful Dead show. I was numb as I walked to my bedroom. I pictured the smug grin on Tom's face. He won through default. As I closed my door my numbness gave way to a deep sense of my final resolution. As the Kilauea cone collapsed magma pushed its way through the ground creating tubes, nature always finds its way. I found my way to the iron range in northern Minnesota.

# W.E.N.S.: A ROTATING POEM

## *Changming Yuan*

West: not unlike a giddy goat  
wandering among the ruins  
of a long lost civilization  
you keep searching  
in the central park  
a way out of the tall weeds  
as nature gulps down new york  
with a mummy blue

East: in her beehive-like room  
so small that a yawning stretch  
would readily awaken  
the whole apartment building  
she draws a picture on the wall  
of a tremendous tree  
that keeps growing  
until it shoots up  
from the cemented roof

North: after the storm  
all dust hung up  
in the crowded air  
with his human face  
frozen into a dot of dust  
and a rising speckle of dust  
melted into his face  
to avoid this cold climate  
of his antarctic dream  
he relocated his naked soul  
at the dawn of summer

South: like a raindrop  
on a small lotus leaf  
unable to find the spot  
to settle itself down  
in an early autumn shower  
my little canoe drifts around  
near the horizon  
beyond the bare bay

# ART SHADOWS MAKE ON PULLED BLINDS

*Dianna Henning*

*Written in Cedarville, 09*

It's not self-conscious,  
this interlay of bough over bough;  
juniper trees swayed  
by an early fall breeze,  
their spike-needles imprinted  
on the backside blinds  
that swoon ever so slightly  
as air seeps through window casings;  
the room nearly as silent as sleep,  
and I marvel here in the quiet  
this steady brush work  
of the junipers,  
their plumped out berries,  
as well as shades of light  
that shift and change according to the sky.

# RESTORATION OF NORTH FARM

*Arian Katsimbras*

*After Ashbery*

In that place, hooded travelers race maddeningly toward you,  
blind in darkness, in alleys, in sleep, your black mornings and rollers,  
through maelstrom, cloudburst, derecho – neither squall nor swell,  
through sorts of corposants, reaching through valleys of floorboards.  
Lost where we once were, waiting for our weather or seasons to cease  
to see you or me, everyone else too, empty handed, cold and shaking.

We knew nothing of land or sea or ravens that darken skies like  
thunderheads.  
Is it enough that gutters are left to drain our floods, that you and I are the  
same  
as them, that rivers grow dark as the center of our eyes, as thin as  
thoughts,  
that our nights are much like our days, that I wish for you to come home  
from the storm?  
Is it enough that I think of you sometimes, sometimes and always, with  
mixed feelings?

# THE WOMEN WHO GLOW

*Deysi Gallegos*

**2nd Place Meadow Poetry Award**

We worked in the factory licking our paintbrushes  
straight with the suck of our mouth  
and the twirl of our tongues, consuming  
the chemical that made the watches  
and our porcelain skin glow in the fall of light.  
We painted the twelves and the fours  
and hands made of exclusive gold.  
I had cuts shining like diamonds in my skin  
and hair, more brilliant than fairy dust,  
more brilliant than the moon's glare.  
Our magical tint ran from the start  
of our veins to the deep of our bones.  
We were better than silver,  
better than pinup girls. It didn't matter to us  
that we weighed more than 125  
or that our breasts separated a little more  
than they should. Our nakedness sparkled.  
We were enchanting nymphs in mythology  
that crossed even the most gentle  
of man's mind. We could have very well been  
a comic book character or the highlight of a circus show:  
"The Women Who Glow."  
But when we began coughing the diamonds out of us,  
they told us the company knew all along  
the liquid touching the tip of our tongues  
and made its way to the surface of our skin  
was a toxin that would kill, radioactive liquid  
that we smiled poisonous to show our special gift  
all for the twelves and fours  
and the hands made of exclusive gold.

# RIMBAUD RELOADED

*Mark Terrill*

*“Je est un autre.”*

— Arthur Rimbaud

Boot heels scuffing on  
red-light district cobblestones  
on my way down to the harbor  
                    of Hamburg  
where cranes & containers  
oblique light  
            & Rothko colors abound.

If I is another then who am I?  
Or must we devise some  
Cartesian qualifier like  
“I is another, therefore I am”?  
Or is it just the objective “I”  
versus the subjective “I”  
and may the best I win?

And is that a pistachio-hued  
vintage Mercedes 290 SL  
hardtop-convertible pimpmobile  
generously trimmed with  
                    gleaming chrome  
parked in front of that bordello  
that I’m pretty sure is Polish—

or must all such speculations  
                    constantly be born  
into something called language  
                    & a splenetic stream  
of continuous interior dialogue  
between one self  
& another?

# WAITING FOR PERNOD

*Mark Terrill*

Walking up the rue du Odessa  
then walking back down again  
it's tough to contemplate  
the parameters of transcendence  
when you're looking for a bar

a bar in which a woman once  
whispered something into your ear  
a bar in which Beckett once  
waited interminably for the barman  
to bring him a glass of Pernod.

On the boulevard Edgar Quinet  
your shadow suddenly detaches  
disappears into a film noir alley  
leaving you in Sarte's lonely ontology  
like a hapless fly in a chunk of amber.

In the café some are seated  
others are getting up and going away  
some with a feisty truculence some  
with a wavering kind of hesitation  
that distends the definition of time

while others are trying to appropriate  
the shambling remains of your subjectivity  
and in the many stately plane trees  
on the other side of the square  
the red squirrels are dying of old age.

# ANGEL AS FLOTATION DEVICE

*Joanne Lowery*

Pull out what you've been sitting on,  
flying on, false security replaced  
by survival instinct, square cushion  
morphed into a kapok gown,  
halo bobbing your head above water.  
Prayers discourage sharks and jellyfish,  
holiness shields you from the noon sun  
as you cling, waiting for rescue.  
Her message: hold on.  
And so the current, and so the storm.  
You lose your grip, you sink,  
she follows, the weight of darkness  
until twenty yards from shore  
she kicks you free where the tide  
promises the sands of eternal life  
will rise up to imprint  
your waterlogged heart and puckered feet.

# ANGEL AS PALEONTOLOGIST

*Joanne Lowery*

By her very nature she knows something  
about death, bones, and what lies unfound  
in the dust, how beneath sinners' faces  
skulls grin like the devil, how though we walk  
upright something primitive hunches in our hearts.  
She borrows humerus, radius and ulna for wings,  
an eagle's eye to spot the femur  
protruding from ancient rock,  
studies eons to count the earthly age  
of her latest find. Mary was sixteen  
and not yet fossilized by the church.  
Girlhood the angel also understands,  
the role of opening one's self for procreation,  
generations to come, a future  
not even the Creator can predict.  
She watches us do our part and drop.  
Time covers over, we lie in wait  
for eureka and shovel.

# EXISTENTIAL KITTY

*Michael Dubon*

I witness the struggle as the cat plays  
with the closed bathroom door.

She paws  
and claws under the crack at the door's bottom,  
aiming insecurities at the abyss  
from without.

It's short moments before her attentions turn to her tail:  
time to fight the internal emptiness.

It's a short bitter conflict. She walks off  
meowing her problems  
and bathes the emotion off with her scratchy tongue  
through the night.

The following day,  
her tiger-stripe gray-and-black fur glows  
a shade of a photo's negative standing under the morning sun.  
She stalks a bird in her jungle cat's form.  
Leaping at the crow, she catches air;  
nothingness in her paws.

A look of painful sadness crosses her kitty's countenance,  
whiskers frowning.

An elegant tabby approaches, says hello with his cry.

With cheetah speed, she retreats behind a tree;  
too scared of herself to deal with any other.

The sun shines through the green hiding place.  
Its warmth embraces her.

She only yowls sadly in return.

Coming back inside, she laps up yellow floating curds.

It is solace and comfort to take the heavy drink, but  
it makes her fat with anxiety.

She takes the litter's stage and  
acts as though the night's prior battle is forgotten:  
All is well.

Her overcompensating arrogance meows otherwise.

In the evening, she comes to me for company and to cuddle.

That's all I can give: it's kitty who must make the choice to live.

The amber eyes state truth as she looks past me,  
gazing into the mirror of her thoughts:  
she wants to bite,

scratch the night away for she knows  
her war, one not yet won.

She jumps and scurries off, her farce revealed.

The rapid pitter-patter of the paws' soft black pads makes a song  
that for so long she tried to conceal.

Nowhere to hide anymore, no, not at all:  
Her evading agility has run its course.  
Back to the bathroom; she's vicious and driven.  
She roars a lion's call at the surrounding dread darkness  
and hisses fierce at the absurdity of her tail's tale.  
She thrashes. She stops. She lies stark still in apparent declawed defeat.  
Finitude looks to cast its shadow, to take her into the abyss  
she ached to defeat.  
Without indication, the shadowy shroud of the finite draws back.  
A soft vibration hums through the ground:  
The purr of life.  
Kitty is only sleeping deep. I caress the fur with gentleness;  
she awakes. She rises, and knows, and accepts  
the fathomless darkness  
of what is inside and what is outside.  
She blinks her sly eyes. They've opened; wide-awake now.  
She purrs in joy and knowledge,  
reborn into light.

# EYES OF A GHOST

*Caren Franklin*

**2nd Place Meadow Non-Fiction Award**

**I**t was the summer of 2003 when I saw a ghost. I was jerked back with the force of twisting metal, breathless for a brief second that slowed into hours. The hood of my white truck crunched towards me, one wrinkle of hood by wrinkle, like the slow pushing of sheets on a Sunday morning. My legs were pinned by the dash and the tin-can sedan that I T-boned floated then scraped on its side in front of my still-framed eyes. It grated painfully across the pavement while spilling oil, undercarriage exposed. Everything became still. I realized what had just happened and opened my door. The driver was an elderly gentleman, a terminal cancer patient. He suffered a heart attack while he blew the stop sign at the intersection where our lives collided.

Sound died, people gathered in their yards and stared while the emergency vehicles crept to the scene. I found a green yard to kneel in. Began to mumble. Just a bad dream. The audible screams from the sedan were muffled by an ocean of shock. They lifted the old man's wife into the gurney, her powder blue sweater stained red. A paramedic trainee orbited the ambulance and puked in the ditch while tow trucks eased in, hooks swinging. On the edge of the pavement lay the old man I saw alive only moments before, lifeless and covered in a sheet. I didn't even know his name. I didn't want to know it. He is forever a faceless sheet; ghosts are easier to deal with when they are covered in sheets.

My ghosts are most active at night, when I lie in my sarcophagus of silence. It is when my mind has nothing else to distract it, when the alcohol has worn its fuzzy buzz, and when the room is a carousel of shadows that I remember the ghosts that have been more resonant in my life than even my own self. They crowd my bed like a funeral while my favorite Modest Mouse song plays through my head, "I drink the part of the day that I can not sleep away." Memories of my father rise like a dank corpse, memories of his paraded death inside his living, vacuous vessel. He drank himself into a stupor nightly to escape the same ghost in which I fill my empty body to feel whole, my mother.

Her face hangs on my walls, mirrors my own and is burned into my soul. Mourning has become drinking in her name. She committed suicide when I was fifteen. My father struggled for years to help her with her mental illnesses, lost his business to chapter seven for her medical bills, and after the divorce lost his will to live when she died. Countless nights he was broken in the corner of the kitchen, head low and arms limply braced on his knees, cans lining the kitchen counter as a silent audience to his quiet mumblings of everything he had done in order to save her from her chosen fate. As a teenager, guilt weighed on my bones but I disconnected coldly with the warmth of drink and learned that pain can be subdued by holding your breath. The last eleven years I floated through my life trying to fill the emptiness of my rotting chest. Living purgatory

is a strange place where the ghosts are tangible but out of reach. They thrive in the darkness of my mind and fill the vacancy of the echoing chambers in my heart.

It is a perfect October day when one of my ghosts came to me in daylight, six summers later. It is a silent Sunday and the sun is still and warm. The trees are all changing their leaves to a soft merlot. Unsteady, I start my truck and drive the two blocks to McCarran to get a burrito. All I think about are carbs and Coke to cure a vicious night of drinking the night before. Driving back to my apartment a blue Honda peaks from the right out of a subdivision. The elderly driver isn't stopping and my vision slows like it had six years before. His cute wrinkly wife is in the passenger seat, her arms folded across her baby blue sweater.

They are back to haunt me.

I scream, swerving to the left as he hit the brakes. He didn't see me until the last minute. As our cars slow, they both stare into my truck with their mouths in Gerber-O's. I glare in ancient anger. My breathing stops, my thoughts swivel, and my past catches me in a single second. I was doing such a great job of running from it, but it is there on the road in a Honda staring at me. The vision of a lifeless sheet flashes before my eyes, a protruding nose and swollen chest draped in white.

My breaths are quick as I pull into my apartment complex wanting a stiff drink. The surprise visit from memories stirred up un-rested graves. I spin her ring on my finger yearning for her presence, her physical body pouring into my own like hot tea into a cracked china cup. I tear my keys out of the ignition with panic choking at my throat and hurry inside to bunker down from my internal tornado. Stumbling to the shower, I run the steaming water and sit on the toilet. My world spins as I realize I'm not strapped in. Orphaned all over again, helpless as the time I played with some big kids who thought it would be fun to spin the merry-go-round as fast as they could. Gripping the iron bars of the merry-go-round, the smell of blood tattooed on my palms, I screamed at the top of my lungs for it to stop. The park turned into a blur of torment as I flew. Then came the collision, my body and a tree, my small chest gasping against the negative. Voiceless, I cried out for my mother who wasn't there. I didn't hang around play grounds much after that.

The wind picks up outside with a sickening howl as my mind is back in the bathroom. The falling water beats the bottom of the tub and the mirrors fog as I cover my eyes and sigh. My earliest memory came to mind without permission. The water was so blue and I was three, following a ball into my grandparent's Jacuzzi. My body hovered over the decorative tiles and bone-colored drain while the sky rippled above me. Bubbles fluttered up from my mouth like birds as I drowned. I remembered it being so calm until my mother noticed my absence and dove in to pull me to the surface saving my life. It was the one time she was there.

I squint my eyes tighter as the room is hotter and moister by the second. I rise only to collapse against the counter as tears flood from my cemented lids. Sobbing, I resurrect the courage to open my eyes and face myself in the mirror. Wiping the blanket of mist from the surface,

my mother's face stares between salty streaks in my reflection. Her deep blue pools swallow my torn insides. I wish for her to save me from my bubbling hot guilt, to fill my selfish body with the will to live. Holding my breath in the hot womb of now, I close my eyes.

Pulling her from the black, there in the dark she stands, plump and perfect as my last memories, in a faded eyelet dress. Her skin is firm and eyes electric, her hair frames her face and glows against the pitch darkness around us. From her mouth she exhales a mist of aurora borealis just out of reach of my parched lips. The emptiness of my lungs pulls against my bones as I struggle to inhale, to be resuscitated with her living breath.

# KARAOKE

*Jeffrey H. MacLachlan*

Quick burn of light beer  
    strained neon of football clocks  
    television stock cars wrapped  
in a möbius strip -- crash  
    of cymbals, chorus kicks in  
    The Night The Lights Went Out  
In Georgia  
    singer unfurls her palm,  
    snatches an imaginary moon  
    middle-aged necks tangle  
in the corner, hair bursting  
from shirt holes -- frayed mic cord  
    hisses and frays  
slaps of applause  
    flash of lotto numbers  
dance floor spills of gin  
    and soda, lemon seeds  
crunch under hard boots like gravel  
    week's worth of muscle knots  
versatackle and monkey's fists  
    untie with slips of spaghetti  
straps and tongues

# A LAST HURRAH FOR L.A.

*Robert del Carlo*

First stop: a trip down Venice Beach,  
henna panthers across our shoulder blades.  
My love and I, we've got a swagger, see,  
like movie stars.

Her short self showcasing a slender catwalk—  
my Hollywood strut, one for every four of hers.  
If pomposity had a heel-toe, ours is celebrity.

*That's right, we own you.*

The afternoon sun glints off  
the dramatic, obsidian black, of our latest  
Mercedes—the presence of the playa—  
firing up the V12 atomic bomb,  
we drive off with the air of S-Class  
as the sun gives way to the nightlife.  
We hit the 405 and flash our lights to the fast lane.

Flying from the Santa Monica Freeway  
to Mikado Sushi on south Broadway,  
for a party-of-two reservation to dine  
on Godzilla rolls and greens in the good company  
of tipsy pole dancers who've lost their way from  
Hefner's Holmby Hills.

*Didn't we meet in a hotel once?*

Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf:

A pastry and some liquid amber joe,  
we're set for the rest of the night.

*Where's the credit card?*

Let's go pick up your mother, love.  
Doesn't matter—it's chump change to us.  
And we walked out, past the Mexican hobo  
in Ralph Lauren castoffs  
with our AmEX in hand.

My mother-in-law's tokin' up in the back.  
Stone paranoid and flaunting Armani sunglasses  
at midnight, she lets out the smoke and wheezes:

*Where did I hide my goddamn pot?*

*Was that Hugh Laurie?*

*Where? I'm on it!*

Our last night in the City of Angels,

and the accelerator ignites like dragon-fire,  
as we race down Reseda,  
to stalk someone with talent.

# FIRESTORM

*Robert del Carlo*

To see him is for logic to fail, consciousness a monsoon  
like losing my possessions, my keys in the monsoon.

The ventricles, atria, veins and arteries seize  
in ache, bridling vitality when he teases the monsoon.

The wet slate of the drive—a mirror to the mica sky  
where lightning meets birch to appease the monsoon.

Muffled coughs through the smoke cleared the lane  
of any other sound, except the wheeze of the monsoon.

I ran the window through with a 2x4 and clambered in  
as if it were the center ring trapeze of the monsoon.

The flames gnawed at my ankles, wrists, and eyelashes  
yet it is my heart that burns, burns, needs this man soon.

I found him caught in the smoldering floorboards  
and set him free to the extinguishing breeze of the monsoon.

Lungs take in the smoke, the soot, the dust and close.  
Robert's eyes slide shut to offer peace to the monsoon.

# THE SHOPLIFTER

*Mary Christine Delea*

She knows the zap of getting caught  
but cannot help but move like a chipmunk  
from one display to the next. What's desired  
always ends up in her cave of a purse,

and something she would never wish for  
goes to the register to be rung up.

At one time, she wanted to study art  
in Amsterdam, fall in love with  
a generic European and raise children  
on yoga and organic foods. But desire  
takes by-passes and side roads  
and veers off into places children don't know  
exist. She moves to the socks,

on sale, garish in bright colors, and knows  
redemption is not for the living  
but for the places in her apartment  
that hold what is never paid for.

# STRANGLED SATURDAY

*Caitlin Thomas*

Her weeks always laid peaceful,  
Especially Tuesday,  
Which were met with tea and tulips.

June meant clear stars and occasional rain  
But the last braid of weekdays had been tangled  
With a splash of drought and depression.

Take Monday for example:  
When the crimson numbers yelled in the AM  
Her eyes blinked  
Then burned  
Into the skylight,

Drops pounded on the glass with potential  
To creak and crack  
The sturdy surface.

Wednesday acted orange up until rush hour traffic  
When her windshield  
Flooded with sprinkles of rain,  
The aftermath of yesterday's storm.

The PM called for Billie Holiday on vinyl  
As she sang, "Death is no dream, for in death I'm caressing you."  
She repeatedly played the song  
While a few Misty's hid in an old pair of clogs  
And their boyfriends, the Percocets slept above  
In an old jewelry box  
In the closet.

Thursday felt like a lie  
Not because of the school children who rearranged  
The Clifford soft covers  
But because when she fetched the coffee  
For coworkers  
There was silence.  
"Thank you" didn't attend Thursday.

Friday was lightning.  
Jupiter waited for no one's permission before striking.  
She took this as a sign to go ahead with her plans  
And devoured a pack of Misty's and took to her notebook

With scarlet ink.

Once Saturday showed its shameful face  
Cherry numbers blinked ten PM  
As the thunder serenaded her every ten minutes  
Like a snooze button.

The pearls would be acquaintances with her neck  
One last time,  
Right above the rope  
That was rough on her neck and skin,  
But her heels stepped off the chair anyway  
Untying the braid  
And cutting the power lines  
Across the apartment building.

# CONCEPTION IN A TIME OF COLD WAR

*Jerry D. Mathes II*

*“Shoot to Kill, Kill for Thrill!”*

—An Army Call and Response.

The drill sergeant stood over me. Under the summer Kentucky sun, I was in the front leaning rest, which is neither leaning nor rest and the world knows as the push-up position or missionary depending on your inclinations. The sergeant yelled, “The best part of you ran down the crack of your mama’s ass and left a stain on the backseat of your daddy’s car.” I was shocked and dumbfounded and not just for being confronted with such a disturbing image of my mother’s anatomy nor the insult, as my father had routinely pointed out my flaws in such ways, but I was stunned at his presumption that my parents had done it in the backseat of a car, which of course they had. In my naiveté I didn’t realize that in the early sixties the car culture was that pervasive and uniquely American and the drill sergeant probably had an eighty percent chance of being right, no matter which of us sorry jackasses sweating and quivering in the front leaning rest he picked out. Neither of my parents had a car, but horniness makes beggars of us all so a car was borrowed.

My dad owned a car back east. He had recently arrived in Arizona from Kentucky as a door gunner in a helicopter to be stationed at Luke Air Force Base. He was set up on a blind date with my sixteen-year-old mother. He caught rides with pals, hitchhiked, and, of course, borrowed cars. I don’t even know what kind of car they ended up in. I imagine it had long swooping lines of two-tone-paint, a chrome grill the size of a bear trap, and tail fins, but it was probably a shitty Rambler with bald tires. Although I was training to fight the same threat my father had, we would find out that this was the height of the Cold War, right after The Bay of Pigs, The Cuban Missile Crisis, the Assassination of J.F.K. and before the Gulf of Tonkin and the large scale deployment of U.S. military forces into South Vietnam, although we did have advisors there and the first American soldier had been killed there in 1945, the year my father was born. This was the era of mutually assured destruction (MAD), a time of annihilation in thirty minutes after the sirens wailed if you couldn’t reach a fallout shelter, a time of pent up tensions where young girls swooned in a moment of passion by smooth talking southern boys who vaguely sounded like Elvis. Or at least in my family.

The drill sergeant, apparently not satisfied with the volume of my “Yes, Drill Sergeant” response to his insult, took the added measure of shifting his boot forward and onto my hand. “I can’t hear you,” he yelled.

His insult strikes me that my finer qualities never even made it into me. I am composed of my father’s inability to shoot far and his poor follow through and my mother’s reckless inhibition and inability to say no or

at least cover that thing. I am the sum of poor planning through passion. My father and mother married in October, and I was born in May eight months and three weeks later—very nearly scandalous. Although no one has said so, I figured I was at the wedding. I was not premature, in fact most first pregnancies go long. It's as if the firstborn wants to kick around and stretch out the womb like the early Europeans before the virgin forests of the New World. The first of worn hand-me-downs for the second child worn with a sense of entitlement of someone marked as first. Perhaps this is why my father favored his next son—both second sons—and they could commiserate the tyranny of the first son in the world, ruining everything he leaves behind with a callous disregard that others may need to follow. But that's what you risk when you unleash an army without thinking—the best is dribbled away and the worst create a scorched earth out of someone's motherland. My mother assured me that I was a difficult pregnancy and she had to make numerous visits to Major Love, the Air Force Doctor.

All of us recruits look like a field of right triangles kept in shape by our trembling arms. The drill sergeant's boot threatened to collapse the triangle of myself into a parallel line with the ground. I have yelled at the top of my voice and still the drill sergeant yelled, "What's the matter, Mathes? Haven't your balls dropped?" My name has been interchangeable with epithets like bitch, dick, cunt, pussy, and asshole, making it its own curse and that was before I reached Fort Knox, so the drill sergeants did not bother me. My father often said we'd always be losers because we were Mathes, and nothing ever goes our way; we lose and no matter how hard we try we'll never make it. My birth weight was 7-11 you'd thought that would've accounted for something. I have wondered if the curse only follows from a life of decisions flying on impulse. Shooting from the hip or with the hip. There is certain amount of hubris in thinking the only reason you can't succeed is because of some outside force and not a lack of foresight and planning on your part. After all, if your very name is a curse borne of slip shod meta-physical forces you can be absolved. All of us bastard children like to think our woes were the woes of our fathers and their fathers passed on curses like a venereal disease. Conception as an STD—a supernaturally transmitted damnation. Why let the lack of one little condom stand in the way when pressure's at the wellhead? Who's got time to run to the store? In thirty minutes everyone could all be dead. Just lay back and enjoy the air rich with honeysuckle.

The drill sergeant, tired of toying with us, took his boot off of my hand and told us to recover and we all jumped to our feet without doing one push-up. I am the sum of all my flaws, but unlike nuclear war, it is not a zero sum game. At the end of my basic and advanced training I would be named the honor graduate, the top of my class, cursed name and all that hasty, hair-trigger breeding. My conception, oh child of western deserts, of hot nights, mini skirts and nylons and the backseat-front-leaning-rest, is as American as Imperialism in the guise of defense, the short sighted-American Post WWII Dream, teenaged hubris, life out of the fear of imminent destruction, and ultimately, shooting to thrill—from the hip of course.

# BATTLE BUDDY

*Cole A. Lindstrom*

Like a brother you were the calm voice  
of reason that kept me from hitting on officers  
while drunk in the bars.

The next day laughed at how bad  
we smelled after riding the mechanical bull  
and sweating out last night's drinks.

We fought side by side, and argued that we knew  
each other better than ourselves. On bitter cold nights  
we kept each other warm. On a sunny day

while we laughed and smoked, you told me a story  
about a fat girl you once slept with. In one moment  
I looked away, and when I looked back you were face

down in the sand before I heard the gunshot.  
The firefight erupted, but all I could do was stare  
at the splatter of bloody brains across the desert behind us.

# FOR LOST FATHERS AND DOGS

*Pam Woolway*

The corner of morning  
is different from the corner of mourning—

One is a cane chair leaning into sunlight,  
the other a cobbled alley in a rough city.

One murmurs a hello in the ear,  
the other shivers the spine with farewell.

One, an unopened Missal with a worn binding and fragrant pages,  
the other, an overturned Scrabble board on a hard wood floor.

The corner of morning  
is different from the corner of mourning—

One has the slow eyelids of sunrise,  
the other, the quick plunge into sunset.

One is a coffee-stained newspaper marooned on an easy chair,  
the other, a leather wallet, reading glasses and watch in his bureau  
drawer.

One is the warmth of her muzzle resting on your bare foot,  
the other, an empty bowl on the bottom step.

# LION PROOF

*Jessica Lee Hagar*

Your stepfather found you,  
Fetal on the floor of your bedroom,  
Only a few feet from the door.

The same place we had spent so much time before.  
Staring contests with Christy Turlington, Churchill  
And many a *National Geographic* lioness,  
Were held behind that door.

We learned each other too quickly,  
And by the time we were pushing tar up our veins,  
Your mother and stepfather were downstairs,  
Deciding how they would keep their marriage.

Always hunting a heart less heavy,  
You had asked me to take your hand,  
And with you, to fly away. But, you said it in a poem,

And two weeks before they laid you out and cut  
You open, looking for the place we could all point our fingers.  
But it didn't matter. They all kept pointing at me.

So I wore the dress for the sake of your smile.  
Pink satin with ruffles, I worked that gaudy bridesmaids  
Gown, up the runway that held back your beloveds,  
Past your father wishing for my nerve and a Hawaiian print.

# WAKE

*Morgan Mason*

I hear the attendants say under  
their breath that you died in your sleep,  
and removing you from that contorted position  
was hard. The disinfectant spray  
used to clean your skin  
and all your orifices smells of bleach,

and they joke about a bathroom.  
They shaved your face much like the way  
you did, and I think about how I watched  
you every morning, how careful  
you were not to draw blood.

They set your features, but  
I can't see the string tying your jaw  
shut, or the eye-caps put under  
your lids after your eyes sank into your skull.

They speak about the wide array  
of embalming fluids they have to choose  
from, and how if they don't suck out  
all the compost inside of you, it will leak  
out of your mouth. They put your organs  
by your feet in the casket,  
and I am tempted  
to look. The makeup is nice,  
and I notice the subtle pink color  
that brings life to your cheeks.

They talk about the old suit  
mom and I chose you to wear, and how placing  
you was fun, because your hands  
went anywhere. They struggled  
to make your body look right, so small pins  
and wire are put all over to force  
you into position.

At least now you look comfortable.

# GLOVES

*Soren Browning*

When I visited, I slept in their bed,  
draped in the scent of moth balls. Over  
breakfast I offered to help pack up her  
belongings. He declined as he spread  
his toast with hand canned raspberry jam.  
At night coyotes sniffing through  
compost piles ripe with pickled prunes  
kept me awake. I searched that room, through  
photo albums, pictures stained  
as yellow as her lungs as she shouted, *Say Whiskey!*  
to faces at barbeques, us in bathing suits.  
Nestled between wedding photos lived  
a crumpled pair of white silk gloves  
with a cherry sized burn mark on the left palm.  
I pulled one slowly over the length of my right  
arm like she had the day of her wedding.  
Before overcome, she snuck out back with a flask  
of cousin Wilber's moon juice. The blinding burn  
of her first swig knocked the rollie out of her hand,  
leaving a brown stain on white silk. I learned of those  
gloves at eight, too young to wear them, she promised  
me someday they would be mine. As for her,  
she never slipped them on again. They retired  
as a book mark to her memories. She lived in the earth—  
the dirt, green stripped gardening gloves sewing the land.  
They found her hunched over the pressure cooker  
in the garage, red berry juice on her nose.  
When I left, he asked me if I wanted to take something  
of hers with me, a token. As I slipped the gloves  
on my hands, I felt the crusted surface of clay  
and jam over green stripes. I imagine her, rollie in mouth,  
picking raspberries, knees in the mud.

# BIRD PEDDLING

*Doug Schmierer*

**1st Place Meadow Poetry Award**

I make birds for a living.  
They fly from my fingertips  
And say the things I can't  
To any wronging person.

They fly from my fingertips,  
Those things I couldn't say  
And, to those who wronged me,  
Everything lands fair again.

Everything I couldn't say  
To those people I hate  
May land unfair after so long,  
But I did the best I could.

To those people I hate:  
Everything is upside-down,  
But I did the best I could  
While finding feathers.

Upside-down, I should have started...  
But I did the best I could  
When matching the feathers I had  
With some chosen words.

I started the best I could,  
But I fit the feathers  
And, by every word I had,  
Made an albatross.

I matched the right feathers,  
I had the right words,  
But I made an albatross  
For a man I loved.

I gathered the right words  
To say everything I can't.  
A creature cowers around my father's grave.  
I make birds for the dead.

# CONTRIBUTORS NOTES

**Jeffrey Alfier** lives in Tucson, Arizona. His recent publication credits include *Crab Orchard Review*, *New Madrid*, and *Pearl Magazine*. He is author of two chapbooks, *Strangers within the Gate* (2005), and *Offloading the Wounded* (2009). He is the co-editor of *San Pedro River Review*.

**Conor Allen's** work has appeared previously in *New Delta Review*, *Beeswax*, *Tulane Review* and *Monday Night*. He is very thankful for the support of his wife and cat.

**Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán**, author of *Antes y después del Bronx: Lenapehoking*, is completing *Yerbabuena/Mala yerba*, *All My Roots Need Rain: mixed blood poetry & prose* and *Heart of the Nation: Indigenous Womanisms, Queer People of Color, and Native Sovereignties*.

**Teresa Breeden** is a mother of two children, one who daily turns the other into a butterfly. Teresa enjoys the feel of fresh dirt under her fingernails, and is a long time member of Ash Canyon Poets. The managing editor of a small vegetable garden, Teresa is currently accepting seed submissions. She has poetry published in the *Amherst Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Red Rock Review*, and *White Heron* among others.

**Soren Browning** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

**Robert del Carlo** will graduate from TMCC High School with his Associate degree in Biology in June 2010. After, he will matriculate to University of Nevada, Reno to complete a degree in Neuroscience before heading to medical school. Both poems featured were written with his two best friends in mind.

**Joe Crowley** is a former long-time employee of the University of Nevada, Reno, who, in retirement, has turned to writing poetry.

**Mary Christine Delea** is the author of *The Skeleton Holding Up the Sky*, as well as two chapbooks and numerous published and award-winning poems. She lives in Oregon, where she is currently working on new poetry manuscripts.

**Michael Dubon** has lived in Nevada all his life, primarily the Sparks. Currently, he is working on his associate degree in English at Truckee Meadows Community College. Writing brings him great joy. He writes for fun and hopes to one day make something out of this joy.

**Caren Franklin** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

**Deysi Gallegos** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

**Mark Gallegos** was raised in Merced, California and currently resides in Reno, Nevada. His work covers a wide range of subject matter but primarily focuses on the difficulties of forging an identity as a gay Latino in a small town and coming to terms with an often turbulent childhood.

**Therese Genio** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College. Her photography has won awards and been exhibited at the *Scholastic Art & Writing Awards* and *Wild Women Artists* show.

**Taylor Graham** is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler. In addition to *The Meadow*, her poems have appeared in *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present*, *The Iowa Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and elsewhere.

**Jessica Hagar** is a native Reno, Nevadan and a student at Truckee Meadows Community College. She enjoys fire performance/fire dancing, writing poetry and prose, photography, music and loves having a passion for life.

**John Hayes** acts and directs in Community Theater and appeared as a scurvy looking corpse on *Homicide* and a clothing shopper on *Wire*. He has been published in *The Meadow*, *Emerald Tales*, *Alien Skin*, *Thema*, *Pulsar*, *Modern Haiku*, *Writers Journal*, *Premonitions* and other magazines. He won third prize in the *Writers Journal* poetry contest. Five of his one-act plays have been produced.

**Dianna Henning's** poetry books include *The Tenderness House*, published by Poets Corner Press in Stockton, California and a book from Black Buzzard Press, Texas, entitled *The Broken Bone Tongue*, released October 2009. Her work has appeared in *Crazyhorse*, *The Lullwater Review*, *Poetry International*, *Fugue*, *The Asheville Poetry Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review* and the *Seattle Review*.

**Michael Jurkovic's** poems have appeared in one hundred literary magazines and four national anthologies. CD reviews appear regularly in *Elmore & Folk* and *Acoustic Music Exchange*. Currently V.P. of The Howland Cultural Center & co-director of *Calling All Poets*, both in Beacon, New York. He loves Emily most of all.

**Arian Katsimbras** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

**Kirsten Kinnear** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

**John Knott** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

**Cole A. Lindstrom** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

**Christopher Locke's** other essays have appeared in *The Sun*, *Parents*, *American Spectator*, *The Rambler*, *Georgetown Review*, *Maine Home + Design*, and *Exquisite Corpse*, among others. His fourth collection of poems, *End of American Magic* is available from Salmon Poetry (Ireland).

**Ellaraine Lockie** is a widely-published poet whose latest chapbook is *Blue Ribbons at the County Fair*, a collection of first-place prize winning poems. Ellaraine teaches school and community poetry workshops.

**Adrian C. Louis** is a Professor of English in the Minnesota State University system. His 2006 book of poems, *Logorrhea* (Northwestern University Press), was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. Recently, he edited *Shedding Skins: Four Sioux Poets* (Michigan State University Press, 2008).

**Joanne Lowery's** poems have appeared in many literary magazines, including *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Eclipse*, *Smartish Pace*, *Cimarron Review*, *roger*, and *Poetry East*. Her chapbook *Call Me Misfit* won the 2009 Frank Cat Poetry Prize. She lives in Michigan.

**Jeffrey H. MacLachlan** has forthcoming work in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Beeswax Magazine*, among others. He hears Bruce Buffer's voice when reading contributor bios. He hails from Skaneateles, New York.

**Morgan Mason** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

**Jerry D. Mathes II** is a writer and recipient of a Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship. Lewis-Clark Press will release his collection of poems, *The Journal West* in the future. In the summer he fights wildfire on a helicopter-rappel crew. He loves his wife and two daughters very much.

**S. M. McLean** is a no-hawk barber, black-light inkblot bleached tree carver, gadje corporation gypsy, long haired non-hippie, ever-student eager teacher, no-thump example preacher, abstract realist, white space analyst, truth seeker.

**Dana Oldfather** was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1978. She has been in exhibitions and collections across the country. Oldfather is represented at The Bonfoey Gallery in Cleveland, EO Art Lab in Chester, Connecticut, and Kathryn Markel Fine Arts in Chelsea, New York.

**Doug Schmierer** is a genius forced into an idiot's body, forced into thinking he's a genius. Also: a TMCC student.

**Andrew Sieracki** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

**Cara Sherill** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College High School.

**Christie Shoupe** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

**Nathan Sowle** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

**Mark Terrill** shipped out of San Francisco as a merchant seaman to the Far East and beyond, studied and spent time with Paul Bowles in Tangier, Morocco, and has lived in Europe since 1984. The author of 16 volumes of poems, prose poems, memoir and translations, he currently lives on the grounds of a former shipyard near Hamburg, Germany, with his wife and a large brood of cats. His most recent chapbooks are *The Salvador-Dalai-Lama Express* (Main Street Rag) and *Some Very Popular Songs* (Toad Press), a translation of a long poem by Rolf Dieter Brinkmann.

**Caitlin Thomas** is a student at both University of Nevada-Reno and TMCC. She is a columnist for the *Nevada Sagebrush* but this is her first poem ever published.

**Kyle Vermillion** is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

**Changming Yuan's** poems appear in *Barrow Street*, *Best Canadian Poetry*, *London Magazine* and nearly 200 other literary publications worldwide. His debut collection, *Chansons of a Chinaman*, and monograph, *Politics and Poetics*, both released in September 2009, Yuan has recently had work nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

**Christopher Woods** is a writer, photographer and teacher. He lives in Houston and in Chappell Hill, Texas. His work has appeared recently in *Glasgow Review* and *Narrative Magazine*. He shares an online gallery with his wife Linda at *Moonbird Hill Arts* - [www.moonbirdhill.exposuremanager.com/](http://www.moonbirdhill.exposuremanager.com/).

**Pam Woolway** has an M.F.A. from Antioch University, Los Angeles and works as the Lifestyle editor for Kauai's daily paper, *The Garden Island* newspaper. She lives on the East Side of the island with her husband and a small tribe of animals

# SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

## How to submit to *The Meadow*

We **accept only e-mail submissions**. Submit your work as described below to meadow@tmcc.edu. We only read submissions from Labor Day and Valentine's Day—any unsolicited manuscript sent outside of our reading period will be deleted without response.

## Sponsored Cash Prizes

In past issues, the ASTM student government of TMCC has sponsored cash prizes for the winners of *The Meadow* literary, art and design contests. Through a blind submission process, the editorial board chooses finalists in four categories: fiction, poetry, nonfiction, art/photography and cover design. An independent committee selects the first-place winners from among the student body. Only TMCC students are eligible for prizes.

## Specific Guidelines

We welcome submissions of poetry, fiction, screenplay, nonfiction, artwork, graphic design, comics and photography, preferably high-contrast artwork that will reproduce well in print. We only accept submissions as e-mail attachments (in .doc or .jpg format). **Exception:** cover design contest entrants please send a PDF.

All submissions in all categories must be accompanied by contact information (name, address, telephone, e-mail) and a brief (less than 35 words) biography. Do not include the author's or artist's name on the work itself. Put this information in the separate cover letter that includes the above contact information, which can be within your email text. All submission are considered blind without author's name.

We will accept up to six poems, photos or art pieces or two works of prose from each author or artist. We prefer that prose works not exceed 3,500 words.

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