

Speak Poetry

Issue 2



poems from
San Mateo County

edited by
Aileen
Gazzinotto

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Speak Poetry Campaign, 2019

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Introduction

*By age 2, along with simple, three-word sentences, most children also start forming implicit memories... by age 5, they learn to rhyme.*¹

We are the language(s) we learned, the dragons we slayed, the monsters we defeated, the “gods we created”²—we are all of our stories and every story read to us. We are also everything that we have forgotten. For this anthology, I’ve sent out a call to all poets in San Mateo County to submit poems on the theme, “childhood.” One reason is, to quote Robert Pinsky, to seek a vision of our future in the poetry of our past...³

According to a California Department of Finance study, there are 163,129 children between the ages of 0 and 17 in San Mateo County.⁴ If more than 57% are living with at least one foreign-born parent, how does a village support cultural literacy? What role can poetry play in a multilingual household? If more than 15% come from lower income families, or if more than 2% are homeless, how can our communities help in ensuring their future economic mobility? What possibilities can poetry possibly offer? More importantly, how does poetry change a life? From the 24 local poets featured in this anthology, it is my hope that we gain a deeper understanding of what childhood is, as well as everything that it can be.

Aileen Cassinetta

¹U.S. Department of Education. “Typical Language Accomplishments for Children, Birth to Age 6 — Helping Your Child Become a Reader.” Accessed October 30, 2019. <https://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/reader/part9.html>; and Batcho, K. I., A. M. Nave, and M. L. DaRin. 2011. “A retrospective survey of childhood experiences.” *Journal of Happiness Studies* 12: 531-545.

²Carroll, Jonathan. 2012. *After Silence*. New York: Open Road Media.

³Pinsky, Robert. 1999. “Poetry and American Memory.” *The Atlantic*, October 1999. Accessed October 30, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/10/poetry-and-american-memory/377805/>

⁴Lucile Packard Foundation for Children’s Health. “kidsdata.org.” Accessed October 30, 2019. <https://www.kidsdata.org/export/pdf?loc=4>

Renee Aubuchon (South San Francisco)

IF THERE IS A BRIGHT LIGHT

“Now children!” our first grade teacher said
Clapping her hands loudly
And giving us the eagle eye.
“Today’s lesson is
How to survive a nuclear bomb!”

Maybe I should have been surprised
But I wasn’t.
Even though I was only six.

Daddy had been talking
About the Russians and nuclear bombs
At home.

He and my Uncle Art had
Important conversations
About how to build
A bomb shelter.

“You’ll like it in our bomb shelter.”
My daddy told me.
“It will be a sealed bunker underground.
A special hiding place!

Most likely we’ll only have to stay down there
For six months.

You can bring some of your toys!
It will be fun!”

I began to secretly seriously wonder
If my daddy was crazy.

Our teacher told us
To crouch under our desks
Facing away from the windows
With our hands crossed
Over our necks.

“If there is a bright light....”
She cautioned,
“Don’t look at it!”

After we practiced
How to survive a nuclear bomb
It was time for recess.

Some kids, most kids
Ran and played, like usual.
Tag, jump rope, four-square
Or jacks.

I stood in the middle of the playground, alone,
Looking up at a luminous blue sky
Watching wisps of clouds
disappear into nothingness.

Watching seagulls swoop and glide
Their white underbellies
Glowing in the afternoon sun.

This is the sky the bombs will come from,
I thought.
The bombs the Russians will send
To kill all us children.

I had not always been a good girl.
I had thought mean things.
I had made mistakes.
I didn’t always keep my room clean.

But the Russians didn’t know me.
They didn’t know about those things.

I looked up into the breezy blueness
Of that beautiful sky and whispered
“Why do you want to kill me?”
To the bomb that I would not see

Until it was too late

Camincha Benvenuto (Pacifica)

YOUNG GIRL

in San Francisco ¿qué pasa?
These days,
a lot man! and it's heavy
You can visit an art show,
a park, a restaurant
in the Mission
and feel is a plot
to transport you to Latin América
and you come out wondering
Why didn't I make this trip before?
With your pride surging knowing
what you want most is: to tell
the world that you are
A LATINA.

WHERE?

Angry. Excited.
Soft voices. Many accents.
Flowers inspire. Momma's
Coffee aroma, caresses
the mind.
Awaking it to words.

Words waiting in the passage
ways of memories calling from
some long misplaced
day longing to be born.

Words struggling, moaning, sharing,
Crying, dancing, informing.
Angry. Excited.
Soft voices. Many accents.
Where?
In a Poetry Reading.

Kaitlin Bonfiglio (Menlo Park)

YOU CAN HOLD ON FOR ANOTHER NIGHT

stop trying to convince me of your logic, oh gentle boy, for love is heedless. you tell me that it's a burden you can bear. i say yes. you use the word "disrespect." i fight the urge to remind you of your humanity. you are so young, so young after all. a heart so pure & pliable: there are countless ways it can break. does it bother you? you can say yes. did i find you, breathless, sobbing on the doorstep last night? you can tell me no. you can tell me whatever you want. my fury may have reason, but that doesn't matter. my outrage means nothing; it won't change how you greet them on the phone. how the years, packed neatly inside you, come out in childish smile. tender boy, love is inexplicable. defending it is a waste. you climb through nine-thousand kilometers like you're ascending to heaven. but as you go, i will reach for your hand. i will tell you, you can hold on for another night.

Chuck Brickley (Daly City)

FOUR HAIKU & ONE HAIKU SEQUENCE

days old
her gaze returns
to the azure



plum blossoms
the child slung on her hip
licks the air



summer evening
the grandchild waves once more
at the empty road



the story ends
my daughter's eyes wide
with ceiling stars

Chuck Brickley (Daly City)

TRIPTYCH

balancing
a boy empties his shoe
in the summer wind

deserted schoolyard
the fence he climbed over
to Iraq

on his youth in Japan
my neighbor falls silent . . .
the clear summer sky

Aileen Cassinetta (San Mateo)

ORANGE JESSAMINE ROAD

in summertime, is a chalk-drawn
hopsotch court. Every face evoked is young
and wraithlike, springing forth, wildcrafted—

hibiscus, mock orange, lemon grass;
breadnut and black plum; star apple,
sweetsop, rose apple. You,

most beautiful and most brave, leapt boldly
towards your moon, marked
with the rind of a fruit and

the incidental leaf, silvery,
from a golden leaf tree. But then, you were tangled
mid-air, between a rosy expanse

and your half-circle on the ground. You landed,
outwardly unfazed, on a chalk-drawn line.
Yesterday, I thought of you.

How in the days of your invincibility, I was
invincible, too, felled only
by whiteflies and afternoon naps.

I wondered if you ever found
that rind of fruit,
if you remembered to jump,

over mock oranges,
over star apples,
over your moon.

Stephanie Dobler Cerra (Redwood City)

MY LAST SUMMER IN VERMONT

August, and we were moving. I walked to school,
Closed for the summer, one last time.
Queen Anne's lace frothed all along the roadside;
Beyond were cows hills trees houses fences a little bridge a barn
Calico's house the lane Putney Central.
I wanted to remember it all perfectly.

If I could wish for that girl now, I'd wish her pretty
Like Queen Anne's lace: Strong and pretty
With a stiff stem, tough carrot root. Hardy and pretty,
Growing anywhere. Kindly and pretty, like roadside weeds
That leaned toward me, and shook their lace at goodbye.

WEDDING DRESS

Braving the attic, thick-furred dust between not enough
floorboards
We'd visit the Gown, my sister and I. Remembering it
Is like remembering there is treasure in your house.
We pull down the oversize zipper on the tall plastic bag with
gold-quilted top
Reach inside and pull out impossible yards of skirt.
We touch everything, the scalloped neckline lace, the little pearls
And especially we amaze our hands with satin.

That dress once clothed a woman young and full of plans.
After marriage, she hid them away. Children, housework,
husband.
And one day, my mother will pull out poetry again:
gleaming folds emerging from a plastic bag in a dirty attic.
Every day she writes will be a wedding day.

Stephanie Dobler Cerra (Redwood City)

ORACLE

Dad out of state for work, mom got spooky
Shuffling her Tarot cards, gazing at the layouts
Pouring glass after glass from the big Gallo jug.

Crossing the unlighted living room I'd see her
Hunched over the Ouija board, planchette roaming
Mystifying Oracle, mother unfathomable.

At the dinner table she ignored us, lost somewhere
And trying to stay lost in her constant gloaming
Slapping our words away like biting insects.

Mystifying Oracle, we could have used you
Please explain our mother to us and where she went
Is she coming back? YES, NO, GOOD BYE?

We didn't know how to ask her, or the Oracle, or anyone.
The family's first rule for children: Don't ask for anything.
What did we know of what our mother wanted?

She was a year away from writing poetry again.
I wonder if the planchette spelled that out for her
Or if it just left her, as we were left, in the dark.

That wasn't right, but I can almost understand—
Now that poetry's taken me by the wrist to the cleft
In the muse's cave where heady vapors fume.

Now I wish we could join in this dimness
Our fingers delicately spread, my mother and I,
Scrying for what living rock can yield: Smoke. Water. Honey.

Poetess Kalamu Chaché (East Palo Alto)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

We come upon the morning of each day
With expectations on how we'll live
Our lives, on any given day,
To help those around us to live.

We go about our day doing lots of things
That support us in fulfilling our destiny
And completing what the day brings
For us to do in doing our share for humanity.

The time is here now before us
To make a positive difference in doing our share.
Let's do the best that we can on purpose,
In letting others know the extent of our care.

It's now on us to give more thought to food.
Good nutrition has many healthy benefits.
We all gain from us all being in a happy, better mood. Good
nutrition nourishes our
minds, bodies, and spirits.

Somewhere, someplace, there are millions of people
Who are in need of our kindness and generosity.
Let's continue planting seeds of hope for people,
So that we can all enjoy living in a healthy community.

Sanderson Dean (Burlingame)

ARE YOU LISTENING?

My wife finally made her point
It took forever

She –
No you can't have that
Said –
What are you guys getting into?
That –
Stop hitting your brother
I –
Wait, is that gum?
Need –
I'll help you in a second
To –
Give me the stick
Listen –
Where'd you get that?
Better

LOVING HANDS

Always grabbing
Always clinging
Always sticky

Where have they been?
What have they touched?
When were they clean?

Now, they're here
Rubbing my face
Your hands letting me know
We share everything
Like your runny nose

Sanderson Dean (Burlingame)

THE MASTER-PIECE

All that cutting
Meticulous care
Glue
Just the right shapes
In just the right places
Glue
The utmost concentration
The required contemplation
Glue
You step away
Your masterwork through

And your priceless art
Perfectly stuck
to the kitchen table

DAD'S QUIET TIME

How to find quiet time
Without the guilt
No reproachful stares
Making resolve wilt

I'm walking the dog
It has to be done
And with a little silence
It's almost fun

I can hear myself think
As I walk this loop
A smile on my face
As I pick up poop

Paul Fericano (Millbrae)

ESCAPING CRITICISM

from the painting *Escaping Criticism*
by Pere Borrell del Caso (1874)

1.

The strange picture of the startled boy
Stepping out of the frame and fleeing the scene

Is torn from a book and thumb-tacked to the wall
Above the bathroom sink next to the mirror

This is you my father says buckling his belt
A warning shot aimed at his second son

The little monkey in a disappearing act
Who climbs out second-story bathroom windows

Shimmies up drainpipes and sits alone on rooftops
Late at night to escape the rage of lovers

Screaming and throwing ashtrays and souvenirs
Against the walls that always talk back

2.

I brush my teeth I comb my hair I stare
At this other me this nexus boy

This doppelganger kid who leaps and bounds
From his world into mine

Unaware perhaps like me of what there is
To see or be on this or any other side

Where fathers say our names and sound
The way all fathers do when they dream

3.

One night I surprise us both
I sneak back in through the window

Like a tiny thief caught in the act
And there he sits on the toilet reading *Popular Mechanics*
his face so startled by my entrance
That I see the wound of his disappointment

The locked bathroom holds me now
There is nowhere to go but into his line of fire

I take the brown leather blows like daily penance
With time enough to flee again tomorrow

On the other side of all this noise and deception
My mother bangs on the door with small fists

THE CAMPANELLA BOY

1.

He lived a short time around the corner on Delta Street
teeth feet and neck busted bent and crooked
wore leg braces and headgear to keep from falling apart

Thick leather straps shiny metal bands long bolted wires
extra body parts walking talking mechanical boy
moved like Frankenstein and spoke with swollen tongue

Me the stuttering kid rubbery arms legs goofy high voice
Jerry Lewis hair always joking no clue how I could understand
every word he uttered but I did as only boys in pain could

2.

Our grandmothers grew up together in Sferracavallo
journeyed together to America from Sicily in 1906
settled in San Francisco just in time to see it destroyed

Spring came and they climbed the hills of McClaren Park
near the edge of the neighborhood to gather in baskets
weeds grass wildflowers leaves for cooking and healing

I never ran ahead but trudged alongside far behind
leaned hard against the stammering plodding bright shiny
metal flashing sun our warm faces almost pressing skin

3.

In his basement smell of wet dirt wood bark and manure
stung our nostrils cool black damp spreading spores on
cardboard and hay one corner where prize mushrooms grew

His dark garden secret tending familiar nurturing return
one step one leg one clumping downstairs dragging metal
stiff neck cold cement each day until the rich harvest

Brown buttons fried in olive oil butter garlic and finocchio
he laughed at grandmothers dancing with wooden spoons
I laughed and threw my head back for both of us

TEDDY AVENUE

When I was a little kid
my grandfather was very big
on Theodore Roosevelt
a son of God
he would tell me
and even though
Teddy and Jesus
were brothers
Teddy was so close
to God that sometimes
Jesus would get
jealous and beat Teddy
in all the primaries

Nevertheless
it was something
to be proud of
he would tell me
to know your street
was named
for this country's finest leader

It was some time afterwards
that I learned
Jesus was never
president
Roosevelt was not
the second third
of the Blessed Trinity
and that Teddy Avenue
had been named
for a local contractor

And just last week
my older brother informed me
that it was not my grandfather
who told me all this crap
but a crazy old man
who lived across the street
above the grocery store
that all the kids on the block
called *grandpa*

Sophia Gamini (Menlo Park)

IF I WERE A BOOK

My crisp pages turn, dancing, spinning, in a dim candlelight.

My worn-out pages ripped, burned, and broken. Waiting to be tended.

My words, some may call magical, whispering of the future.
Beholding the past.

My words dance with glee, for there is still happiness inside of me.

I have been read millions of times, hearing the whisper of their words, like silk being thrown into air, going in all sorts of direction, dancing as it falls into the empty air.

Each person reads delicately, like they're frightened if they read any different, I will rip into a million different pieces, and can never be mended again.

But they do not know, that if that is to happen, my words will live on. Floating in air, like dust, still whispering words of wisdom. If you listen so softly, you might hear me.

The candle light flickers, giving a warning of burning out soon.
Burning away, melting, like my old, worn out pages will too, soon.

Nobody will ever know the secrets that I carry, they will never know.

Unless they listen...

Caroline Goodwin (Montara)

THE RIVER EYOT

child at the circle
drawn in mud willow
branch and shining fur—

humming under the surface
earwig and pillbug
crane-fly and pearl—

heron at the tideline
stock-still, clam shell, thin
white lines, milk-thistle, quill—

hold out your hands
open your heart
here's where the world slides in

Caroline Goodwin (Montara)

HORSEBACK

my daughter in the saddle the hills
not rising behind her not coming up not
jutting into the sky but rather
holding her like a couple
of large soft arms
as the animal turns
at the far end of the fence and heads
back toward me I am standing at the gate now
and I can sense the valves of my heart opening
and thumping shut steady as hooves unbeautiful
as a thing you'd find beneath a stump
something mysterious and unidentifiable
with jagged edges asymmetrical and perhaps a dark
purple maybe the size of a fist (like they say)
but so distinct from anything you've ever
seen before that you're moved to invent
a new kingdom a realm untouched
by the physical world
where the need to name the shape
does not even exist
and nothing can be pinned
down or held as evidence and nobody
knows the code or holds the key

Emilia Hansen (Menlo Park)

IF I WERE A BOOK

If I were a book,

I would have hilarious adventures,

I would have super hero dreams,

I would swim in beautiful seas,

I could fly over gigantic green trees,

I could walk in a castle, where you need lots of keys,

I could be aboard a pirate ship, with my friend named Mc. Pufferson
Heavenly Fleas.

And I could see humongous waves, which makes me look brave,

I could see bats, who live in dark dark caves (who also look brave),

Why not have you look at a monster band, or have you read about
crabs who like to live in sand?

Maybe learn about mermaids, who dive around secret lands?

Or about funny people who like to dance! And learn how to prance...
maybe a handstand in France?

I would love to see all different types of faces,

And the eyes of different races,

I would like to see the faces of delight, or faces having great fright.

But I mostly love to see faces cry,

When they say, to me—the book, *bye bye!*

Sarah Hansen (San Carlos)

MAKE ME WONDER

Stuffed animals,
more pillow than friend
toys,
tucked away on high shelves
homework,
calling my name
flashcards,
waiting to be done
laundry,
that I've done myself
caffeine,
to sustain me after a sleepless night
an interest,
in politics beyond who the "good guy" is
tears,
about emotions deeper than I've been able
to express before
make me wonder
how did my childhood slip away?

Monica Korde (Belmont)

FOOTSTEPS OF SPRING

Golden poppies
California buttercups
Toyon berries
audacious wild things

not meant for the bouquet—

she stood at the door
charming in her carelessness
holding that cluster of spring
in her little muddy hands—
slowly, she walked towards me.

Monica Korde (Belmont)

INVITATION

Have you ever walked in the long silver rain?
Have you watched it run into creeks and cracks?

Listen. Here it comes. Big, wild rain
in spells and storms and stories and
I, feel the coming of the rain inside me first.
How marvelously have I adapted to all storms
that now I can truly listen, watch it fall

on the other side of my life.
Into each little thing I pay attention to. Small, neon rain
on smooth asphalt
micro-droplets cradled in cobwebs
on the greenest blade of grass
falling off the beak of the sparrows at rest
pinpricks of water against my face, mapping
every inch of space across bodies of land and water and
flesh and ink.
Come,

join me in this conversation, with the long silver rain.
Follow the song of the river newly born.
Let it remind you of how loved you are.
Be here. Ready when you are—
to feel the rain outside, the quiet within.

Anna Krakowsky (San Mateo)

MY MOTHER ON THE OCEAN, CIRCA 1972

she doesn't look much like me in the photo
everyone always says she does
she looks more like my glamorous cousin
who has the fancy headshots taken
& dances for a living

her squint in the photo
suggests pensiveness
thought its probably just sunshine
it seems as if there's something enthralling
just unencapsulated
by the photograph
but what could there be?
sea weed? a school of fish?
a drowning arm stuck through the calm swell?
she floats serenely on the old-fashioned raft
her green two-piece half-
submerged in the dark cold, the coast line suggesting
vaguely in the background
what is she considering in her child's mind?
how to escape?
kick far enough out to sea to be set free of
her family still seized
from the loss & replacement of her birth father
a newly seamed rupture
dripping yet,
a few years short of
the death of her brother,
all rented by alcohol, blame
or is she simply grateful
for the day at sea?
the cool to counter
Louisiana's relentless hot
the gentle salt-lick of the waves
I could ask her but I doubt she'd remember that exactly

& besides this moment
pure as it is
holds crystal

Ida J. Lewenstein (San Mateo)

SUPPOSE...SUPPOSE

Do you have a wiggle inside of you?
What does it do...?
Just what does it do?

Suppose...suppose...
You wiggle your toes
And the wiggle inside
Wiggles up to your nose.

Suppose...suppose...
You then wiggle your nose
And the wiggle wiggles
Right back to your toes!

Up to your nose
And down to your toes
Up and down
Uh...oh! There it goes!

Suppose...suppose...
You say to this wiggle –
STOP RIGHT NOW!
You're making me wriggle
And when I wriggle
I start to **GIGGLE!**

WRIGGLING and GIGGLING
Is all I do –
It's bothering my Mama
And my Daddy, too.
Can't you find
Something else
To do?

But a wiggle is just a wiggle
And you can talk 'til you're blue
After all, wiggles must wiggle
What else can they do?

Ida J. Lewenstein (San Mateo)

JUMP UP

Jump up
Jump up
Jump up high!

Reach up
Reach up
Touch the sky!

Touch the moon –
The sun –
And stars –
Spin with Saturn
Land on Mars.

Gaze at the comet
Streaking by.
Count all the stars
You see on high

One star, two stars
Three stars—four!
Five stars, six stars
HOW MANY MORE??

So much fun
Up here in the sky.
But it's time to leave
And say goodbye.

So wave to the sun –
Blow a kiss to the moon –
And tell the stars
You'll come back soon.

One star, two stars
Three stars—four
Five stars, six stars
And a LOT...LOT...MORE!

Eileen Malone (Broadmoor)

BIRD UNDERBELLIES

*“Miracles occur
If you care to call those spasmodic
Tricks of radiance miracles.”
—Sylvia Plath*

All day, cliffside, against everything I believe
I search the sky for a sign, any explanation
or reason to help me deal with the news
of all those children dying

beyond, a scudding stain against electric
blue, a pod of pelicans maintains a glide
slipstream, in-formation, not a flap or
wing-beat in the sea-washed air

almost ready to leave, I am caught in a shock
of a blinding flash, a shift, a swirl as if shuddered
from shaken silk, above me, the sky at once
thickens with bird underbellies reflecting the silver
sea, coalesced as one glorious firmament

signs? souls? I know only I cannot undo what has
been done by ourselves to ourselves, and cling to
my rejection of the ancient Greek idea holding
the belief of spirits as birds

yet in this apparition more saturated than drizzled
with reasons for hope, I wait and watch until the pure
white explosion of winged undersides breaks up
—and I am left to reconsider.

Eileen Malone (Broadmoor)

SHEETS INTO SWANS

Once, when I screamed the whole house awake
it was my older sister who pulled me out of bed
brought me to the window overlooking the backyard

see, she said, it's just the wind making noises
flapping the laundry lines still hung with white sheets
mother didn't bring in, leaving them, leaving us
in a hurry the way she did

understanding only too well there is no fear purer
than childhood fear, my sister stood over me
behind me, let's call those crisp, white sheets swans
good swans, nice swans

and we did, we called out to the swans. we opened
the window to the night, "hello beautiful swans"
we sang out squinting at enormous white feathered
wings all starlit and silver

it was then I learned how ghosts are not what they are
if we call them something else and if we can conjure
sheets into swans, big sisters can easily become mothers.

Eileen Malone (Broadmoor)

PULLING, LAUGHING

Shoes off, pants rolled up, holding hands
obedient to the fog shrouded signs
that cautioned no swimming allowed
dangerous-undertow

we rinsed sand-encrusted toes in choppy
metal-green foam, hopping from foot to
foot as catching the hem of a wave one
of us fell, pulling the other down laughing
pulling the other up, laughing, oblivious
to the one perfect rogue wave miles out
to sea, swelling, waiting its turn to claim us

we noticed only the cold currents swirling
around our ankles how they dragged sand
from under our feet, carrying it steadily
back to feed the surf.

Abigail Milne (Portola Valley)

WHERE I'M FROM

I am from Raisin Bran
from elderly grapes and sugar dust.
I am from the back fence rosebush
(Cream, silken sheen
drawing bees who drew my blood.)
I am from the parched front yard
the sprinkler and I laughing so hard we cried
each glistening drop a fragile summer rainbow
dissolved on my blue-stained tongue.

I'm from burnt erasers and crayon aromas
from Emily Dickinson and Theodore Geisel.
I'm from good-morning-to-you and sweet-dreams-sweet-pea
from grab a coat and nighttime adventures.
I'm from Once Upon a Time and the hold shelf
and listening with my whole body on the alphabet rug

I'm from Candy Kitchen and Mystic Point,
chitter-chatter snow cones and buttersweet hominy.
From Pop-Pop gluing jigsaws on his hand-crafted basement bar
to Rena's multitude of wedding rings.
My crowded bookshelf holds a composition book
Crayola scenes between black covers,
a childhood in waxy strokes
abandoned to fill new pages.

I am from Memory Lane—
where the sidewalk ends and I begin—
a fragile rainbow etched in crayon

Abigail Milne (Portola Valley)

FUNNY THINGS ARE EVERYWHERE

There is a bridge from here to there
Across a gorge so wide
That as I stand halfway across
I can't see either side

A riverbed of crayon wax
Spills onto tanbark shores
Echoes of blacktop laughter fade
Suspended silence roars

Tatters of soured melodies
Stick to my lungs with smog
As swings and see-saws dissipate
Into a soiled fog

I peer down into the abyss
Of endless velvet black
Longing to sink in its embrace
And feel my tongue hang slack

The rope bridge shudders at my step
I'm hanging by a thread
My shoulders burn with graphite hail
Too numb to shield my head

Trudging along, I catch a glimpse
Of fuzzy future days
A jagged city skyline slicing
Through a sunset haze

Storm-sodden clouds eclipse the scene—
Unsure, I pause to stare
Are skipping stones or avalanches
Waiting for me there?

I stand halfway across a bridge
Washed in a fragile dawn
A final glance back seals my fate
Wearied, I blunder on

Jacki Rigoni (Belmont)

A GOOD FRIDAY

Lengthening April light,
resurrection
the ubiquitous theme,
robin's red return,
white lily fireworks,
and these fuzzy,
yellow and black
ducklings, hatched
not more than three days,
disciples of mother,
trusting her across
a freeway off-ramp.

I swerve too late.
My boy and I
turn around to look
for hope, but we know.

I've lived
through too many springs
not to believe
in redemption, but first
there's the business
of rolling back the stone,
and this one is just
too heavy to budge today.

In the rearview, through
overgrown bangs, only his eyes,
those stricken eyes, wondering
what he's doing on a freeway,
behind a mother he trusted.

Three days later, happening
off our hiking trail, we follow
a sunrise-tinged finch,
take turns peeking
into her down-lined cup.

Jacki Rigoni (Belmont)

LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

Behind beachsand bricks,
beside the corner downspout,
I stood honor guard
in the ceremony of the peonies.

In an aura of soon-summer,
scented rose-ish and curly,
Mom clipped
fat blush blooms
with their frantic black ants,
wrapped them
in damp paper towels
and tin foil,
presented them
to my almost-second-grade hands,
before the first
come out, come out
wherever you are,

when playdate
wasn't yet a word,
but an unscheduled world
on the other side
of a doorbell,
teeming with neighbor kids,
sprinklers and crayfish,
caterpillars, dirty feet, scabs,
whiffle ball, black-eyed susans,
Queen Anne's lace,

until barbecued chicken
or bug spray or bedtime
called for us, one by one,
wild entourage of the peonies.

Lisa Rosenberg (Menlo Park)

KWIKSILVER

Four years old, I pose with a model airplane
on the front lawn. It is bigger than I am.
Nosewheel and wingtip lean into the grass
beside the transmitter, the one with a beetle-
green metal housing, long obsolete.
I kneel, holding the neck of the Kwiksilver
against my shoulder, not seeing all
I am modeling on a morning of open sky.
In a moment's breadth. In flagrant light.

Lee Rossi (San Carlos)

SACRIFICE FLY

Like sleepers roused too early,
bugs stumble into the new grass
flexing their unpracticed limbs and wings,

each year earlier than the last.
And yet, they are as beautiful as ever,
glossy, iridescent, or matte black—

like everything new, they snatch
our attention. This little guy, buzzing
on the sill, desperately trying any way

out, just a minute ago was desperate
to find a way in. Is it instinct, judgment
or cunning that rouses this demented

earnestness? In a day or two,
he'll be nothing but husk,
brushed away by the softest

touch. As a child I feared
every insect—caterpillars,
beetles, bees, wasps, even mosquitoes

and ants. I'd wait in the Amazonia
of right field for some looping
ball, magically accelerated

into that little used corner
of the outfield, to bend my way,
scratching my ankles and instep

the whole time, enough sulfur—
my mother's gift—in my socks
to cover my legs to the knees.

I took my exile with good humor,
cheering my more athletic teammates
and steadfastly belittling our opponents—

nobatternobatternobatter,
cricketed the chatterbox in right.
And yet, I felt lonely out there,

just me, the chiggers and fireflies,
the suffocating humidity
and the moon arching overhead,

patiently nearing its apogee,
taunting me to measure
my patience with its own.

Lee Rossi (San Carlos)

WHITE FLIGHT

We lived on the second floor
in a building two steps up
from the alley. I was two,

then two and a half. My mother
could barely crawl up the stairs.
She says I kept falling down

the stairs, that's why I needed
glasses. We had a kitchen
and two bedrooms, one for me.

I sat in my crib, face pressed
against the bars, listening
to my parents. I remember riding

my tricycle, the building—red bricks,
wooden stairs—looming behind me,
a kind of prison. I could've hurled myself

into the alley at any moment—
no fence, no gate.
I was always flying in my dreams,

why couldn't I fly here?
I peddled, hard as I could,
chubby little calves and thighs

pumping like crankshaft and pistons.
But when I hit the end of the runway,
ready to soar, the front wheel

dipped—I remember!—the power
of my imagination not enough
to lift me into air, much less

over the building across the way.
It wasn't fair. Birds could do it.
I was tired of my play penitentiary.

As I started to fall, I could see
the blood on my face, the dent
the bicycle fork would make

in my chest, the holes and
lacerations, gravel studded,
in my hands and shins.

Nothing could save me
from my reckless need
for freedom, nothing but

a twelve-year-old who'd
been playing broom ball
or kick the can

in that dingy place as if it
were enough of a place.
He stopped me

at the brink, turned me around,
pushing me toward
unwanted safety.

Tanuja Wakefield (Belmont)

ELEGY FOR DEERWOOD

The cicadas hum in the heat as I walk the old neighborhood,
along Windward Way West and Holly Ridge Road,
past the country club my parents never dined in,
the tennis courts they never served on.

I grew up among golf carts and security guards,
swayed to air conditioners and ice makers,
while the Florida wild was a pink-throated lizard
pulsing on a window screen.

How can I choose between the possum at the window,
and the blue-haired lady in her Cadillac, between the pungent
armadillo scratching the front door and Victor's hand on my
thigh?

As waves of heat wash over us, my daughter and I stumble on a
squirrel carcass
near a manicured hedge. Together we peer at the bones:
grass sprouting through the eye sockets as the cicadas crescendo.

The carpool van blaring "*Who Are You*," fur and a flake of skin
on the rodent's serpentine tail, running through the dunes, pool
parties and potlucks, a skull licked clean into a smooth white,
reading Wordsworth beside man-made lakes, mirrors of blue sky
and pine, bullfrogs hidden in sneakers, family from India, a trail
of ants across the ribcage, Elizabeth treating me to cherry cokes
from the club, hissing mailboxes, graduations, rolling green,
bridal showers, insect wings, baby showers, the boys I never
kissed, breaking glass, roller-skating in the driveway, lawns wet
with pesticides, warm rain and I don't know where I am

among the crickets, crickets, crickets.

*NOTE: *Deerwood is a gated community in Jacksonville, Florida where I grew up. It's very quiet and green with large stately homes. We were most likely one of the first Indian immigrant families to move into the community. Our family tended to keep to ourselves. We never took part in the amenities a gated community offers—like golfing and dining at the club. My parents never felt they belonged in such places. However, they still live in Deerwood in a home that holds many family moments. Whenever I visit them, I take long walks there, and those memories always wash over me and make me think of how we belong and also don't belong in certain places.*

Genevieve Zaidain (Half Moon Bay)

MISPLACED

In our white cabinets,
Donated to my mother by
Her father when he moved back to Munich,
Seen now that our second hand
Vases have been packed away,
Bound for our new, old house,
Is a cardboard box,
Inscribed in permanent marker
Across the side,
“Eva’s tapes.”

Unlike our box in the garage
that says, “nutcrackers,”
When really it was halloween costumes
Circa 1999-2004,
Or our water-damaged bin
Labeled, “bedroom,”
Which contains a really unhealthy collection
Of novelty nutcrackers inside,
This small, brown container is home
To about 25 plastic cassettes
Full of songs and music
I could hear if we still had our
Cassette player.

Jamie Zou (Menlo Park)

IF I WERE A BOOK

We'd all like to inspire odes—and others, chronicles.
Some would hope for novels
Or a romanticized retelling of a life
They're never even seen

A visceral string of 12 summers,
The 13th is when you see reality for what it is

But if each of us got only a couplet,
What would it illustrate?

Impulsive bloodlines,
What's supposed to be the golden girl

Mediocre at best
Could've bought my merits—but I choose to write my own
chapters

Hopeful youth
Solitary dreamer

I did as I was told
A product of society

How will the world remember me?
—It's for you to choose.

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CHUCK BRICKLEY

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“plum blossoms” from *On Down The Road, HSA 2017 Members’ Anthology*, edited by LeRoy Gorman (Haiku Society of America, 2017).

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“deserted schoolyard” from *But For Their Voices*, edited by Carolyn Hall (Two Autumns Press, 2015); and *earthshine* (Snapshot Press, England, 2017).

“on his youth in Japan” from *Modern Haiku* Vol.XIII, No.3, Autumn 1982; *Haiku, Anthologie Canadienne/Canadian Anthology*, edited by Dorothy Howard & Andre Duhaime (editions Asticou, Quebec, 1985); *Haiku In English: The First Hundred Years* edited by Jim Kacian, et al (W.W. Norton and Co., 2013); *But For Their Voices*, edited by Carolyn Hall (Two Autumns Press, 2015); and *earthshine* (Snapshot Press, England, 2017).

PAUL FERICANO

“Escaping Criticism” from *Looks Like Me*, Ekphrastic Poetry Series (Silver Birch Press, 2015).

“The Campanella Boy” from *Fungi Magazine* (Spring, 2019).

“Teddy Avenue” from *Loading the Revolver with Real Bullets* (Second Coming Press, 1977).

LISA ROSENBERG

“Kwiksilver” from *A Different Physics* (Red Mountain Press, 2018).

SOPHIA GAMINI, EMILIA HANSEN, JAMIE ZOU

Poems first appeared in a commemorative booklet released by Menlo Park Library. “If I were a book” was the theme of the First Youth Poetry Contest co-sponsored by the Menlo Park Library Foundation and the City of Menlo Park in 2019.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Renee Aubuchon went to Alta Loma Middle School and El Camino High School in South San Francisco in the 1960's. Her favorite things about South San Francisco are the fog, the wonderful library and places to get great food such as La Tapatia, Taqueria La Morena, and Panaderia Hernandez. She has been writing poetry since she was five years old and she is now 68. She considers teaching poetry to middle schoolers on the Hoopa Reservation one of the happiest times in her life. Renee is a retired MFT therapist and former newspaper columnist. Besides writing poetry she also paints watercolors.

Camincha Benvenuto is from Miraflores, Lima, Peru. She is the current Poet Laureate of Pacifica, California. She was selected by KDTV for their segment "One of Ours" to honor her contributions to the Latin American community. Her novella, *As Time Goes By*, was published by iUniverse. She has desktop published three chapbooks and her novel, *Con el Pasar del Tiempo*. The San Francisco Bay Guardian said: "Camincha frames the ordinary in a way that makes it extraordinary, and that is real talent."

Kaitlin Bonfiglio is Residential Faculty and Manager of Student Life & Experience in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion program at the Priory School.

Born in San Francisco, **Chuck Brickley** grew up in Daly City, graduated from Westmoor High School, the College of San Mateo, and San Jose State University. A North American haiku poet who lived for 35 years in rural British Columbia, Chuck once again calls Daly City home. His work has been published in England, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, and America, and has appeared in numerous anthologies, including *Canadian Haiku Anthology*, *Haiku: Anthologie Canadienne/Canadian Anthology*, all editions of the seminal *The Haiku Anthology*, and the Norton Anthology, *Haiku In English: The First Hundred Years*. His book, *Earthshine*, published in 2017, and already in its fourth printing, has won the Touchstone Award for Distinguished Books, and a Haiku Society of America Merit Book Award. His haibun, *Is Where The Car Is*, was nominated in 2018 for a Pushcart Prize. For more bio info: chuckbrickley.com

Aileen Cassinetto is the third Poet Laureate of San Mateo County, and the author of two poetry collections and three chapbooks.

Stephanie Dobler Cerra is a book reviewer for Kirkus Reviews and a freelance editor/writer. She has a master's degree in literature from Indiana University, specializing in Victorian Studies. Her poem, "Photograph of a Minamata Disease Victim," appeared in *The Pennsylvania Review* (1986).

Poetess Kalamu Chaché was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. She has lived and worked in East Palo Alto, California since the 1960s. Since her residency, Chaché has served the East Bayshore community of East Palo Alto and the Belle Haven area of Menlo Park in numerous professional, executive, administrative, advocacy, and artistic areas of employment and volunteer services. She has been a noted Cultural Performing Artist in the greater San Francisco Bay Area since the 1970s. She is the author of the poetry books, *Survival Tactics* and *A Change Of Interest*. In addition to these accomplishments, Chaché is a loving mother of one daughter, as well as an advocate for, friend, and mentor to thousands of children and youth who are within her sphere of influence. Chaché has served as East Palo Alto's Poet Laureate since 1983.

Sanderson Dean is an Emmy-award winning writer in the wonderful world of entertainment advertising. From NYC to LA, he's worked on thousands of movies, tv shows, and video games for numerous movie studios, television networks, and advertising agencies. And after more than 20 years in the business, it's a safe bet you've seen, heard, or read some tiny tidbit of entertainment advertising he's spent countless hours toiling over. But perhaps his biggest accomplishment – is surviving his two boys. He now resides in Burlingame, still copywriting for Hollywood, and using his spare time to write poems about poop and other messes. Sanderson's poetry, humor book, *Stark Raving Dad*, is now available at all major book stores. The book is illustrated with pre-school & grade-school art from his two boys, and packed with poems covering everything from plunging toilets, to being puked on, to grinding up Star Wars figures in the garbage disposal! You can check the book out at *RunningPress.com*, or *StarkRavingDad.com* (also on IG & FB @strkravingdad)

Paul Fericano is the co-founder of the first parody news syndicate, *Yossarian Universal News Service* (1980) and the director of SafeNet, an advocacy group that assists survivors of clergy sexual abuse. His poetry and satires have appeared in

numerous publications, including *The New York Quarterly*, *Second Coming*, *Poetry Now*, *The Realist*, *Free Lunch*, *Outlaw Poetry*, *The Wormwood Review*, *Punch* (London), *Charlie Hebdo* (Paris), and *Krokodil* (Moscow). He is the author of several poetry books and chapbooks, including *Things That Go Trump in the Night: Poems of Treason and Resistance*, *The Hollywood Catechism*, *Commercial Break*, *Driving to Reno with Freud*, and *Loading the Revolver With Real Bullets*.

Sophia Gamini is the top prize winner, grades 4-6 category, of the First Menlo Park Youth Poetry Contest, co-sponsored by the City of Menlo Park and Menlo Park Library Foundation.

Caroline Goodwin is a poet and essayist based in Montara, California. Born and raised in Anchorage, Alaska, she holds a BA in biology from The Colorado College and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia. In 1999 she moved to the San Francisco Bay Area to attend Stanford as a Wallace Stegner Fellow in poetry. She is the author of the chapbooks *Kodiak Herbal* (2008), *Gora Verstovia* (2010), and *Peregrine* (2015) and the full-length collections *Trapline* (JackLeg Press, 2013) and *The Paper Tree* (Big Yes Press, 2017). Her essays have appeared in *South Dakota Review*, *Junction Box* and *Catamaran Literary Reader*. She teaches at the Stanford Writer's Studio, California College of the Arts, and UC Berkeley Extension; from 2013 to 2015 she served as the first Poet Laureate of San Mateo County, California.

Emilia Hansen is the the top prize winner, grades 2-3 category, of the First Menlo Park Youth Poetry Contest, co-sponsored by the City of Menlo Park and Menlo Park Library Foundation.

Sarah Hansen is a freshman at Sequoia High School who loves to write poetry in her spare time. Sarah enjoys dancing ballet and playing with her dog after school. You'll often find her with any one of the Harry Potter books.

Monica Korde has worked for many years as a teacher of English and French in India. She now lives in California with her husband. A lot of her time is spent in community work, in working on freelance content writing projects, and learning new things. She has had the opportunity to also host a few local poetry open mics in the Bay Area. Her poetry has evolved over the years and most of her poems now are inspired from her many pursuits such as hiking, horseback-riding, photography, painting, and motorcycling.

Anna Krakowsky, a former child, works counseling queer and trans youth in Redwood City. They hail from New York but currently reside in San Mateo with their father's high school maybe ex-girlfriend (it seems complicated, best not to ask). They love the sound of rain, which is unfortunate for anyone living in California in the summer, but are mostly content and only tired.

Ida J. Lewenstein is a retired English-as-a-Second-Language instructor of some 22 years who wears several hats. She has written many poems, chants and rhymes to reinforce, in a fun way, the structures she was teaching. Some of these have worked their way into imaginative story poems for children. She is a long-standing member of the California Writers Club (CWC) San Francisco Peninsula Branch, and some of her poems and stories appear in their anthologies. She also belongs to the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), and is the author of several children's books. Ida attended the University of Washington, Seattle, and San Francisco State University.

Eileen Malone's poetry has been published in over 500 literary journals and anthologies, a significant amount of which have earned awards, i.e., three Pushcart nominations. Her award winning collection, *Letters With Taloned Claws*, was published by Poets Corner Press (Sacramento), and her book, *I Should Have Given Them Water*, was published by Ragged Sky Press (Princeton). Her past experience includes teaching for the California Poets in the Schools Program as well as for local community colleges. She founded and directs the Soul-Making Keats Literary Competition, and is a voting member for the Northern California Book Reviewers Awards.

Abigail Milne is a thespian, musician, poet, and student at Woodside Priory in Portola Valley. She composes her own songs and plays the ukelele in her free time.

Jacki Rigoni writes within the found spaces of single parenting her three children in the San Francisco Bay area, where she serves as Poet Laureate of Belmont, California. She has an M.A. in English from UC Berkeley, and is a credentialed teacher. A finalist for the 2018 Francine Ringold Award for New Writers, her poems appear or are forthcoming in *Nimrod International Journal*, *Moon City Review*, and *Poems-For-All*. An educator and award-winning copywriter by profession, Jacki's other writing can be found on TV and the back of snack packaging.

Lisa Rosenberg is the author of *A Different Physics*, winner of the 2017 Red Mountain Poetry Prize. A former Wallace Stegner Fellow in Poetry at Stanford University, she holds degrees in physics and creative writing, and worked as an engineer in the space program. She has recently been awarded a 2020 Djerassi Artist Residency where she will be one of twelve international artists and scientists participating in the cross-disciplinary “Scientific Delirium Madness” residency that includes public and academic forums, and published blogs and articles in LEONARDO/ISAST’s journal from MIT Press. Lisa served as the 2017-2018 Poet Laureate of San Mateo County.

Lee Rossi is the author of three books of poetry and has appeared in numerous anthologies. His poems, reviews and essays have been published in journals throughout the country, including *The Harvard Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The North American Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *The Southeast Review*, *The Atlanta Review*, *The Green Mountains Review*, *The Sun*, *Poetry East*, *Chelsea*, *The Wormwood Review*, *Nimrod*, the *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Poet Lore*, *Pedestal*, *The Southern Poetry Review*, and *The Southern Indiana Review*. He is a winner of the Sense of Site poetry contest sponsored by the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department. From 1986 to 1992, he edited *Tsunami*, a journal of contemporary poetry based in Los Angeles. He is currently Staff Reviewer and Interviewer for *Pedestal*, an online magazine based in North Carolina.

Tanuja Wakefield is a poet, writer, and editor. Her first book, *Undersong*, was published in 2019 by FutureCycle Press. Her poems have been published in numerous journals and anthologies. She has an MFA in Poetry from San Francisco State University, an MA in English from Tulane University, and a BA in English from Wellesley College. She lives with her family in Belmont, California where she served as Poet Laureate from 2015 to 2018.

Genni Zaidain is a senior in high school from Half Moon Bay. She is enrolled at CSM’s Early College Program. A visual artist all her life, Genni has found new passion in writing and hopes to pursue it along with fine arts in college. She has not been able to decide on a creative path to go down, and has finally learned that the world is too beautiful to just pick one.

Jamie Zou is the the top prize winner, grades 7-8 category, of the First Menlo Park Youth Poetry Contest, co-sponsored by the City of Menlo Park and Menlo Park Library Foundation.