



# PEN IN HAND

LITERARY JOURNAL JULY 2023

**M** MARYLAND  
WRITERS'  
ASSOCIATION

*Dedicated to the Art, Business,  
and Craft of Writing Since 1988*

# PEN IN HAND

The Biannual Literary Journal  
of the Maryland Writers' Association

July 2023

Editors: Roderick Deacey and Kari Martindale

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# Message from the Editors

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We'd like to thank President Amy Kaplan for her encouragement as we have continued to improve the standard in MWA's flagship literary journal, *Pen in Hand*! This is our way of waving to the world, saying, "Check out the great poets and writers we have in Maryland!"

Inside this issue, you will find terrific poems from some of the best poets in the state—old and young, award winners as well as those awaiting discovery. Prose writers have been sending us some great stuff, too! We appreciate that members are giving us their best submissions, which helps us to create a literary journal that represents us all.

You will have noticed that our cover this time features a spectacular painting by poet and visual artist Nicole Abuhamada, from MWA's Frederick Chapter. Nicole also has two poems inside! Thank you, Nicole!

We had a number of compliments about the artworks on the front and back covers of the previous issue. These paired up with ekphrastic poems inside—and we will again feature poems that are about, or prompted by, visual works of art in the January 2024 issue. Poets involved in ekphrastic readings during the summer and fall, please let us know!

At the end of the poetry section, there is an appropriately

short section on haiku. This is a prompt for entries to be sent in for a haiku section in the next issue. These three-line poems—or sometimes one-liners—are often considered to be the most difficult forms to write well, so we thought we would challenge everyone! We will offer a magnificent prize for the best, as well as publication for the top ten.

*Pen in Hand* is an excellent showcase for MWA members—so please keep your poems, essays, memoirs, flash fiction, and short stories flowing in! Thank you for your support!

Roderick Deacey and Kari Martindale, **Editors, *Pen in Hand***

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# Message from the President

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Kudos to Roderick Deacey and Kari Martindale for once again producing a beautiful *Pen in Hand* journal packed with terrific contributions from MWA members, and this time with an awesome custom-painted cover. They have raised the bar even higher in this publication. I look forward to seeing the haiku our members create.

Since haiku are short, here are a couple of short quotes to ponder:

*“A word after a word after a word is power.”*

— Margaret Atwood

*“Always be a poet, even in prose.”*

— Charles Baudelaire

Amy Kaplan, **President**



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# POETRY

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## Forever Marylyn

by Shirley J. Brewer

Ninety and petite,  
a charmer in a celery-green suit,  
Marylyn poses at her grandson's wedding reception  
near rows of mini cherry pies. She smiles  
like a proud mama who has just given birth  
to these pastry babies.  
Beyond baking, her skilled hands create  
patchwork colors, embroidered designs.  
On a tour of her Ohio home, I notice scraps of fabric

peppering the front room,  
a line of pins up the arm of a chair.  
Piles of quilts fill every table and alcove space.  
Marylyn Heffelfinger, domestic genius,  
exudes old-fashioned country roots. Plain-spoken,  
at ease with a sewing machine and oven mitts.

Next stop: Marylyn's bedroom. I expect  
a display of family photographs in solid frames,  
maybe a sturdy cabinet overflowing with figurines.  
Nothing prepares me for Lana Turner's boudoir:  
a gilded dressing table mirror reflects shapely  
glass bottles offering a whiff of glamour.  
Did I miss clues in the scarlet pies, the ornate quilts?  
Marylyn glows as I recite the alluring perfume names:  
*Forever Krystle, Scoundrel, Night Musk, Masquerade.*

*This poem is from Shirley J. Brewer's latest collection, "Wild Girls,"  
published by Apprentice House Press in June 2023.*

**Trash Bag Rose**  
*by Shirley J. Brewer*

My mother crafted a good luck  
black cat from a plastic trash bag  
in her Silver Seniors art class.  
She called it Rose.

Rose starred as the Halloween  
mascot for my speech therapy kids.  
Vowels and consonants tricked them.  
Yet, they mastered the dramatic meow:

high-pitched, screechy, out-of-tune.  
Nine lives later, Rose collapsed—  
her Styrofoam parts fatally dented  
by an excess of affection.

With solemn honors,  
the school custodian carried our feline off  
to an unseen burial place. Grieving,  
I picture Mom adding the snazzy

orange ribbons, pipe cleaner whiskers,  
a tail with wiry attitude.  
Trash Bag Rose, Wild Mom—you two  
feisty babes still conjure magic spells.  
You spark an abundance of pluck.

*This poem is from Shirley J. Brewer's latest collection, "Wild Girls,"  
published by Apprentice House Press in June 2023.*

**Unstill Life**  
*by Claudia Gary*

Late in the day  
we balance the stone  
that offers to hold us,  
pose us:

I will draw you  
as you draw a vase,  
forgetting I'm here.  
I'm here

bringing in color,  
paint-pencils, brush,  
sharpeners, water.  
Water

diffuses the light,  
unshades every edge.  
Where is your shadow?  
Show me.

## Sapphics for a Fine Mind

*by Claudia Gary*

Trap of steel that benefits all your learning—  
grasping concepts, studying light and shadow,  
hearing songs, exploring each upbeat, downbeat,  
memory's cadence—

won't let go until it has found another  
subject, which had better not be the wrong one:  
only beauty, pleasure, delight. The right phrase  
fills you with music.

Oh, but if I utter a note of worry,  
light is lost, forgotten amid the shading.  
Melody has vanished within the hubbub.  
Echo is empty.

Where's the key to open these jaws, release joy,  
seize the buried treasure this trap was built for?  
Paint away the worry of words, disarm them  
so they can't harm you.

**Ėvolūtiōnis**  
*by Nicole Abuhamada*

Insects were the first  
to evolve wings—  
    before the Pteranodon, Cormorant,  
    or Quetzalcoatl.

They didn't need each other,  
insect and bird.  
    Only later, and then only  
    to prey

and predate.  
But their bodies came  
    to the same conclusion—  
    in different time.

Writer, reader,  
we will reach these conclusions  
    in our own time.  
    We do not need each other.

Only later, and then only  
to liquidate  
    and sublime  
    like rime into vapor into rime.

The dictionary tells us:  
*turn your worst impulse into art.*  
    Vaporize something—  
    and watch it return to itself.



How can the definition  
of sublimation  
    be disjunctive—  
    when purity is absolute?

I have turned enough desires over  
and painted the undersides.

    Any time now,  
    they will condense in kind.

Cryophytes will rise from rhyme.

**Lucilia Sericata**  
*by Nicole Abuhamada*

Stumbling  
    across phantasmagorias,  
a cross is only what  
    you do.

The body, my own  
    I am told,  
    was cast away,  
now makes  
    a knot  
        on the tangled road.

Cloaked and bald  
    a cloistered monk  
    unfolds.

Hunched modestly,  
this humble familiar prays,  
    holding vigil over  
  
    my headlight-stained contour.

Even juvenile vultures  
    know the meaning of meat,  
    redolent of a craving  
        for completion  
        hitherto incomplete.

My ribcage will surely snap  
under the weight of so much  
    cacography—  
every stem of me

gathered  
to nest.

But in my hollowed chest  
upwells a candelabra  
wick lit from within.  
Adipocere,  
a lovely word  
for corpse wax, runs  
golden and lachrymose.

The dappled lamp is weak—  
but the heat persistent,  
and this wake  
lasts longer than meat.

And the incense  
of olive oil  
and iron  
fades,  
becoming crushed scoria  
becoming soil.

*Lucilia Sericata*

makes a home in me.  
Sacrifice is my legacy,  
an honor etched into

bone

with a still sharper

beak.

**Anomia**  
*by Terri Simon*

*(Anomia: the inability to name objects or to recognize  
the written or spoken names of objects)*

I look at you and say “blue.”

All I wish for  
is to unfold my inner origami  
as a gift to you, yet  
when you ask what I want,  
all I can say is “pizza.”

You squirm, claim  
I don’t understand,  
and all I can say  
is “car, porch, broccoli.”

## **Distaff: Cassandra**

*by Terri Simon*

I can tell you your future,  
each glorious, sunlit success,  
every dire, depressing failure,  
but you won't believe me.

Not your fault.  
It's just my curse.  
Apollo blessed me with prophecy,  
but, devoted as I was,  
I only loved him as a worshipper  
loves her god, not as a woman  
does a man, and so I turned away.  
Apollo, anger replacing unrequited love,  
cursed me, to never have my true words believed.

I warned Agamemnon, tried to worry  
him about the hollow horse,  
to no avail.  
My efforts came to naught.  
They think me insane,  
don't understand my words,  
lock me in a tower.  
They do not heed me,  
and they die.  
I see it all  
and can change nothing.  
I try. I try again  
and again,  
using any measly, pathetic  
words I can find.  
And still I fail.

I babble into infinity.  
And no  
one  
listens.



## Communications

*by Anita Nahal*

- i.  
for one reason or another halt, break, fall through. Fall
- ii.  
through the cracks as thin as pencil tracings or leaf veins. Fall
- iii.  
hitting off people's pride thicker than a bank vault's door. Fall
- iv.  
because others are unaware of broken souls. Fall
- v.  
because broken souls are humble and brittle. Fall
- vi.  
because humility doesn't taste spicy. Fall
- vii.  
because petals flying from another garden seem lost. Fall
- viii.  
because fragrance from wildflowers seems worthless. Fall
- ix.  
because some don't see their own forefinger  
admonishing them. Stop
- x.  
Please. Crushed ice finally knows where it came from  
and starts clinking.

## The Bald Eagle

by Anita Nahal

They lived in a house. A house on the hill. A hill that was sparse yet warm. Warm and regal like the beating full chest of an American bald eagle soaring high above the house, pondering myriad paradigms, peering at occupants including the sprightly dog, as if it could be food.

Wait, just wait, dear calculating, sly humanoids, wait. Don't rush to biased conclusions. Don't open your crooked jaws or nod your puny brains and spew out shocking exclamations. Shock is what sits on the sagacious lips of the bald eagle as she watches you burn the very mound you sleep upon. Germinating the very bane of your final moments in a planet roasting. Only AI might survive in the unknown singularity. Posthuman eras may have new Earthians ruling with severity.

No, the bald eagle's thought was different as she exigently raised her knotted brows. Brow one, brow two, twisted and curved. From which she severed. Didn't wanna be hit hard like the smack of a baseball bat in motion, no lotion could easily soothe. Nor be bit by cruel human words like poison darts with yellow betelnut cracked teeth with no relieving tastes underneath. See that's just it. The bald eagle couldn't get human anger, jealousies, or pettiness. One that had no stapled plan of readiness.

What does? What gives? Who are they? These humans? Aliens left here for experimentation. By whom? Gods? In their own image? Or survivors from Noah's ark? Or from hidden caves in the mountain *Hanuman* carried with life giving *Sanjivini* bark and all?

No need to stall in any way. Cold war and hot are here to stay. War-death, famine-death, thirst-death, terrorism-death, cold eyes sighting nothing but a dystopian end.

From which bend of humanity's seditious, tempestuous, provocative, seductive waist will I peer and see a spark in the bald eagle swaying without haste in the thick of a serene wind atop a swing set in a children's park?

*\* Hanuman: Hindu God who was portrayed in the Hindu epic "Ramayana" as a companion to God Rama and who fought loyally to bring Rama's queen, Sita, home from Ravana.*

## Soap Opera Elegy

*by Lora Berg*

*“Playful Kiss,”* why did you end?

Why only 16 episodes, like a lad lost at 16 in a midnight crash, a life yet to unfold, until we learn it wasn't him but his twin, switched at birth, a tragedy, and still, we touch our thumbs and pointers together to form hearts mostly for our hero.

I wasn't ready to shed my earphones, longed instead for 16 more episodes, and 16 after that, and 16 more, multiples of 16 extending all the way to infinity

∞

the young couple twirling

together

apart

together

apart

ever deeper into the knot of love, soft close-ups in rain with K-pop serenaders purring in the background. I wanted their love to keep growing like a giant gauzy bubble blown at a fair where the children watch dazed, and watching, never age.

## **Loving Words'**

*by Lora Berg*

curves, syllabic rise and fall, ease of melody, wink of i's,  
these beauties we live among that tantalize the tongue  
are our own making, elating as water's chill as we rinse  
clay from our hands. Like amulets, each offers its spells,  
tells how time has stretched, scarred, and now lifted it  
to the sun for meaning to emanate through its facets,  
the way bliss shines through wrinkled skin, on meeting  
a word so new it teethes, shakes a rattle, takes first steps,  
pronounced and beaming necessary-ness into this world—  
only to say it isn't possible to write in an everyday way  
but with each letter forward to keep loving words.

**Flight 93**  
*by Jack Slocomb*

The dull frizzled crimped goldenrod tips  
stilled leftovers of once-yellow flowers  
and soft pollen  
flex and sway in the northwesterly  
biting blows  
that scour  
the clean contoured point  
where the tons of diving wings  
and steel and aluminum  
and red and green rubber coated copper wire  
and foam and fabric  
and courageous living flesh  
and screams  
and hating maddened hearts  
all smashed with fire and blast  
that mild morning  
in a forfeited ordinary time

And nothing now  
only the emptiness  
of a strange wind chanting  
in sacerdotal space

The world must come of age  
sometime  
and yield its raging  
and begin to speak new congenial sentences  
what more to say

By late summer next season  
the desiccated brown goldenrod stalks



will have turned a deep warm green  
and the tips will break out again  
into delicate sweet blossoms  
and they will weep their prayers  
for Flight 93  
and for this wracked pitied  
piece of earth  
to pour forth waving white  
supple petals  
of peace

**Revelations**  
*by Jack Slocomb*

There is a white skein  
of fungus  
fast enveloping  
in its many-tendrilled way  
the bone-dry  
gnarled  
shattered shard  
of decaying log  
I always mark  
along the berm  
of my daily treading

The sense of things  
not in place one day  
and coming into being  
the next  
is surely  
a bewilderment

Like in the same hour  
the jackhammering  
woodpecker  
somewhere echoing  
in the newly leafing trees

Or later on  
the riveting repeating scritch  
of an unknown  
single bit  
of bird  
concealed

in the wiry impervious  
bush

And yes  
the russet wisp  
of a thrush  
bulleting  
across the grassy space  
where my body  
is easing down  
for a time  
from its days  
of data jam weariness  
that too

And the east drifting river  
over there  
making a wholly fresh  
claim on me today  
now a richer thick  
and abyssal green

Never the same  
never the same

Oh  
I couldn't do much better  
than to live in  
than to revel in  
these unrestrained revelations  
for a while

## A Lesson in Petrification

*by Gabby Gilliam*

Screen door blows ajar  
nothing now but air between  
me and the summer storm

sky roiling in aberrant waves  
and I worry for my tomatoes  
heavy on their vines

nothing to prevent this wind  
from prematurely ripping stems  
to toss them into puddle-churned earth.

Lightning spotlights a lone tree  
branches still while the tempest turns  
the yard into an unfamiliar landscape

and I wonder what it would be like  
to have roots that run so deep  
that Nature's fury cannot shake you.

**Aubade**  
*by Gabby Gilliam*

I would kiss a rainbow  
down your body

curves softer than light

begin with plump red plum  
of your lip already swollen

trail my mouth across satin petals  
of your slender lines

to buttery sunbeam  
dancing on curve of hip

decorate the deep purple  
of your hidden hollows

with passionate color

just to hold  
this union  
on my tongue

## **Please Come Clean**

*by Fran Abrams*

I'm really tired of you tossing  
mustard-stained shirts into my belly.  
It's a lot of effort to get out those ugly spots  
even with all the detergent you insist on

pouring in. Have you never read  
the instructions on the bottle? Or did you  
skip the class on how to use a cap to measure?  
Of all the families I could have been placed with,

here I am in the laundry room of the family  
that insists on having drippy lasagna every Tuesday  
and greasy fried chicken on Sundays, the people  
who pour buckets of ketchup and mustard on burgers.

How many times have I heard you say,  
"It'll come out in the wash," never  
taking into consideration how much work  
that means for me.

## Greetings from the ATM

*by Fran Abrams*

I see ya, ya know,  
squinting your eyes,  
trying to remember your PIN,  
searching your wallet for a scrap of paper  
it might be written on.

I feel your sticky fingers punch my buttons.  
Go easy I beg you.  
I will give up your money just as fast as I can.  
Let me count these twenties.  
Again.

I imagine you complained  
about the price of bourbon  
you planned to buy before you said,  
“Excuse me” to the clerk  
and left to withdraw more cash.

Thankfully, I cannot smell you.  
If I could, I fear I could not perform my job.  
It’s bad enough to breathe the odor of cash  
hundreds of people have handled before me.

And that receipt that ejected  
along with your plastic.  
Please read the message printed there—  
*I have your money. I’ll remember you next time.*

## My Little Sister Looked Up to Me

by Lois Villemaire

*After Vitaliano Bassett "Girls Dancing" (Italy) 1954*

I wish I had spent more time with her,  
the baby of the family.

I, the eldest, held her tiny hand  
as we whirled in circles and fell down together.  
She in a dress with smocking, puffed sleeves,  
barrettes in her curly hair.

Less time at home, I began to go out,  
learned to drive, was invited to sleep-overs,  
as she played in kindergarten.

She hid my purse when my date  
arrived at the door. It was later found  
in the ceramic umbrella stand.  
Did she think I would stay home?

I wish I had spent more time with her.

I cut her hair too short—  
she never got mad. I read her stories,  
but busy with the wonders  
of being a teenager, I don't remember  
the days of her childhood.

Later, the years between us disappeared.  
Sisters, a concrete bond nothing could crush  
—except her illness.

There was no stopping the force  
that stole her away  
and left me whirling in circles.



**No Strings**  
*by Lois Villemaire*

*After Remedios Varro "The Red Weaver"*  
*(Spain, Mexico) 1956*

She stayed  
tangled in knitting  
her color fading to blue  
as she rocked in a chair  
moving to the cadence  
of her ragged breath  
never casting doubt aloud.

She chose to stop treatment,  
grasping the goodness  
of each day  
instead of the numbness  
drugs delivered.

When she left  
she was calm,  
eyes open,  
at ease with transition,  
her arms became wings,  
no strings to untie  
when she floated away.

**Well**  
*by Salisa Grant*

The city moves around me  
as my feet fold into the ground.

Planted—toes dancing joyfully  
in the earth.

I do not wish to be shifted  
by the tides or winds.

We have been moved by boats,  
by brilliant blows to body and soul.

Blows that cracked, separated  
and confused.

Dismembered and dis-remembered—  
we have forgotten enough.

For now, I will hold onto the hot concrete  
beneath my feet.

Those wicked waters  
already know me well.

## Second Summer

*by Salisa Grant*

Cicadas filled your  
second summer.

Their songs could be heard in the branches of every tree—  
we stepped over them  
and moved back into the world.

Outside again,  
breathing the air we so hungered for  
before.

We were eager  
to live in public again.

## **Audience**

*by Lisa Green-Cudek*

Sliding through her skull  
contained  
but for the tapping of fingers  
a dream dances on paper

A dancer sits still  
expectant

There are no shapes in her words  
only evolving horizontal images  
sounds rippling water over stones  
in a vertical progression down the page

melting and jolting  
continuous  
melting and jolting

Words that have no meaning to another  
moving limbs that half cry to no one  
each spectacle is private in its imperfection

melting and jolting

Every word desires to be read  
every limb, to be touched

Eyes eat  
and feed  
her hunger

**Moss and Thistle**  
*by Lisa Green-Cudek*

I want them  
to leave me here  
alone  
with grass and sky

I need the quiet of the evening  
the lulling lowness of the clouds  
to sweep me clean and free me  
sit me still and till me  
like the porous earth  
of which I am a prodigal part

I crave to be found  
in the song around  
a melody of hills and mounds  
greens and browns

Winter here is gentle  
It brings forth velvet moss  
where not long ago  
thistles armed the land

## Winterizing

*by Joanne Oh*

When we notice  
that the leaves need raking,  
we clean the gutters out  
as well, start caulking windows,

slide a weather strip  
under the door,  
reverse the fan  
to push air to the floor.

After all this work, we know  
the heater could still stop,  
putting pipes at risk  
when the temperature drops.

Yet when the pressure  
grew too strong and broke  
the pipe between us,  
we cracked

a worn-out joke  
and claimed the pipe,  
neglected,  
started crying,

though what went wrong  
wasn't lack of trying.

## When the Football Stream Lags

*by Joanne Oh*

the players become squares  
on the screen.

The remote sits on the TV stand,  
his head on your lap.

You stay there.  
Your leg is asleep anyway.

His sighing—no,  
his breathing—fills the gaps

when the cheering cuts out.  
By now, the two-minute warning

should've been called.  
You can't make out the score

or the time,  
how long two minutes

will take to play out,  
how long the two of you

will stay on the couch  
together.

When most would've given up,  
you stay on the channel,

hoping the ambiguities  
will become clear.

**Wörter verloren**  
*by Kari Martindale*

*From a painting by April M Rimpo,  
“Morning Commute” (2015)*

Stirring emotions of living a continent away  
seemingly centuries ago,  
spurring me to search  
for the words that have been *vorloren*,  
fallen from me along the path I ride.

I search for these *Wörter* in the snow,  
words to describe the merriment  
of *Weihnachtszeit* in Deutschland  
or a Sunday hike  
through Liechtenstein *Schnee*.  
I search for a word to describe evenings  
of wandering the streets of Salzburg  
as concertos of perfect *Schneeflocken* fall.  
I search for all the words for the Alps:  
the majestic, inviting, enchanting, looming *Alpen*.  
Words that have slid  
off the roof  
of *eines Chalets*  
and melted away.

I search the forest, remembering  
breathing in the freshest of *Luft*.  
I search for words that rolled  
down  
vineyards  
and spilled  
into the *Rhein*.



I search for the words in the bicycles,  
as words once mine  
circle the *Bodensee* still today.

I search for the words my husband used  
for his daily commute,  
when he peacefully pedaled  
from Dieburg  
to Darmstadt,  
Darmstadt  
to Dieburg—

words that now litter I-70.

The words—*die Wörter!*—  
may have coasted out of sight  
but the memories remain,  
forging *eine Brücke*  
from *meinem Herzen* to this painting.

I thirst for new words—  
*palabras, mots, parole, Wörter*—  
*words!*

I want to gather them all like raspberries,  
staining my fingertips with the joy of *Sommer*  
until my basket overflows.  
I crave finding them, clutching them,  
holding them close,  
even knowing I will someday lose them  
when *Zukunft* drifts into *Vergangenheit*.

Did I ever know a word to describe  
the intersection of *Nostalgie* and *Fernweh*?

Where pining to return to paths I've ridden  
meets longing for paths I've yet to ride?  
Whatever the word  
that's where I dwell,  
in between yearnings,  
as words come and go.

## The Same Walk

*by Roderick Deacey*

I take the same walk every day—  
making observations, unearthing unnoticed connections.

On a rock, a fresh thumbprint of lichen stands out  
like a sore thumb—what else? A tendril of vetch

agitates a fence post—each data point repaints  
the picture, rewrites subtext, changes a footnote.

One goldfinch forages where four had previously  
skittered between seedheads. Thirteen robins

eat hawthorn berries where sixteen perched before,  
finding fallen berries amid the Japanese anemones.

Even the nut-seeking squirrels stutter-step between trees  
in fewer numbers than recently recorded.

These small lives are part of the landscape that contains us,  
their patterns overlaid and weaving to form the whole.

But the big picture seems to be rearranging—everything  
responds to shifts in the continuum.

The trees are slow to react—or are they? They wail  
in the silence, whisper in the darkness,

while their measured green thoughts travel underground  
along mycelia, almost invisible fungal networks.

These fine, nerve-like threads link trees via their roots—  
we live inside a vast structure where all life is connected.

There appears to be no master planner, no master plan,  
there are only constant small adjustments.

I walk the same walk every day—it's never the same walk.  
I codify the changes in suitably small poems.

It's just like pointing,  
pointing at the moon.

## **The Balancing Act**

*by Roderick Deacey*

Across the flickering years  
we find ourselves at peace.  
Grand passion recedes to fond memory  
but steadfast love remains.  
Children leave, grandchildren grow  
impossibly tall. Finally,  
only the two of us are left—  
but all is in balance.

In the evenings, we sit close  
so we may clasp hands  
when we feel the need.  
At night, we sleep touching;  
without touching we cannot sleep.  
We have reached equilibrium, stasis,  
something akin to contentment.

Yet time is always there lurking—  
every so often it reaches out to stroke us  
with one clawed paw.  
Our bodies fray, become frail.

Of late, an uneasy feeling has inched  
its way out of the ink-black night:  
    pressing wordlessly into dreams,  
    pushing away sleep's release,  
    sliding inside like a gut-wrenching gasp of icy air,  
    nagging like a three-in-the-morning wisp of thought,  
    whispering quietly, so quietly,  
    saying, soon enough

one of us will slip away.

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# HAIKU CHALLENGE

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*These sample haiku are taken from the 50 States Haiku manuscript,  
by Kari Martindale:*

**Idaho**

*by Kari Martindale*

Snake River sidewinds  
slithering through steel arch spans  
hissing waterfalls

**North Dakota**

*by Kari Martindale*

prairie dogs pop up  
tourists playing whack-a-mole  
with a camera flash

**About the Haiku World and the Haiku Challenge**

The deceptively simple, mostly three-line descendent of a powerful old Japanese form, the English language haiku remains as hard to master as ever. As in many formal poems, the requirements of the form are ultimately both liberating and restrictive—which leads directly to divisions that exist in the haiku world today.

Haiku traditionalists prefer the old rules: the 5-7-5 syllable pattern, nature-based topics with seasonal references, and the surprise “turn” somewhere in lines two or three. A number of traditional haiku journals will only consider publishing haiku that follow these conventions.

The modernists, on the other hand, pare down the syllables to essentials regardless of count, cover any topics that occur to them, don't automatically include seasonal references and may use in moderation frowned-upon poetic devices like internal rhymes, wordplay and alliteration.

Traditionalists prefer to keep the poet out of the poem, while modernists tolerate the use of the first person, and may allow feelings and impressions to be expressed, on a poem-by-poem basis rather than by established rules.

To convey the ideas in the limited words of a haiku, both schools of thought use the present tense, no punctuation, and the "turn," to keep their "one breath—two images" poems in the moment. Unlike conventional poetry, haiku rely upon the reader's participation to flesh out and complete the picture—hence the description of a haiku as a "wordless" poem.

At *Pen in Hand*, we don't care which school you belong to— we just want to see up to three haiku from you for next January's featured Haiku Section! There will be an appropriate prize for the best poem and only the most successful haiku will be published. We're looking for what Allen Ginsberg described as "*little jumps of freedom into eternity!*"

We're telling you now to give you plenty of time to come up with some good ones! Please email entries in the body of the email to [peninhand@marylandwriters.org](mailto:peninhand@marylandwriters.org) any time before November 1, 2023 with "Haiku Entry" in the subject line.



## Haiku: Six Fly, Some Walk, One Sings

*by Roderick Deacey*

fleeting shadows  
pin me to the patio—  
Canada geese

high-flying buzzards  
death spied from four miles away—  
desert first responders

flying fish glide  
from the ferry's bow wave—  
Catalina welcome

kingfisher dives deep  
wriggling fish—  
smartphone catch

great blue heron  
one push  
airborne

happiness  
swoop and gone—  
a bluebird

wild turkeys—  
don't need  
no stinkin' watches

disguised as a reed  
the bittern blows his cover—  
boom

Please visit **The Haiku Foundation** ([thehaikufoundation.org](http://thehaikufoundation.org))  
and the **Haiku Society of America** ([hsa-haiku.org](http://hsa-haiku.org))  
for additional information and examples.

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PROSE

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## The Liar

by Kathleen Fine

“How you feelin’?” you ask, as you adjust the pillows behind Astrid’s tiny five-year-old head. You try to reposition her frail body upright to help drain the excess secretions from her nose and throat. She grimaces. You force a smile.

“I heard Santa is visiting today,” you say, as you turn the almost-empty IV pump to hold, hang the new bag on the pole taking the stopper off, remove the tubing from the old bag and insert the tubing into the new bag.

You see Astrid’s eyes light up. “He is?” she asks, her eyes lighting up with a hint of hope.

“He sure is.” You smile. “What will you ask for?”

It’s December 3rd. You don’t think Astrid will live until Christmas. Most definitely won’t.

“A paint set and My Little Pony,” she exclaims. You see her imagining all the presents that will be under her tree in a few weeks. See her imagining herself going home.

“You’ll have to tell Santa that’s what you want, and he’ll bring it to you on Christmas morning,” you lie. You turn the pump back on and make sure to change the volume amount in the pump settings.

Astrid smiles. “How’s your puppy?” she asks. You’d told her two weeks ago you got a puppy. Something to talk about. You don’t tell her you live alone in a shitty studio apartment since it’s located only two bus stops from the hospital. You don’t tell her you don’t have any pets. No husband. No kids. Just you and your Lean Cuisines and nightly *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*.

“He’s a little devil. He chewed up my new shoes last night!” you say. Astrid giggles.

“What color shoes?” she asks.

“My fancy red high heels,” you say. You don’t tell her

you haven't worn heels in years. You don't tell her they hurt your plantar fasciitis. You don't tell her you wouldn't have anywhere to wear them anyways even if you did own them. You hand her ice chips held in a purple *Frozen* plastic cup.

"That silly Oscar," Astrid says, placing an ice chip on her tongue. You'd let her pick the puppy's name when you told her you were getting a dog. You'd found photos of lab puppies on Google and showed them to her. Told her she could meet him when she got out. You glance out of the window and see Astrid's parents approaching the building from the parking lot, carrying a Sammy's Subs bag. You smooth the pretend hair on Astrid's head and stand up.

"Looks like mommy and daddy are back. I'm going to check on our friends," you say. Astrid raises her brows towards the window, and you walk into the hallway and enter Vernon's room. His mother is asleep on the pull-out chair and he's playing some sort of a gaming device. You wave your hands in his peripheral vision as to not wake up his mother. He looks up and smiles, placing the device on his lap.

"Minecraft?" you ask, gesturing towards the device. You don't tell him you hate video games. You don't tell him you think they are rotting the brain cells of every child in the world.

Vernon nods.

"So cool," you whisper as you change out his IV, "How're you feeling today?"

"Not good," he whispers, "Feel pukey."

You raise your brow. "Did you throw up?" you ask, checking his temperature.

"No, but feel like I'm going to." His brown face turning a dark green hue. You add some Zofran into his IV to stop the nausea.

"Any pain?" you ask, checking on how much pain medicine he's receiving.

"The same." He clenches his jaw. You make a note to

check with the doctor about upping his dose. No point in him being in pain during his last days.

“Are you excited to see Santa this afternoon?” You change out his catheter.

“I’m too old for that crap.” Vernon frowns.

“Too old? Aren’t you only twelve?” you ask. You fluff the blanket on his bed and put his device on its charger.

“Almost thirteen,” he says. You don’t tell him he’s not almost thirteen. You don’t tell him he’ll never be thirteen.

“You’re never too old for Santa,” you say. “I love seeing Santa even now that I’m an old lady.” You don’t tell him you grew up Jewish and are now an atheist. You don’t tell him you’ve never sat on Santa’s lap in your whole life.

“Can I ask you something?” he asks, scratching at the tape around the IV on his hand.

“Of course,” you say as you look over as his mother shifts positions in her chair.

“Am I gonna die?” He whispers so quietly; you almost don’t hear him.

You pause what you are doing for a second. Only a second. You don’t think he notices. “We’re going to get you as good as new,” you say.

“Mom says I’m going to get better. But I’m not stupid. I know I’m in here to die,” he says. “I know I’m dying.”

You fluff his pillow and prop him up. You walk over and change the water in the vase of flowers. It’s getting brown and smelly. You wipe a smudge from the window with the sleeve of your undershirt.

“I said I know I’m dying,” Vernon repeats himself. You turn your eyes from the window and look at him. You’re startled at his accusation. You swallow hard.

“We’re all dying, aren’t we?” you say. “What do you want for Christmas?” You change the subject. It’s always good to change the subject.

You watch as Vernon shifts in the bed.

"Fortnite for my Xbox." He points towards his device.

You smile and make a mental note. You think he'll make it to Christmas. Maybe even make it to Valentine's Day.

"Is that one of those shooting games?" you ask, crossing your arms, a grin on your face. You don't tell him that he shouldn't be spending the last days of his life killing pretend people on a gaming device.

Vernon smiles. "Battle game. It's awesome."

"Just make sure to tell Santa when you see him this afternoon," you whisper as you walk towards the door. You give Vernon a wink.

Vernon rolls his eyes and waves goodbye.

You head towards Wynne's room and peek inside. Her parents are gripping both of her hands and her eyes are still closed. She's been unconscious since Sunday and it's only a matter of days.

"Do you need anything?" you ask gently as you approach the mother and father. Their faces are puffy and wet from crying. Eyes, bloodshot from lack of sleep.

Wynne's mom, Megan, turns her head and looks at you in despair. You place your hand on her shoulder.

"Do you think she can hear us?" she asks, "We've been talking to her."

"I think so," you lie as you check Wynne's vitals. You don't tell her that Wynne is on so much morphine, she most probably cannot hear them.

"Do you think she could make it till Christmas?" her dad asks, his eyes filled with hope.

You look down at Wynne. You look at the tubes in her nose. At her skeletal body. "You never know," you say. You don't say you doubt Wynne will make it through the week. You don't say Wynne might not even make it until tomorrow. So instead, you say, "There's always hope."

You leave the grieving parents alone. Give them privacy. There's nothing you can do for her now except let her be with her parents and make sure she's not in pain.

You step into the hallway and check the time—4:05 pm. Your shift ended five minutes ago, and Shelly should be taking over soon. Shelly loves the shift when Santa comes. He'll be coming right before supper. You go to your locker, gather your things, and pass by Shelly. You fill her in on the patients before exiting the building.

As you wait for the bus stop, you go to your Amazon account. You add a paint set, a My Little Pony, and a Fortnite game to your cart. You click to have them over-nighted. You'll wrap them in the morning and place them in Vernon and Astrid's rooms while they're asleep tomorrow. You'll write, "Love Santa" on the card. They don't have time to wait until Christmas.

You step onto the bus and find an empty window seat across from an elderly man who looks at your uniform and then up at you. You smile and stare out of the dirty window. You wonder how often they wash them. Not often.

"You work in the hospital?" the elderly man asks, pointing towards your teddy bear scrubs.

You smile. "Yes, I do," you say. You do not want to have small talk. You want to go home and eat your Lean Cuisine and watch *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*.

"What do you do there?" he asks.

You tell the truth.

"I lie," you say. The man furrows his brow as you turn your head and look back out at the buildings passing by. You wonder if you have enough wrapping paper at home or if you should stop and buy some. You hope you have enough.



## My Homer Simpson's Five Stages of Writing

*by Elisabeth Lang*

**Confidence:** This isn't too bad. It needs a bit of polish. A smidgen of a tweak. This part is done. My mom likes it. I like it. We all like it. I'll send this one in and wait to hear. Maybe start another one. This one is sweet. It reads like someone else wrote it, but they didn't—I did!

**Doubt:** It's no good. What was I thinking? Where are the plot holes? What ARE plot holes? I haven't learned enough. Am I too old? I don't have enough experience to write about this. How can I write about other people? I don't know them. I can't do this. I don't know where to go from here. Why did I ever start? OMG—did I just plagiarize?

**Depression:** I would delete the entire thing if I could just get out of bed and stop kidding myself. I'm worse than depressed, I'm delusional. Thinking this adds to the world rather than stuffing it with more drivel, drivel, drivel. I spent all this time and will never get it right. No one will ever read it. And I can't ask the same people to read another version. The sheet covers my face.

**Achievement:** A perfect sentence bloomed! Joy radiates through me. Grinning, I celebrate the brief firework of jubilation. Adverbs and weasel words be damned, I have finally expressed what I wanted. The vision is real, right there, scrolling on the page. Perfect.

**Anticipation:** I itch to write. I don't need to stop for coffee or to brush my teeth. I hurry to the keyboard to burrow down to find out what's happened in my private world since I last visited. A world where the words tremble on the edge of my

brain raring to shine. Will this be the time of magic when my words fly onto the page and the real meaning streams pure and easy? Will my imaginary friends be themselves, without artifice or stutter?

## **Rivers Flowing with History**

*by Andrew McDowell*

Maryland is a state on the water, caught between the north and south, where cultures clash and where critical moments in history have shaped America. I was born in Germany and lived in Japan, but while I have visited many places in America, Maryland is the only state I have ever called home. Japan may have taught me to respect and be open to new cultures, but I've always felt at home in Maryland, where cultures have come been intermixed to create something new, like the United States itself. Just as Maryland helped shape America, Maryland in turn has shaped me and my interests through its natural beauty and historical significance. I've been reminded of both in my life when I have looked out onto Maryland's prominent bodies of water, two of the most important being the Chesapeake Bay and the St. Mary's River.

The Chesapeake is without doubt the first body of water that comes to mind for anyone when thinking of Maryland. So it was for me when I was a child. I first saw the Chesapeake as a little boy when my parents and I would go down to the National Aquarium in Baltimore. Baltimore sits on the Patapsco River near where it empties to the Chesapeake, but to me it was all the Chesapeake. I remember standing out at the dock and looking down into the water. However, beyond that I didn't give the Chesapeake much thought, other than it was the home of blue crabs that were main characters in *Chadwick the Crab* by Priscilla Cummings, which used the Aquarium and the Chesapeake as settings. I recall the author visited my elementary school once. It was cool to see real life settings in a children's book I loved. I wondered when I saw crabs in the Aquarium sometimes if one of them might be Chadwick himself. I even tried calling one Chadwick. The

Chesapeake Bay is a part of Maryland's identity, and since childhood I've been fascinated with wildlife, especially marine life.

I would return to the Chesapeake years later as a student at St. Mary's College of Maryland. After a memorable trip with the College History Club to Harper's Ferry in the fall of my sophomore year, the following semester our next road trip was to Baltimore. It was winter, and I remember how freezing cold it was outside and covered with snow. Nevertheless, my peers and I visited an important historical sight I'd heard of but never seen before—Ft. McHenry. I walked through the fort that was the site of the famous battle from the War of 1812, from which America would receive its national anthem. It is one thing to read about a historical event, but quite another to walk the grounds—and see the waters—where it took place. Although it was freezing cold during that trip, seeing Ft. McHenry was worth it.

My four years at St. Mary's left me with many memories, most especially of the St. Mary's River. The water comes into view for anyone coming to campus. From the beginning I knew it was a beautiful location. Every day I would walk along cobblestone paths, and pass by St. John's Pond, where students would sometimes be dunked on their birthday, and where there were plaques bearing the poetry of Lucille Clifton, whose poem "Blessing the Boats (at St. Mary's)," was displayed in large blue words on the stairway of the Student Union. The St. Mary's River could be seen in the distance from St. John's. I was always on the water there.

I almost didn't attend St. Mary's, but I chose to go there. One of the factors that influenced my decision was the scenery. While I may not have been much of a sailor, throughout my years there I would walk through the church cemetery near the riverside, looking at the graves and sitting down on benches overlooking the water. I would sometimes

just stand and look at the river or take a small hike down and stand by the river's edge, and even meditate—if the weather was warm enough, as I would take my shirt off to absorb the sun. That was good enough for me.

For any college student bogged down by work and clubs, it is good to take a break occasionally. The river offered me an escape to relax and marvel at the beauty of nature, which was at its greatest when the sun reflected on the water, creating beautiful sparkles, or sometimes a giant beam of light. Those were some of my most cherished college memories—and photographs. The river for me was an escape, but looking back, it may have been a sign of providence for people who traveled on it centuries ago, aboard two ships named the *Ark* and *Dove*, who stepped ashore on the same riverbank and set down roots from which would eventually sprout Maryland.

In some ways, Maryland is often overlooked in US History classes. Jamestown, Virginia and Plymouth, Massachusetts, are always prominent exhibits. By contrast, I cannot recall St. Mary's City being mentioned at all. The first settlers in Maryland came ashore on the St. Mary's River and settled in what is now Historic St. Mary's City, Maryland's first capital, which adjoins St. Mary's College. They were religious refugees—Roman Catholics—seeking a haven from persecution in England, much like the Pilgrims who settled in Plymouth. In St. Mary's City, as I learned upon entering college, the seed for an important foundation of the American republic would be sown. Like Rhode Island, Maryland guaranteed religious tolerance (though in Maryland it was specifically for Trinitarian Christians) and more importantly, separation of church and state. This separation at St. Mary's City was embodied by the church and statehouse, which stood on opposite ends of town.

I got to see Historic St. Mary's City several times as a student of St. Mary's. I would pass by there on my walks

to the river. A reconstructed ship like the one Maryland's first settlers sailed in is there, and for a while a modern ship would be docked there. When mold broke out in several dorms, students needed to be temporarily moved. A modern cruise ship became their temporary home. Now as then, even if it was the reverse, the water plays a vital role for people living in Maryland. There are, of course, many other bodies of water, including Antietam Creek, where a battle of the American Civil War was fought, and the beaches along the Eastern Shore. But for me, the Chesapeake and the St. Mary's River are the ones I have always come back to, because they were the sights of significant founding moments in the history of Maryland and the United States.

Eventually Maryland's capital was moved to Annapolis, and St. Mary's City disappeared. But the historic town has since been rebuilt, including the old church and the statehouse. Historic St. Mary's City now stands as a place to step back in time and see the early beginnings of Maryland. It offers a diverse variety in living history exhibits. In addition to the statehouse and church, there was farming, an Indian home, and a print shop with a press (like the first printing press in Maryland, run by one William Nuthead). Like all first-year students before me, I had to sign the book within the statehouse and walk down the path out the front door, signifying I'd become a part of that great college community, a community that was diverse like the people who came to Maryland by water. From childhood onward I've been a lover of the environment and history, and I've learned to respect diverse cultures and customs. Maryland is, in turn, a state shaped by all those things, just like the United States.

## Mixing It Up in Melburn, 1958

*by David Hoffman*

Scott stepped out to the front porch of the worn 1920s frame house he and his parents had come to occupy. With his broom he pushed away peeling green paint, barely clinging to the wall, as he swept away the porch debris. The smell of burning leaves mixed with a dose of household garbage was overwhelming as he watched his middle-aged neighbor, Leon, a Bond Bread delivery driver. Leon was intently stoking a fifty-gallon metal drum stationed just across the chain link fence, separating the two yards. Leon momentarily peered up, smiled and waved, totally oblivious to the possibility he might be causing olfactory discomfort for those within a five-house radius.

It was 1958, and Scott Greenwald's family had just relocated from a pastoral setting on a hilltop estate in eastern Connecticut. It was the reverse of rags to riches for the Greenwalds as they made the transition from the elite elegance of his grandparents' home to a fifty-dollar-a-month shabby frame house in a blue-collar neighborhood of Melburn, a Boston suburb. The interior of the house was just as weary as the exterior, with walls adorned with ancient gaudy and torn wallpaper. Some of it had been sloppily painted over in the upstairs bedrooms and hallway. The chandelier in the dining room was twisted and bent, hanging low, and resulting in unpleasant encounters. The constant subtle odor of a leaky kitchen gas stove was equally displeasing. The wooden furniture had taken a toll of abuse with gouges and scratches deep enough that furniture polish was no savior. Although comfortable, the upholstered furniture was frayed and speckled with coffee stains and cigarette burns.

As Scott continued to sweep the porch, he pivoted

around at the sound of youthful Bostonian voices. A small ragtag gang of youngsters of assorted ages approached to greet him.

“*Hi-ya*, I’m Pauley and I live next *doo-ha*,” and “I’m *Spensah* two houses down,” and “I’m Dominic at the bottom of the street. People just call me Dom *foha shawt*.”

Scott was taken by surprise, used to the isolation of his grandparents’ hilltop estate where all visits with contemporaries usually had been coordinated in advance and often centered around well-planned events. He twitched and scratched his close-cropped auburn hair as his large hazel eyes focused on the new audience. Hesitatingly he replied, “I’m Scott. We just moved here from Connecticut.” “Are you Catholic?” asked darkly handsome Dom Morello and smiling pug-faced Pauley Sullivan almost in unison as they conspicuously fingered the small silver crucifixes angling around their necks against less than pristine white tee shirts.

“No, I’m not. I’m Unitarian and sometimes we go to church,” replied Scott.

They looked mildly disappointed if not perplexed, then Pauley spoke up, “Well that’s OK, Spencer’s father is Catholic but his mother isn’t.”

“What grade will you be going into?” asked Dom.

“Fifth.”

“Pauley and I are sixth and Spencer is fifth like you. Do you like backyard football and wrestling?”

Scott didn’t know what to say, never having participated in either, so just quietly nodded and smiled.

“Well then, let’s have a game!”

Scott tossed the broom aside with some trepidation and within a minute Pauley returned with a well-worn but properly inflated football.

Scott weakly had to admit, “Sorry I am not up on the game



or the rules. One time my cousin from Providence brought a football when he visited, and we tossed it.” He failed to admit he had not once succeeded in catching it.

“That’s O.K., you’ll learn as we go,” both Pauley and Dom chimed in.

By now Scott’s younger brother Matt had emerged from the house out of curiosity. Pauley, Dom, and Spencer loudly started whooping their neighborhood boys’ rally call, a sharp two-tone call, a low followed by a high, “*Ouu-eeet!*” Within a minute or so, two sturdy red-headed Irish brothers darted out from the house across the street, and then Pauley’s younger brother Donny emerged from next door. Dom’s cousin Sal from the next street over behind Pauley’s house jumped the chain link fence to join them. They all scurried across the street to a small half-acre vacant lot. It was backyard tackle football with no helmets or protective padding, and improvised rules that would have made the NFL wince.

“We need to equalize the teams,” Pauley declared. “Me as captain with Dom, brother Donny, and Spencer against the five of you with Sal as your captain since he knows the rules.”

After nine bruising scrimmages and a multitude of humiliating fumbles for Scott, Pauley’s team had won all but one scrimmage. Aching, panting, and sweating, Scott and his brother Matt sat down for a time-out. Pauley concluded the teams had not been equally matched but chose not to start over again. After a cooldown with plenty of cold water and a pitcher of lemonade, compliments of Scott and Matt’s mother, Pauley declared they would have a “free-for-all”—an unrefereed wrestling bout in the same vacant lot. Sometimes the boys were equally matched and other times Pauley or Dom would take on three or four of the younger boys at once. Pauley and Dom took pity on Scott and decided to teach him how to take down his opponent quickly using

a single-leg takedown and how to keep him pinned down with a half Nelson.

Within a matter of months, Scott no longer felt like the hothouse plant he had once been. His physical strength and stamina were approaching that of Pauley and Dom.

TV at Pauley's house had become a routine for the boys since Scott's parents didn't own a black and white one yet. One Saturday morning after watching their two favorite programs, *Captain Midnight* and *Ramar of the Jungle*, all six boys—Pauley, Donny, Dom, Spencer, Scott, and Matt were primed for some action. After each downed a glass of cold Ovaltine, as sponsored by *Captain Midnight*, they descended into the rather dank and moldy cellar for a bean blower fight. Pauley's dad worked as a union pipe fitter and had a wide variety of pipes and tools including a small metal saw and metal file, perfect for fashioning bean blowers out of old copper pipe. They were cut to about six inches and then filed smooth. Beans were cheap and plentiful.

Pauley stuffed his mouth with dried beans, proclaiming in a muffled tone, "Now watch this" as he fed the hard, dry beans with his tongue into the blower as fast as he could blow them out at high velocity. His accuracy was deadly as he toppled a tiny block of wood off the top of his father's workbench, and then continuously pinged a small tin can.

Scott and the others floundered around, often loading one bean at a time manually with their fingers into the pipe. An occasional poorly placed shot intended to hit the can would hit the wood block instead. The embarrassed shooter would claim the wood block had been the intended target all along.

Pauley divided the boys up into two teams for real warfare, "Scott, Spencer, little Donny, and Matt can be the commies on the other side of the basement. Dom and I will be the Americans."

Although Dom lacked Pauley's speed and experience as a bean-blowing warrior, he was accurate and calculating. As a coronet player he had good blowing capacity. Even with four against Pauley and Dom it was uneven warfare, akin to an assault by US marines against a tiny third world island with antiquated weaponry. After feeling the sharp sting of Pauley's high-velocity shots against the side of his neck twice in a row, it was more than volatile Spencer could bear. Spencer, who wore glasses and was scrawny, lacked both Pauley's vision and blowing capacity.

"Pauley, you have a good bean blower and I don't. This is unfair. I want to trade bean blowers with you."

"I don't want your spit-filled blower in my mouth," Pauley contested. "Besides, yours is actually half an inch longer than mine so should be even better than mine. You are spitting into it and not blowing hard enough."

Spencer became incensed, and insisted he use Pauley's instead, as he made a desperate lunge for it. Soon there was a scuffle. Although Spencer was not inherently strong, a quick adrenaline surge gave him momentary super power. His hands wrapped around Pauley's neck in a stranglehold, trying to force Pauley to relinquish the bean blower held in his mouth. His sharp fingernails dug into Pauley's neck deeper and deeper as Pauley started gasping and choking. In a flash, powerful Dom went to the rescue with a well-placed rabbit punch to the back of Spencer's neck. He followed up with a kick in the rear, sending Spencer sprawling to the hard floor, shattering one of the lenses of his glasses that had already fallen off during the scuffle. Dom and Donny kept Spencer pinned to the floor for at least a minute until he had calmed down. Once released and having gathered his broken glasses, he made a quick embarrassed exit up the stairs and out the door. The bean blower fight came to a halt as Pauley massaged his sore bruised neck where the

indentations of Spencer's fingernails still lingered. Scott was in a state of disbelief, never having witnessed this side of Spencer before. Several days passed before Spencer was seen again, now with a new lens in his glasses, and appearing in a rather jovial mood, oblivious to what had occurred.

Back at school on Monday, crazy Kenny, the class clown, was up to his antics during morning recess. He fancied himself both physically and spiritually as a miniature Jackie Gleason. He loved to emulate Jackie with greetings to his classmates: "How sweet it is," "Away we go," and "One of these days...POW, right in the kisser," depending upon the ongoing activity at the moment. Some of his other lines were more likely lifted from his father's accounts of off-color jokes heard at Boston nightclubs: "All of my organs are feeling just fine today," or "How would you like a lady milkshake?" at which point he would jump up and down vigorously for five seconds and then squeeze his flabby breasts like he was ejecting milk. This usually got a laugh from some of the boys, yet others found it totally disgusting.

Scott was quick to observe that crazy Kenny had no love for Dom's righteous role as junior enforcer towards any classmate who dared cross the line with respect to his own moral perspective. However, plump Kenny was no match to challenge the physical prowess of Dom. Dom had lunged at him for his indecent jokes in the presence of female classmates.

One week later, crazy Kenny reported to a substitute teacher, "Dom has been rolling car wheels down the steep side street from the school to Main Street and this could cause a traffic accident on Main Street."

Out of genuine concern, the substitute teacher unmercifully seized Dom by the arm and dragged him to the principal's office.

Irate but compliant, Dom insisted, "All I did was to

roll two tiny rubber toy wheels I found on the sidewalk as straight and far as I could down the street.”

Although he was politely excused, the episode had ruffled his dignity and incensed him. During lunch break when no monitoring teachers were present, he, Spencer, and Pauley seized Kenny by his belt. Scott stood by passively and fearfully as he watched them hoist Kenny by his belt halfway up the school’s flagpole. Instead of the American flag waving in the breeze, it was Kenny’s plump rear wriggling half-mast in the wind as he hollered for mercy to the consternation of the substitute teacher and the principal. Apparently, no one would confess up to it. Surprisingly, even Kenny claimed it happened so quickly he wasn’t really sure who had done it.

The following winter was a record snowy one, but profitable for the boys who snow-shoveled driveways and walkways up and down Maple Street and the two neighboring streets. Plenty of sore muscles were rewarded with pockets full of money in wait for the much-anticipated Melburn Spring Street Carnival.

The Carnival was a three-day event, from Thursday afternoon through Saturday evening. Scott, Dom, Spencer, and Pauley, with little brother Donny eagerly trotted the mile to the town center. The carnival was set in the town’s only central parking area. What an onslaught of humanity, all ages and social classes, from Melburn and surrounding communities, all champing at the bit to get past the entry gate like the start of a horse race. The twenty-five cents admission included tickets for two rides. This year the iconic Ferris wheel of many years had been replaced with a modern rendition at least fifteen feet taller and many RPMs faster. The tilt-a-whirl, no longer tame, was spread over a larger and steeper gradient, gyrating at sharp angles and high speeds. The traditional carousel remained with its same blaring

repertoire of piped calliope music blasting clear across the parking area.

Two rides on the Ferris wheel and the tilt-a-whirl were sufficient for the boys. Younger Donny preferred the carousel. The guys scrambled towards the canvas-covered arcade area to ply their skills in hopes of winning a ludicrous stuffed animal, a Mexican straw hat, or a glitzy little trinket. All this effort just to proudly bestow it upon a younger sibling or a wanna-have girlfriend, if feeling bold enough to approach her.

At the baseball pitch, Dom and Pauley each knocked down all three milk bottles with little effort. Each was rewarded with a huge stuffed animal, either an orange tiger or a purple giraffe. Scott and Spencer fell short but received small plastic sparkle rings. At the balloon dart throw, Scott darted all five balloons, winning a straw sombrero. At the coin toss, Spencer landed dimes into a drinking glass and into two gaudy dishes, gleefully claiming all three. Scott and Spencer decided they wanted to give the ball pitch a second chance.

When they approached the arcade, to their surprise, there stood plump Kenny, all spiffed up. He made an exaggerated show of peeling off his jacket and flexing his plump throwing arm several times like a world series pitcher. His first ball spun wildly, coming close to conking the forehead of the attendant who had to duck. His second ball grazed a bottle without enough force to topple it, and his third ball toppled the top bottle. Kenny turned and reached towards a low fence to retrieve his jacket. He needed more money for a replay.

He was not the only one reaching for the jacket. A tall sleazy teenager with a pockmarked weasel face and hair slicked with enough oil for a salad appeared to be inspecting the jacket. Kenny confronted the guy who by now had dug

the remaining dollars out of the jacket pocket, stuffing them into his own shirt pocket. Kenny grabbed at the guy as he exploded in a high-pitched squawk, "You took my money!"

The guy gave him a push followed by a punch on the rebound, uttering, "A fat thing like you don't need no money nohow cause you can't win nothin' no way."

By now Scott and Pauley were on the scene. They were mildly amused watching Kenny wailing for his money. Hearing the commotion, Spencer, Dom, and little Donny were soon on the scene. Evidently, Dom the enforcer saw no humor in the situation and boldly approached the older tall guy, facing him off with his fists clenched.

The thief smirked, "What's wrong with you kid? Do you want a fat lip or a black eye?"

Dom was undaunted. They exchanged a few punches. The sleazy guy aimed a sharp kick at Dom's shin sending him off balance. Pauley, Scott, and Spencer rushed in, grabbing both of the guy's legs and toppling him to the ground. Kenny now had access to the guy's shirt pocket. He attempted to retrieve his money but the guy had metamorphosed into an angry cat. He spat and attempted to bite Kenny's nose. At this moment little Donny poured a huge cup of ice water onto the guy's face, causing him to choke and gurgle. The commotion invited a crowd, including a local cop. The cop ordered all to break it up and stand. All the guys were quick to point fingers at the thief. The sleazy guy denied it, saying the money was his. The cop was skeptical and said he would take him to the station for questioning. Then the guy pulled loose, making a run for it. Two sailors on leave for the weekend tackled him. Another cop arrived and the two escorted him away.

Kenny made a graceful bow, extending his hand to Dom, once his archenemy. He didn't spare any words of grateful thanks to the group. He took half of his recovered carnival

money, handing it over to little Donny for saving his nose from getting chomped. All five of the boys adopted Kenny the comic as a buddy, at least for the remainder of the afternoon.

Yes, rough and tumble Melburn in 1958 was a new chapter in the life of Scott Greenwald.



## The Garden

*by James Hughlett*

Karen is working with a trowel. Pruning, pulling, planting, she attempts to keep her garden perfect. It is her escape.

She is alone, watching random dapples of sunlight pop about on her just-blossoming perennials. A distant roll of thunder—the only trespass—distracts her from her tasks. “Storm’s coming. I need to finish,” she says to an ant.

She stops, looks around. Joe has cut the grass. Done his part to keep up the perfection. Both of them struggling with it.

“Beware of perfection,” Mom used to say. “Life presents enough burdens. You do not want to add perfection to it.”

She gets it now. She tried to keep her marriage, her job, her home ideal. She doesn’t do that anymore. So far, she is surviving his betrayal. However, the constant effort at keeping the pain away saps her energy, her happiness and her spirit, but not her faith. She prays. It helps. Keeps hope alive.

Her little garden is sprouting. Her annuals are planted in the dark soil. Hmmm—sounds like a metaphor. She pauses, stares into the distance. Thinking about her future, wondering where she’ll end up. She’s in a meditative state. Blissful, absorbing everything.

“Karen, can I help?”

“Joe, you startled me! Please!”

“I’m so sorry. I saw you staring. Such a peaceful look. What were you thinking?”

They look at each other. Joe is close. Intruding.

“Please, Joe, leave me alone!”

Lacerated, he stumbles away. It is a fatal blow. His sweetheart is gone. No doubt about it. His face, a bright red, burns with shame and guilt. Shocked, he runs to the bathroom and throws up. Cleaning up, he avoids looking

at the mirror. He goes into the bedroom and lays down. He begins to rock, slowly, back and forth. Trying not to be heard, he weeps.

The storm is getting closer. In the house, Karen hears the thunder and starts her silent count: One—one thousand, two—one thousand, three—one thousand. Hmmm, about three-fifths of a mile away. Time to stop and watch the lightning. She moves over to the window and looks out. And the rain begins.

## A Child's Brooklyn Memories

*by Linda Berry*

When I try to remember my early years, what emerges are feelings of sadness and pain, without any clues of their origins. Curiously, when examining a toy chest, I came across a toy firetruck. A memory fell out of the shadows and I knew I had to examine it more closely.

In this early memory, I was about three or four years old. My family was living in a daylight basement apartment of a brownstone building in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York. My family consisted of my mother, father, and brother Bob. Back then, Brooklyn was not the highly desirable community it is today. There were no fancy coffee shops nor tony boutiques. Back then, I remember there was a mom-and-pop grocery store on Lee Avenue that was within easy walking distance from our apartment. That was important because my mother didn't drive, and my father, an auto mechanic, had no interest in teaching her.

Outside the grocery store door was an open barrel of kosher dill pickles. The barrel was tall and very wide. It was always filled to the brim with pickles. The scent of the liquid brine would tempt one as far as 200 feet away. The drifting smell would make me salivate. I asked my mother for one every time we walked by. Her immediate response was negative. I was then pushed away from the barrel and into the store. After multiple denials, I realized it was safer not to need or want anything to avoid disappointment or punishment.

Across the street from the grocery was the neighborhood toy store. When my mother had children in tow, she made sure we didn't cross the street and pass the toy store. Children begging and whining can be very bothersome and embarrassing. One day, standing near the pickle barrel I

spied a new tricycle in the toy shop window. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. The tricycle was painted a shiny metallic aquamarine and had sparkling silver racing fringes on the handlebar. I imagined what it would be like riding that tricycle around town. I hoped that one day it would be mine.

Back then I shared a bedroom with my brother in our Brooklyn apartment. He was one year younger than me and we were the best of friends. In this memory, I vaguely recall my brother and me being called to the living room. The sound of cheery music played on the radio. I felt so happy and safe at that moment. I saw a grouping of presents on the floor. I focused my attention on the two large brightly colored boxes.

One large box was for me and the other was for my brother. It was time to open both our gifts. I was faster than my brother in opening mine. I hoped that the racing tricycle was inside my box. I had told my parents about the tricycle in the window and how much I loved it. With great anticipation I opened the box. To my surprise I found a doll staring at me. This doll stood as tall as me and wore a simple dress. She had bobble eyes that would open and close depending on her position. She could also move her arms and legs as if marching. I didn't care how magnificent this doll was, it was not the tricycle. I couldn't believe it. I was devastated. I didn't know what to do with this monstrous doll. My attention drifted to my brother who was staring at the doll with envious delight.

It was now Bob's turn to open his present. He slowly opened his gift, drawing out the suspense and excitement. I was ready to jump in and tear it open. When the box was finally opened, Bobby discovered a shiny red firetruck that he could sit in and pedal. He just stared at it blankly. Was he expecting something else? I eyed his toy with longing. It

was not the tricycle I wanted, but it was almost as good.

Being a year older and far more sophisticated, I convinced Bob to make a trade with me. I would keep the firetruck and the monstrous doll was all his. He immediately hugged the doll and joyfully ran around the apartment with her in his arms. I had never seen such happiness on Bob's face. I followed him around the apartment in my new firetruck.

This happy moment was short-lived. My traditional parents observed us and didn't like what they saw. Bob, their only son, was playing gleefully with a doll. They looked at Bob with disapproving eyes. How could he have so much fun playing with a doll, a doll of all things? How could a mechanic's son prefer a doll over a shiny new firetruck? Our parents immediately intervened, taking the doll away from Bob. They demanded I get out of the firetruck. I shouted,

"But we made a trade, a fair-and-square trade!"

This declaration fell on deaf ears. Our parents emphatically insisted I get out of the firetruck immediately. Bob was gently placed in the driver's seat of the vehicle. The monstrous doll was thrust back in my arms. Bob and I looked at each other's face and saw in each sadness and disbelief. We thought their actions were wrong. Aren't toys supposed to bring happiness? If Bob found delight in playing with the doll, then logically he should have the doll. If I truly loved that red firetruck, why shouldn't it be mine? I passionately wanted this truck. It didn't matter to either one of us which toy was specified for girls, and which was deemed a boy's toy. We knew what we were doing when we traded. Why did our parents need to intervene?

I was then overtaken by a feeling of heartache and worthlessness. I fell in love with that red firetruck. It was as good, if not better than the tricycle. Why did Bob deserve the better and more valuable present. This was just wrong and unfair in my opinion. I looked for a solution, some kind of

compromise. The best solution would have been if Bobby and I each got a firetruck. That was out of the question. Then I had another idea. When our parents were out of earshot, I suggested to Bob we share the two gifts and play together with them. He agreed wholeheartedly.

The happiest memories I have of that Brooklyn apartment were of us playing together with those gifts. In my mind I see us zooming around the living room and the backyard driving the red firetruck with that monstrous doll in tow. The doll was usually in Bobby's lap while I drove. Often, we took turns driving the firetruck. However, when our parents were watching us play, I made sure Bob was driving and the monstrous doll was in my lap. Although I was young, I was able to exercise what little power I had to fulfil a want. Perhaps I was not always needless and wantless.

## The Times-Messenger

by Paul Marion Geiger

Darlene couldn't help herself, putting the window down she yelled out a reminder to her father.

"Now, don't forget, Pop. If you have any trouble, just push the big button on your watch and I'll be right there. Remember, hit the big button. Ok? See you in a bit."

With that she gave him her reluctant smile and drove down South Philadelphia Avenue toward the inlet.

Moving away from the curb, she thought that maybe her father was no longer in his element, even though he had grown up on these blocks some fifty years before.

While tasting the faint salt from the blowing wind that emanated from the east, Elwood Baynard remembered his youth, when every day after school he would run home to begin his first chore of the evening, delivering sixty-three daily *Times-Messenger* newspapers door-to-door.

On this island, with its harsh hot, humid summers and cold, blustery winters, this indeed was no small task for a boy of his age in the sixties. He knew his responsibilities at the age of twelve and carried them out like an adult.

His mother, a widow of the Korean War, often cried herself to sleep dwelling on the fact that her boy was losing his childhood to life, a life that could have been made much more tolerable but for one thing—their lack of money. Elwood could feel his chest tighten as he looked toward the sun over his head, envisioning his days of delivering the *Times-Messenger* to everyone in an eight-block range. He wiped his forehead with the back of his right hand and smiled to himself as if he had just finished a run a few minutes earlier.

"God, what a day. This sun just won't stop. Christ! I bet it's 90 degrees, and it's not even noon yet."

He was startled as the bus rolled past him on South Philadelphia Avenue thinking, "Where the hell did that come from?"

A small girl of about four and her father had just gotten off the bus when they were greeted by Elwood.

"Good day, young man and little angel! And what is your name? And how old might you be?"

He had dropped down to one knee when asking the cute girl in the white outfit her name.

He then added, "When I was your age I used to live here. Right here."

The young father smiled while his daughter eagerly answered,

"I'm Kathy, with a K, and I'm four. What's your name? How old are you?"

Elwood slowly rose and, after shaking the man's hand, softly spoke, "You two have a grand morning and take care of yourselves."

With that he started to meander on his journey. When Kathy and her father were about fifteen feet away she said,

"Daddy, he didn't tell me his name. He didn't tell me how old he was. How come, Daddy? You think he don't know how old he is?"

Mr. Elwood Baynard had known the streets of this small fishing community like his own reflection in a mirror. And yet with each footstep he pondered where he was going. The houses and alleys of his childhood had mostly given way to hotels, condos, restaurants, and various small stores.

Still, a few yards from the spot where his daughter had let him off, he gazed down one block toward Somerset Street. He smiled to himself as he recollected the old Harbor Inn Bar. He even chuckled loudly enough to be heard by a young man on a bicycle passing him.

"Shit, Woody. That bar was ancient when you were born.



Let's head that way. See if they're still around."

As if by instinct, his feet moved one after the other. The sixty-eight-year-old man slowly but purposefully made his advance toward the destination. His eyes swept each side of the street as he made his way, recalling the names of the people he would deliver the newspapers to. "Mrs. Adams. John Billings. Really Mr. Billings, but he made me call him John. There, yes there, on the left, the Williams twins. One upstairs and one down. Yet they each got their own paper. Good tipplers, too."

Turning right on Somerset Street he was about one house along when he saw the yellow house on the left. Just as it had been in the 1960s. It had always looked like it went thru a good five or six hurricanes, though the facade was more a result of sheer neglect than weather damage. The dignified old man froze as his eyes fixated on the front door of that dwelling.

As if by magic, he heard the sound of a fist on the front door. He hadn't realized at all it was he who was doing all the knocking. Knocking just as he had done more than fifty years before. Louder and louder, he hammered. He had to. After all, the doorbell didn't work in his days as a paperboy. Why on earth would it work now?

"Hold on, hold on. I'm coming." He heard in a faint voice from behind the window on the left.

Stopping his assault, he still had the palm of his hand resting on the door when it fully opened. The lady inside was astounded to see what was on her porch.

"Oh, my stars! What's all the banging about?"

The sharply-dressed gentleman, Elwood Baynard, transformed instantly into Woody, a middle-school child. He didn't say a word as his eyes dropped to her feet. The woman, who had to be at least in her mid-nineties, was dressed in the same robe she had always worn when she answered the door

in those early days.

Woody advanced through the door, inching his way into the living room. She backtracked, while he regained his composure and sheepishly spoke.

“Mrs. Donnelly I’m here to collect. Your total for the past seven weeks is three dollars and sixty-five cents. I’m sorry I can’t wait any longer. Mother needs the money.”

Mrs. Donnelly admitted she appreciated the joke and with a smile sat in her chair in the kitchen.

“I’ll be switched. You are. Aren’t you? You’re that Baynard boy. I’m surprised you remembered me after all these years.”

Yes, he remembered her. But Woody wasn’t telling her a joke, far from it. He recalled every time she and her husband had stiffed him on the money due for the paper and never was a tip involved.

While she sat perfectly calm, with a smile of contentment, he picked up the glass blender pitcher off the counter and gave her one solid whack to the side of the head. With the accuracy of a cruise missile, she was here one minute and gone the next. There were no more chances she’d be getting her papers free off the sweat of his back. No, ma’am.

He walked out the front door, crossed the street and made his way down to St. Louis Street. Crossing over toward the water, he found a spot where no one would notice him dropping the cracked pitcher in.

Now, he was ready to cross back over to the bar side of the street for a cold one when the idea hit him.

“Why not stroll a block or two. See if the bar is still open later. That way the sun won’t be the hottest and after a beer or two, my ride will be here.”

Smiling in a way that would remind someone of a family priest on Easter morning, he wandered north on St. Louis Street. Just crossing Dorchester Street, he took his time to

do a 360 turn. How he loved the freedom of the sights and sounds of the gulls. Noticing how no two birds seemed to look alike, he found himself analyzing the passersby the same way. The people of all ages and colors were, oh, so different. This difference didn't seem to bother him in the least. It was as if it was like that here, on this corner, some fifty-plus years ago. But, unbeknownst to him now, that wasn't the case.

The grayish-blue house, just past the new condos, made him feel uneasy for a moment. Easing his way closer and closer, he was slightly nervous about something. Just what evaded him. That was until his eyes locked onto the stained-glass marlin fish just above the front door.

Loosening his second button from the top of his two-hundred-dollar Jams World shirt, he pulled ever so slightly, fluffing the front for a cool-down. His temperature seemed to rise as much as his frustration and confusion. Still with all the heat and humidity, his composure was still quite intact.

He could have been a senior character actor on a daytime soap—or even in the movies. He seemed to always have “that look”. Even nearing seventy, his weight was ideal for a six-foot-three man, and his hair was as full as a ten-year-old's. Throw in the year-round tan and smile, he was easy for people to approach. This elderly man may have worn a full head of grey-white hair, but he also retained the muscles he had from his thirty years in the Merchant Marines.

Talking to himself in a hushed voice, he demanded an explanation.

“Let me think now. What the hell was it. Shit, Woody. Oh yeah. Right. That prick never did settle up. Well, he'll settle up today. Yeah. No more ‘next time’ bullshit.”

Slowing, he took one step at a time until he was within a foot or two of that multicolored marlin. Close enough to

give a good solid pound on the heavy sun-bleached door, he hit the doorbell with his left elbow instead. It hadn't taken any concentration at all—it was as if he'd leaned on that bell a million times before.

Hearing the constant buzz of the bell inside, he wondered if they would ignore his ring like they had done in the past. But not this time. He was due his money and that was that. His hands were crossed holding his forearms and all his weight was on that button. He would stay attached to that button until Hell froze over if necessary.

He heard the door slightly jar and instantly dropped his arms to his sides. The silence was abruptly interrupted.

“Yes, sir? Can I help you?”

The thirtyish young man's friendly inquiry was given a quick reply.

“Good day. I'm here to collect your balance. Sorry, but I can't take no for an answer this week. You're long past due. Sorry again. But you'll have to pay today.”

The resident of the house now wore an expression of sheer disbelief. Looking behind the well-dressed gent and up and down the sidewalk he was thinking, who is this old man and what on earth is he talking about?

This came across to Woody as if the guy had yelled it in his face. This change of facial expression now really pissed Woody off.

“Goddamn it! I have had it with you deadbeats. My mother is working her ass off and you never, ever pay what you owe.”

On that last word, “owe,” Woody slammed the man back into the hallway. He pushed him so forcefully his head hit one of the coat hooks on the oak entryway bench. That quick, effortless nudge seemed to suspend him like a limp marionette. All that was needed were wooden cross-sticks and some string. Not even a gasp of his last breath—nothing.

Woody retreated toward the doorway and upon closing the door behind himself, smiled.

“Fine, asshole. I’ll be back next Saturday and you’d better be ready to pay. I’m telling my mother.”

Elwood was smiling and humming the old Scottish tune “O’er the Moor, Amongst the Heather” as he crossed Talbot Street. His tune was aborted the moment he saw the house standing alone on the northeast side of the street. As if hypnotized, he crossed on a diagonal, almost sideswiping an Uber driver.

He always thought if he worked hard and saved, he’d own a house like this one. He still saw the old building as a good house on a very large lot. Not what it was today—a has-been bait shop. His footsteps announced his arrival to the dog inside, who proceeded to bark his greeting to all in earshot.

Jacob Metzger opened the door with a loud welcome.

“Hi Mister. I’m Jacob. My dad will be back in ten minutes if you want to wait.”

Woody smiled at the teenage boy.

“No thanks, young man. I can’t wait, but thanks. Tell your dad I’ll be back to collect next Saturday. Ok? Saturday.” Jacob shook his head that he understood and shut the door.

Turning back toward St. Louis Street he was certain the young man would relay his message and his problem would be solved. Woody chuckled to himself.

“Kids don’t lie or cheat you. Sure, their parents will. But kids won’t screw other kids.”

Situated on the corner where St. Louis Street meets Caroline Street is a house. Before the new bridge was built to cross the inlet to West Ocean City, this house had a great upstairs view. Now all those grand sunsets and vistas are gone, unless you consider staring at vehicle after vehicle on weekends in the season something worth watching. Not to

mention the bonus of all the carbon monoxide.

The traffic above on the elevated street didn't seem to bother Woody in the least. It even lulled him with its calming effect, like the sound of the ocean waves hitting the beach at night. Watching the house from a few yards away, he didn't realize he was pulling on the band of his new watch. That was until he felt the slight mosquito-like sting of the strap grabbing a hair. The sting brought him out of his daydream, and he moved forward with determination—

"I know the Buckleys work a lot at the rides. But I work a lot, too. And every time I go over to the fun house or Ferris wheel to get my money, they say he's not around. If it were me, I'd leave the money with the cashier. Wouldn't that be simple? It's all a bunch of shit. Pure bullshit. Just pure bullshit."

Stopped in front of the house, he looked over his shoulder to see who had been talking. Not even realizing it was himself, he shuffled up to the stairs. This older gent was extremely fit for his age and wasn't thinking clearly when he scaled the stairway three steps at a time.

Puffing, as if he had just delivered his last Fourth of July paper, he leaned to the left side of the door. He was accustomed to resting there at this mid-point in his deliveries. He always took advantage of how cool in the summer and warm in the winter this secluded small alcove made him feel. He'd regained his thoughts and stamina at this oasis every time he delivered his papers.

"Hello. What can I help you with, sir?"

Startled, Woody hadn't heard the door or the screen door open. He hadn't heard anything, for that matter. The voice in the doorway asked again.

"Sir, are you OK? What can I help you with?"

The tall tan-skinned man with the long greyish-black ponytail had no idea who was on his porch. None in the

least. He was probably in his upper-forties to mid-fifties and looked as though he had just been woken from a long sleep. Still running his fingers through his hair and around his face he tried to assess the situation a little more clearly. He appeared to be around the age his father would have been when Woody was on his route.

“Oh. I’m so sorry Mr. Buckley. I’m here to collect. I can wait.” Woody spoke to the confused fellow in such a soft mannered way.

“Collect for what? The Elks, Legion?” The small nod and silence was misread as a sign it was for the American Legion.

“Just a sec while I get my wallet.”

Woody couldn’t believe what his ears had just heard. “Get my wallet? No way! I’ve heard that crap before.”

He mumbled to himself as he walked right behind the owner of the house into the living room. He wasn’t going to get a door or two slammed in his face again.

There on the coffee table were two empty wine bottles and a few beer cans from the night before. Woody’s first thought was “no wonder the poor bastard’s tired.”

Seeing Woody right on his heels, Dennis Buckley stopped short to confront him. One would think at this point it was too late for a confrontation. Maybe it was deemed too late when God somehow made this Dennis Buckley the spitting image of his father—Dennis Buckley Senior.

Woody already had the corkscrew from the table lifted in his right arm and struck like lightning. It was a perfect Mohammad Ali hit to the neck. In like a butterfly and out like a bee. The screw went in under his left ear; first piercing the jugular and then lower brain stem. Mr. Dennis Buckley Junior dropped to the floor in an instant, leaving Woody standing over him holding a five-dollar Kmart wine opener.

Looking down at his hand, which had a minuscule speck of blood on it. Woody proceeded to the kitchen. There, he rinsed his hands and the corkscrew with cold water. After wiping the faucet handle with a paper towel, he put both the towel and bottle opener in his left pocket.

Once making the left onto St. Louis Street, he started to hum. The ocean breeze was ever so slight and warm. He wondered if it was always like this at the noon hour in Ocean City. If so, why would people ever leave here in the winter to go to Florida?

Just past Talbot Street he could see the sign for the Marine Deck bar. Thinking he'd might as well take a look on such a perfect day, he walked on. Standing in the alley, just outside the restaurant, he wondered how the place managed to appear amongst the taller condos. He must have forgotten the bar was there long before anything else.

His eye caught a rather large crab on a piling.

"You're so right, Mr. Crab. You may need this someday."

Not wanting to draw attention, he slid the towel-wrapped corkscrew out of his pocket and threw it backhanded under the wooden deck.

There wasn't that much of a crowd yet in the place, but he knew of another that would be full of locals. Onward to the end of the next block he went. Leisurely strolling with no care in the world, he smiled at everyone who looked his way. Why not? In such a beautiful place, at such a beautiful time.

His low uttered "Thank God" wasn't heard by anyone in the Harbor Inn as he took the last empty seat at the bar. It was on the end close to the door, but the AC was on full, and he felt truly relieved.

"Yes, sir, what'll it be?" the pretty girl, who looked like she should be in high school, asked with the brightest smile.

"Beer, please."



She drew him a cold Bud and in what seemed like seconds he was asking for another. He was somewhat startled at how easily that first one went down, thinking it must have been all the walking and maybe even the heat. Yet, he loved the heat. Actually, you could say he didn't mind it too much. On a day like today, when it was probably 90 by noon, he loved air conditioning more.

The natives at the bar and the pool tables were all gathered for what seemed a single purpose. They were all escaping the humidity and heat. Most were outside laborers and surely today was not a day to be out in the elements.

Elwood's curiosity overwhelmed him, and he scanned the dimly-lit room. Smiling to himself, when he heard the start of an Allman Brother's Band tune, he couldn't help but feel a little guilty he was wearing such an expensive shirt. After all, he could tell by his fellow clientele in this establishment that two hundred dollars may be a week's pay or a car payment.

Feeling the heat from the opened front door he turned to see a shadow of a tall man. The young man quickly pushed the door closed behind him and smiled.

"Sorry for letting the hot air in."

A voice from the closest pool table yelled back, "No problem, Danny. I think you let out more hot air than you let in."

The girl behind the bar already had a glass of iced tea to give to the young police officer as the rustle of laughter quieted down. He stood next to Elwood.

"Good day, sir. Hell of a hot one, don't you think?"

Elwood agreed and asked the Ocean City policeman if he wanted his stool for a few minutes. He declined, saying he was just having a quick drink and then he'd be back out on the street.

Elwood put a twenty down in front of his glass and lifted

it, signaling he was ready for another. This time it wasn't delivered by the lovely young girl. No, not this time.

With his next round came, "It is you. Our Woody Baynard. Where have you been? I can't believe it's you."

The lady of Elwood's age went on, "It's been years. Maybe twenty. Thirty?"

Woody smiled and blushed. She came around the bar and hugged her old friend. A friend she'd known all the way from kindergarten through high school graduation. They hadn't seen each other since the mayor's funeral back in the late eighties.

She kissed him on the cheek and asked for forgiveness for having to run in the back to check in a liquor delivery.

"Don't you go anywhere. I'll be finished in about twenty minutes. My granddaughter will take good care of you. Just stay put."

The officer had left during their reunion and Woody rearranged himself on the stool. He picked up his half-full mug and tried hard to remember who she was. It was no use. In less time than it took him to swallow the rest of his beer, his mind had moved on to other topics.

Another four or five songs had gone by and some people came in, and some people left. Time wasn't standing still for Woody, but it didn't feel like it was moving on either.

The door opened again and this time the heat kept coming. A police officer was holding the door open from the outside while Danny, the officer from a few minutes earlier, walked in.

"Excuse me." Then, much louder.

"Excuse me!"

The music was shut off and he continued.

"There's been an incident on Somerset. Does anyone know Mrs. Donnelly? The older Mrs. Donnelly?"

As he walked to the back of the bar all he heard in

response to his question was

“What’s happened?”

“Hey Danny, what gives?”

A girl at one of the pool tables spoke up.

“Danny; doesn’t her grandson Pete work over at the Red Eyed Frog?”

Hearing no other clues or advice, the officer made his way out the door and once more Woody’s seat was cool and comfy.

The hum of the bar seemed to overrun the music that was again flowing as everyone turned either left or right asking

“What the hell was that all about?”

“You think maybe the old lady died or something?”

Woody smiled as another beer came his way and didn’t speak out loud what he was thinking “Yeah. The old bitch just don’t like me. She didn’t tip either. Good if something happened to her.”

The sweet bartender took his happy expression as his pronouncing he was really satisfied with her service.

Woody seemed to have a perfect sense of timing. He had put his empty mug down on the bar the moment his daughter spoke in his ear,

“Are you ready, Pop?”

Even on his end perch, he hadn’t noticed it was Darlene who had let in the last blast of hot air. He left the twenty where it had been near the edge of the bar, along with his empty glass.

His daughter was leading the way when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Ok, Woody. Go ahead and leave now. But you’d better bring that sorry ass of yours back soon.”

Mrs. Buckley kissed him again on the cheek and went back to her work.

Darlene couldn't help but ask,

"So, Pop. Old flame? Before mom? I guess you'd still know a lot of people around here."

Woody floundered as they approached the car, "Yeah, I guess."

Both were seated and the air turned on full when she continued the inquisition.

"So, what's her name, Pop? She single? Have any kids?"

She wasn't quite sure if his distant stare and lack of response was a reaction to her needling him or something more significant. His first major health diagnosis, two years earlier, always kept her on alert.

Still, sometimes it was hard for her to differentiate between the man who raised her and the man she was now caring for. Was the man to her right her father, or the other man?

When he didn't answer fast enough, she lovingly added,

"Maybe if you took your blood pressure pill and that amyloid blocker this morning, you'd know. You think maybe you could try?"

He lowered the fan and reminded her.

"You know how that blood pressure stuff makes me tired. Especially on hot humid days like today. And that 6573843 experimental shit. Well, who knows if that does anything anyway? Besides, it makes me feel like I'm somebody else. I'm telling you it sometimes scares me the way it makes me think."

She put the car in drive.

"Well Pop; you need to take it. Both your doctors believe it's helping, even if you can't tell. And by the way, your 6573843 is not your medication number. It's your phone number."

Driving east on Somerset Street, just shy of South Philadelphia Avenue, they noticed police car after police

car. A roadblock was set so no traffic was coming south, and it looked like the only way north was to stay on Somerset Street and hit South Baltimore Avenue.

The traffic on South Baltimore Avenue seemed to be more of the rubber-necking variety, and Darlene and Woody were no different than the other drivers and passengers. Yet while Darlene was distracted by all the commotion around her, Woody was preoccupied with who was driving the car.

She did look familiar, but still he just couldn't place her. He thought, maybe if I just sit here awhile, she'll tell me who she is.

They must have had every marked and unmarked police car, ambulance, and firetruck from three counties packed into the lower blocks of the island. Crossing Talbot Street, on the right-hand side, was a marked car with the young officer directing traffic. Officer Danny gave a small wave to Darlene and motioned for her to proceed north. He smiled and waved at Woody as if to say, "see you later."

Woody saluted back and mouthed "Thank you" as they crept past him, wondering if the nice policeman was on his route.

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# POET AND WRITER BIOGRAPHIES

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**Fran Abrams'** poems have been published in numerous journals and more than a dozen anthologies. In 2019, she read at Houston (TX) Poetry Fest and DiVerse Gaithersburg (MD) Poetry Series. She won the 2021 Washington Writers' Publishing House Winter Poetry Prize. Her first poetry book *I Rode the Second Wave: A Feminist Memoir* was published in November 2022. Her chapbook, *The Poet Who Loves Pythagoras* (Finishing Line Press) was released in March 2023. Visit [franabramspoeetry.com](http://franabramspoeetry.com).

**Nicole Abuhamada** is an interdisciplinary literary and visual artist with specialization in poetry and oil painting. She is a former fashion model and film actress, known worldwide as a winner of the popular TV show, *America's Next Top Model*, with clients including Paul Mitchel, Pepsi, and the Marvel Avengers. Her filmography includes theatrical productions *Ashley*, *Paradise Club*, and *The Last Survivors*, among others. Nicole wrote, illustrated, and published her first book, *Lipton Loves*, in 2021. Nicole painted the cover art for this issue of *Pen in Hand*.

**Lora Berg** writes with a light touch from her home in Maryland. She is the author of *The Mermaid Wakes* (Macmillan Caribbean) written in collaboration with visual artist Canute Caliste. Lora is at work on a new full-length book of poems.

**Linda Berry** is new to the writing crafts. She writes haiku, short stories, and memoirs. She is working on a Young Adult novel. Linda won first prize in the 2018 Montgomery Writes competition for a story in the creative nonfiction category entitled "When the Dam Breaks."

**Shirley J. Brewer** (Baltimore MD) serves as poet-in-residence at Carver Center for the Arts & Technology. A Push-

cart nominee, her poems garnish *Barrow Street*, *Passager*, *Gargoyle*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Poetry East*, *Slant*, among other journals and anthologies. Shirley's poetry books include *A Little Breast Music* (Passager Books), *After Words* (Apprentice House Press), and *Bistro in Another Realm* (Main Street Rag). Her fourth poetry collection, *Wild Girls*, was published by Apprentice House Press in June 2023.

**Roderick Deacey** is a performing poet, reading with bass-player and drummer to emulate the Beat Poets' poetry and jazz forays of the nineteen-fifties. Deacey was awarded the 2019 Frederick Arts Council Carl R. Butler Award for Literature. Crossing genres, he won the Gold Award for Best Lyrics in the 2020 Mid-Atlantic Song Contest held by the Songwriters' Association of Washington, plus the Silver Award for Best Lyrics in 2022. His contemporary poems appear regularly in literary journals.

**Kathleen Fine** received her Master's in Reading Education. When she's not writing, she enjoys spending time with her family and reading anything she can get her hands on. She lives in Baltimore with her husband and three children. Her debut novel, *Girl on Trial*, will be released in October 2023.

**Claudia Gary** lives near Washington DC and teaches workshops on Villanelle, Sonnet, Natural Meter, Poetry vs. Trauma, etc., at The Writer's Center ([writer.org](http://writer.org)), currently via Zoom. Author of *Humor Me* (2006) and several chapbooks, most recently *Genetic Revisionism* (2019), she is also a health science writer, visual artist, and composer of tonal chamber music and art songs. Her chapbooks are available via the email address at this link: [pw.org/content/claudia\\_gary](http://pw.org/content/claudia_gary).

**Paul M. Geiger** spends his time in Ocean City, Maryland and



Key West, Florida, playing his handmade fiddles and writing. Living with the elements of the ocean gives him the inspiration for his stories. “The Times-Messenger” based in Ocean City, Maryland, and “Baba’s Flying” (Beach Mysteries) Rehoboth, Delaware, reflect life on the Atlantic coast. His novel, *Whomba War*, details the life of a teenage boy growing up during the Vietnam War in northern New Jersey.

**Gabby Gilliam** lives in the DC metro area with her husband and son. Her poetry has most recently appeared in *One Art*, *Plant-Human Quarterly*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Pure Slush*, *Deep Overstock*, *Vermillion*, *MacQueen’s Quinterly*, and *Anti-Heroine Chic*. You can find her online at [www.facebook.com/Gabby-GilliamAuthor](https://www.facebook.com/Gabby-GilliamAuthor) or at [gabbygilliam.squarespace.com](https://gabbygilliam.squarespace.com).

**Salisa L. Grant** is a mother, wife, poet, educator, and scholar living in the Washington DC area. She has a BA from Hamline University in St. Paul, MN, and an MA from Howard University. Salisa uses poetry to make sense of and process the world around her. She also uses it to heal, to communicate, and to educate. Her debut poetry collection *In these Black Hands* (2019) is currently available on Amazon.

**Lisa Green-Cudek** has written poetry for most of her life although her professional creative output has been in dance. During the pandemic, she turned more to the page than the stage. Recent publications include *The Dancer-Citizen* and *Pen in Hand*.

**David Hoffman** is an emeritus USGS wildlife biologist/ ecotoxicologist and retired adjunct Professor. He is the author of books, book chapters, and reviews. His *Handbook of Ecotoxicology* was a best seller for CRC Press. He writes short fiction with publications in the *Bay to Ocean Journal*. He lives in

Bivalve, MD and, when not writing, enjoys distance swimming, birding, cooking, homebrewing, walks with his dog, and feeding nine feral cats.

**James Hughlett** sent *Pen in Hand* his first submission ever. He has been writing short fiction with dialogue as a way to help people with relationships.

**Elisabeth Lang** lived in the South, the Midwest, on the West Coast, and in New England before moving to Maryland with her family and two noisy dogs. A lifelong lover of books, she has pulled all-nighters, climbed trees, and stayed in the car long after the journey ended to read. Her writing passion spans adult and young adult sci-fi and fantasy. She's grateful to belong to the WOW Writing Group and the Maryland Writers' Association's Montgomery County Chapter.

**Kari Martindale** is a Pushcart Prize-nominated poet and spoken word artist who has been published in various literary journals and featured in events and readings across Maryland. She sits on the Board of Maryland Writers' Association, has an M.A. in Linguistics, manages EC Poetry and Prose, and values kindness over niceness and justice over peace.

**Andrew McDowell** has been writing since he was a teenager. His fantasy novel *Mystical Greenwood* won the 2021 MWA Novel Contest in Science-Fiction / Fantasy / Speculative. He has also written and published poetry, short stories, and creative nonfiction. He studied at St. Mary's College of Maryland and College Park. He was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder. Visit his website/blog at [andrewmcdowellauthor.com](http://andrewmcdowellauthor.com) to learn more about him and his writing.

**Anita Nahal** is a Pushcart Prize-nominated Indian American author and professor. She teaches at the University of the District of Columbia, Washington DC. Anita has four poetry books, four books for children and five edited anthologies to her credit, among others. Her third poetry book, *What's wrong with us Kali women?* (Kelsay, 2021) was nominated by Cyril Dabydeen, Guyanese Indian Canadian poet and novelist, as the best poetry book, 2021 for *Ars Notoria*. It's also prescribed as mandatory reading in a course on Multicultural Society at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. Anita's first novel, *drenched thoughts*, will be released this year.

**Joanne Oh** is a Korean American writer from Frederick, MD. Her poetry has appeared in *Palette Poetry*, *Poet Lore*, *Hobart*, *Envoi*, and elsewhere. She holds a B.A. in Writing Seminars from Johns Hopkins University, where she received the 2019 Chaffee Writing Prize and the H. Lee Kanter Woodrow Wilson Research Fellowship.

**Terri Simon's** chapbooks are *Ringling the Bell*, (Clare Songbirds Publishing House, 2021) and *Ghosts of My Own Choosing*, (Flutter Press, 2017). Her work appears in *The Avenue*, *Third Wednesday*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Slant*, *Pen in Hand*, and other journals. She is a founding member of the EC Poetry and Prose writing collective and began Fallen Tree Press in 2022. <http://www.terricsimon.com>.

**Jack Slocomb** lives in the Allegheny Mountains of Western Maryland. He is a retired clinical social worker, active outdoor educator, nature poet, nature essayist, and novelist. He has lived in this country most of his life and considers the rolling ancient hills, the hidden valleys, and surging creeks of this beloved landscape to be the inspiration for his literary life. He recently released a full-length poetry collection, *Native Tongue* (Akinoga Press).

**Lois Perch Villemaire**, a member of the ESWA chapter resides in Annapolis, MD. After a career in local government, she concentrated on her love of writing. Researching family history has led to memoir and creative nonfiction. Her prose and poetry have appeared in a number of journals and have been included in several anthologies. She enjoys yoga, fun photography, watercolor, and raising African violets.

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