

# WestWard Quarterly

*The Magazine of Family Reading*



**Fall 2013**

# To our readers . . .

It's odd, isn't it, how a date can slip past us, such as a relative's or friend's birthday or (for husbands, especially!) a wedding anniversary. Well, we overlooked the fact that our previous issue, Summer 2013, marked the start of our second decade editing and publishing *WestWard Quarterly*. It has been "quite a ride," as they say. Probably, when Marsha Ward handed the magazine over to us in 2003, she had no idea we would be hanging on for this long. By the way, both Ms. Ward and Raymond Flory, who edited *Explorer* magazine which merged into *WestWard Quarterly* before we took it over, receive all the issues we publish, in appreciation for their efforts through the years.

Our featured writer in this issue is Leticia Austria, a frequent contributor to this magazine. Her "bio" and poems are on pages 4-5. We can also report that contributor Joyce Bradshaw has published a new booklet, *Living Parables*, consisting of "soliloquies" in the voice of various Bible characters. It's available for \$6.00 from the author at 1561 Days End Road, Wimberley, TX 78676.

If you're a contributor to *WestWard Quarterly* but not yet a regular subscriber, we invite you to consider becoming one. Details are below. By subscribing you help to underwrite the cost of publishing this magazine as a vehicle for your writing and that of others. We're all in this together!

Finally, I don't usually put my own poems in this magazine, preferring to make room for others. However, I have three poems in this issue. Our Publisher has been after me to include some of my own writing, and I decided to placate him. I hope you don't mind.

*Shirley Anne Leonard*, EDITOR

## WestWard Quarterly

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*WestWard Quarterly* showcases the best work of upbeat writers and poets. Our magazine's philosophy is: "Adversity happens. Find the eternal purpose behind it." Reflect an uplifting, positive or gently humorous attitude in your submissions. Send all letters, requests for guidelines, queries or submissions to the address above. Send SASE for response.

Maximum length for poems is 40 lines. Shorter submissions have a better likelihood of being published. The Editor reserves the right to edit material. For more information on guidelines and how to send your submission, visit our web site.

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Cover Image: *Western Waterfall, 2012*  
Photo by *Miriam Faith Silkebakken*



## Featured Writer . . . Leticia Austria

### Texas

When I was in the fourth grade, my teacher sent a poem I wrote to the Young Pegasus Poetry Contest sponsored by the public library here in San Antonio. It was chosen as one of the winners that year and was published in an anthology with other students' winning poems, including three pieces by a seventeen-year-old Naomi Shihab (Nye), of whom you poets may have heard. It was my first time ever to be published, and I would not be published again for thirty-six years.

I did write more poetry in my adolescence, but in college the muse fell silent while I pursued a musical career, studying piano and voice. Eventually, I became an opera coach, crowning my career as an assistant conductor at Houston Grand Opera. Poetry got pushed to the back burner.

Then seemingly out of the blue (but not really) came an irresistible call back to the Catholic Church, and with it an equally irresistible call to religious life. I gave up my operatic career completely and entered a monastery at the unlikely age of 44. There I was encouraged by the novice directress to reawaken my poetic muse. The quiet of the cloister was most conducive to writing, and the muse not only reawakened but asserted itself with great vigor. I wrote a good many poems; one was published in *Dominican Monastic Search*, a journal circulated among all the American monasteries of St. Dominic's order.

After two and a half happy years in the cloister, I returned to San Antonio to help my mother care for my infirm father, and the poetry continued to flourish. It has appeared in a number of publications, including *The Lyric*, *Time of Singing*, *The Eclectic Muse*, *The Road Not Taken*, *La Stanza di Nightingale*, *The Storyteller*, and of course *WestWard Quarterly*. In addition, I was a featured poet in the UK publication *Decanto*. Along the way, my poetry won prizes from Utmost Christian Poets and The Laurel Crown Foundation, and I was a finalist in the 2012 Thomas Merton Poetry of the Sacred Contest.

I began purely as a formalist, with the sonnet as my primary focus; lately, however, I've been writing more and more free verse, but formal poetry will always be my first love and true poetic home. Some poets — I daresay many — feel shackled by meter and rhyme, but I find them curiously liberating. In fact, free verse is much more difficult for me. I suppose I'm like a wayward child who needs rules and regulations in order to become a truly productive adult. My desire to write — not just poetry, but prose as well — is not a result of that early success in the fourth grade; rather, it was endorsed by it. The desire has been there as long as I can remember, just as my love of music has been, and these, along with my faith, are the forces that propel and nourish my life.

There are poets who want to shake the world, to speak out on political and social issues, to disturb and provoke. My hope is to write poems that the ordinary person — not only poets and academics — can readily grasp and identify with. I want my readers to be able to say after reading one of my poems, "I have felt this." As intimately personal, even confessional, as my writing is, if what I write is true for myself, it may be true for others. If what I write is a map of my own heart and soul, it may share a common landscape with the hearts and souls of others. We are all of the same species, after all, fashioned of the same fallible flesh. My words will surely stir something in someone, as was my hope at nine years old.

I want my poems to remain small and to speak with a quiet yet truthful voice. I want them to speak for the experience of the Everyday and the hope of the Eternal.

### Optimism

Be captivated by the light,  
the hidden colors in its whitest ray,  
the gleanings gathered in the bright of day,  
and take them with you into night.  
Seek out the modest gleam of dusk,  
the varied values of its subtle hues,  
the finished golds beneath the muddled blues,  
and spread them out upon the dust.

*First published in* The Road Not Taken: A  
Journal of Formal Poetry

### Apologia

My verses are but letters never sent,  
The wringing out of years too full to bear,  
The winging of a heart consumed and spent,  
Laid out for "judgment excellent and fair."\*

My words are only echoes of the words  
Unspoken, hostages of heart unvoiced  
And broken like a captured wing-clipped bird  
Who gave its higher songs to silent joys.

My poems are paradoxes better read  
By eyes unschooled, uncritical of skill,  
By readers ruled by heart instead of head,  
Whose hope has never waned and never will.

\*From Emily Dickinson, "Ample make this Bed"

*First published in* The Road Not Taken: A  
Journal of Formal Poetry

### The Recalling

Now beauty is elusive,  
folding its wings, lamenting,  
and summer droops its bright head  
over the brittle meadow.  
Even the rills lie silent.  
Yet there is still the remnant  
of autumn that arises  
at the call of an old song,  
that beckons me back to shade  
and leaf, to gleam and whisper.  
Weary with light's blank hardness  
I choose the bygone shadows,  
where beauty awaits, promised  
in the echo of your voice.

### Russell Square (London)

In the slate air  
a medieval mist  
hovers, mingles  
with the steam from  
my Styrofoam cup.  
I pass benches  
that are moist from  
night's lingering breath  
and take slow steps  
round the flower beds,  
drawing slender sips  
from my cup, savoring  
the waking of my limbs.  
The pavement  
beneath my feet  
shudders with a sudden breath  
as a lorry passes  
unseen. Beyond  
antique roses,  
the great City stirs.

### After the Storm

Drops trembled  
on fence wires,  
rustic festoons  
illuminating the puddled lane.  
The afternoon lay  
hushed and slaked  
over grasses bowed  
in mourning  
for the shrouded sun;  
my words were as measured  
as our steps on  
the slicked, packed earth,  
as self-conscious as  
the cattle that  
twitched their ears  
at our passing.  
Your hand, with  
man-child tenderness,  
brushed the salt drops  
from my cheeks.

## A Bird Flies With Freedom

*Rebecca Larsen, Washington State*

A bird glides freely though the spacious air,  
 With motions purposeful, yet swift and light,  
 Its wings spread out in strong, yet graceful flight,  
 It swoops and soars with sprightly avian flair.  
 We love to watch it fly, and long to share  
 The freedom we imagine its delight;  
 It seems a perfect symbol of our right  
 To freedom from restriction, want, and care.  
 Yet it flies in its ancestors' old routes —  
 Migration, finding food, and tending young.  
 We see the wild wings of liberty  
 Fulfilling duties in their free pursuits,  
 For wings are meant to fly, and feet to run  
 In the right pathways, in which they are free.

## Leaves Dead in Fall . . .

*Leonard H. Roller, California*

Leaves dead in fall are green in spring.  
 Is nothing, then, forever lost?  
 Do lordly spells the dead bring  
 Back, and melted snow return as frost?  
 Is nothing, then, forever lost?  
 Exploding stars return again?  
 Does entropy then have no cost,  
 And nothing ever dies in vain?  
 Exploding stars return again —  
 Is it the same with vanished souls?  
 Does nothing ever die in vain,  
 Nothing vanish into black holes?  
 If this is true of vanished souls,  
 There is no end to divine breath,  
 No darkness in the blackest holes,  
 And there is no such thing as death.  
 With no pause, then, in divine breath,  
 If lordly spells the dead bring  
 Back, all melted snow returns as frost,  
 Leaves dead in fall, are green in spring!

## The Candle

*Edward J. Rielly, Maine*

The wax of many colors,  
 dripping, slides down  
 slowly, collects  
 in vertical ridges,  
 like veins, along the way.  
 Brittle shards break,  
 melt into one another.  
 The candle shortens  
 but its substance,  
 transformed, remains,  
 the colors mingling  
 in new ways, hues we  
 have never seen before.  
 From its glow the world  
 awakens, eyes  
 see, a hand reaches  
 as it has for countless  
 years. How beautiful  
 is this world still  
 in the candle's  
 quiet glimmering.

## Improvisation on a Theme by Garcia Lorca

*Christopher Jay, Connecticut*

*Green, how I want you green.  
 Green wind. Green branches.  
 The boat on the sea  
 And the horse in the mountains.*

Lose me in a valley  
 Where grapes bend down vines.  
 Sky's roof, be my shelter.  
*Green, how I want you green.*

I remember, near summer twilight,  
 How the grass glowed like embers.  
*Green flesh, green hair  
 With eyes of cool silver.*

Green is the evening air.  
 Green are the palms of God.  
 Green is the vision of love.  
 Green are the orchestras of the sea.

*The italicized lines are from Garcia Lorca's  
 "Romance of a Sleepwalker."*

## Free Rein

*Aden Thomas, Wyoming*

Far off in the distance the coal train growls  
 along the tracks, lamenting to the wind  
 the recent journey of its miles chagrined,  
 the everlasting paths, the sagebrush scowls.  
 The wind moans back in wandering refrains  
 of gusts through trees. The branches flutter, versed  
 in muted sounds, beset by a silent thirst  
 for the companionship of light-dust rains.  
 The train and wind and leaves continue on,  
 but all that answers back are howling hounds  
 from their confined kennels and chain-linked grounds  
 shouting their loneliness to all who've gone  
 unbound, let loose to live their lives set free,  
 to chase the wind, to catch the leaves, to be.

## In Times of Despair

*Caryl Calsyn, Texas*

Are we so mired in hopelessness  
That we unwisely close the door,  
Before we can hear God say,  
“Wait my child, there’s more?”

Unable to see as God can,  
We lose faith. We disconnect.  
Do we not resemble Judas,  
At least in that respect?

Like a faltering Judas — to  
rudderless ways we revert,  
after sticking around for the meal,  
we leave before the dessert.

## All

*Gerald Heyder, Wisconsin*

All painted portraits  
can’t bring beauty to an ugly eye,  
All music composed  
is mute to ears exposed to lies!  
All flowers blooming  
can’t return lost butterflies,  
All toys tease’n please  
but can’t negate infants’ cries!  
All gleaming gold  
can’t purge soul’s decay,  
All silver needles  
can’t mend spirit assailed!  
All tears shed  
can’t cleanse stains away,  
All kisses given  
can’t heal heart betrayed!  
All my verse  
can never do  
All the things  
I want it to!  
How about “All’s”  
you know,  
do they bring “gold”  
or leave you blue?

## The Red Bridge

*Elizabeth Howard, Tennessee*

Sunflower, goldenrod,  
ironweed, and aster  
border the dwarfish  
red bridge, a scene  
fit for fairy tales.  
Atop the arch, a wizened  
man in straw hat  
and overalls casts  
crumbs to the carp  
idling in the glassy  
water. The fish shift  
and eddy, a kaleidoscope  
of orange and black.  
A monarch butterfly  
flutters onto the old  
man’s hand as it lifts  
and tosses, lifts  
and tosses. Autumn  
breezes begin to blow,  
water ripples, flowers  
sway, and the evening  
sun, like a giant  
magenta balloon,  
settles into the pond.

*CQ/California Quarterly, 25:2, 1999*

## Firewood

*John Grey, Rhode Island*

Giant strides, man into forest  
after Bible reading,  
chain-tough passage on a brittle page,  
to the blaze of dead leaves  
and the flap of crow-wings,  
swinging his axe, his duty.

Salvation learns from light, from color,  
from feathery sky and healing promise  
of the 23rd Psalm.

Old wood beckons him for a clean cut.  
The cold is coming  
but the better life has plans for it:  
a fire-place  
and a place in its flame for God.

Each Fall, red-faced into faith, father  
and axe, blade bearing down  
with a symphony of muscle  
and an orchestra of air.  
Ringing steel, reverberating tree . . .  
reward the fulsome echo.

## Intruder Alert

*Russell Rowland, New Hampshire*

Intent on spotting the loon so clearly heard,  
I pass *Private Property* signs on the lake road.  
No harm intended to any cottage, any beach;  
no harm done. I just won’t let such warnings  
keep me from viewing an endangered species  
whose cry is Rachel’s, bewailing her children.  
And there it floats, just surfaced from a dive:  
one of our State’s five hundred ninety-five.  
At the same moment, around a bend of road,  
a little girl’s face appears and stares me down  
with disapproval that puckers lips and brow.  
She vanishes as quickly. Having been small  
and powerless once myself, I know she runs  
to tell her dad about me — to feel important.  
I’ve seen a loon chick ride its parent’s back,  
their whole future weighing as little as that.

**October***William Beyer, Illinois*

Now the landscape  
Wears vivid,  
Festive colors,  
Deep woods  
Are alive  
With temporary brilliance,  
Maple leaves,  
Deep-crimson,  
Rust,  
Yellow-gold.

Partly hidden  
On extended branch,  
An unfamiliar bird  
Sings intermittently,  
A lyric prophesy  
For advancing Autumn.

**Sanctuary***Andy Roberts, Ohio*

The old oaks in their robes and slippers  
smoke their pipes at day's end with  
feet up, admiring the hillside,  
the valley folding itself in darkness.  
Susurrations, leaves wash their hands  
in last breeze. The white  
granite cliff-face  
flares once, holds,  
before dying.  
Moon suspended,  
yellow as old candle wax.

Shadows deepen.  
The dark ferns open  
their books.  
Moss breathes  
in cool air.

Quietly,  
from beneath pine cones,  
the pale faces of baby mice  
push up to explore.

**A Scene of This Night and Then . . .***Maura Gage Cavell, Louisiana*

The moon seems to fall,  
a shift in the horizon —  
a white gleam gone yellow  
behind the hills and clouds.  
The stars blink, wink,  
drench the sky and light,  
a seeming flicker  
as they come and go,  
playing hide-and-seek  
in the clouds.

They, too, seem to drop  
or rain as the earth dances  
on its axis, patterns  
like lace, intricate,  
filigree, shifting, shifting.

Love, love, as all changes  
again and again and again;  
let us be constant in heart,  
mind and soul.

Let not our love shift  
as the constellations  
appear to do.

Be my constant  
star and light.

**Autumn***Dawn Zapletal, California*

The sun in autumn slants askew  
And shows a desiccated view  
Of summer's dry and dusty stay  
In golden stacks of harvest hay.

The burning sky of summer's height  
That blazed with incandescent light  
Is softened now by nature's cue  
To amber, amethyst and blue.

With a gentle and cooling hand  
It smoothes the parched and fevered land.  
Now is the year's sweet afternoon  
And winter's night comes all too soon.

**The Way It's Meant to Be***Susan Rooke, Texas*

She never leaves for only a semester  
anymore, those months made shorter  
by her returning for long weekends,  
for Thanksgiving or Christmas holidays.

We never keep her cat, and lavish it —  
instead of her — with love. We never  
tiptoe through the downstairs on arising  
for fear of waking her. There isn't

any need. She's living on her own,  
cozy with her cat, and "home" sounds  
different to her ears than to ours. Visits  
are the time she spares us from her life.

Today she's gone again. I lace up  
my tennis shoes, head outdoors,  
sensing her car already miles from here.  
Beneath a dome of blue I walk

on this abbreviated late summer day.  
Dusk will come too soon, and the light  
this time of year is piercing, unbearably  
clear. Overhead, streaming contrails,

jets fly high and silent, on their way  
to places far from where I am, and may  
never be. So many that they stretch  
a white cat's cradle across the infinite,

pulled tight above this empty house.  
The sky-borne winds sweep through.  
I stop to watch as all those strings drift  
apart, and blow away beyond my grasp.

**Communion Wafer***Mark Perry, Georgia*

A day does not go by  
 that I do not think of you  
 who taught me tolerance  
 and quiet courage,  
 a man as humble as a carpenter  
 who modeled honest devotion  
 and unsurpassed dedication.  
 The town showed for your funeral,  
 and a flag flew at half staff  
 on that early spring day  
 so soon after the anniversary  
 of your birth on the ides of March.  
 Like a dull disciple,  
 I tried to learn your lessons  
 but did not understand  
 so very many  
 until after you were gone.  
 In your last days  
 you could barely stand any food,  
 except those peanut butter cups  
 beside your hospital bed.  
 Taking those remaining  
 after your stay,  
 in my grief,  
 from time to time,  
 I bit into one,  
 communing with  
 the memory of you.

**Smallest Acts***Kim L. Neidigh, Texas*

Our smallest acts  
 are eternally recorded,  
 so fill your ledger  
 with charity and kindness.

**Subjected in Hope***Shirley Anne Leonard, Illinois*

the barren earth that cries  
 the dream in us that dies  
 the emptiness of skies  
 the friends that move away  
 the shortness of the day  
 then —  
 immortality's sunshine  
 shows up  
 in  
 the brilliant stars at night  
 the dawn of morning light  
 the grace of birds in flight  
 a symphony of delight  
 and —  
 you can almost touch and see  
 the majestic tapestry  
 the utter intricacy  
 of this thing called Life

**Reflections***Michelle Shen, California*

Over ripples on a lake of baby blue,  
 Leaves dangled near to their demise  
 But still reveled in brilliance of hue:  
 Gold, scarlet, burgundy but a guise  
 For ashen death spreading through.  
 The lake, a mirror for all to surmise,  
 Our time will come soon, it's true.  
 Since the sun must set again to rise,  
 They needed to fall to grow anew.  
 As western wind released the ties  
 To their home and down they flew;  
 Trusting fate, they joined the wise.

**Happiness***Ed Severson, Arizona*

Is not getting to do what you loved to do  
 Anymore, and getting depressed,  
 And not wanting to do anything,  
 Until you finally get to where  
 You can't stand doing nothing,  
 So you start doing something,  
 Anything at all,  
 Which at first keeps you busy,  
 Then somehow makes you look forward  
 To doing it again,  
 Until you want to do it better, maybe even better,  
 Than most people do,  
 And then you want to do it as well as it can be done,  
 Because that is the way you should do it.

Then one day you look up from what your are doing,  
 And you think about how much  
 You loved to do what you had been doing,  
 Before you couldn't do it anymore.  
 And you think about what you are doing now.

It is like you were out on the street  
 And saw this old girlfriend who had left you,  
 And right then, you were suddenly glad  
 That you found your new one  
 Who is better-looking  
 And nicer in a lot of ways, and who,  
 Without your ever catching on,  
 Has made you happy,

**Autumn***Craig W. Steele, Pennsylvania*

*Autumn is a second spring when  
 every leaf is a flower. — Albert Camus*

Autumn brings a creeping chill that's  
 Unrelenting in its task of  
 Turning green leaves red, orange, yellow  
 Until bouquets bejewel the trees.  
 Magnificent, the splendor; yet none remain to greet  
 November.

## Resilience Required

*Kathleen Tiedemann, Arkansas*

Just after you've committed to a  
carefully considered course of action,  
The factors upon which your decision was founded fluctuate.  
Life's like that.

Just after you've dealt with your latest dilemma,  
Another blip shows up on the radar screen.  
Life's like that.

Just after you've inputted a boatload of data,  
One erroneous click and the whole thing's deleted.  
Life's like that.

Just after you've financially found a foothold,  
Your employer's downsizing affects you directly.  
Life's like that.

Just after you've fallen in bed exhausted,  
The rowdy neighbor's rambunctious guests arrive.  
Life's like that.

Just before you've given up totally,  
Someone asks, "May I help you?"  
. . . and a note of sincerity's detected.  
Life's like that.

## Hobbling

*d.n. simmers, British Columbia, Canada*

*" This collection of hobbled humanity" -- Evelyn Lau*

Seeing young feet going to school. The old ones  
who have picked the new Pope. Some hobble.  
While others move with a younger man's stride.

So many steps from young toes to old.  
Paths not thought of, moved through, then  
onto others, still to be, discovered.

Nothing is a straight line in the seismic line that  
stretches from birth to death.

It goes up and around and down and across.  
Skips sections which were demanded  
decades ago.

Some abandoned stretch of road is still to come.

## The Appeal of Making Fudge the Old-Fashioned Way

*Wilda Morris, Illinois*

Is it the sparkle of sugar and salt  
and the mystery of white becoming one  
with the dark cocoa? The magical  
transformation of dull brown  
by adding liquids? The deep, rich  
color of bubbling sauce? The  
chocolaty smell filling the room?  
Or is it the little dabs dropped  
into cold water, scooped up with  
two fingers to test if forms a ball,  
then eaten? Or the sheen created  
when the butter is stirred in?  
Is it the difficulty of timing? The miracle  
of consolidation as it is spread across  
the platter at just the right consistency?  
The challenge of "licking the pan," loosening  
each quickly hardening bite before it's too late?  
Is it the superior taste and texture? Yes,  
all of these, but more it is the memory  
of me and my sister as young girls,  
making fudge with mother and the memory  
of making fudge with my children.

## Needles' Eyes

*Stephen Kopel, California*

There may be countless stars in heaven  
hanging by a thread

Ones upstairs stitched with love  
lie sprinkled on my bed

My quilt appears to float  
upon a celestial sea

Spiral clouds emit patched points  
like some giddy divinity

A swath of crimson stars  
tumbles from a height

Circlets of cerulean ones  
attach to squares of white

My mother's sisters sewed  
in solicitous harmony

Sleepily, I snuggle under,  
a blessing over me



*Drawing by Patricia Sarazen*

### Noon Hour

*Patricia Sarazen, Pennsylvania*

Golden September days  
swept along my way,  
enriched with a beauty  
that brings God's glory!

For across the greens of summer crept  
a gathering of rich golds and bursting reds.  
From the cool nights the day woke anew,  
with joyous wonder to behold and woo.  
And this special day, at the noon hour,  
deep purple asters were in flower.

Their heavenly alchemy moved my spirit  
as I watched fluttering butterflies,  
within the golden rays of the noon hour,  
alight upon the deep purple aster flower.  
They held me spell-bound this September day,  
wooing deep purple asters along my way.

So come —  
Follow your heart  
this September day,  
wooing God's glory!

## *From My Vantage Point . . .*

*by Chester the Cat*



Do the pressures of life sometimes make you feel like hiding under a rug, or pulling the covers over your head like some humans do and going back to sleep? They certainly affect me that way! For example, when the doorbell rings and a strange human enters the house, I head for an open closet door or creep under the bed.

The other night I found what I thought was the perfect hiding place, the cupboard where our Editor stores canned food. As a bonus, there were some packs of soft cat food there, too, which I could sink my teeth into. Unfortunately, the cupboard door made so much noise when I worked my way in that our Publisher discovered my hiding place and pulled me out. (And moved the cat food to the refrigerator — phooey!)

The trouble is, if you write poetry while “hiding under a rug,” you won’t connect very well with your readers. After all, they’re dealing with the same pressures you are. I don’t like to say it, but if you want to write effectively there’s no place to hide.

### *Dedicated to My Favorite Poet: Emily Dickinson*

*If Emily Were Alive Today*

*Shirley Anne Leonard, Illinois*

If Emily were alive today  
would she have fainted  
dead away  
alarmed by Chatter and the Noise  
or would she just have been annoyed  
at such a lack of Privacy?

Would she stay Home  
in this town, too,  
and jot down Poems  
out of the blue  
and think this World,  
more shocking than  
that Smaller one  
from which she ran?

Would people think her  
Quaint and Odd  
and chip away at her Façade,  
and tell her — ‘do like all the rest’  
while they live lives clearly Stressed  
by running here and there all day  
and seldom thinking what they Say?

Would people label her Recluse —  
society have little use  
for one who worked with Words all day  
sculpting them in prim array  
to practiced, perfect, precise forms  
that did not fit existing norms?

## Creative Quotations

### The “Miracle” of American Poetry . . .

. . . Most immigrants to Colonial America visualized the country in their imaginations: a vague, terrifying, misleading, inhospitable, and inaccessible place. They were right. What a miracle that anyone ever ventured to settle here at all!

The second miracle was that Anne Bradstreet was among those early settlers. Born before Shakespeare died, she was to enjoy an honor she would never know about: she was America’s first poet of any merit, despite being a woman.

Anne Bradstreet wrote like the English gentlewoman she was. Although perhaps better off than some and certainly better educated than most women in the Colonies, she was a transplanted English subject writing English poetry in a foreign and puzzling land. But she had an eye for the homely detail, the unique situation. When she writes about the burning of her house, the experience takes on the poignant universality of such a disaster anywhere but with the undeniable detail if not language that classifies it as American. Any immigrant who followed her could identify with the particular sadness of losing treasured souvenirs of a vanished homeland. It was a sexless tragedy couched in domestic language, an example of individualism in an early Colonial New England where individualism was almost completely masculine. There were no Roman matrons in Massachusetts wielding the power behind their emperor squires. More than likely, they were wielding axes or spinning cloth, not tales or odes.

For years poets in this country have been accused of writing against the grain of American life, of emphasizing the alienation from rather than the affection for this country which nurtured even if it did not nourish them. America’s poets have been both traditionalists and revolutionaries, but even the most revolutionary of them has been deeply influenced by the very traditions they sought to escape. In a country founded on the amazing notion of religious and ethnic variety, a diversity of poetry was inevitable, a diversity characterized at first by a mutual wariness and awkwardness beneath its religious zeal. As American poetry escalated so did its aims and its subject matter. The poets got used to the country and vice versa.

—Nancy Sullivan, *The Treasury of American Poetry* (1978), xxii-xxiii.

### The Poet’s Eye . . .

The poet’s eye in a fine frenzy rolling, doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven; and, as imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.

— William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

### Poem Poem

*Herman Bush, Maryland*

A poem is a bouquet of lines,  
showy flowers, dirt, signs of life,

busy ants building a colony  
in the heart. A poem wonders,

dares to assess and create them,  
for what is more important,

the how or why we are here  
or that which we achieve henceforth?

Bowing to euphony, eschewing trends,  
it will, at times, self-construct,

refusing to accept limitations,  
fences confining creativity.

Not party to what went on before,  
a poem summons forces, starts anew.

### The Poet

*Janet Goven, Pennsylvania*

The poet is so gifted  
with an innate ability  
his pen does labor on the page  
to enlighten reality.

His sense of creativity  
with words is readily seen  
this super-sensitive being has  
an insight, ultra-keen.

With wisdom of the heart he writes  
not from a textbook learned  
so anticipate the sharing;  
he’s perplexed if it is spurned.

Imagination knows no limits  
it is as the poet deems  
he has honed his tool so well  
he can immortalize his dreams.

Appreciate the poet for  
his search has seen his soul,  
illumination from his Maker  
in his quest to being whole.

### Confusion

*Peter McQueary, California*

At times it can be accidental.  
At times it can be deliberate.  
At times it can be provoked.  
At times it can be divulged.

However,  
It is never misunderstood,  
Nor is it implied,  
Nor is it unique,  
Nor is it simple.

It can be easy to fix,  
Undo,  
Repeal,  
Defeat,  
And especially easy to discuss.

### Poet’s Tools

*Shirley Anne Leonard, Illinois*

A blank sheet of paper,  
a purpose, a pen  
to capture a vapor,  
an image, a yen.

A cloud floating by  
may furnish a clue,  
or a star in the sky  
inspire a view

To give birth to words  
that soar off the page  
as lively as birds  
let out of their cage,

While others, like rocks,  
when chiseled, can build  
out of commonplace blocks  
a more elegant world.

## That Old Back Yard

*Ron Larson, Virginia*

Years ago, we put up that old basketball goal and net.  
That's a day the kids won't ever forget.  
But they grew up, got married and then moved away,  
And that old goal looked lonely every sunny day.

The net's all frayed, and worn, and almost gone,  
And we felt a piece of our happiness had moved on.  
But now the grandkids are shooting at that old goal,  
And that makes me feel good in my soul

That old back yard is happy again,  
Kids shooting and playing like they did back then.  
Gonna get a ladder and hang up a new net, my friend.  
That old back yard is having fun again.

Our family's like that steel rim and basketball game.  
It changes, but it still stays the same.  
If there's one truth written from above,  
It's about God, family, fun and love.

## Deadheading Gardenias

*Diana Anhalt, Georgia*

Two bushes — blossom-studded — flank the porch.  
Armed with scissors, I grasp each branch, lop off  
the shriveled deadheads, toss them in the basket.  
Their brown petals, dry as wasp wings, rasp my fingers.  
Dust-speckled leaves reflect late afternoon sun.

The gardenias release their cloying perfume, a scent  
arousing memories of sachets, cotillions, funerals.  
I listen to the clop of scissors against stem, background  
of fly-buzz and traffic, a dripping faucet. The sun bears  
down on the crown of my head, dust in my nostrils.

The white bushes flaunt a new perfection. I shake  
my hands and satisfied, dry them on my jeans.

## Impromptu

*Will Leadbeater, New Zealand*

Autumn's big guns  
blast off  
most of the leaves . . .  
but winter's snipers  
pick off  
the remaining few:  
this season  
takes no prisoners

## The Common Folk

*Dr. James E. Kurtz, Illinois*  
(*Editor of Opinion*)

We marvel at the skyscrapers.  
We honor men of fame.  
We envy those of wealth and might,  
Wish we had the same.

But yet you know who made them,  
Those things of which we sigh?  
The common and plain folk,  
Just people like you and I.

It's the waitress and the bellhop,  
The janitor and such,  
The laborer and housemaid;  
It is they who mean so much.

So keep your wealth, might and fame  
In your selfish, greedy fight.  
Just give me work, love and friends  
And a God to keep me right.

## In Times Like These

*Ron Collins, Wisconsin*

In times like these  
we firmly grasp the Master's hand  
Where stormy turbulence arouses  
sense to whirl under a sea of blackness  
Where chaff wheat hath cast  
habitation of dragon in dungeon  
of wild beasts under shadows  
in court of owls.  
We seek Master command  
in treacherous times.  
Where we despiseth gain of oppressions  
and shaketh hands for bribes.  
Where we stoppeth ears from hearing of blood  
and shutteth eyes from evilness  
Where we walk in defense that shall  
be munitions of rock in righteousness.  
We grip firmly the Master hand.

## Grandma's Bible

*Barbara Tate, Tennessee*

What happened to Grandma's Bible,  
the one she held in her hands,  
the one she held so lovingly,  
the one with the gilded bands?

I remember the age-old stories  
she told me from that book,  
the book with the black leather cover.  
I loved to sit and look,

to look at the gold edged pages  
as she read the 23rd Psalm;  
I recited each and every word  
as Grandma read along.

She underlined the passages  
and read it every night;  
she told me how she read it  
long ago by coal oil light.

When the fireplace flamed and flickered  
she'd sit in her chair and read  
the words of the precious Savior  
and the Heavenly Father's creed.

I wish I had that Bible  
to see it once again,  
to see her notes on the pages  
and hear her say "Amen."

## Penelope Page Put Poems in Pudding

*Max Tell, British Columbia, Canada*

Penelope Page put poems in pudding.  
Poems in pudding, Penelope put.  
Pretty and pleasing, and so picturesque,  
Poems pencilled from a poetry book.

Poems of pandas, penguins, and pigs,  
Polar bears, pollywogs, parakeets too,  
Pugs, alpacas, pussycats, puffins,  
Poems of 'possums from Kalamazoo.

Pegasus, poltergeist, and Pita-skog,  
Piranhas, pythons, a purple worm,  
Pugilistic pirates, repulsive vipers,  
Most things 'p' that make people squirm.

Poems by Pope, poems by Poe,  
Piles of poems by poet Pound,  
Poems by Pfeiffer, poems by Pratt,  
Sound poems, found poems, all to expound.

Love poems, dove poems, pie poems, spy poems,  
Poems of praise, poems of praying,  
Poems of peril, poems of peace,  
Penned poems of piston pings.

Penelope Page put poems in pudding.  
Poems in pudding, Penelope put.

A little thing can quell their wrath,  
Just stick them in a bubble bath.

*Max Tell is the pen name for Robert Stelmach.*

## the tiny dancer

*Vernon Waring, Pennsylvania*

there once was a tiny woman  
who lived in a shoe  
she had so many boots and sandals  
she didn't know what to do  
she had itsy-bitsy teensy-weensy  
sneakers and pumps  
and microscopic oxfords  
that made her heart jump  
the mail order clogs  
she wore were custom-made in France  
and they went so well with leisurewear  
like her blue capri pants  
she loved her pink ballet flats  
(the ones that did not pinch)  
and she only wore stilettos with heels  
one-sixteenth of an inch  
her favorite choice of footgear  
was a gift that could not be hipper:  
a splendid miniature pair  
of magical ruby slippers  
and she was the belle of the ball  
with her minuscule diamond crown  
where her little ruby slippers glowed  
as she twirled in her wee princess gown

## Ten Ways to Cross the Moat

*Denny E. Marshall, Nebraska*

Walk across on a pole, Cole  
Try it pole vault style, Kyle  
Use a boat and row, Joe  
Jump in and swim, Jim  
Use a log and float across, Josh  
Cross drawbridge in a cart, Art  
Dig tunnel underneath, Keith  
Fly above in glider plane, Jane  
Use a small zeppelin, Jacqueline  
Use catapult without rock, Brock

Of Cards and High Blood Pressure  
*Suzanne Clement, New Hampshire*

"Let's  
play cards,"  
suggested  
my two nephews  
visiting from Maine.

Jeff is ten,  
His brother,  
Sam, is seven.  
"Okay," I agreed.

"What  
shall we  
play?" asked Jeff.  
"Hearts? Crazy Eights?  
Old Maid? Canasta?"

"I  
will play  
anything  
except Old Maid,"  
was my suggestion.

"What's  
wrong with  
Old Maid?" Sam  
wanted to know.

"The  
Old Maid  
frightens me,"  
was my reply,  
"Seeing her picture  
makes my blood pressure rise  
to a dangerous level."

So we played Crazy Eights.

Ode to Sinatra  
Seth Hurwitz, *Missouri*

When The Voice turned fifty,  
he cut an album entitled  
“September of My Years.”  
I’ve done the analogic math, and  
it’s precise.

Washing the dinner dishes, I background  
the autumnal CD because  
I’ve yet to learn the latest tune  
machinery. Soaped and crooning  
away, I’m interrupted by a call —

It’s my daughter, ring-a-ding-dinging from  
New York, New York, two days  
into her first real long time  
gone from home, attending “The Lion King” and shopping  
in sophisticated, upscale stores  
with moneyed aunt and uncle and, all in all, living  
the perfunctory lush life (peering down  
the Empire State, breathing out  
the Island Ferry), a thousand miles  
away —  
and I barely hear her in the overlapping  
dialogue, because she inexplicably prefers  
the cell phone (the clarity of land lines  
a foggy day in the distant past), and by the time  
we say goodbye,

I’ve lost my way, forgotten  
where I was in song  
and plate.  
Two more days before  
she’ll have to listen once again,  
in the car whose driver gets to choose,  
to songs she claims to hate — but which, I will  
assure her in some wise and half-  
ironic voice that feels  
developmentally correct, she’ll when she’s older  
learn to love in, I suppose,  
some happily, uncannily transplanted world,  
like today’s but different,  
just the other side of my  
December.

Open Space  
Lisa M. Drago, *Virginia*

Cruising city streets,  
sudden awareness  
of open space

On a corner  
Once boarded-up  
century-old home  
now a flat  
brown rectangle  
dotted by white  
and yellow triangles —  
glittering in the sun —  
remnants  
of walls, paint

All that’s left  
To remember  
lives born, loved,  
died within.  
Stories once contained  
— now fly free —  
in this world or  
the next.

Crossword Puzzle  
Eliot Singer, *New York*

At her age, her eyes are failing.  
And the medicine she’s given  
makes her groggy and sleepy,  
even during the daytime.  
So she sits in the lobby  
of the apartment building,  
where the bright lights  
keep her awake,  
and she does a simple  
crossword puzzle.  
It’s not brain surgery  
and other people  
in other places  
are doing great things,  
but her attention is focused  
on those little squares.  
And no one entering or leaving  
the building diverts her attention  
from her obsessive hobby.

The Starling  
Jackie Smith, *Puerto Rico*

A black bird stood in the road,  
A small, nondescript, mottled black bird.  
A grackle? No, a European Starling.  
Much more romantic but  
“Pest,” “Non-native,” “Invasive,”  
Massing in suburban lawns,  
The kudzu of the bird world.  
This bird stood on the pavement  
Apart from the flock,  
Beak tilted to heaven,  
Wings outstretched and flapping  
Like a running back celebrating  
In the end zone.  
Seeing it gave me a joy that  
Lightened my tired heart and  
Made me believe  
That God cares.

*Published in The Shepherd, 2006*

The Added Extras  
Jesse James Doty, *California*

What makes the difference  
Between true caring  
And obligation are  
The added extras.  
When you keep your promises  
It’s your honor and integrity.  
But it is the added extras  
That show true tenderness  
And vulnerability — daring to  
Show your feelings, even  
When they might not be returned.  
To risk — to share — to dare  
To give the added extras  
Knowing they might not be returned,  
But giving them anyway  
Because you love  
In that indescribable way  
That makes all the added extras  
Just part of your day.

**Fall Ball***Phyllis Berentsen, Wisconsin*

I think the trees are having a ball  
Decorating the world for fall.

How do they do it? I always will wonder.  
How do they change colors with never a blunder?  
How flaunt reds and yellows, and in between hues,  
Without a mistake such as moving to blues?

How do they choose how to play out this dance?  
Do they argue, draw straws, or leave it to chance?  
If I want to be yellow does that make you red?  
Or must I be orange because somebody said?

Is someone in charge over all like a king?  
Or does everyone just go and do their own thing?  
If I were a tree I would not have to ask  
It would be like a natural part of my task.

But since I'm a kid I just watch with amazement  
While trees go about their fantastic emblazement.

**Quest***Richard D. Hartwell, California*

a wanderer in search of —  
truth  
seeds of acceptance, germs of maturity.  
responsibility  
longing to be needed, joy of fulfilling.  
meaning  
credo that drives man, cradle to grave.  
self  
final questions, an unfinished world.

**Trivial Pursuit***Robert Black, United Kingdom*

The bookworm was an avid reader,  
until one day, after munching his way  
through a publication about camouflage,  
he turned into a paper aeroplane and flew  
through the open window in the library.  
Outside in the open air his spirits soared,  
until spying a flowery dress upon a bench  
on which his soul came gently to rest  
and was taken in, in time becoming  
an important note for messages.

**At the Manhattan Zoo, 03/07/2012***Vincent J. Tomeo, New York*

Elusive spotted snow leopard  
stretched and slipped away  
into the green pines fir

A Polar bear was hiding  
like a sleeping rug under a cool rock  
not ready to sit in the sun

Parakeets were color brilliant  
as the sun peeped through the forest atrium  
birds bobbed and weaved between the bright light  
and the wooded greens

On a boulder sunbathing  
a seal rolled over on its back smelling like sardines

And the people ran back and forth to see the monkeys  
who could care less

But I stopped  
waited waited waited  
to see Chocolate the spotted snow leopard poised  
Then a stately yawn

**Trapezes***Lois Hayn, California*

At twelve I heard the circus calling —  
did not run away; instead lived backyard summers  
climbing oaks and grasping branches  
to swing past robins and flowers  
daring high as any aerialist.

Now I coast porch swing to hear words calling,  
I grab at meter, hurtle with metaphor,  
soar with similes over rows of rhyme,  
sometimes lunge fearlessly for the no-net  
triple somersault of one poem.

**Peace***Debra Pardue Hollar, North Carolina*

Humanity needs a day when there will  
be tender doves circling a Heavenly  
cloud and world wide yearning hearts  
wishing for an earth touched with Peace.

## Velna

loved to climb the windmill tower  
to the small platform far above  
her bouncing braids  
and sing opera to the bejeweled  
ladies in gowns and to tuxedoed gents  
in the chandeliered opera house  
shimmering on the small farm below.  
She could see forever across  
the Kansas flint-hills and rolling grass,  
black cattle, older brothers baling  
hay, and by the big red barn,  
her father, a kindred singer  
with a fine baritone voice, smiling  
and stopping to hear her song.

Eighty-six years later, Velna  
sang Butterfly arias in a cracked  
voice full of emotion and enthusiasm  
in the California sun. Top down  
on the quick red sportscar, silk scarf  
streaming out behind like Isadora  
Duncan's, she coursed along the dry hills  
with her young friend Susan,  
an opera buff who lived next door.

The only opera stages Velna reached  
were the beautiful ones in her mind  
and such success she reached there,  
standing ovations, curtain calls,  
dozens of bouquets of roses.

*Dennis Ross, Iowa*

## Over Again

*Diane Webster, Colorado*

Days are like my lawn in October.  
Leaves fall and clutter over the green,  
and each breath of wind flutters new debris;  
and each afternoon I rake my rows,  
mound my piles, and stomp my bags full  
with the tree's leftovers,  
content I made a difference today,  
seeing tomorrow I start over again.

## The Last Sunflower

*John Kaniecki, New Jersey*

In the dimness of night's hour  
As stars glimmer in the sky  
I looked upon a fading sunflower  
Withered brown waiting to die  
Yet there was a single precious bloom  
Glorious as day light in youth  
Impervious to inevitable doom  
Defying the reality of autumn's truth

How long shall the sunflower last  
Will it live to see winter's snow  
Before it is but a memory of the past  
A pleasure and delight we once did know

Nothing lasts forever  
This is commonly said  
By poets striving to be clever  
Seeking to be read  
Yet in the beginning God spoke  
Let there be light  
And from darkness Glory broke  
Eternally our delight

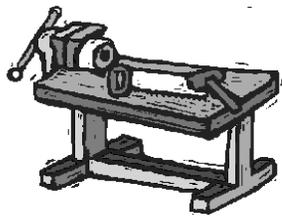
Perhaps the sunflower bright and yellow  
Contains the essence of that first morn  
A way for God to say a daily hello  
For all of creation that has to be born

The wisdom of the sunflower is vast  
Not to mention mysteries of the universe  
All I know is good things fade far too fast  
Like the words of this simple verse

## Autumn

*David Gregg, Missouri*

The sweet lights of autumn  
flood my window pane  
the cat is overcome  
and the dog is outside  
chasing the red and gold  
of the falling leaves,  
a roasted hue, like Indian corn  
or the color of a man  
stuck in fall.



## WRITER'S WORKBENCH

### The Healing Power of Poetry

In his book *The Healing Power of Poetry* (1960) Dr. Smiley Branton, a psychiatrist, talks about the healing power of poetry and how he used it in his practice. He explains how poets give us much of our insight into the human heart and show us how and why we act the way we do. The poets of old comprehended and expressed things, which our psychologists have only recently elaborated into science. It is sad that we live in a culture that ignores and devalues poetry, along with so many other things that are important in life. And much of "modern poetry," instead of lifting us up, only mires us deeper in the mud of human misery.

As Norman Vincent Peale says, in the Foreword of this book, "Most poetry is much more than sentiment, being in itself a profound form of insight. The truly gifted poet is a seer who senses and perceives inner motivations and fundamental depth of thought. Have you ever noticed the strange hush that settles over an audience when truth in the form of a great poem is communicated?"

There's a song that goes, "If I ever needed you, I need you now . . ." I think we can say that about a lot of values in our culture that are disappearing, or are purposely being crushed. We truly need something to lift us up above the stress of the times, and good poetry can be one of those things.

Consider poems such as Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-1861) wrote, "Say Not the Struggle Not Availeth":

*For while the tired waves vainly breaking  
Seem here no painful inch to gain,  
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,  
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.*

Or, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886):

*He ate and drank the precious words,  
His spirit grew robust;  
He knew no more that he was poor,  
Nor that his frame was dust.  
He danced among the dingy days,  
And this bequest of wings  
Was but a book. What liberty  
A loosened spirit brings!*

Or, Emily Brontë's (1818-1848) "No Coward Soul Is Mine":

*No coward soul is mine,  
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere;  
I see Heaven's glories shine,  
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.  
O God within my breast,  
Almighty, ever-present Deity!  
Life — that in me has rest,  
As I — undying Life — have power in Thee!*

These are classics and there are many more that you can find by doing a search on the Internet for Classic Poets or going to your local library. They will not only inspire you personally but also inspire you to write the type of poetry that can have a healing affect on those who read it.

These classic writers lived in troubled times as we do now but in spite of life's pressures decided to write poems that would inspire and give courage. We have the power in our hands as poets to write for the betterment of humanity and what more noble purpose can there be than that!

Happy Writing — THE EDITOR



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