

# *The Loyalhanna Review*

2015



## From the Editor

This past year, our twenty-ninth, has featured our *Loyalhanna Review* publication party at the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art, a greatly appreciated Writers' Conference, and successful student poetry and flash fiction contests. Following a difficult financial decision by the LVW board not to hold a conference in 2015, we concentrated on workshops and community programs in partnership with several other nonprofits. In addition to a series of "Meet Your Local Authors" programs, our workshops have covered topics of finding an agent, writing a memoir, researching genealogy, marketing our books, and using social media for promotion. We look forward to our fall potluck picnic, a new round of flash fiction contest winners, a winter holiday gathering, and the next volume in our fundraiser series, *The Phantom Detectives on Vacation*. What we need to remain a viable organization is increased membership and active support from people who enjoy and value what we do.

—Ruth McDonald, Editor

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## Special Thanks to Ligonier Valley Writers' Contributors and Friends

• Editorial Staff of *The Loyalhanna Review* especially Judith Gallagher

- Ralph and Ginny Bennett
- Lou and Barb Steiner
- Caddy Durkin Harper
- Keith Neill
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- Alicia Stankay
- Rebecca Dunn
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- Greensburg Writers' Group
- Westmoreland Museum of American Art
- St. Michael's of the Valley Church
- Westmoreland Community Foundation
- Megan Huhn at Barnes & Noble
- Joanna Moyar at Westmoreland County Historical Society
- Louise Tilzey-Bates at Westmoreland Heritage
- Janet Hudson at Ligonier Valley Library
- Michele Jones at AIW Communications and Consulting



**Ronald L. Murphy** says, "I am honored to be a past contributor to *The Loyalhanna Review* and look forward to submitting each year. An actor, writer, and father of five, I love this publication and its continued nurturing of the arts."

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# Magarac

© by Jim Busch

"I'm telling yinz that would hurt like a mother."

"You're crazy; it'd fry your ass so fast, you wouldn't feel a damn thing!"

"How about if you went feet first?"

"Naw . . . wouldn't matter; you'd still be nothing but a lump of slag and a bad memory in less than a second."

"Why the hell do they call the damn thing a Magarac, anyway? How about it, Mike, you know all about this kinda crap."

Mike Zubik closed his battered black lunch bucket and looked up at his buddies sitting around on greasy, splintered crates. He hadn't been paying attention to their bull session, so he had a blank look on his dirty face.

"Why the hell do they call doing a swan dive into a ladle of hot steel a *Magarac*?"

"When he got drunk my grandpap used to tell me stories about the old days. He claimed that Magarac personally saved his ass, pulled him out of the way when his leg got burned, but I think that's pure BS. Magarac means "jackass" in Hunky, so that's what the foremen would call these big old farm boys just off the boat from the old country. They meant to insult 'em, but those dumb Hunkies took it as a compliment. They knew that jackasses had strong backs and were tougher than horses. They told stories about Joe Magarac, about how he was the best steelworker that ever lived. He was kinda like a Paul Bunyan for guys like us. They kept laying on the BS until Magarac was twenty feet tall and could shape molten steel like putty with his bare hands."

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*Joe Magarac was the best steelworker that ever lived, a Paul Bunyan for guys like us.*

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"So why do they call offing yourself in a twenty-ton ladle a *Magarac*?"

"Well, the story goes that old Andy Carnegie wanted to build the biggest damn furnace ever, but the steel wasn't strong enough to take the weight, so Magarac jumped into a ladle and the steel in that pour was the best steel ever made!"

"Sounds like a dumbass move to me."

Mike Zubic just waved an arm to show that he was done with this conversation, said "I've gotta see a man about a horse," and walked off into the shadows.

He was gonna miss those guys. It was finally sinking into his brain that the mill was shutting

down for good. There wasn't going to be a callback this time. This was worse than the days of the big strikes and the Depression. This time was different. The mill was done for, and he and all the guys were done for. *Thanks for making the company millions of dollars . . . don't let the door hit you in the ass!* He'd been a mill hunk his whole life; it was the only life he knew. Come next week the mill was done. Then came twenty-six weeks of checks, and after that, nothing. Maybe it was time to take a swim in the ladle like the guy his buddies talked about. One step off the catwalk and all his troubles would literally go up in a puff of smoke.

Maybe it was always meant to end this way. The steel had tried to kill his grandfather. He remembered Grandpap's scarred and useless leg. Some idiot foreman hadn't checked the ladle before a pour. The steel hit a puddle of water and bang! Hot metal went flying everywhere. Pap tried to run, but the white hot liquid burned his flesh right down to the bone. He was lucky; the company police chief was a lodge buddy and found him a job in the guard shack so he could get his pension. Mike's dad had had his share of close calls too; anyone who spends his life around white-hot steel, overhead cranes, and rolling mills is bound to collect a few scars. He was sure that was why the old man got the cancer. Never smoked one damn cigarette in his life and his lungs were still shot to hell. One day breathing in the sulfur air of the mill was like chain-smoking a million Camels. Poor bastard lasted less than two years after he retired.

Mike was lucky. By the time he came along, a guy could make a good living in the mill. You could afford a nice house, a decent car, and maybe a cabin in the mountains. The government had made the mills a lot safer. Some guys still got burned or crushed, that was part of the job, but guys weren't getting killed all the time like in the old days.

It was too good to last. He should have seen the writing on the wall; the company hadn't put a damn nickel into this plant in twenty years. They hadn't built a new furnace since VJ Day, thirty-five years ago. This plant had made the steel for the ships and planes that had kicked the Japs' ass all the way back to Tokyo. Now the Japs were kicking their ass with cheap imported steel. He used to jag his brother about how much money he made working overtime in the mill. Twice what Dan made teaching with his fancy college degree. Looked like brother Dan would have the last laugh after all!

Mike had thought about going to college when he got out of the Navy. He even looked into the G.I. Bill, but he was never serious about it. He wanted to get on with his life. He wanted to marry Cheryl and stand on his own two feet. Now he was royally

screwed. Once this mill shut down he was done. With ten thousand guys just like him on the street, he'd be lucky to get a job bagging groceries at Super Dollar. What was he going to tell Cheryl? She and the boys counted on him. They would lose the house. They would lose everything.

Maybe Magarac wasn't a dumbass after all. If "something" happened to him in the mill, Cheryl would be all right. The mortgage insurance would take care of the house and the union would see that Cheryl got a widow's pension. She would miss him, but she was still a young woman. He had always thought she could have done better than to marry a dumb hunkie like him; this would give her that chance.

But could he do it? Didn't matter. He had to do it, it was the only way. He had one stark choice: starve and take his family with him or go quick and let his wife and kids go on living. Father Frank would tell him it was a mortal sin, but he wasn't sure if that even mattered, and if it was, doesn't the Bible say something about "No greater love" and all that?

He climbed the steel ladder that the hook-on guy used to get to the scaffolding over the ladle. He unhooked the yellow safety chain and stood on the edge. He pulled his goggles down from his hard hat. It was weird, but the thought of the molten steel hitting his eyes freaked him out. The guys were right, headfirst was the way to do this. He silently said, "Cheryl, I love you." He began to lean forward. The intense heat made the sweat bead up on his face. His body began to pick up speed as his center of balance shifted. The shimmering pool of liquid steel filled his field of vision and he thought, this is how it ends.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a huge arm and a rough hand reached across his chest and pulled him back to the catwalk. Mike pulled up his goggles and found himself looking at the biggest man he had ever seen. Everybody in the shop wore heat-resistant green overalls, metatarsal boots, and a hard hat, but the giant before him wore a sweat-stained sleeveless work shirt open to the waist, exposing a muscled chest and arms that reminded him of his boys' wrestling action figures. A dirty cloth cap and a shock of yellow-gold hair were all that protected his huge head.

"So who is jackass now, Mike?" he said in a deep voice tinged with a thick Eastern European accent.

"Do I know you? How do you know my name?"

"Sure I know you. I knew your papa and his papa too. I know every poor son of beech who ever made a pour in dis damn mill."

"Why'd you stop me?"

"You about to do stupid thing."

"It's the only thing I've got left to do."

"How about wife and boys? What you think they say about this idea?"

"It's the best thing for them too."

"I don't think they say dat."

"You don't understand, I'm done for. The

insurance is the last thing I can do to take care of them."

"That's a load of crap and you know it. That not what they need from you."

"Then what the hell do you propose I do!"

"Live! Work! Love your family! You ain't allowed to quit, you dumb Hunky. Don't you think your grandpa wanted to quit when his leg was burned? Your pap kept coming to work even when his lungs burned like fire. You ain't allowed to quit!"

"You don't understand, this mill is history. It'll close for good on the first of July. And when it's done, I'm done!"

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*Thanks for making the  
company millions of  
dollars. Don't let the door  
hit you in the ass!*

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"You are big dumbass! Don't you know? Mills come and mills go. Generations come—grandpaps, paps, and their kids—and then they go to cemetery. What goes on is us, us working men. No matter what happens, we do the work and we care for our families. This mill is just rusty steel, coal dust, and a pile of bricks. We're what makes it live. This mill can't stand without us, but we sure as hell can go on without it. Compared to us, steel is nothing. We're tougher and stronger than any rail, I-beam, or armor plate that ever came off the line."

"But what will I do? This is the only thing I know how to do."

"You'll struggle, you'll learn, you'll find a way, but you won't quit. It's not in your blood."

Mike looked down at his shoes and thought about what the big stranger had said. "I am a dumbass; I'm not gonna let these bastards get the best of me." He picked up the safety chain and locked it in place. He turned to thank the stranger, but he was gone.

As Mike climbed down from the catwalk he thought, "Maybe Grandpap wasn't BS-ing me after all." He looked over at the ladle of steel and called out, "Thanks, Joe! I owe you one." ♦

**Jim Busch** works as a sales trainer, public speaker, and writer in the newspaper industry. He writes several monthly columns and has published a number of freelance articles. Jim lives in White Oak with his wife and proofreader Glenda.

# From Pie Crust to Hot Steel

© by Rose A. Domenick

When my son was about two years old, I suddenly went from a sheltered young mother whose hands were known for baking the flakiest pie crusts to a steelworker whose hands rolled hot steel to order at U.S. Steel Duquesne.

Against the wishes of my family, especially my husband and father, I applied for the advertised opening to keep my little family off the welfare rolls.

I got the job, along with a handful of other women, and vowed to stay as long as I could—especially after hearing horror stories from those with mill experience who tried to scare me off.

Well, my rose-colored glasses were shattered. I had no idea how innocent I was.

For example, I didn't know married men asked women out--married women, yet. I offset the offers by kidding the older ones that they reminded me of "my Uncle Tony" and the younger ones of "my brother Ricky."

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## *My ears felt like bacon crisping.*

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They got the message.

There were two other women on my shift in the primary mill, where we rolled hot ingots first into slabs, then beams, then down to the 21-inch mill before the skinny beams went out to the cooling beds.

I mostly worked with a black woman named Roxanne. When we walked to our post, the guys would call out, "Here come salt and pepper!"

Some women used their gender to avoid tasks. These women were not highly thought of, since they were making the same family-supporting wages. I did my share, even when male co-workers tested me by trying to baby me during certain tasks.

Early in my job, a labor group was sent to replace refractory material in an ingot soaking pit. Since the ones adjacent were functioning, it was so hot the workers had to take turns using a 100-pound pneumatic jackhammer in 15-minute increments while wearing long underwear and green protective gear.

The steel in my boots got so hot it felt as if the tops of my feet were burning. My ears felt like bacon crisping.

The guys in my crew said, "Rosie, you don't have to do this." I thought I did. Handling the jackhammer was all in the balance, once you got it up and on. The only issue was the huge bounce in my booty, which the guys certainly didn't have. I ignored their initial amusement and did the job.

I took on jobs some of the men were too leery

to do, like setting the saw to order and cutting hot steel as it came down the line. This steel was ordered for specific buildings, and the lengths required were printed out on a recorder in the two-story pulpit. This was where the controls were for the four-foot saw blade, along with the various rolls and stopper plates to move the steel around. There was even a control for the end piece of scrap that I worked with my foot at the same time. The hardest part was running down to the saw between heats, changing the stopper measurements so I could cut the steel to the ordered length, *and* check to make sure there was enough hydraulic fluid left to move the huge saw blade (since the hose leaked).

The gathering tables were another job where I had to catch the red-hot steel bars with stoppers as they flew down the rolls. They needed to be moved real fast before the next batch came through.

Many times leaving a shift after my relief took over, as I was walking up the mill, I'd see in the monitor steel bars flying off the rolls like giant twisting spaghetti noodles. The mill would need to be shut down and the crane called. The production time lost meant a big loss of money.

I found I was good at handling heavy equipment that needed coordination skills. I could handle the people (even the ex-cons in the locker room, who were scarier than the men).

But I didn't like getting dirty and working long shifts. It was not a career. I made a paycheck for a few years that enabled my family to buy a modest house and saved a bit of money so I could be home with my son and begin college.

What a boost to my self-esteem, which had also been sheltered. More importantly, I learned that I was equal to any man and deserved respect.

I guess I got it, too.

My last day on the job, I was called into the 36-inch mill pulpit at the end of my shift. The guys had a surprise for me. They sang "For She's a Jolly Good Fellow," gave me a butterfly necklace, and had a cake and half-melted ice cream. (With all that hot steel nearby, the little fridges could never stay cold enough for frozen goods.)

Nowadays, not many men have heavy industrial backgrounds, let alone women. While this experience was almost forty years ago, it seems like yesterday. How nice it would be to somehow have a reunion! ♦

**Rose A. Domenick** is a freelance writer, Reiki practitioner, folk artist, and former *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* newspaper reporter. Her vast variety of job experiences has ranged from poodle groomer to steelworker.

# Boston, Facing West

© by Michael Albright

*We must not fear daylight just because it  
almost always illuminates a miserable world.*  
—Rene Magritte

I.

A hostess draws the curtain back, and breakfast  
floods the dining room. The Charles floats by,  
more lake than stream. Sculls and loons skim the  
sheen.

New leaves on riverside rattle the breeze.  
My mother passed here ten months ago—  
the Marathon four weeks today.

A four-paned window frames town and sky,  
a painting, *Ceci n'est pas Cambridge*,  
a cross against the morning clouds.

I'm hopeful for redemption, grace,  
a parking space in Harvard Square.

II.

Mother looked down on this same scene from  
twenty-three at MGH, post-op, med-foggy,  
at a schoolbus yellow tourist boat—

*That's not supposed to be there!*  
But none of it all, not one of us is  
supposed to be, strapped to the wheel,  
arms and legs splayed open wide, cruel myth  
prescribing the cure of redemptive pain  
turning until the axle snaps—  
and I beat my bleeding head against  
the firmament, trying to understand.

III.

But, today I glimpse possibility—  
the window in the corner just beside  
is just as wide and just as tall, but one  
whole pane instead of four. No cross in this,  
but a perfect curl of rich, red oak,  
circumference kissing every side.  
Through this lens I see more greenery,  
and a bridge with traffic east and west.  
Some days I get the window with four panes,  
but today, I choose the circle and the bridge—  
I'll take a cab to Harvard Square.

**Michael Albright** is a Greensburg poet active with Ligonier Valley Writers and several Pittsburgh poetry groups. His chapbook, *In the Hall of Dead Birds and Viking Tools*, will be available later this year from Finishing Line Press.

# Joan, Ascending

© by Michael Albright

She could barely walk  
at her sister's service, trembling,  
borne by sons, one to an arm.  
They all blamed her back, but  
she knew better, the dark secret  
racing through blood and bone.  
Her nephew kissed her face,  
and whispered in her ear—  
*You were always my favorite.*

They took her straight to the hospital,  
the one with one story, and no elevator—  
she was scared of going up, or down,  
but mostly of being stuck between.

He stopped  
to see her on his way out of town,  
said get well soon, he'd see her again,  
but she couldn't even look at him—  
four more weeks, and she'd be gone.

He sent flowers, and agonized.  
Should he make the trip, fly back there  
for another funeral in less than a month?  
He could do that, maybe he should,  
but he didn't want to make a scene—  
it wasn't his turn anymore.

---

# Route 79 North in Winter

© by Sally Witt

When shadows of bare trees—  
strong and certain,  
sometimes intricate as lace—  
fall on fields of snow,

doesn't your heart leap  
at what the unexpected winter light reveals,  
at beauty deeper than death or any darkness!

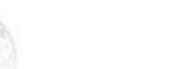
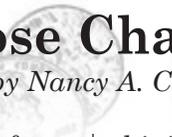
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# When Waiting

© by Sally Witt

When waiting is most wearisome,  
understand it is your gift  
to bear the balm of stillness  
for the scarred, impatient city.

**Sally Witt**, a Sister of St. Joseph in Baden, PA, belongs to the Taproot Writers' Group. Currently she is researching and writing about the history of women religious in the United States.



# Loose Change

© by Nancy A. Clark

When Dad was a coal miner and the father of three young minors (with more to come), he was paid his wages from the Rochester and Pittsburgh (R & P) Coal Company in paper bills and coins. The money was tucked into a nondescript three- by five-inch manila envelope Dad picked up at the paymaster's window each payday. By the time he arrived home, the envelope with his name—Nick Fedoruk—handwritten across the top front was smudged with his own coal-embossed fingerprints. I never knew how much money Dad earned tapping out a coal seam while lying or kneeling in a poorly lighted 24- to 30-inch crawl space for eight to ten hours a day in an Indiana County, PA, coal mine. The figure was of no concern to a prepubescent girl who had all of life's necessities: nourishing food, warm clothes, a doll of her own, and an endless supply of affection. My eight-year-old self focused on the jingle—the loose change—in the pay envelope Dad (who I believed was equipped with super-powers) pulled out of the food tray portion of his round, three-piece aluminum lunch bucket. From time to time, a chocolate or “banana flip” lunch cake magically appeared with the envelope, solidifying my image of Dad, the Magician.

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*The world's greatest dad  
is our world's  
greatest teaser.*

---

Picture it: Payday, circa 1950. As he does every day, Dad trudges into the house through the side door of our two-story clapboard house just before the supper hour. Normally, he'd make a beeline for the basement to “worsh up” and change clothes before coming to the supper table. But today is different: today is payday.

Dad settles himself on the top step of the basement stairs and summons us to him by rattling the coins in his pay envelope. “Guess how much change is in this envelope and win first prize,” he teases, mimicking the cadence of a circus barker and shaking the envelope above his head. We beg for a hint and stretch to our utmost in an effort to touch the envelope, but Dad pulls it out of reach.

“No cheating,” he admonishes, a chuckle escaping from his barrel chest, his eyes bright with a Santa twinkle. The world's greatest dad is also *our* world's greatest teaser.

We three shout out numbers over each other but never hit the nail on the head. Mom, fearing the game will go on forever, fakes a heavy sigh. “Supper's gettin' cold,” she warns, cueing Dad to implement Plan B.

“The closest guesser,” he promises, “gets the

shiniest coin.” Magically, there is *always* one very shiny coin in that envelope. And like magic, the loose change will, without fail, be divisible by three so that at the end of the game *each* of our piggy banks will be *equally* richer by two cents or six cents or 24 cents or more. Why, at the end of the game, our coin banks could be richer by 33 cents each! Mystery and magic: For that, we'll eat cold baloney soup.

My younger siblings rush off to feed their ceramic pigs, but I linger and see Dad surreptitiously slip something into Mom's hand. As she drops it into her apron pocket, he reaches into the water reservoir of his lunch bucket and, true to his payday routine, presents her with a pink, half-pint carton of Meadow Gold Premium Strawberry Ice Cream.

“For you, hon,” he says, handing Mom her favorite frozen treat as if for the first time. She smiles broadly, kisses his coal-dusted chubby cheek, and clutches the frosty carton as if it's the best gift she ever received.

“Supper will keep,” she says, brushing particles of black soot from her upper lip.

The R & P Coal Company, the source of my family's livelihood for decades, shuttered the mines just before my sixteenth birthday, bringing an end to life as we knew it. Dad eventually found employment in a nearby machine shop and was paid his wages via the more efficient (but less romantic) payroll check.

Years later, latent memories of Dad's pay envelopes fueled conversation at the family dinner table. “How was it, Dad,” I (still mathematically challenged) asked, “that the loose change in your pay envelope was always, *always* divisible by three?”

He and Mom exchanged knowing winks even as that familiar chuckle escaped his barrel chest. That permanent twinkle danced in his aging eyes. “Magic,” he replied, keeping secret the nondivisible-by-three coins Mom used to slip into her apron pocket.

Mystery preserved.

Magic intact. ♦



**Nancy Clark** lives in Export, PA. She is a DAWG (Delmont Area Writing Group), attends the New Stanton Writing Workshop and is a contributing editor to the *Laurel Mountain Post*, a regional monthly magazine with editorial offices in Derry, PA.

# My Favorite Uncle

© by David A. Landsperger

My Uncle Alec was my mother's youngest sibling, one of twelve first-generation American children and one of eight who survived infancy. He became Abbo to our family when my younger sister couldn't pronounce his name. Single all his life, he shared an apartment with his single sister, my Aunt Mary. They lived in Donora, a dying steel-mill town south of Pittsburgh, about eight miles away from our home in the even smaller town of West Newton. That is, they lived together except for the many times they got on each other's nerves and one or the other would move in with us for a few days for a cooling-off period. Being a grade-schooler, I was never sure what caused the fights because my mother and Aunt Mary told all their secrets in Ukrainian and Uncle Alec would just stomp around muttering, "Th-that d-damn Mary ... ."

Though Uncle Alec had over ten years of seniority in the steel mill, I don't think he ever got through a year without being laid off. During some of these periods he would move in with us, sometimes for weeks at a time. When he did, I had a full-time pal. He taught me to play checkers and showed no mercy once I got the hang of the game. After that he taught me blackjack and then poker, complete with odds, raising and calling, and bluffing. Of course, we eventually played for pennies, but I rarely lost much; later I realized he was funding my piggy bank by folding some good hands.

We'd play catch endlessly in the backyard every summer. Uncle Alec could catch my best heat barehanded for a few years until my ever-increasing testosterone forced him to buy a glove. One day I threw a wild pitch through the living-room window. He immediately blamed himself and set off to the hardware store to buy a replacement window pane, which he installed and glazed, all before my dad got home from work.



We had other secrets too. The summer after I got a BB gun for Christmas was a deadly era for the birds in our neighborhood and not my proudest time, looking back. But my dumbest shot was the time I spotted a fly on my uncle's back. "Abbo, I'm going to shoot that fly on your back. Don't move." He warned me not to do it. He was certain I was kidding, but I was certain I had a clean shot. Pop! Abbo leaped into the air, howling and swatting at his shoulder. His white T-shirt was torn and his back was bleeding. He gave me a lecture and a well-deserved chewing out, but my dad never found out about that either.

Often we'd take a drive in his '51 Chevy to one town or another, stopping at several bars in each town where he'd treat me to a soft drink and potato chips or peanuts, whatever I wanted. On one of these midday jaunts I recall that after we got back into his car, he flung open his door and threw up violently on the street. When he regained his composure he said, "I'm fine. Don't tell your mother; she worries too much. That's why, you know." I didn't tell. What ten-year-old would squeal on his favorite uncle?

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*"Don't tell your mother.  
She worries too much."*

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When I was sixteen or seventeen we had a little black mutt named Tuffy. When Abbo stayed with us, he and I, always at his urging, would take her for a walk after dinner. One cold winter night I dug in my heels and refused to go, so he went without me. Ten minutes later there was a loud banging on the back door and Uncle Abbo ran into the house cradling Tuffy in his arms. Her side was ripped open and she was gasping and bleeding badly, her blood already covering his arms and dripping down onto his pants. Abbo was shaking, stuttering, apologizing, and my sisters were screaming. We were all screaming.

"We gotta go to the vet!" I yelled and grabbed the car keys. We sped the mile to the vet, who needed no detailed exam to tell us what we didn't want to hear. No hope ... out of her misery ... only thing we can do. There were other words, but those were the ones that stuck. Abbo and I were both crying as he laid her on the cold metal exam table. When it was over and we drove home, Abbo kept apologizing. I kept telling him it wasn't his fault, but inside I felt in some way maybe it really was, a little bit.

My mother *did* worry about her little brother. He seemed to get sick a lot and was hospitalized periodically. I can remember her more than once stripping his bedsheets in the morning because they were wet. Was this part of his sickness, I

wondered? As I got older I visited him during his hospitalizations, which were increasing in frequency. His stays at our house had ended because Aunt Mary had moved out West and he had the apartment to himself.

He got sick again the summer before I left for college. I went to the hospital alone. The doctor was there when I arrived, probing my uncle's bloated yellow stomach. Abbo's wrists and ankles were strapped to the bed, something I hadn't seen before. Shaken, I greeted him after the doctor left.

"Unstrap me. I'm not staying here. There's nothing wrong with me," he said.

"Abbo, I can't do that. You need to stay here until you get better." We went round and round until he realized I wasn't going to do what he asked.

He turned away, staring at the wall. "G-get the hell out of here! You're n-no friend of mine. G-get out,"

he stuttered. He wouldn't turn to look at me. After a long silence I gave up and left.

It was November, but which November? I think it was 1970 or maybe '71. I was married and living in Reading, at the other end of the state, when my alarm went off too early one morning. But it wasn't my alarm; it was the phone.

"Abbo's gone," my mother said in a near whisper. The demons had finally won, taking my favorite uncle away from me forever, leaving me with only memories ... and so many unanswered questions. ♦

**David Landsperger** is retired from the hardmetal manufacturing world and splits his time between Mt. Washington and Sarasota, FL. When he's not practicing his writing, he enjoys cycling, hiking, yoga, avoiding winter, and spoiling his grandson.

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## Mirage

© by *Mary Ann Mogus*

Dr. Henry Paulson walked along the shoreline, careful to avoid the waves slowly creeping up the sand with the incoming tide. For a man still vigorous at fifty, his shoulders slumped forward and his movements were leaden. His dead mother's last words held him in thrall, and the familial hatred they carried echoed over a century.

Henry stopped and lifted his cap, letting the breeze refresh the damp hair plastered to his head by the sun's heat. He returned his cap to his head when he noticed her walking toward him, her feet splashing the water as she moved. Her long gauzy dress clung to her body and her loosely tied hair trailed behind her as she walked.

She approached him. "Professor Paulson, do you know what a mirage is?"

"Yes," he answered and scoured his brain to discover if she had been one of his physics students. He didn't remember her. "A mirage is an optical illusion formed by layers of air of differing thermal densities. The layers act as a lens."

She moved beside him and they continued to walk: he on the sand and she in the water.

"Then you must know that neither captain could have been responsible for what happened that night so long ago."

Henry stopped. He tried to speak but could form no words. She moved before him and waved her left arm across the space between them.

"The night was still and turned very cold. The Labrador current slipped its icy tentacles beneath the warm Gulf Stream and turned the water so cold that breath hung in the air."

Henry felt his blood pounding in his ears.

"Like an Arctic magician, nature created the illusion of a raised horizon. It hid an iceberg in a cloak

of invisibility until it was too late. It transformed a magnificent ship into an ordinary passenger vessel before another captain's eyes.

She dropped her hand. "You do understand?"

Henry nodded.

"No one was really foolish or incompetent enough to kill all those people or fail to rescue them. Nature created the conditions. Men were caught in her web of illusion."

Henry removed the cap from his head and used it to brush the sweat from his face. He wiped his eyes and looked toward the woman, but she was gone. He glanced around and saw, outlined in the wet sand, her footprints heading toward the ocean. After taking a deep breath, Henry slipped his feet from his canvas shoes. He stepped into the lapping water. He took two more steps until the water came to his ankles.

Henry stared across the expanse of ocean and felt something slip from his mind. It was nature, he realized, that had created the conditions for a perfect killing cold. The Arctic magician, she had called it, hiding and distorting. And the price for this illusion was over a thousand lives, his great-grandfather's included.

Henry became aware of the water. It was warm, subtly teasing. The cold was gone for now. ♦

**Mary Ann Mogus** taught physics at a university until retiring. She is interested in archaeology, history, and forensics. History and physics appear in her writings and include "what if" ideas. She writes fiction and nonfiction, designs jewelry, and loves plants.

# Let the Poem Come

© by Patricia Orendorff Smith

I have played with words  
Let them tumble off my tongue  
Trickle down on paper  
Coaxed them  
Cajoled them  
Into thoughts bouncing  
Out of  
Thin  
Wispy  
Air  
No words come now.  
My reservoir is dry.  
No lilting phrases  
Toss about my brain.  
No clever words pop up.  
Just a dry spell—  
We must endure.  
Wait for inspiration to return  
And it will.  
Days, hours, minutes,  
Not a sparkling word  
To wind about my mind,  
Just snippets of thought  
To jot on paper.  
Creative word phrase  
Come  
Jostle my brain  
Implant excitement  
Spill on paper—  
Let the words flow  
Implicitly  
Easily  
Let the poem come ....

**Patricia Orendorff Smith** has over 200 articles, poems, and prose pieces appearing in many publications, including the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Writer's Digest*, *USA TODAY*, and *Pittsburgh Boomers*, as well as on the NPR, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *New York Times* websites. Her book *Mama's Mountain* is about her family.



## Heart, Soul, and Mind

© by Janice McLaughlin

A poem should whisper in your ear  
sing within your soul  
dance upon your tongue.

A poem should have lovers, not readers  
be all the colors of an artist's palette  
be so much more than words upon a page.

A poem's magic should flow,  
intertwine, weave patterns—  
wrap its tendrils around your heart.

A poem should be born to grow,  
expand within your mind  
and last for all eternity.

**Janice McLaughlin** has always loved rhyming poetry. She has authored two books available on Amazon: *The Nooce (sic) and Other Fun Poetry* and a book of Haiku and other Japanese forms, *Haiku: Pennsylvania Perspective*. She is currently completing a third book of forms and editing another.



# Rewards

© by Lou Steiner

In December 2014, while reading *Some Desperate Glory*, a chronicle and anthology devoted to the British poets of the First World War, I received as a gift a book of new poems by the English essayist and poet Hugo Williams. By coincidence, the war poems, from Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" through deeper, darker works to the spirit-shattering "Dulce et Decorum Est" of Wilfred Owen are separated by nearly a full century from *I Knew the Bride*. Williams, although not facing the harrowing dangers of trench warfare, was confronting serious health difficulties, which he detailed with measured calm in a group of poems entitled "From the Dialysis Ward." Reading and rereading the poems from these two distinctively different collections reaffirmed my continuing and growing interest in poetry.

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*The rewards of poetry  
are more abundant if  
I read attentively, read  
again, and read aloud.*

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The rewards found in poetry, particularly lyric pieces, seem to be more abundant if I read attentively, read again, and read aloud. For many readers this approach is undoubtedly far too structured and much too time consuming, but I believe that it both improves my understanding of each poem and expresses my respect for the effort expended by the poet in writing the work.

Exercising care while reading a poem for the first time helps to establish a more reliable link to the poet's intentions and achieves a greater awareness and understanding of the language and forms used.

Reading a poem over again is helpful at almost any time, including immediately following the first

reading. Despite the care taken during an initial reading, ideas, images, concepts and associations, unrecognized just moments before, will often emerge. Back-to-back readings may also signal a need for a quick trip to a dictionary or reference book to more accurately understand the poet's use of a particular word or selection of a specific allusion. Because lyric poems are usually short, I read a new poem twice and then try to read it again the very next day. Obviously, returning to a poem on later occasions can be a surprising experience, simply because both we and the world have changed in the interim. Altered perceptions when I consider the unchanged group of words in a familiar poem are quite likely to reveal attitudes and emotions that did not exist earlier.

Reading aloud (but only after timely alerts to other members of the household to ignore strange mumbling background noises) gives an opportunity to experience the dual nature of poetry's "sense and sound" and to hear the patterns and rhythms of spoken poetry that give us a hint of its subtle relationship to music.

Reading poetry will never diminish the pleasures of prose. In fact, it appears to develop a sharper eye and a more sensitive ear with which to discover the beauty of thoughtfully conceived and skillfully crafted language, whether in lines of poetry by Robert Frost or Seamus Heaney, the opening sentences of a novel by James Agee, the closing paragraph of a James Joyce short story, a letter by Martin Luther King, Jr., or John Updike's account of Ted Williams and his final time at bat. ♦

**Lou Steiner** is retired from business but continues to write brief essays, which he hopes offer a few sensible thoughts about books, music, and art.

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# Attic Night

© by Carolyn Cecil

Up the uneven steps, push the ceiling panel out, flick the fluorescent light on, enter. Dusty boxes with masking tape. Hallmark calendars from 1966, black and white photos of boys. Three spiral yearbooks in yellow and blue, State Street Junior High. Reminder of Massillon, white and maroon, the opposition. The wooden heart you carved that says "Love and Light" burned in with electric pen. The handwoven scarf from New Mexico, gift to my mother before she was a mother, not even moth bitten. ♦

**Carolyn Cecil** from Baltimore attended the Vermont Studio Center residency in 2013 and 2015. Her poems have been published in *The Broadkill Review*, *Free State Review*, *Gunpowder Review*, and *The Loyalhanna Review*. Her chapbook, *Taken Away*, is available through The Broadkill Press.

# The Imp in the Inkpot

© by Joseph F. Stierheim

Write the poem  
To be solemn;  
Don't allow it  
To be gay.

There's no time for  
Useless laughter;  
Keep it far from  
Fun or play.

Write the poem to read trippingly,

Not morose but flowing ringingly,

Springingly, singingly, swingingly,  
flingingly,  
Trippingly on the tongue.

Write the poem  
Free from laughter,  
Shunning joy or  
Blithe array.

Write the poem to suit your mind

Not to be of another kind.

Write the poem singingly,  
swingingly,  
Trippingly on the tongue.

Never vary  
From the rhythm.

Write the poem somewhat sillily.  
Write the poem willy-nillily.

Keep it constant.  
Stay in sync.

With never a care, never a thought  
Write what you feel, not what you  
ought

Write with logic  
Mind the metre  
It's the master  
To the brink.

Write the words happily, snappily.  
Take your time or do it rapidly.

Don't be guided  
By your passion.  
Keep it steady,  
Always think.

Write the poem funnily, sunnily,

Make the words flow clear and  
runnily.

Write the poem.

Make it profound, make it inane;  
Write with the heart and not with the  
brain

Write the  
Po - em.

That's really not the way to go

And the imp in the inkpot says it's  
so.

Write the  
Po - em.

And whether or not it is clear to you

Never think; simply do.

Write the poem;

Write what you feel, not what you  
think;

Write!



**Joe F. Stierheim**, resident of Ligonier, PA, retired from a profession as an architect some years ago and began a new career of writing about the year 2000. Since that time he has been published in local, regional, and national publications.

# Hiking Tips for Writers

© by Alicia Stankay

Staring at a solid wall of leafy green trees and overgrown bushes, I wonder if my latest adventure in exploration is doomed to fail. How can I begin hiking if I can't find a trailhead marker anywhere? Suddenly I spot it, a slight opening in the trees guarded by a rickety brown sign, and I'm off. Who knows what challenges lie ahead, what twists and turns of the trail, or what surprises will amaze me around the next bend? That's how I feel when I find the trailhead for my next hike, but it could just as easily be the sense of discovery and excitement when I begin my next short story or novel.

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*I leaf through my notebooks, and suddenly the lightbulb goes on.*

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Finding the beginning of a story presents similar challenges. First, I need an idea that clamors for attention, or if I'm lucky, I've had a plot simmering in my brain. Then all I have to do is start typing the first words into the computer. Unfortunately, other times I sit in front of a blank screen and can't seem to come up with any words at all. Frustrated, I leaf through my notebooks, and suddenly the lightbulb goes on. A sentence, name, or setting I've jotted down sends me on my writing adventure.

Once the story has begun, obstacles immediately arise. Is this really the story I want to write? Should the protagonist win or lose? What does she learn over the course of the story? Maybe I should take the laundry out of the dryer and fold it now before it wrinkles, or check the freezer to decide what I want to make for dinner. How about pork chops? What if my main character wants pork chops for dinner, but her husband doesn't? He's sick of pork chops. Hmm. Now I have conflict, so I go back to writing, and soon it looks as if Jane has murdered Dick because he threw her pork chops in the garbage.

My protagonist must also run into problems to build up tension in the story, or most readers won't continue reading. Maybe Jane doesn't murder Dick, but he drops dead at her feet five minutes after consuming half a pork chop. She knows the police will hold her for questioning, and she decides to skip town until she can figure out who killed Dick. Or Jane really does murder Dick because he has abused her for years, and she escapes to live a new life in some other town. Either way, Jane will have a series of adventures before the climax of the story.

The hiker runs into the same problems. Well, not exactly the same problems. I've never grilled pork chops while hiking, and I've certainly never murdered anyone because of them, but there are always hurdles. For example, I've hiked the Bog and Boulder Trail in Gallitzin State Forest in Pennsylvania. Just the name gives you a clue about the obstacles, so believe me when I tell you it's a challenge. Being sucked into the muck and then rewarded by clambering over endless boulders certainly make a hiker's day. When you finish, jubilation fills the air. Another trail conquered!

Flooded trails can be even more fun, especially when they're unexpected. When I hiked the trail to the beach in Calvert Cliffs State Park in Maryland, I had the option of sloggng through the water and climbing up the hillside multiple times to avoid the unexpected lake, or hiking the roundabout trail that would add two or three miles to my trip. Getting my boots soaked up to my ankles might not be a problem, but when the flooded wetlands contain numerous black water snakes, then what? Are they poisonous or aren't they? Maybe I could throw them some of those pork chops to keep them occupied. In the end, I decided scrambling up vertical hillsides and hanging onto tree branches worked just fine for me.

At first I assumed all trails were neatly marked along the way and at every juncture, but they're not. Getting lost on the trail is common. Tree blazes are often nonexistent, which means every time I come to a crossroads, I must study the trail map and figure out the right direction. Often the map drawings or distances don't coincide exactly with the trail I'm walking on. Then I try educated guesses to find my way. Or I just close my eyes, turn around three times, and go that way. It makes hiking more interesting.

Since writing a story or book doesn't come with a map, many writers outline their work first. This method can be simpler because then I just follow the path and flesh out my characters and plot as I go along. The outlined story is similar to a trail that is blazed so the hiker can easily follow the path. But even a writer who has written a detailed outline knows that characters don't always stick to the plan. Sometimes they insist on doing their own thing, and the plot develops in ways I never expected.

Other writers may skip the outline and jump right in, allowing the plot and characters to develop willy-nilly. That often leads to dead ends or overwriting in the first draft, but the writer can always clear up those problems in editing. This method is like a trail without any blazes or maps, or where all the blazes have washed away or fallen off, so that the hiker plays a guessing game and never knows exactly where she'll end up.

For example, maybe Jane does go on trial for Dick's murder. But what if her neighbor Jim was looking out his back window and saw Dick take out a vial of liquid and dump some onto the remains of her pork chops? Then, as he dropped them in the garbage can, he swallowed the rest of the liquid. Dick shouted loudly enough for the whole neighborhood to hear how disgusting Jane's pork chops tasted, and then he staggered into the house to die. Even as he committed suicide, he hated Jane so much that he wanted her blamed for his death. Since Jim has been after Jane for years to leave her abusive husband, he's desperate to prove her innocence. See how my plot thickened just because Jim popped into the story?

Even though most of the time I know where I'm heading on a trail, I never quite know where I'll end up. Sometimes I hike a loop trail so that I come back around to my starting point; sometimes I hike a designated number of miles and then retrace my steps. Surprisingly, things look different on the way back. Often I see sights I missed going out, or find a side trail I didn't notice when I hiked in the other direction. Trees assume different shapes, flowers blossom at different angles, or a deer startles me as she runs away, ensuring that no two hikes are ever the same.



**Red Bridge Scene** © by Alicia Stankay

When I reach the end of the trail for the day, I'm pleasantly tired and ready to stop. I've taken some photos to jog my memory in the future, and I'm ready to drop my backpack and change my hiking boots for tennis shoes. I don't wander around aimlessly for an hour or sit at the trailhead counting how many nuts are left in my trail mix. The hike is over, and nothing else needs to be done.

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## *Writing a story doesn't come with a map.*

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So, too, when I conclude my story, I should stop. I shouldn't show Jim wolfing down pork chops as Jane looks on happily, or have Jane visit her mother and retell the story, or give blatant hints about a possible sequel. Once the climax is reached, the conflict is resolved, and the characters discover how they have changed or haven't changed, the story is over. Nothing else needs to be done.

The goal of hiking a trail is to find a new way of understanding myself. I leave behind worries and stress, my overscheduled daily life, the constant communication with others. A trail takes me into the woods, where I can focus entirely on golden trees, bubbling streams, rocky paths, even a black bear as I immerse myself in this natural world. Exuberance at conquering the trail and sadness at leaving intermingle as I return to my car.

A story should do the same thing. It should take the reader into a new world, filled with exciting ideas, different lives, and unexpected endings. The reader should enter into the character's life, follow him or her through the story, and in the end feel both a sense of completion in a tale well told and sorrow at leaving that imaginary place.

If all this hiking and writing has made you hungry, I recommend that you don't make pork chops for dinner. They could be hazardous to your health. ♦

**Alicia Stankay** is a writer and photographer from Ambridge, PA. Her two books of short stories, *Between Two Bears* (co-written with Bruce Midkiff) and *Tales of Twenty Women*, and her novel *Beyond the Bridge* are available on Amazon and Kindle.



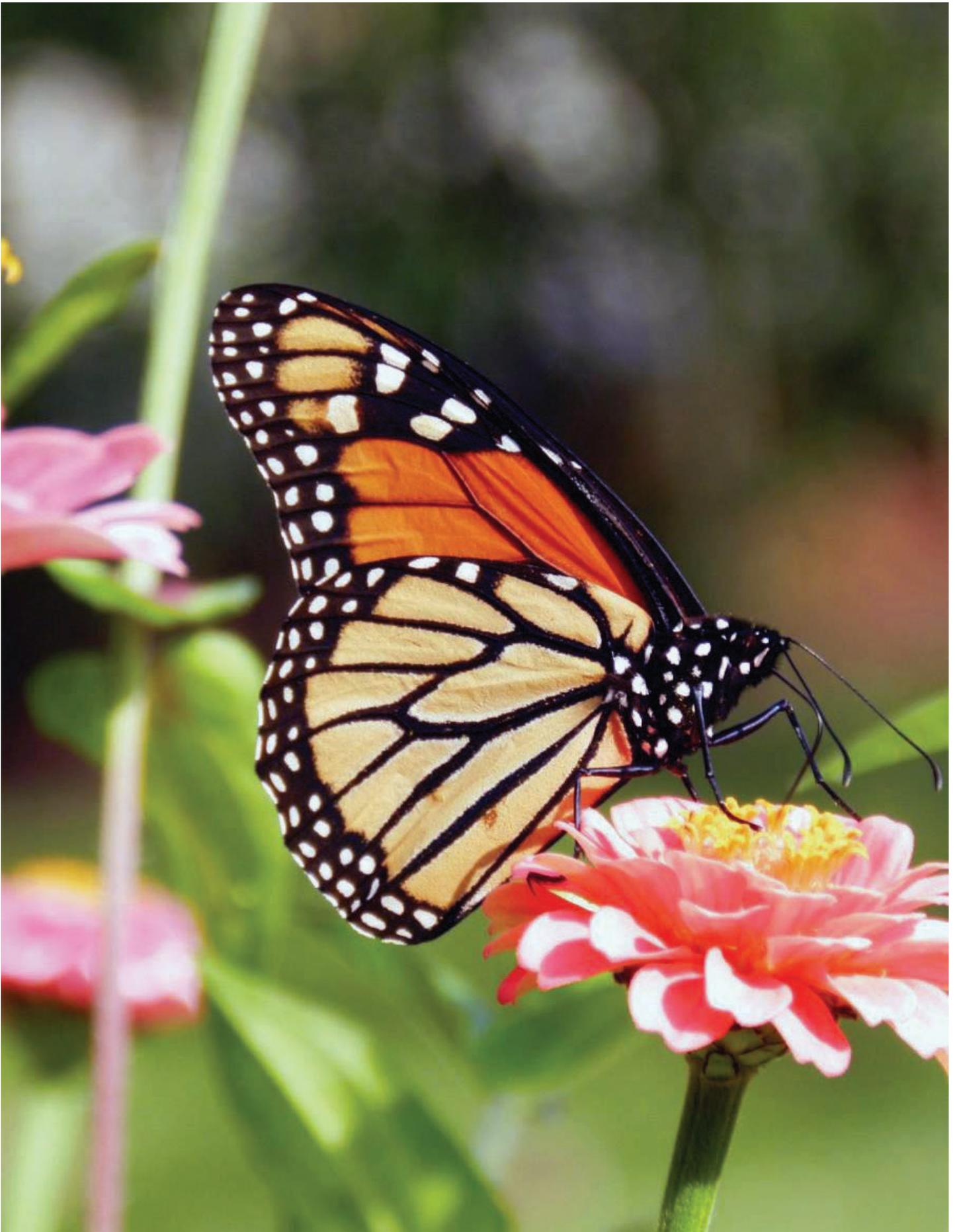
**Rainy Day Blues** © by *Joe Potts*  
(see Joe's bio on p. 27)



**Third Birthday** © by *Ronald L. Murphy*  
(see Ron's bio on IFC)



**Sunrise** © by *Janet R. Sady* (see Janet's bio on p. 17)



**Monarch Butterfly** © by *Alicia Stankay* (see Alicia's bio on p. 13)



**Gerrie Grandpre**, a Sister of St. Joseph of Baden, PA, is a long-time nurse, educator, and chaplain with an interest in travel, nature photography, and gardening.

**Closed for the Season** © by Gerrie Grandpre



**Marjorie DeAngelis** is active in Taproot Workshop. She has published in *Loyalhannas* and the *Taproot Literary Journal*. Retired from ACTION-Housing, in Pittsburgh, she is assembling her dream book on her Kenyan experiences and lives with her husband in Ambridge.

**Ducks on a Pond** © by Marjorie DeAngelis

# The Earth Tilts

© by Linda Gangewere

Light is gold  
    Not white  
Hummingbird sips  
    And thinks of Mexico  
Cat stretches  
    In a new sunny spot  
The trees are still  
A green leaf falls  
Autumn is coming

**Linda Gangewere** grew up in a steel town on the Allegheny River. She is a graduate of Allegheny College and Columbia University. She lives with her husband, Bob, and their cat, Lydia, in Pittsburgh's North Hills and Ligonier Township.

# Affair of the Seasons

© by Paul S. Brittain

They were opposites,  
like fire and ice.  
He warmed her cold white skin,  
She cooled his hot brown muscles.

Summer, bright lord of sun and solstice  
Winter, gothic goddess of snow and equinox  
hid their affair from Nature's eyes  
until finding the lovers in stormy embrace,  
she banned them in fury to opposite realms.

Autumn, Winter's handmaiden,  
brilliantly clothed in golden red and  
Spring, Summer's acolyte,  
garbed in newborn greenery,  
eternally separate the lovers from bliss.

Vainly they persist,  
Reaching out to one another.  
Summer's warmth finds October  
Winter's frigid air prevails through April,  
Yet they are turned aside by Spring and Autumn.

Ever they yearn to embrace.  
Summer's eyes weep rainstorms;  
Winter's winds wail glaciers and blizzards,  
mourning their exiled affair.

**Paul S. Brittain**, a career photojournalist, has earned two state newspaper awards for photography and sports columns and been a finalist for the Golden Quill Awards. His work appears in four self-published books, *Reader's Digest*, and the *Banzai Girls* comic book series, among others.

# Harbinger

© by Sarah Russell

Boots and parka are still standard gear, but the breeze is warm this afternoon, the sky is trying on a new blue dress, and icicles sweat, nervous in the sunshine.

A new season's soundtrack has begun—cardinals play penny whistles, songbirds flirt with feathery mates and mourning doves sing wistful songs.

At the corner, starlings make a bathhouse in a puddle, gossip, wash off winter's grime – splash under wings, submerge their bellies then shimmy off the droplets – shameless joy in their ablutions.

I know there'll be more cold. Puddles will freeze again, and robins will wisely stay away 'til crocuses appear, but today the birds announced that there will be another spring.

**Sarah Russell** is retired after a career teaching, writing, and editing academic prose. She is the poetry editor for *Voices* in State College and has published in numerous national and international journals and anthologies. Visit her website at [www.SarahRussellPoetry.com](http://www.SarahRussellPoetry.com).

# Winter's Sunrise Magic

© by Janet R. Sady

Just below the line of delineation—  
between the earth and sky,  
radiant spears of light push upward against the  
    darkness.  
Shades of magenta and azure blue break forth,  
as morning triumphs over night.  
Like fire—golden rays streak across the eastern  
    heavens.  
Skeletal oaks extend leafless arms high in praise as  
golden splendor bursts between their branches.  
Dappled light casts shadows over snow-covered  
    stubble,  
and trees sway and clack in time with winter's wind.  
Lifeless leaves appear renewed as they skip across  
    frozen ponds,  
in a dance of winter's sunrise magic.

**Janet R. Sady** is a writer, speaker, and storyteller. She is published in twelve anthologies and ten magazines and has authored eight books. Her latest book is *A Sound in the Night*. You may contact her at [janfran@windstream.net](mailto:janfran@windstream.net).

# Undercover Gardener

© by Candace Kubinec



No one pays any attention to gray-haired ladies with cameras. That's what I was counting on as I wandered through the Community Gardens snapping photos. My friend Christina had told me that strange things were happening in her garden plot. All her kale was gone, and a sticky orange residue was on the ground near each empty hole. I couldn't think of a single creature, man or beast, that would take kale and leave behind red, ripe heirloom tomatoes, green peppers just the right size for stuffing, or eight-inch cucumbers without a single blemish.

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## *My specialty is alien insect eradication.*

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As I roamed around, I spoke to some of the gardeners who were tending their plots. A blonde woman with two wiggly toddlers was pulling weeds along a row of carrots while trying to keep the kids from pulling up the green beet tops in the next row. She hadn't noticed any damage, other than what her children had inflicted on the plants, but she often had to clean an orange substance from the bottom of their shoes before they got into her SUV.

A tall man with short dark hair and red glasses was hauling a bucket of water from his silver pickup truck. His plot was next to Christina's but his crops were thriving. In fact, he told me his plants had never produced so well before. "My only problem is that every day I have to shovel up small, orange sticky piles from the edge of my plot." He pointed to the grassy verge between his and Christina's plots.

Something was wrong, and I had a suspicion what. I set my camera on macro and snapped some closeups of the orange "stuff" in Christina's garden and the holes where the kale had been. Then I followed the dirt path back to my green station wagon in the parking lot.

I was eager to get back to my garden shed and

take a closer look at my photos, but first I needed to get a sample of that mysterious substance. Being a Certified Garden Guru, I'm always prepared with containers for collecting plant and insect specimens for identification. I trekked back to the gardens, put on my heavy black rubber gloves and then scraped a small amount of the goo into a glass jar and tightened the lid.

Ten minutes later I pulled up behind my small house at the end of a country lane. A stone path led to the blue door of my purple clapboard garden shed. I was greeted by a riot of yellows, oranges, and reds from my wildflower bed. I could smell the lavender planted beside the shed as I opened the door. Ahhh . . . that fragrance always makes me feel calmer. Along the right side of the shed was a long potting bench with a sink. Across from that was a wall of shelves holding pots, trowels, spades, various reference books, and bags of potting mix. All the way in the back were the tools I would need to identify the material in my sample containers. A bank of computer screens covered the wall, and three high-definition microscopes and a mass spectrometer were lined up on the countertop.

First I called a fellow garden guru for help. "Rose, I need your expertise. Can you meet me in the shed?" I asked.

"Sure, I'll be there. You sound worried." An hour later Rose stepped into the shed and we got busy. Rose is an expert in DNA analysis and my specialty is alien insect eradication. Did I mention that we're undercover operatives for a black ops agency?

After four hours of intense work we had our answer. The sticky orange substance was filled with eggs of the five-ringed spiny vegathor. "If we don't eliminate the eggs and destroy the nest of this nasty bug from the planet Eltor, there will be no vegetables left on Earth," Rose said.

The adult insect will lay eggs only where there is an abundant supply of kale, and Christina had unwittingly provided the perfect environment.

Over coffee and freshly baked lavender brownies, Rose and I came up with our plan to save the world's vegetable crops. We would have to wait until dark since the adult appears only after the sun sets. We had about two hours to get ready.

I called Christina. "Christina, were you able to harvest any kale from your garden? I could use some for an experiment."

"Oh sure," said Christina. "You can have it all. Hank refuses to eat it anyway." I hopped into my car to pick up what she had left. While I was getting the kale, Rose got both our cameras ready, replacing the macro lenses with long-range laser lenses and night-vision scopes.

At 9:00 we headed out to our mission at the Community Gardens. We had put on our hunter-green Garden Guru shirts and our official yellow nametags. If anyone questioned why we were in the gardens at night, we would tell them we were hoping to photograph the night-blooming cereus.

In my camera tote I also had several hazardous-waste bags so we could clean up and destroy the caustic residue from the egg cases. Once in the garden, we put the kale next to the holes in Christina's plot. Then we sat down on the damp grass behind the compost bins and waited.

Within half an hour we began hearing the distinctive click and whirr of the adult beetle. Sitting very still, we watched the three-foot-long insect descend from a nearby maple tree and head straight for the kale. Rose quietly moved to the tree, where she would eliminate the nest, while I crawled in closer to get a shot at the bug itself. We had to time our strikes so that we hit them simultaneously. If either of us failed, the vegathor would release a deadly vapor, and Rose and I would vanish without a trace.

I established a clear shot through the tomato plants and waited for Rose's signal. Two hoots meant she was in position; then we'd each slowly count to three and fire. Finally I heard Rose's throaty "hoot, hoot." Now slowly, 1-2-3. Two bursts of light were all that remained of the vegathor and its nest.

As the lights faded, Rose and I gathered all the orange egg sacs into our waste bags and loaded them in a special chamber built in the floor of my station wagon. Back at my garden shed we hauled the bags to the vaporization incinerator hidden in a rain barrel along the side of the building. I flipped the switch. Goodbye beetle eggs.

---

*We watched the  
three-foot-long insect  
head straight  
for the kale.*

---

The next morning I drove over to Christina's house to let her know Rose and I had discovered the problem and eliminated it using the appropriate "insecticide." Christina was ecstatic and eager to get back to gardening. She'd been confident that we garden gurus would solve her problem. As I walked to my car I smiled when I heard her mutter, "Hank told me not to plant kale." ♦

**Candace Kubinec** lives in Greensburg and is a member of Ligonier Valley Writers. Her poems and stories have appeared in *The Loyalhanna Review*, *Highland Park Poetry Muses' Gallery*, and the *Journal of Modern Poetry Peace Anthology*.

## Global Warming

© by Candace Kubinec

I traded in my gas guzzler  
for something compact and  
efficient that can be plugged  
in, with no room to  
haul anything except a few  
grocery bags.

I recycle and compost and  
switched to biodegradable  
everything.

I strung a rope between two  
poles in the backyard and hung  
my sheets and towels and dainties  
to dry using wooden pins  
— just like grandma.

I buy local and carry reusable  
totes for my spinach and rutabagas.

But the cows, oh the cows,  
with their placid bovine faces and  
ambling gait, have done nothing to  
reduce their carbon footprint.

They munch on grasses and then  
with seeming innocence — with toots  
and belches — expel methane.

I'm doing my part. So  
you can just blame it on the cows.



# Freeze Frame

© by David Adès

If your life were a movie  
I would freeze it here,  
in this frame,

at the moment  
you are leaning forward  
reaching for a gun,

when the range of options  
is still open  
and hasn't funneled

into any predictable  
grisly outcome —  
and hold it frozen,

to give you the chance  
to turn away,  
to not lean forward and reach,

and then I would rewind it  
back to the moment  
of provocation

so that you could be  
*somewhere else*  
and unprovoked,

and then rewind it  
back further to the moment  
that gun

entered your life,  
to let you  
refuse its entry,

to choose  
to continue your life  
without the gun,

and then back further,  
all the way to childhood,  
when your choices

were instinctive  
and there was no pressure,  
no gathering momentum

toward a particular destiny:  
back to a thousand moments  
and a thousand choices,

any one of which  
could have been other,  
could have steered your life

into so many other directions,  
so that this frozen frame  
might have happened

six months ago,  
or might happen  
in six months time,

or might not happen at all,  
and your life  
would never be funneled

towards the trajectory  
of a bullet.  
I want to dwell

on the alternatives  
while there is still time,  
but your life isn't a movie

and I cannot freeze it.  
The moment has passed:  
you have picked up the gun

and are walking  
headlong  
into the future

you have chosen,  
chosen,  
repeatedly chosen.

**David Adès** is an Australian poet living in Pittsburgh. His poems have appeared widely in Australian and American journals. In 2014, he won the University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize and was shortlisted for the Newcastle Poetry Prize.

# LOST

© by Marge Burke

I stand beside your desk, as you fumble through your planner.  
You are lost in tomorrow, knotted with yesterday like a skein of tangled yarn.

The pages fade before you as I stand there, helpless to help – feeling as lost as you appear.

Your eyes reflect confusion, frustration...  
Your hands tremble, only slightly, as you stumble between the months.

You are suspended there, between the pages of days in your mind.

I gently guide your thoughts back to today, and finally  
Your plans make some sense, enough to make notes.

But as you close the planner, your hand lingers. You re-open the book; your notes drift  
to the floor.

“What’s this?” you ask, picking them up, and the process  
begins again.

You struggle with the questions, words floating free like balloons escaped from a child’s grasp. And I – a master  
of words – can find none.

If I could give you the answers, or explain the progression of days, or fasten tight the memories just beyond  
your grasp ...

If I could put the gleam of humor back in your eyes, the spark of understanding in your smile, the air of  
confidence in your life ...

If I could stop the relentless march of destruction that has taken you captive ...

If I could somehow wield the magic that would restore tomorrow ...

But ... as I stand beside your desk, you fumble through your planner, and you are lost.

Still.

Again.

**Marge Burke**, employed at Smail Automotive and Pinnacle Auto Sales, has been published in local magazines, newspapers, and anthologies. Her novel, *Letters to Mary*, combining her love of history and research, is based on Civil War family letters and is currently available at [www.margeburke.com](http://www.margeburke.com).

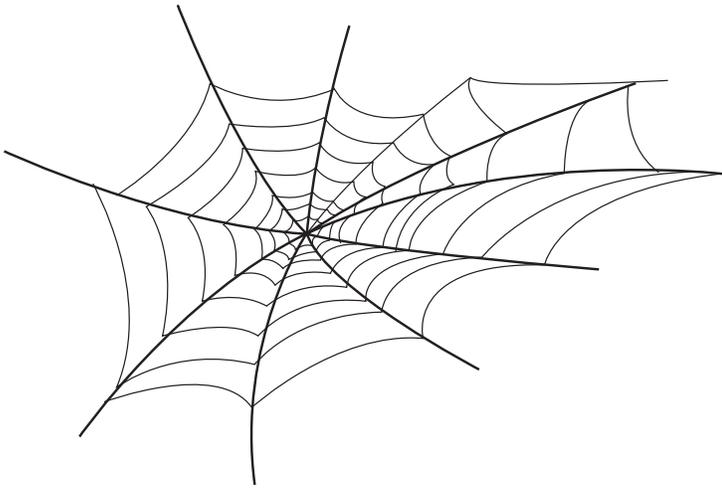
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## Old Lady

© by David Adès

— but once she was not old, not bent  
or wrinkled or smelling of lavender,  
not living alone in a house damp with  
faded ardour, dusty with regret of time  
misspent. Photographs on the mantelpiece  
attest to someone else within her crinkled  
skin, someone light and whimsical, and  
there are traces still, if you care to look.  
And stories that would hold you to your  
chair, dousing your restlessness,

those skittering hands and feet, if you  
would just open the book. She is kind  
and polite – gives you stale cake and  
tea – but will not impose her memories,  
asks only that you visit now and then  
to let her see the future through your eyes —  
and catch a passing glimpse of herself  
as she was when the future was still hers  
to surmise.



## Charlotte's Web

© by Sarah Henry

A piglet is born  
the runt of the litter  
like I was.

The farmer wants  
to kill him because  
he is so small.

The pig is called Wilbur.  
The farmer's daughter  
is Fern. She rescues  
the pig and raises  
him on a bottle.

A doctor rescued  
me from smoking.  
He saved my life.

And then the pig  
is fattened up  
for Christmas dinner.

I know all about  
Christmas dinners.  
The ham always has  
a cherry topping.

I'm beginning to take  
this story personally.

Next Wilbur meets  
Charlotte, a talking  
spider in a barn.  
She weaves messages  
into her web  
on his behalf—  
SOME PIG.

The man who brings  
the pig's slop is impressed.  
He runs to the farmer.  
The farmer reconsiders.

Then Charlotte weaves  
more and more important  
announcements into her web,  
like RADIANT and TERRIFIC.

This causes a real  
brouhaha in the county.  
Wilbur goes to the county  
fair and takes home a prize.  
He lives happily  
ever after,  
except for one thing—  
Charlotte dies. She dies,  
leaving her eggs behind,  
the way spiders do.  
This is so terrible,  
so tragic. She dies and  
dies and dies.  
I cry and cry at the end.

I don't want to see  
the movie with Kathy Bates  
and Oprah Winfrey.  
I never reread books.  
I read a book once  
and get it over with.  
I already know the ending.  
I know my ending.

## A Sinkhole in Florida

© by Sarah Henry

The backdoor opens by itself.

The kitchen windows all  
break at once.

Your bamboo furniture  
slides east.

The end tables were  
useless anyway. Still,  
you walk safely through  
the front door like

passengers in a horrible  
plane crash who step  
out on to a field.

It's a short hike to see  
a neighbor's pool  
sloshing an inner tube.

An underground stream  
has betrayed the bedrock  
in your yard.

Many odd things  
happen all the time  
in Florida.

There are missing  
person reports daily—  
“Her car was found  
unattended.”

Everyone comes from  
another state.

A little hand reaches  
out of a tree and  
gives you a glass  
of orange juice.

Your garage tilts.

**Sarah Henry** studied with two poet laureates at the University of Virginia during the seventies. Her poems have appeared in a much earlier edition of *The Loyalhanna Review* and recently in *The Camel Saloon*. More work is forthcoming in *Degenerates: Voices for Peace*.

# The Fair One Who Came from the Sea

© by Jan Kinney

WIn a time long ago and a place far away, there were two sisters. The older was as dark as the threatening storm. Her eyes flashed like summer lightning; raven hair cascaded down her back. She was beautiful, as beautiful as the raging sea. And they called her The Darkling Maiden.

Her sister was as fair as a summer morn. Wheat-colored hair framed her lovely face. Her eyes sparkled like dew on the grass. She was as light-hearted as a spring colt and beautiful as the glass-green sea. And they called her The Fair One.

Although they were as different as morning from evening, never an unpleasant word passed between the sisters. But one day a young man came to the place where they lived. When he saw The Darkling Maiden he was struck by her beauty. She followed him with her dark hungry eyes. In the manner of the times, however, they spoke naught to each other. Instead the young man went to her father.

"May I call upon your daughter?" he asked.

The father replied, "You may call upon The Darkling Maiden, but The Fair One is scarcely more than a child."

So the young man came to call on The Darkling Maiden. Calling soon changed to courting. Many sweet words passed between them, but one day his eyes strayed to The Fair One. He began to speak to her in ways that made The Darkling Maiden angry.

The Fair One began to chatter on about the young man. "Does he not have the most incredible smile? Have you ever seen eyes that color? He said this to me. He said that to me." The Darkling Maiden smiled, but the worm of jealousy gnawed at her heart.

The servants, however, felt the sting of The Darkling Maiden's temper, and when she entered a room, the dogs moved from her path with uneasy sideways glances.

One day as she was walking near the sea, The Darkling Maiden saw an old man sitting on the gnarled stump of a tree. She would have gone by without a word except that the old man asked, "Why do you look so angry, Darkling Maiden?"

"I think it none of your concern, old man," said the darkling sister.

"Ah," said the man. "It concerns you and therefore, it concerns me. You think The Fair One has taken your young man and you want him back."

"How did you know that?" she asked.

"I know many things, Darkling Maiden. Even how to bring your young man back and tie him to you so that he never again looks at your sister. But such a valuable service comes at a great price!"

"What do you want? I will give you anything. Gold? Jewels?" she said.

"Jewels are nothing more than a lady's pretty

baubles. Gold no longer pleases me. No, I want a treasure beyond beyond price. I want your sister."

"Take her," said The Darkling Maiden, "and be damned."

"Ah, Darkling Maiden, some things are preordained." The old man stood up. He was much taller than he had appeared on the stump, and he stood straighter than a man half his age.

He leaned close to The Darkling Maiden. She tried to turn away from the rotten smell of his breath, but the old man grabbed her arm. His fingers burned deep into her flesh.

"It's too late for turning away, my girl," he hissed. "Tomorrow morning, walk with your sister along the cliff. When you get to the place they call Devil's Point . . ." He lowered his voice and finished speaking. The smile on The Darkling Maiden's face masked the evil in her heart.

"Yes," she said. "I will."

The next morning, The Darkling Maiden called to her sister. "Let us walk along the cliffs. The sun is warm and winter will too soon be upon us."

"Sister, I have many things to do this day," murmured The Fair One.

"How can you refuse me," asked The Darkling Maiden, "when I have a message for you from the young man?"

"What is it?" said The Fair One.

"All in good time," replied her sister. "First let us walk." And the two girls strolled hand in hand to the narrow path at the edge of the cliff.

When they arrived at the tiny spit of land that jutted out into the sea, The Fair One paused. "This place frightens me," she said. "I am afraid to go closer to the edge."

"Trust me, little sister," said The Darkling Maiden. "Hold on to my hand. I won't let anything happen to you." And gently tugging her sister's hand, The Darkling Maiden moved out onto the narrow needle of land.

Far below, the waves crashed onto the rocks, throwing great clouds of spray into the air. The air was filled with the roaring of the surf and the screaming of the sea birds. The wind pulled at the girls' dresses and tangled their hair.

"Please," said the Fair One, "I'm frightened. Let us go back."

"Go back? I think not. Look down, little sister. You are too young to dash my dreams like waves on the rocks below. Look down, little sister. You are too young to steal my love from me." And The Darkling Maiden gave The Fair One a push.

The Darkling Maiden smiled as The Fair One tumbled over the edge of the cliff. She laughed with delight as The Fair One's screams mingled with

those of the sea birds. She watched in fascination as her sister's body smashed onto the rocks far below. She nodded with satisfaction when she saw the first fingers of the tide lick at her sister's broken body. The price was paid. The Darkling Maiden went home.

By the time she got there, she had worked herself into a state. Screaming, wailing, tearing her hair, she told her family that The Fair One had thrown herself off the cliff. "I tried to hold her back. I couldn't. I was not strong enough."

Family and friends tried to console The Darkling Maiden. They even made their way to Devil's Point, hoping for a miracle. But there were no miracles that day. The tide had already given The Fair One's body to the sea.

Down the coast that evening a simple fisher-man found that his nets were heavier than usual. He found The Fair One's body. He tried to pull it to shore, but the waves fought hard to keep their prize.

A wandering harper saw the fisherman's struggle and came to help. Together they pulled The Fair One's body from the water and laid it on the beach. The harper thought, "How sad that one so young and lovely should be gone, with no one even to mourn at her grave. I'll take three strands of her golden hair to wrap around my harp strings. When I play, the songs will be her remembrance." He helped the fisherman dig the grave and say the prayers for the Fair One Given Up by the Sea.

When it was done, the harper continued on his way, composing a new song about the poor drowned girl. He wandered from town to town and everywhere he went people exclaimed at the beauty of his songs, especially his newest song. In truth he had never heard his harp sing so sweetly as it did when he played that song.

In the fullness of time, The Darkling Maiden married her young man. With the price paid, her life went on.

One day, the wandering harper came to the place where The Darkling Maiden lived with her husband. Strangers were few but welcome. And since everyone knew of the harper and his songs, The Darkling Maiden was pleased to offer her hospitality.

That night, all who could came to The Darkling Maiden's house to hear him. The harper played long into the night. But finally the fire dimmed and he began his last song, his best song, the song of The Fair One given up by the sea. His voice and the golden voice of the harp were one. The hour grew late; it was neither night nor dawn. Suddenly the harp and the harper grew still. Too caught up in the magic of the music, no one spoke. The silence deepened; the harp began to glimmer.

Slowly, as though materializing from the smoke that rose from the fireplace, a woman's shadowy face wreathed in golden hair took form. It shone through the strings of the harp and the woman began to sing:

*Farewell to my father who loved me*

*Goodbye to my mother as well.*

*And as for my sister who killed me*

*May she burn evermore deep in—*

Suddenly there was a flash of light and a roar. Smoke and the stink of sulfur filled the air. Out of it stepped a tall thin creature. Tiny tongues of flame licked at the creature's goat-feet. Its skin was gray and lumpy, with a human form. But the form was hideous, the face grotesque. Bulging eyes slowly moved from guest to guest. As the creature's gaze rested on each person, that person began to sweat heavily and whimper as though in pain.

Its gaze finally came to rest on The Darkling Maiden. It opened its mouth to speak and out came a fog of winged insects. Maggoty worms dropped from its chin as it boomed in a voice that came from everywhere and nowhere. "Some time ago, you gave your fair sister to me," it said. "But she had already made her bargain with me. She gave you to me on the eve of the day I first sent the young man. You too are mine, Darkling Maiden. You too are mine."

The creature strode toward The Darkling Maiden. It put its claw-hands on her shoulders. There was a second blinding flash of light and a scream of pure terror. Smoke and the lingering smell of sulfur filled the air. When it cleared, the creature and The Darkling Maiden were gone.

And the harp lay twisted and broken at the harper's feet. ♦

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## Dark-Eyed Woman Child

© by Jan Kinney

Dark-eyed woman child

Awakened too soon by sweaty lust-filled gropings.

Not for you puppy-love and schoolgirl crushes.

A terrible knowledge haunts your teenage years;

A knowledge of midnight terrors;

Crystal tears wrapped in silence.

None will ever know your shame.

And yet, Dark-eyed Woman Child,

God knows you don't even share the blame.

**Jan Kinney**, a retired high school librarian, has told her stories all over Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Jan's poetry and short stories have been published in the *Review* and *Story Arts*. Two of her stories received People's Choice Awards from *The Storyteller Magazine*.

# Phantom Child

© by Tikvah Feinstein

The little girl lowers her face to peer at a green grasshopper.  
Eyes close, it rests on a broad leaf with brown, curled tips;  
both insect and perch the colors of autumn.  
She reaches to touch a warm fleshy tomato, pulls, but it  
clings tight to its stem, ripe in the sun. She smells the crisp  
scent of Basil, the pungent damp of the earth,  
sweet Petunias and bold onions.

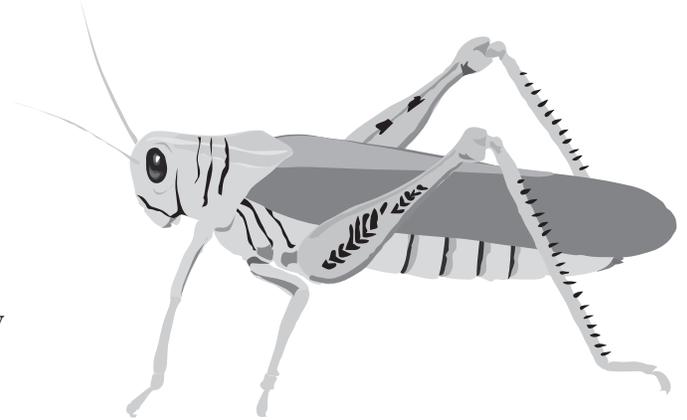
She turns to glance again at the still insect, hind legs  
bent like stems, undisturbed and dignified; and she  
suppresses an urge to catch the elbows of its legs  
in her small fingers, like she has done  
before, and suppresses the will  
to hold the little fellow in her palm,  
to watch the brown liquid spill  
from his jaws while he chews and chews.  
If she turns just a bit to the right, she will see  
me watching. If she looks up to the bird feeder, she will spy  
a squirrel eyeing her. But the little girl would rather  
view the yellow finches, as they pluck sunflower seeds,  
bouncing on their perches of spent flowers  
in upside down positions.

I could tell her stories of a life she will join when she leaves  
this yard. I could say there's the other side of childhood, where  
ideals and dreams are dashed and others judge her value,  
worth by their designs and not by her deeds.

But I won't do that to her child's heart. And she won't trap  
a grasshopper by its legs ever again.

We both know boundaries now.

**Tikvah Feinstein**, director of Taproot Writers' Workshop, has a degree in English writing from the University of Pittsburgh and is widely published in poetry, journalism, and prose. She is author and illustrator of three books and is working on a memoir.



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## Welcoming Persephone

© by Nicole Bradley

Buds arrive, leaves unfold  
at the right moment. Inner knowing guides  
Persephone's journey from the underworld,  
from deep damp darkness—the womb.  
To the surface she rises, breaking  
through hard ground. Her rebirth brings  
the hope of full bloom, of ideas  
and dreams brought into fruition.

What starts so small, a seed hidden  
in darkness, will break free  
into the light and become a giant oak,  
food for nourishment, flowers for inspiration—all that  
we seek.

**Nicole Bradley's** hectic domestic life raising her five human children and five four-legged children is interrupted by brief daydreams of fantastical journeys in foreign lands, and occasionally by stepping into her role as a professional massage therapist/doula.

# Fifteen Minutes of Fame

© by Joe Potts

I often felt inadequate when I visited my Uncle Don in the Alzheimer's care facility. Elder-care visitation isn't something one usually prepares for in a systematic manner. There are, to my knowledge, no degrees offered in that area. I found myself wishing that there were. Few of the skills I had acquired while galumphing through life had to do with socializing of any sort, let alone connecting with dementia patients. I was an engineer, for heaven's sake. If I had people skills, would I have chosen mechanical engineering? And certainly nothing in my life had properly equipped me for my encounter with Rita.

Uncle Don was always happy to see me. He was my dad's younger brother and had never married. I suppose that was part of the reason that he didn't get many visitors. My wife and I went to the home at least once a week, and Don always greeted us warmly and engaged us in interesting conversation. The fortunate aspect of his dementia, primarily for him and secondarily for us, was that it left him quite happy and contented. We saw the broad spectrum of effects in other patients that Alzheimer's can produce. Aggression, fear, sorrow, child-like and childish behavior were all on display.

We got to know a resident named George, for instance, because he would approach us each visit and ask, "Can you tell me how to get out of here?" He was forever walking the periphery of the building, searching for an exit, like a spy casing a high-value target. It was an indication of Alzheimer's insidious power that George, a former executive for a large corporation, couldn't get out, for above the keypad on the locked exit, the code to open the door was clearly printed, for the convenience of visitors.

My uncle, though, usually had a bemused expression on his face and appeared to be just lounging around until it was time to go to the club. Don had always been a likable person, with perhaps a few more quirks than average. The dementia seemed to have excised the negative aspects of his personality. He was well-liked at the facility, and two workers, Deb and Julie, had a particular fondness for him. We knew we could count on them to watch over him.

We never knew what tales Uncle Don would tell us during our visits. He had been in Germany during World War II, and those years dominated much of his memory. He was also fascinated by the *Titanic*. One day he told us Hitler had built the Autobahn that was visible from his window (actually the Pennsylvania Turnpike). Another time he told us that, years ago, he had sailed the *Titanic* up the Mississippi River to Pittsburgh. But the important thing was that he was happy and not tormented by his condition.

One afternoon as I sat beside Don, listening to him talk about the "church pews" at Oakmont

Country Club (he was a big golf fan), a sudden wail pierced the calm, followed by loud banging. Then another wail and more banging. I had never heard anything like it at the facility, but my uncle seemed unsurprised. "There she goes again," he said. "She's always pounding the walls and shrieking like that."

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Her name is Rita. They brought her here this week, and she's a real doozy." The wariness was evident in his eyes and body posture. "I hope she stays away from me."

The next few visits, I saw more of Rita. She was clearly very difficult to handle. The staff had their hands full with her, and the residents seemed uniformly afraid of her. I felt a bit apprehensive myself. I didn't think I'd know what to do if her wrath were suddenly directed at me. I felt sympathy for her, though, and couldn't help but wonder what she was like before the dreaded disease stole her mind. Who loved her? Whose lives did she brighten with her presence and her smile? When I looked in her face, I could still see a hint of mirth in her sparkling eyes.

One day I was sitting next to my uncle when Rita entered the room. We were in a smaller room, off the main sitting area, with several couches and stuffed chairs. Rita had been causing another commotion just before she entered. My uncle immediately got up and went to the far side of the room—he wanted no part of that woman.

For whatever reason, drab clothes seemed to be the required uniform at the facility, but Rita was wearing a brightly colored floral robe. She might have looked more at home in Hawaii, and I wished she were there. I thought she was going to pass by without acknowledging me until she stopped, looked at me, and gave a slight smile. Not to be overly dramatic about it, but I wondered if this was what a GI felt like when a German Panzer tank spotted him, turned, and came his way.

"Hi. Can I sit here?" She suddenly seemed shy, and somehow fragile.

"Sure," I said, though I felt like I was inviting a hand grenade with the pin pulled to sit next to me. She sat on the couch, put her hands to her face, brushed back some stray feathery hairs, and sighed in a weary way. A few seconds passed in silence. Then she looked at me.

"You remind me of Danny Miller," she said. "Do you know the Millers? From Sutersville?"

"No, I'm sorry, I don't."

"No? Are you from Sutersville?" she asked hopefully.

Believe me, at that moment, I dearly wished I was from Sutersville, because I didn't want to set her off. "No," I said, "I'm from Harrison City."

“Oh, I know Harrison City.” Her manner was surprisingly breezy. “The Brents are from Harrison City. Do you know the Brents?”

Dang. Why hadn’t I ever met the Brents? “No, I don’t know them.”

“Well, you’d like them,” she said. “They’re nice. Like you.” She smiled shyly at me, and her face lit up with a warmth I could feel.

I was stunned. I had no idea why she thought I was nice. Maybe because I looked like the Millers and lived near the Brents. “Well, thank you,” I said. “You’re nice, too.”

Her smile widened a bit, and she leaned closer. “Oh, thank you! It’s so nice to hear that.”

But the smile quickly fled, and she lowered her voice. “The people here don’t like me.” Her eyes went forlorn.

I wasn’t sure how to react. “Ohhh, Rita, I don’t know ...”

“It’s true,” she said. “Nobody wants to come near me. They’re not nice, like you.” She smiled again.

I couldn’t help but feel guilty. I figured she was transferring “Miller niceness” to me. But whatever was going on, she was certainly the calmest I had seen her. “Rita, they just don’t know you,” I said. “They haven’t given you a chance to show them who you are inside.”

“The Millers liked me,” she said. “They were good friends.” She gave me an almost conspiratorial look and for the next few minutes told me about the Millers, and the good times they had together, and what good people they were. “Oh, we used to have such good fun. You’re sure you don’t know them?”

“No, I’m sorry, I don’t,” I said. “They sound like good people.”

“Yes. I wish the Millers were here.” She looked around the room as if maybe they were hiding somewhere and if she just looked hard enough, she would find them. She had a faraway look in her eyes. Then her face brightened and she looked directly at me. “But I’m glad you’re here.”

“Me, too, Rita.”

She leaned back against the couch and closed her eyes. Several minutes went by before she spoke again. “I don’t know why I’m here. What did I do? I wish these people liked me.”

I turned to face her. “Rita,” I said in a soft voice, “if you just show these people the Rita you’ve shown me, they’ll like you fine. You’re a very nice person.”

She looked at me closely, her eyes showing an unmistakable clearness and intelligence. “Thank you. I hope you’re right.” She got up, stretched a bit, and sighed. She took a few steps and turned to me. “Come see me again.”

“I will, Rita.” She walked out of the room with a purposeful stride, as if she had a pressing appointment.

Deb came over and laughed lightly, patting my shoulder. “We’ll have to put you on the payroll,” she

said. “That’s the most calm and relaxed she’s been since she got here.”

I never saw Rita again. The next time we visited, Deb told me that Rita’s guardians had moved her to another facility. I thought of her often, though. I thought of how she hadn’t done anything to deserve her fate. I thought that what happened to her could happen to anyone, including you or me. And I wondered if anything else could have been done to help her. I don’t know the answers, but whenever I look back on those fifteen minutes with Rita, I take a small amount of comfort. Not because of anything extraordinary I did, but simply because in a small way I helped assuage Rita’s misery.

I could wish that those fifteen minutes had stretched into hours, or that I could have seen her and had the same effect on her every day, but that’s not what happened. But I console myself that for those fifteen minutes, Rita wasn’t feeling tortured or angry. For those fifteen minutes, she was enjoying being alive, having an agreeable conversation, and pleasantly passing the time with someone. So for at least those fifteen minutes, I did some good in this world. For those fifteen minutes, my life served a purpose, and I helped someone who desperately needed it.

It may not have been fifteen minutes of fame, exactly. But it was fifteen minutes of something that felt a lot better and was more fulfilling for both Rita and me. ♦

**Joe Potts** is a semiretired engineer and has had articles published in the *Pittsburgh Tribune Review* and the *Laurel Mountain Post*. He lives in Harrison City, PA, with his wife. His humor blog is at [joepottszone.com](http://joepottszone.com).

## The Dance of the Butterflies

© by Janet R. Sady

Happenstance brought me to the meadow. Monarchs and Swallowtails hovered over sunflowers, chicory, and purple thistle. Like delighted children opening birthday packages, they zipped from blossom to blossom, dancing as only butterflies know how. Transfixed—I lingered—cherishing the magic of this moment. Dancing butterflies in the midst of an ordinary summer day, wild and free, bringing unexpected pleasure—gladdening my heart in a special way—when butterflies danced for me.

(see Janet’s bio on p. 17)

# Ambitious

© by Michele R. Johnston

I am a silly courtesan. I am a flower dried of her perfumed strength, a dog sitting patiently at the door in the rain, sighing without imposition. I will become unseen; I will wait on a chain of my own choosing; on the floor speckled in stunning shattered glass, a parched paint-stroke blooming to be overlooked. A rose in your lapel—is this the beauty that trains the cogs of your ambition? Dried petals beneath your feet, and no sweetness scattered through pellucid shards; don't pause when I snatch up sunbeams in my hands—leave, brush your palms clean, tread past the door and keep walking—it is merely a trick of the moon.

**Michele R. Johnston**, a self-professed nerd, lives and writes in Johnstown, PA. Her significant other, Scott, her two stepsons, and their dog and cats somehow manage to put up with her.

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# Ligonier

© by Carolyn Cecil

The Diamond in center of town with rotunda, hanging flower baskets, benches. Imagine village life walking from library to home, book clubs and lectures. With side trips to Laurel Highlands for hiking and biking from nearby Connellsville to Pittsburgh. The Farmers' Market on Saturdays, Ligonier Conference Center up the hill and the Pie Shoppe on Route 30. Fish and chips at Carol and Dave's Roadhouse, moved into town from Route 711. Or Diamond Cafe off the circle where farmers go for coffee. The egg salad was sparse, the first hint this might not be Utopia. But they put milk for my coffee in a little pitcher just for me. The art competition did not want our work in their gift store on Main Street, but *c'est la vie*. This little Pennsylvania town might still fill the bill of retirement rest stop, last stop.

(see Carolyn's bio on p. 10)

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## Ligonier Valley Writers' Calendar of Events

**July 18, 9:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m.** at the Greensburg YWCA. A workshop on marketing your writing. Attendees are encouraged to bring their tablets, phones and computers to this workshop. LVW's own Ed Kelemen will share his secrets for selling your books, and Louise Tilzey-Bates of Westmoreland Heritage will talk about how to promote your writing on social media.

**July 25, 7:00-9:00 p.m.** *Loyalhanna Review* publication party. Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art (SAMA), One Boucher Lane (Route 711 South), Ligonier, PA 15658. Garden and art tours, wine, hors d'oeuvres, readings, and camaraderie.

**August 15.** Deadline for submissions to Flash Fiction Contest. Cash prizes and readings of the winning entries. Check the LVW website for guidelines.

**Sept 13, 3:00-5:00 p.m.** Annual LVW picnic. St. Michael's of the Valley Church, Rector.

**October 24.** Readings of the winning Flash Fiction stories at local venues, combined with a workshop on writing flash fiction and horror. Details TBA.

**December 6, 3:00-5:00 p.m.** Annual LVW Christmas Party. St. Michael's Church, Rector.

For 2016 details on the Student Poetry Contest, *Loyalhanna Review* submission guidelines, Flash Fiction Contest, workshops, and other events, please check [www.LVWonline.org](http://www.LVWonline.org) for the latest info and date confirmations. If you have questions, email Judith Gallagher, LVW Publicity Director: [jgallagher@LVWonline.org](mailto:jgallagher@LVWonline.org).



Deer with Leaf © by Janice McLaughlin

Blue Butterfly Majesty © by Alicia Stankay

