

LOOK TO THE SKY

Issue 25: Spring 2023

OpenDoor magazine

**LOOK TO
THE SKY**

JOURNEY

HOME

*Featured
Authors*

CONVERGENCE

**NOXIOUS
REMINISCENCE**

We are SO THRILLED to be back with our new QUARTERLY ISSUE! This marks the official ISSUE TWENTY-FIVE. And with perfect timing, we are reminded to “Look To The Sky.” Where I’m sitting, looking out my window, right now – I see blue sky. The possibility of Spring and new growth. What do you see when you look up? Do you see memories? Possibility? Something more? Just remember as you look up and dream about the future or make shapes out of clouds... “YOUR WORDS MATTER!”

Thank you for continuing to share our magazine with your friends and family and allowing our audience to keep growing. We are so incredibly thankful for each and every one of you!

Kassie & Mel



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The background is a watercolor illustration featuring large, soft washes of blue and green. The colors are blended together, creating a dreamy, ethereal atmosphere. The blue washes are more prominent in the upper and lower right areas, while the green washes fill the lower left and central portions. The overall effect is reminiscent of a soft, hazy sky or a misty landscape.

Look To The Sky

EVEN THE STARS

Sarfraz Ahmed

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<https://www.instagram.com/sarfrazahmedpoet/>

Even the stars have turned cold
Without your love to have and to hold
Without the warmth of your embrace
A vacant smile is all that's left
There is no look of love upon your face.

The bust of colours
The sunset and sunrise
Ignites a flame
Your poured magic
Into my veins
Hit me
Time and time again.

You left a dent in my heart
In all the right places
A wound so precise
Without you
Even the stars
Have frosted over
Inflamed cold as ice.

THE HORIZON

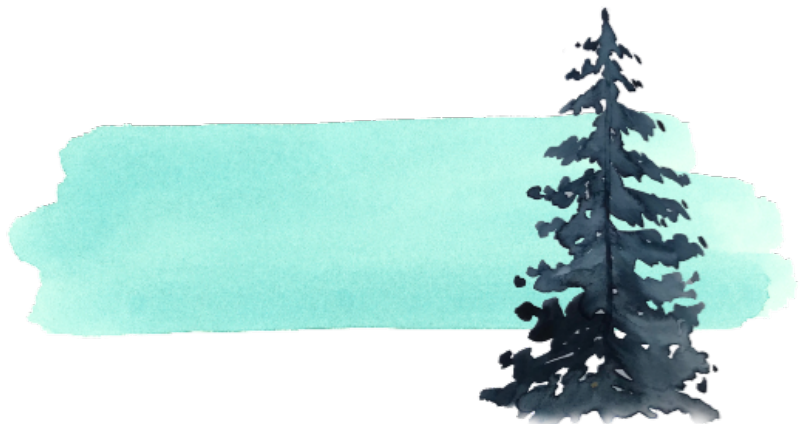
Kathy Jo Bryant
United States

Look to the sky
The golden horizon
Expect a better day

The failures you've had
Are in the past
Don't stay under clouds of gray

Look to the sky
So full of bright stars
Just be a star, you may

Another might see
Your shining rays
And in your sweet glow they'll stay!



TOO LOW, NOT TOO HIGH

Martina Robles Gallegos
California, United States

Whenever every door seems to close, look to the sky for light.
Whenever your spirits hit too low, remember to look up to the sky
for motivation. The beautiful blue will brighten your day.
Look to the sky when hope feels like it's fading away.
When your dreams seem to dim your path, look to the sky for stars
to shine brightly on them again.
Whenever faith wanes, look to the sky for the moon to brighten it anew.
Whenever sadness waxes in your heart, look to the sky for meteor showers
to bring happiness back from the heavens and into your life.
Look to the sky and let the rain pour down on your wanting body.
Look to the sky and let the sun warm your courage.
Look to the sky and grasp the moonlight.
Look to the sky and let the stars lead the way to wisdom.
Remember, nothing is too low that can't be risen, and nothing is too high
that can't be lowered.

CLOUDS: THE ENDLESS MOVIE

Duane Anderson
Nebraska, United States

Clouds overhead,
floating by,
dressed all in white,
highlighted by a blue-sky.

They are the movie of the day
as they slowly pass by.
I keep watching,
not wanting to miss the ending

when the sky becomes too dark
and disappears into night,
waiting for a second viewing
as I replay them in my dreams.





MAIDEN LANE DAWN

David Dephy

New York, United States

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYfKmxGEW47Qo-tgnCIGKEA>

Silence tomorrow, but tonight, the sky is clear,
no wind, nothing, the stars shine, see that?
Still, the song echoes, you know a song enough
to drown the notes in silence as the seeds.

Warm breeze appears, as the answer to a prayer,
this morning. Maiden Lane drifts on the rays
in lower Manhattan. See the man in the street?
That's me, who still believes everything is
in many ways our breath. Yet he still turns his breath
into a prayer, and dawn, that embraces him, right there,
remembers that second, when he was a kid,
standing alone in front of the man with the machine gun,
and closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and made
his first wish looking right into the heart
of his own future.

NIGHT SKY

Kenny Likis
Massachusetts, United States

The problem starts with my tongue.
It wants to say what my eyes think
they see when my eyes cannot speak.
It wonders at the weight of it, the sum.

What about the poplars? Did they birth
the blues? An anaconda has it easier.
Or a white cockatoo in a gold-plated cage.
We search for omens in crossword puzzles
we solve al dente with a redbrick abacus.

The sound of the surf argues for a retrial.
The salty sea air feigns steamed cabbage.
In the night sky shine haibun monks
on three continents get drunk explicating.



WHEN THE SEAGULLS COME FEASTING

Jonathan Ukah
United Kingdom

When the seagulls come feasting
With squawking, crowing, screaming,
I hold a full-minted loaf in my hands
My stomach shrieking, squealing;
My mother's eyes twisted with pain
When she sees the seagulls feasting.

When the seagulls come feasting,
The sky turns a searing, blind eye,
And blind billows the western wind
That brings the band of seagulls to me;
My mother's eyes twisted with sorrow
When she sees the seagulls feasting.

When the seagulls come feasting
My blood runs cold; my heart bleeds
And dry run my hands to my head
Where the crumbs go crumbling;
The day the seagulls come feasting
Cold is the ground and colder the sky.

I sit on the ragged cleft of a rock
Where the waves haul me into the sea,
Over the precipice of a half-chopped dam
I sit alone and look to the silent sky,
The day the seagulls come feasting
Is the day the sky abandons me.

PEACE COMES TO THE MIDDLE EAST

I saw the tracks of angels on the earth...
-Plutarch-

Dianalee Velie

New Hampshire, United States

<https://www.dianaleevelie.com/>

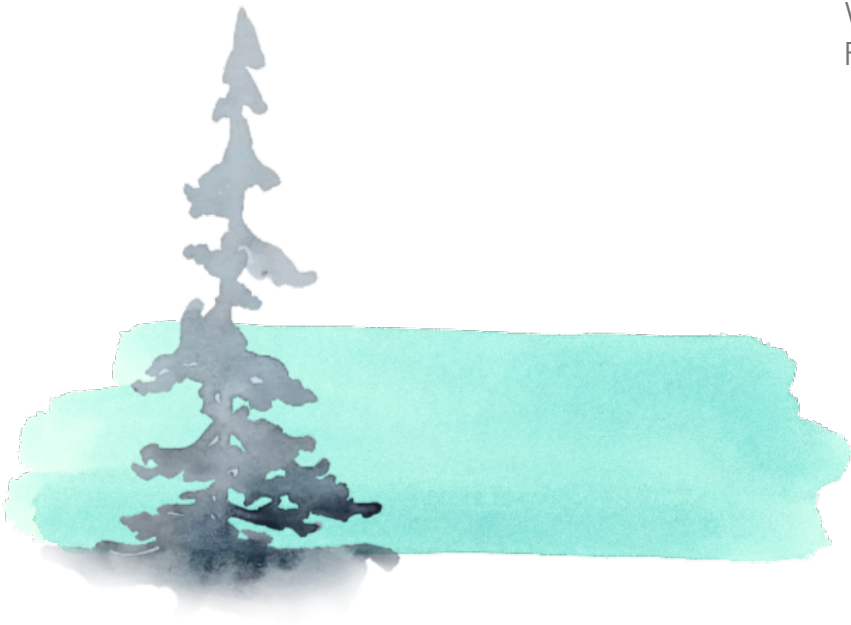
The glowing, sandy footprints stopped midway
to the Red Sea. Disappeared into azure sky.

Bikini clad women cried.
Muscle-toned body builders stared
speechless.
Children laughed and danced.
The elderly prayed.

Frolicking above the foamy waves
cherubs sang a psalm of peace.

Seraphim rejoiced with trumpets
as the footprints crystalized into pink stone,

signaling the beginning and the end,
the start and the finish, immortalizing
a lasting peace for eternity.



I AM THE CONSTELLATIONS

Marianne Tefft

Sint Maarten

<https://www.facebook.com/MarianneTefftPoetWordsmith/>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCALiRAX7idctDYEZOUhy-eQ>

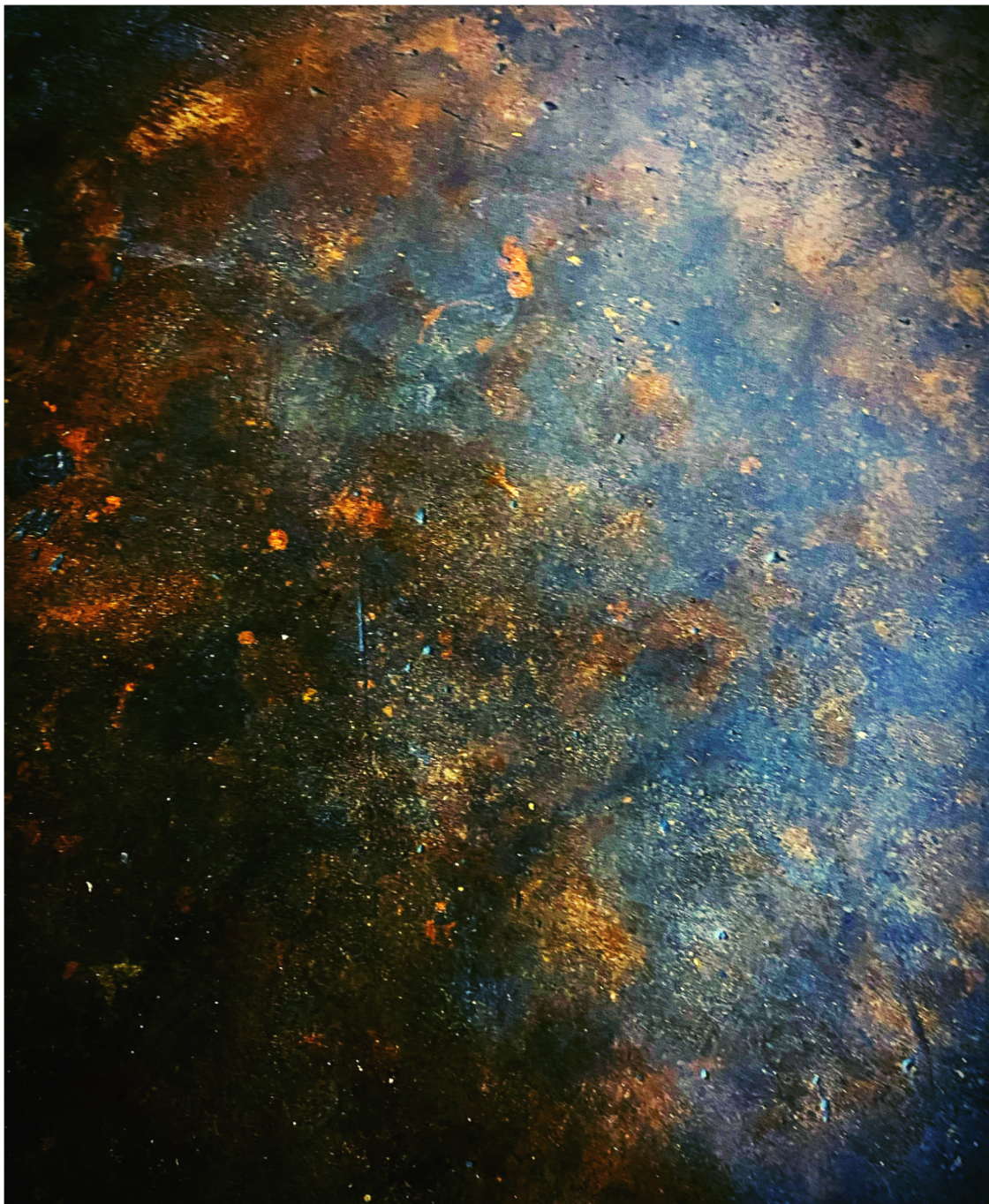
I am the constellations
That rise with you
When your voice calls to me
From your dreamless night

I am your summer trio
Your harp your swan your eagle
When you crave melodies
That soar on midnight wings

I am your bright dolphin
Who rides eternal waves
To soothe your mind
With her indelible smile

I am your moonlit crab
Who sheds her own solitude
To pierce the mighty shell
That once held your heart

I am the constellations
That delight your eyes
When my voice replies to you
From my sleepless night



OUT THERE

Christopher Woods

Christopher Woods is a writer and photographer who lives in Chappell Hill, Texas. His photographs can be seen in his galleries:
<https://christopherwoods.zenfolio.com/f861509283>
<https://www.instagram.com/dreamwood77019/> His poetry chapbook, WHAT COMES, WHAT GOES, was published by KELSAY BOOKS (kelsaybooks.com).

VAST

D.R. James

Michigan, United States

[https://www.amazon.com/stores/D.-R.-](https://www.amazon.com/stores/D.-R.-James/author/B00IW6KT3W?ref=ap_rdr&store_ref=ap_rdr&isDramlntegrated=true&shoppingPortalEnabled=true)

[James/author/B00IW6KT3W?ref=ap_rdr&store_ref=ap_rdr&isDramlntegrated=true&shoppingPortalEnabled=true](https://www.amazon.com/stores/D.-R.-James/author/B00IW6KT3W?ref=ap_rdr&store_ref=ap_rdr&isDramlntegrated=true&shoppingPortalEnabled=true)

[https://www.amazon.com/This-Aint-High-School-](https://www.amazon.com/This-Aint-High-School-Anyore/dp/B099C14N6G/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=david+james+this+aint+high+school&qid=1631546122&s=books&sr=1-1)

[Anyore/dp/B099C14N6G/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=david+james+this+aint+high+school&qid=1631546122&s=books&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/This-Aint-High-School-Anyore/dp/B099C14N6G/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=david+james+this+aint+high+school&qid=1631546122&s=books&sr=1-1)

Just out of Minneapolis-St. Paul we seemed
briefly to stall as if to shadow
all those wispiess drifting below.

The mazes of cul-de-sacs had given way
to assorted squares of barren fields,
their whiskered homesteads glued

to odd corners like stamps, wide ribbon
slipping backward and away, silent terrain
under a lazy canoe. Now the sun

has cast a gray ghost of our plane
down and to my right, framed it within
the awkward porthole, its sliding shade,

an unaccountable halo of rainbow—
and this ridiculous filigree of angels,
filmy leagues camouflaged in ether,

special recruits that mingle and network
like secret agents: the FBI of the sky.
But when we soon tilt and ascend

to the high status toward Denver, I know
all this silliness will vanish, angels fading,
becoming the thin air, and these fields will retreat

to compose vast sheets of stamps, re-impose
perspective, that inevitable severance
from everything that's then re-imaginable.

—first published in *Ruminate*



Look To The Sky

LONE EAGLE

Thomas Piekarski
California, United States

Cloistered in my lonely room
with undefinable smells hovering
the phantom bride and groom quit
which peppers me with gloom.
Shadows are randy, no music,
and whirl of ceiling fan a bore.

I get a knock on the door,
it's a maintenance man
come to check my smoke alarm.
His duty to comply with statutes
so this inspection is thorough, dull
enough to make an elephant snore.

News on the net a little scary,
our ecosystem in jeopardy of collapse.
I channel attention to the view outside,
construction of a new strip mall:
the builders have best intentions,
allow for simple access and egress.

I whirl in luxurious dreamscape,
a path out of my lethargy like
zipping through worm holes in space
past galaxies in the blink of an eye.
Screech of brakes and a loud crash
when cars collide and windows rattle.

Strength emerges and bold as an eagle
swooping down on unsuspecting prey
despite absence of Mont Blanc
or any such pinnacle I'd scale
I set a goal to live carefree
like a pollywog in an infinite sea.

Yet that would never pass muster
with modern quantum theory
nor alchemical wizardry.
"Hang it all" I mutter, "think
I'll pack my bags, ditch this place
and head for Mount Olympus."

Pankhuri Sinha

<https://www.facebook.com/pankhuri.sinha.56>

A plane flying to NY
The big apple, got diverted
To london, the imperial city
Though all theories of neo-colonialism
point fingers at America! The big
M! But listen up, let's not digress
A plane flying to Japan
Flew directionless
For 7 hours, god knows why?
Flights from india
To Saudi and other places?
Diverted ! What the hell happened?
Sky traffic jam?
But that's not the only reason
To look to the sky!

As it is, everyday, we look
At the sky, casually, even
Deliberately, sky is infinite!
Limitlessness is the sky
That place to soar high!
Raise our spirits to float and fly!
But its so much more than that!
The sky is blue and pink and
Red and yellow, and we can't stop
Looking at the horizon!
Where the sun sets and rises and beyond!

In the sky is the other hemisphere
Where the night is the day!
Day is night!
Completing a circle!
Of unchangeable constant!

But we must look to the sky
And not just at it, the minute
We ever trip or fall
Or dither or pause or doubt
Or regret and yes even celebrate
Because the sky
Is the most tranquil
And unending part of our
existence!

LOOK TO THE SKY

F. Kate Langan
Canada

<https://www.facebook.com/fkatelangan>

<https://fkatelanganauthor.wordpress.com/>

When my son was just an infant boy
and my days were filled with him
I'd take him to the park to play
just to pass the time of day.
I'd push him in the baby swing
and this little song I'd sing:
"Look to the sky where the airplanes fly.
Down to the ground where the worms are,
over and over until he could laugh no more.

WHAT MIDNIGHT HAS TO OFFER

Skye Price
England

<https://www.tiktok.com/@aspiretowrite>

Peace and solitude wrapped in ink blotted stars
Rare pockets of time set aside for ourselves
Free from requests and a race to success
Midnight is reserved, unassigned, safely held

Protection and warmth gently humming from the moon
A meditative silence surrenders its spell
Closed away from the tension that daylight exudes
Stardust swirling with tomorrow's potential

A void to fill in, a limbo - a pause
Reflect on philosophies, or dream up worlds
Focus on now, no after or before
Stare at the stars; watch your best work unfurl

Lay your trepidation to bed
Cushion the weight of your thoughts
All is accepted at midnight
Midnight is yours.



THE STAIRWELL

Thomas Leonard
Maryland, United States

There is little air
 between levels,
 little sight beyond the light
 bounding living space,
 a flight of possibilities
 fallen like sky shards
 deep in this crevasse to lie.

Low ebb about the ankles
 the potentials have melted,
 all that could have been
 washes out like driftwood –
 beautiful, blanched, airy
 lovely to glance at, then toss
 back into the rising froth.



The way up appears locked:
 cold-painted cinderblock and
 steel doors apprehend
 hands reaching dark walls
 to find clammy guardrails
 ringing with others' thoughts:
 "Make do with what you have."

Above the flotsam haze
 somewhere rises
 a boy swimming in
 untrammelled air
 lifting ages past
 from a narrow well
 in long upward drafts.

DAWN

Cathy Hollister

Tennessee, United States

<https://www.poetschoice.in/>

golden ring on the horizon
weds night to day
under a rose-tinged cloud trellis
blessing the union

thrush, finch, chickadee join the dawn chorus
thrive, mate, feast
on the morning breeze
as if in worship to the first star
who wishes farewell to the night
and ushers in an open heart

persistent love
growing deep, seeking diamonds hiding
undiscovered, waiting for the brilliance
bursting from the night

binding love reborn in an infant's cry
bidding the love-lost to join
the sunrise choir of welcome
to the new day

reflected in the drops of morning dew
on each blade of grass
on asphalt streets and prison yards
on weedy lots and palace walls
green sprouts emerge through
the slough of darkness

fluid as deer running through the forest
peace and joy flood
to banish lurking shadows
the marriage of forgiveness and need
delivers the reward of mercy
in the blazing daybreak of
love of all, in all, through all, to all,
within the sight of the morning star



SKY

Najma Naseer Bhatti
Sindh. Pakistan

Oh! Vast sky,
You are here from centuries,
Your every colour is strange,
And spectrum appears after heavy rain,
Reason of smile on every tired face,
You are shelter for homeless,
How could I define you?
I have no words like stars,
Which represent your charm
Moon is your ornament,
Sun is your necklace,
But instead of all that,
You are victim of all the crimes and
injustices happened under you,
How you tolerate it?
From years, you are still stable as at
beginning.

PERMANENT EXHIBIT (FLORENCE 2019)

Kathryn Temple

<https://medium.com/@templek>

<https://georgetown.academia.edu/KathrynTemple>

We're tourists at the Uffizi, we don't know much
about art so listen to the guide, it's light versus dark,
Botticelli, Leonardo, Caravaggio, chiaroscuro
under the porticos, in the galleries, on every wall.

A madonna cradles a glowing child, all the
madonnas hold hallowed children, the mothers
sit in the dark. I am cranky, I complain,
these women served God, where is their light?

I'm with the science guy, he's looking for Kepler.
We find the famous painting, smaller than imagined,
the floating face dissolves in the dark, chin buried in black,
he wants to know, *what do they have against Kepler.*

Cecilia's shining neck, suspended alit, awaits the sword,
Judith swings a tyrant's head, blood drips. A swan lies
slick-white against Leda's dark thigh. Bright-bodied
Hercules fights a green-dark hydra, *kill it* we think.

We roam from room to room, remark the light, outstare
the dark. Painting after painting, vengeful gods, dying saints,
the medusa, one martyr too many. We're martyred ourselves,
we've sacrificed, our feet hurt, we want the exit, life not art.

Life not art, we walk the grimy streets, the air reeks, Vespas
part the crowds, we scorn designer shops and they scorn us.
People push and shove, they ignore fake David, flock to Ponte Vecchio,
look but don't buy, complain about the heat, spit in the cobblestones.

Downcast, we hike the hill to the Piazzale, another David, a
closed basilica, we watch the sky darken over the city. A mead
moon rises above the Duomo, a few stars form bright points,
Acrux, Sirius, Cygnus, meteors and moons. Star-lit, enchanted,

we drink from the fountain, eat grapes, bread, cheese,
we are changelings, art lovers now, we review:
Botticelli, Caravaggio, chiaroscuro, beneath the
porticos, in the galleries, on every wall. And here.

This is the sky Leonardo loved.

Look To The Sky

NIGHT

Pratibha Savani

United Kingdom

[https://www.instagram.com/](https://www.instagram.com/pratibhapoetryart)

[pratibhapoetryart](https://www.instagram.com/pratibhapoetryart)

[https://www.facebook.com/](https://www.facebook.com/pratibhapoetryart)

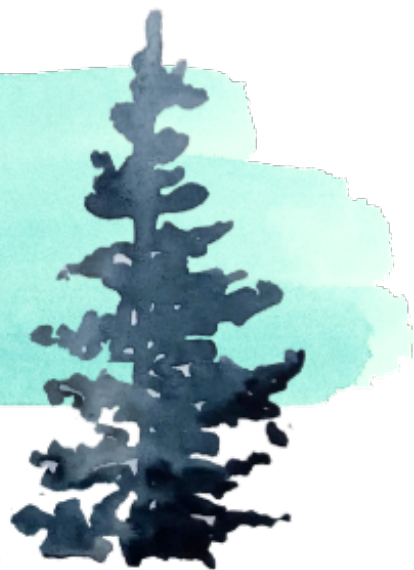
[pratibhapoetryart](https://www.facebook.com/pratibhapoetryart)

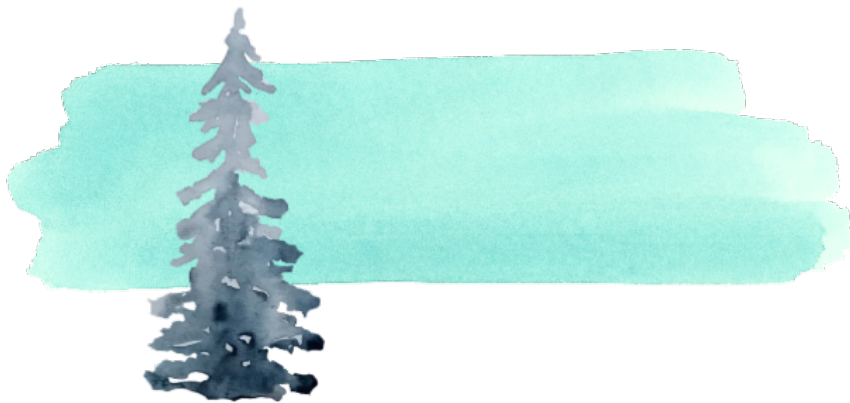
Evening begins
Night's a mystery
Wonders of stars
How many do I see?
Cool air whizzes through me
From above it shines
Milky and glowy
Can't touch, want to
Can't reach, want to
Following me
Just an illusion
Shadows created
Reality
Evening's ending
Night's began
I wonder around
Hoping I've won

THE NAMES OF STARS

Mark Hudson

Stars, stars in the sky,
show me your significance!
The whole world walks by
with an air of indifference.
If stars are so very vital,
why can't I see them connecting?
Who got to give them titles?
Where they inspired by their reflecting?
Adam, the first man, named the beasts,
while someone else gave the stars names.
I see a star up above in the East,
a shooting star going down in a flame.
Naming stars has already been done,
the Big Dipper and Milky way known.
No stars visible when seen by the sun,
but when moonlight glows, starlight is shown.





WALK ALONG **Shampa Saha**

Walk along to some furlong
Stop and stare the sky
Dare to dream and think extreme
To the altitude, high!

Starry nights or scorching days,
The sky is always broad.
Blue and black, never be stagner
Whether the longest road.

Walk along, if no one
Is ready to be your friend
Sky will be there, smile and stare
And reach the goal at end.

Sky the teacher, teaches to be broad
Teaches to be bright or cloudy
Always be there, where you are
Don't feel lonely, if there is nobody!

Look at the sky, keep thoughts high
Always be happy like a lark
Luna and the sun will be there, just them, stare,
And ignore the ugly dark.

THE SPECTATORS **Carolyn Chilton Casas** **United States**

<https://www.instagram.com/mindfulpoet/>

As the sun begins to set,
on the highest tips
of leafless twigs are perched
at least fifty starlings.
All facing west and trilling.

Why the sycamore today
and not the almost as tall
mulberry trees or oaks?
The best view, perhaps,
as close as possible to heaven.
At other times I see their small bodies
strung out side by side
on the telephone wire
in the hastening dusk.

The birds remind me of beach walkers
at this time of day
stopping to face westward.
It's as if watching this sinking globe
is a sacrament not to be missed.



Renee Williams

Renee Williams is a retired English professor, who has written for Guitar Digest, Alien Buddha Press and Fevers of the Mind.

Look To The Sky

LOOK'D UP IN PERFECT SILENCE AT THE STARS*

Neal Whitman

California, United States

there are a billion zillion
stars
more or less

named, thus far,
only eighty-eight
constellations

so many stars
opportunities galore
for new ones

it takes imagination
to connect the dots
and see a shape

with seven stars
a profile in outline
low on the horizon



BADGER

looks for no trouble
squints in the light

constellations
and poetry
best seen in the dark

* from Walt Whitman, "When I Heard the
Learn'd Astronomer"

SCRATCH THE SKY

Karuna Mistry

United Kingdom

<https://karunacreations.wordpress.com/>

https://www.instagram.com/karuna_mistrypoetry/

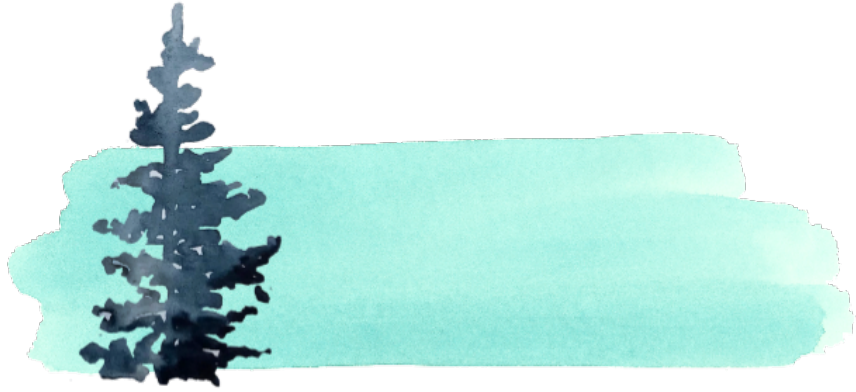
Sunshine stricken
On patchwork clouds
We lie lazy on a
Soothing moment

Skyscape in view
Of panoramic heat
Sound of nothing
Passing us by...

Until

Fuselage contrails
Tear up the sky
Scratchy streaks
On ruined canvas

Butcher on high
By carvery slice
Slash us back
To city life...



THE THUNDERSTORMS OF ARLINGTON

Gary Shulman, MS. Ed.
Virginia, United States

The thunderstorms of Arlington
Envelope me in a soothing blanket of comfort
I am not sure about the reason nor the why
But I am indeed calmed by the tumultuous metamorphosing sky
Bolts of electrons seem to energize my brain
Never forgetting they can so easily bring chaos and pain
Torrents of life-giving rain drumming on my windowpane
In any other situation would certainly drive my OCD insane
So why would a storm so severe calm my senses
Soporifically hypnotize and pacify my defenses
Into the womb I seem to gladly regress
As clouds thickly gray I do love I must confess
Perhaps for just a brief moment, for an instant in time
Mother Nature's grand majesty becomes supremely sublime
And again, I am reminded of how tiny and small
Humanity is and I profoundly recall
We are merely tenants temporarily on earth
Only here for a moment through hardship and mirth
Not trying to instill fear only trying to share
That these monstrous storms remind us to be aware
Tomorrows never promised and we might not even be here
So, thunder do bellow your basso song
And lightening bolts feel free
To instill fear among the throng
For your anger above reminds earthlings below
To appreciate each moment and make your life-force still glow

SEE THROUGH THE SKY

Ellen Suzanne Urowitz

Canada

Are we talking about the sky?
I think so but don't ask me why?
Simple each time I
meditate and look up at the bright blue clouds I cry.
Honest what would I gain if I lie?

As I look through the sky. .
I think free artwork.
The only time I have to look each day is
evening just before I cook.

If I don't spend five minutes looking
and helps me relax.
I wouldn't have enough energy to cook
I tried one and I broke an old antique glass.

Michelle Lishman

South Africa

https://www.instagram.com/miki_lishman_writing/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D

Our love is not written in the stars
it's conveyed by the clouds
for when it rains, it makes eternity grow



LOOK TO THE SKY n. 1

To S.

Gabriella Garofalo

Italy

Please act cool, moon, don't scream blue murder,
The first light of the morning is here,
And warped comms numb days, and diaries-
'Cause you can't see her desire in blue
Uncertain whether to lie with fire,
Or a distant laughter in the night,
As the only fire is hailing from candles
And maybe it's your life to challenge it-
So don't waste your time, soul,
Just leave, as first light cares for you
Only when you're gone, you and your rooms,
And never trust heaven's greed,
This month too warm for winter,
Where the hair is setting ablaze
Limbs in a kiln and time
Anxiously awaits the firing of the clay,
As he's setting up a personal exhibition:
The impervious black of the earth,
A sand that won't get involved,
The water of dismay already seared-
Such bloody mess, sure, but don't kid yourself
You can relight waste, the hoarded dross
Of seasons skies limbs, men who write,
And by a sad alchemy of the years
Even swear they are in love with unsayable shadows,
The unlikely splendour of a start,
Mad air from rejecting windows-
Warped comms again?
Maybe yes if once you hounded the moon, the sky
When they would haunt a spare soul,
But in the end they didn't choose her,
'Cause her silent dreams always skip out
After dispersing the undergrowth, the hired storm barriers,
The night standing still at cobalt corners,
And delirious colours shouting 'no use for you'-
No need for unworthy souls, so they just discarded her.

SPRING EQUINOX, PORT ORCHARD

Lesley Roger Hobbs

Pacific Northwest, United States

<https://lesleyrogershobbs.com/>

The dark feels endless
in the Pacific Northwest -
days short
and nights too long to avoid.
Skies grumble and grey-wash the world,
rain soaks;
I am damp for months.

Now, today, spring.
I rise before cockcrow when
hope calls me to the Puget Sound,
"Take heart" it whispers,
"day now equals night."
I watch a northbound
flock of geese crest the horizon.

Morning haze tendrils
and wisps the unfamiliar sun
sprinkles stars
on the water,
a dawn-dazzle catches me
off guard – I am unaccustomed
to holding such joy.

Who doesn't want light
after a long winter?



SWINGING HIGH

Petrouchka Alexieva

Swinging higher and higher,
Towards the ruby-red sunset,
I see the beams of the diving sun
Deep down into the ocean horizon.

Swinging high I see above the clouds
Eagles that fly toward the endless sky
I glide on their wings and satisfy
My desires to ride.

Swinging high towards the wind
I hear all fairy tales that it whispers in my hair
I can travel with him all the way
To the Milky Way.

CRYPT IN THE SKY

Michael Lee Johnson
Illinois, United States

<https://www.illinoispoets.org/>

Order me up,
no one knows
where this crypt in the sky
like a condo on the 5th floor
suite don't sell me out
over the years;
please don't bury me beneath
this ground, don't let me decay
inside my time pine casket.
Don't let me burn to cremate
skull last to turn to ashes.
Treasure me high where no one goes,
no arms reach, stretch.
Building for the Centuries
then just let it fall.
These few precious dry bones
preserved for you, sealed in the cloud
no relocation is necessary,
no flowers need to be planted,
no dusting off that dust each year,
no sinners can reach this high.
Jesus' heaven, Jesus' sky.

*Note: Dedicated to the passing of
beloved Katie Balaskas.*



MY ODE FOR OWEN BEACH

Carl "Papa" Palmer

Washington, United States

<https://www.facebook.com/carlpapa.palmer.1>

Tacoma Washington rains
a foggy mist I breathe
in cadence
with soft whispers
of Puget Sound surf
heard front row center
sitting on this sand-locked log
all to myself at Owen Beach.

Seeking similes for birds
behaving like birds
as I float a morning prayer
toward the Tahlequah ferry
crossing for Vashon Island
from Point Defiance Park
sailing the horizon between
gray water and gray sky.

THE UNSEEABLE DREAM

Ken Gosse

To dream an invisible dream,
To see an unseeable sight,
To bear with hope many find doubtful,
To code, till we prove it is right;

To confirm what past genius hath wrought,
To believe, then to prove the bizarre
To continue when efforts seem endless,
To seek the unseeable star.

That was our quest
To see a dark star,
In all of the wonder
It veils from afar
To fight to enlight
Without seeking applause
To be willing to strive for the right
theoretical cause

In our hopes that we'd find that it's true
Knowing there is no rest
To the efforts which we must pursue
In this heavenly quest

And the world will be better for this
That our team, working both near and far,
Will strive, and continue in courage,
To see the unseeable star!

WILL MY SOUL FLY?

Nolo Segundo

Will my soul fly
When I die...
Will my soul soar
O'er the Alps,
The Rockies, the Andes,
And the Himalayas?

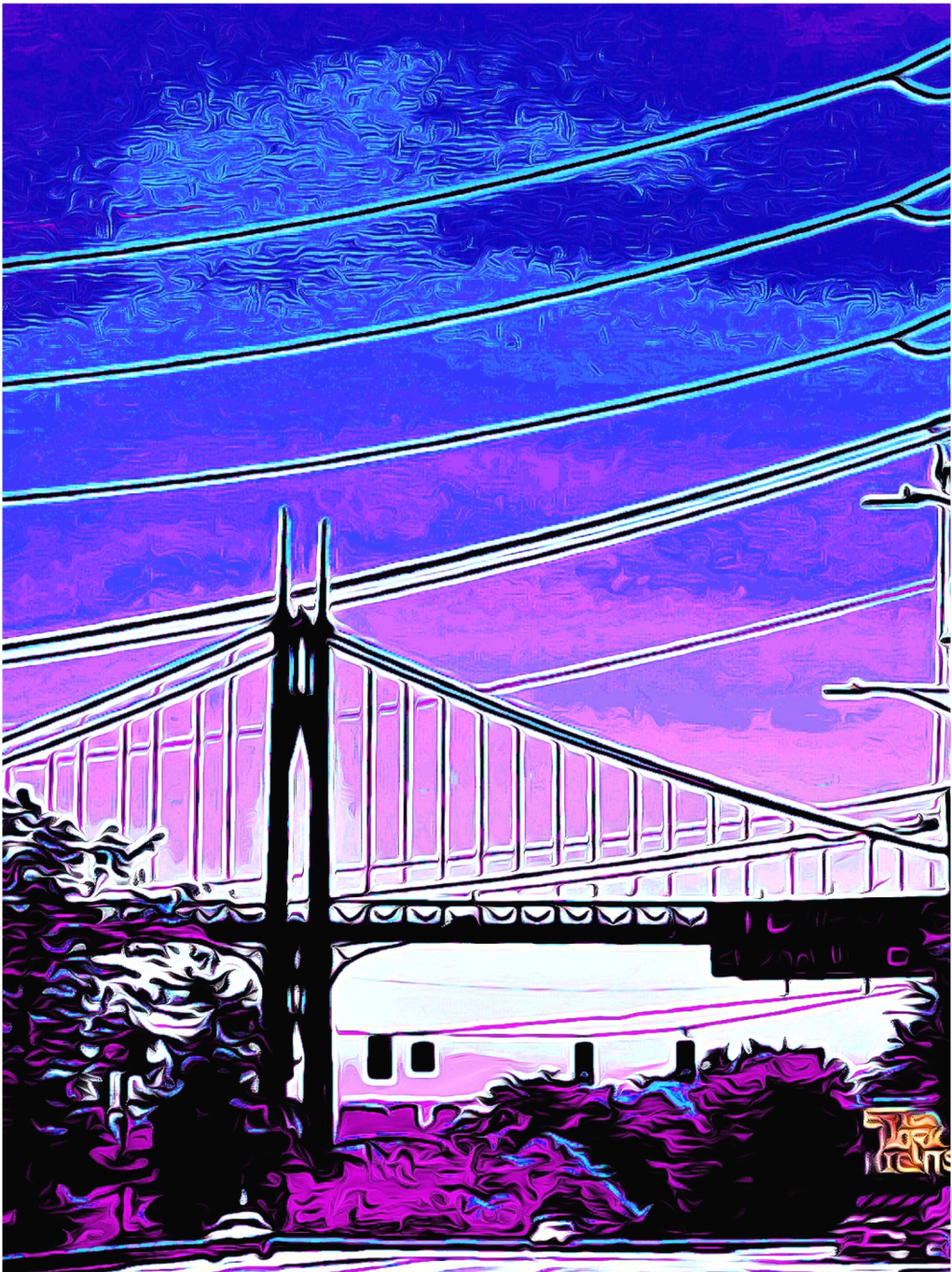
Will my soul see
The Aurora Borealis
Finally?

Will my soul
Dive deep, deep
Into the oceans,
Seeing beauty
And creatures
Unknown to
To those who
Live on dry land?

Will my soul slip
Time's iron hold,
Then to skip, at will,
Through the Ages,
Back and forth
Like an unruly child,
(the dream of sages)
Knowing the faces
Of Caesar stabbed,
Of Joan of Arc burning,
Of Lincoln laughing,
Seeing too the places
Where the lions fed
On the Christian saints,
Where soldiers died
In battles long over,
Where Hitler lied
And Jesus cried?

And will my soul then
speed through our vast
Universe, far faster
than the speed of light,
faster than even thought
as it takes in billions
of stars and trillions
of other worlds, and
begins, just begins
to feel how really
big God is...?





CATHEDRAL CROSSING

Lindsey Morrison Grant

Oregon, United States

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/lindsey-morrison-grant-425567216/>

<https://siygallery.com/collections/lindsey-morrison-grant>

<https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipNIJYL34v7fZwBKZQwJX2iL0viHxIXs9OBK2Hr2yNWnJ2-yJWa-BhtrNSmjQIQBUQ?pli=1&key=TXIGNXFJZU†Za0ZvSmIHVXIDYi1YUVZDUFpIUk13>

I HAVE BEEN CALLED BY STARLINGS

Thomas A. Thrun

Wisconsin, United States

I looked skyward, and
behold a *murmuration* of starlings
spun upwards, like a black funnel cloud,
swirled heavenward up from the lawn, from
where they'd found swarms of aphids to consume
among the cutting blades of wiregrass ...this all being
outside the window of the fast-food restaurant where I, too,
sat consuming calories of my own sausage-biscuit breakfast.

Alas, the brown/black birds rose in waves, up and up, like a
crescendo of Beethoven eighth notes on a scored page, each
keeping its own special place and space in measured
time ...a symphonic apparition, as it were, one
conducted by something (or someone?)
unseen, but yet hoped for, since
the beginning of rhyme.

And, as fast as they'd ascended, the starlings then,
in decrescendo, descended once again, phrasing
their synchronized falling to land black
and back upon the lawn. And I ...I
thought, as I sat there, as I chewed
and swallowed the last bite of
sustenance I could afford,

I thought softly alone to myself:
I do not deserve this, such a gift of grace!

For, the starlings, in their annual autumn migration,
stopped me suddenly with their *murmurizing*! Indeed, they
gave me great pause, as I ...I now have been called upon
to be a witness to that *something or someone*, to all
that is and isn't seen, to what is and isn't heard.

I took my plastic juice cup home to be recycled
and glanced, as I drove out of the parking lot, for more
starlings flying up and more grace coming down.

THE ASSASSINATION

Kenneth Stephens
California, United States

A gallows was erected on one side of a bridge,
and a law was passed whereby those crossing
from the other side must tell why they wished
to cross. If they spoke truly, they would be allowed
to pass, if they spoke falsely, they would be hanged.

When Nathuram Godse came to the bridge he
spoke truly that he was on his way to Gandhi's
prayer meeting, and he was allowed to pass. The
Hindu fundamentalist did go to the meeting, said
his prayers, and fired at Gandhi three times at
close range.

My train was stopped at the station
of Kurukshetra, empty at midnight. I looked out
at the full moon, which hung over this battlefield
of the Bhagavad Gita. Godse was hanged here,
where the ghosts of truth and wisdom mocked
him. A vendor went by chanting *garm chai, garm
chai*, hot tea, hot tea.

WINTER MOON

Julie A. Dickson
New Hampshire, United States

I have looked up to see a winter moon
between sparse remaining oak tree leaves;
a full or crescent make some lovers croon,
stars peek out from darkest sky believe

that all is calm and bright, just like the tune,
under my breath I hum as now I walk.
Path beneath my feet lit up as noon
quiet thoughts surround, no need to talk.

When chance I meet nocturnal eyes that glow,
I pause, give way since night belongs to them;
my feet are warm, though breaths cold vapor blow,
dark form moves off, resume my journey then.

With sunrise breach this night becomes the day,
moon of winter pale as fades away.



WHEN I LOOK UP TO SKY

A dedication to my grandpa : Died on 27th Dec,2020.

Sonia Pal & Trisha Ram

United Kingdom

When I look up to clouds,
I'm reminded of cotton candies that we shared.

When I look at the birds,
I'm reminded how, above all the heights, you cared.

When the wind touches me,
I'm reminded of your soft gentle hands and their touch on my head.

When I see the colourful rainbow,
I'm reminded of our beautiful days spent together.

When I see the shiny stars above at night,
I'm reminded of our 'twinkle twinkle little star' singing with actions together.

When I see the full round moon,
I'm reminded of you saying 'Ladoo'*.

When I see the sun over my head,
I'm reminded of the warmth of your love.

When the rain pours down slowly-
I cry with my silent tears, and I don't jump now in the puddle.

When it gets dark in the evening
I know you are here to hear
That I really miss you a lot 'Baba'**
And looking up to the sky NOW isn't easy.

Ladoo- A sweet round yellow ball-An Indian Sweet.*

*Baba**- Grandpa in Punjabi language.*

FOR ANOTHER NEW DAY, ANOTHER NEW LIGHT

Lakshman Bulusu

Stir in the silence from newfound exuberance
Of seeing the light of the day after days
Portsmouth New-Normal-based care beyond kindred

Morning routine starting with light exercises
Breakfast with coffee, tea, egg toast, and cookies
Then sauna-based massage to revitalize

A hot lunch prepared for the palette and passion
With fries, steak, and wings to satisfaction
Always helping to savor the flavor

An evening coffee and a walk led hand in hand
Dinner with salad and chicken buffet grand
Finally, a sleep zone to entreat the senses

The cared spend their days in the shine of this new home
Each wow moment, a reflection as bright as chrome
For another new day, another new light

CIRRUS FIBRILS

Sangita Kalarickal

Teeth chattering, we
combed the skies for Leonids
Walked hand in hand, on
the cobblestones over Vltava
You breathlessly asked me
to walk with you
until the end of time.

And here we sit years hence
Coffee cups and unspoken words
Will you buy the milk and eggs?
I'll fix dinner and mow the lawn
Our questions hang midair
And answers are strands
of punctuation in time.



Look To The Sky

AWE AND WONDER

Emecheta Christian

Nigera

<https://www.facebook.com/emechetac>

Romancing the stillness of the night,
I sit and ponder,
the moon my only companion,
as I contemplate the mysteries of the world.

The wind whispers secrets,
the stars sparkle wisdom,
the trees stand tall and proud,
as if they hold the secrets of the universe within their leaves.

I am but a speck,
in this vast and wondrous world,
yet I am filled with a sense of wonder,
as I contemplate the mysteries that surround me.

The allure of gorgeous scenery mesmerized me,
I became conscious of the power of the elements,
and the spirits in the wind,
coupled with the stunning colors in the world.

In this quiet solitude,
I can tap into something deeper,
something more profound,
A sense of significance and purpose filled me,
As I explored the depths of my thoughts and feelings,
and the wonders of the world around me.

GO!
Precious Ejim
19 Years Old

Stay inside, don't make him think twice
Make her star, the main attraction at the bar
Beg and plead a beautiful smile
Cause she'll always be, a little girl
Cause she'll always be, his little girl

1234, she'll drink his venom and shell hit the floor
"Oh please, no more"
Don't want to face the reality

nevermind, they're hard to find
Not typical, one of a kind
Fallen angels, so beautiful
Why do they cry?
Beautiful, why do they cry?

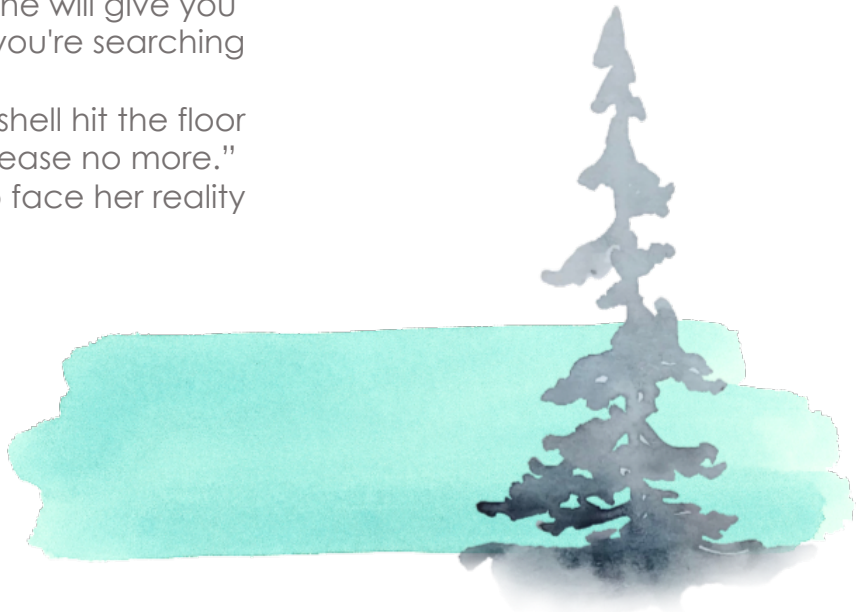
1234, they'll turn off the lights
And they'll shut the door
"Please no more."
Don't want to face the reality

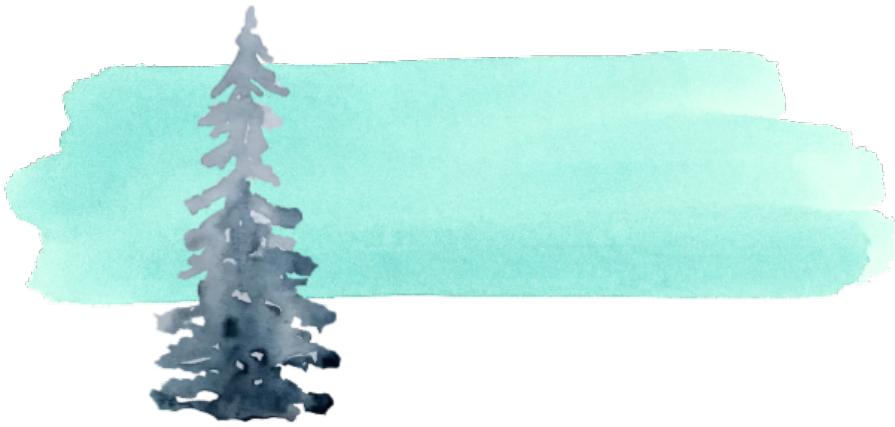
She's just as capable
Just want to have a good time
Let her show you, everything
It takes two to tango
Heartbreaking
She will give you
What you're searching

1234, she drinks his venom and shell hit the floor
"Oh, baby please no more."
Don't want to face her reality

DAY'S FINAL HOUR
John Muro

Day's final hour
has been windswept
and blown out by dusk,
and a sky of ebullient
blue is now in peril as
a profusion of plum
sweeps in, spreading
like gall ink and blushing
hillsides, a cluster of
small ponds and an open
expanse of pasture,
before the gloaming
dries into an immense,
slumbering darkness
that's gradually awakened
by the audible light of
a Zildjian-gold moon.





A TOPPLING OVER SKY VIEW; BUBBLES OF LOVE

Kanta Roy
India

You wanted four walls,
to start the sky;

bagging all that you tried to install, green growling

I shout, look to the sky:

sections jumble towards our legs

the face of Venus

forms wet areas now dried and higher than what we used as our choice:

for her naval tobacco, just smoked and did despair a figure, what we started with

and what should be a hard way for living in a pendant,

laughter to hatred now floating like throaty misfortune,

soon the process becomes audacious to fingers crosses

turned off the wants to wait for a relief

searching for sky high sparrows

free to fly outside,

our lookouts' fly around doodling circles

and the Bungee jumps proudly towards a copy of etiolated tree line:

bending tees down to ground, we gotta start waiting to hear for a call

and looking to the sky,

nullity immersed in sea forks

sending her a metanoia

your car looks different from her skyline view:

your earth just a dough of happy flour in palm

screaming pain at the good night:

sky seeming infinite love.

Albert Russo



BLOWING CLOUDS

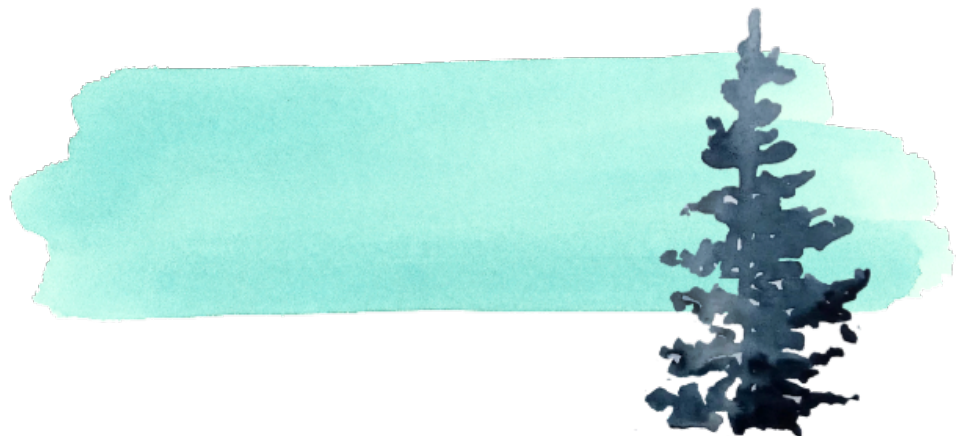
In Memory of My Mother, Charlotte Hyatt 1930-2020

Shelly Blankman
Maryland, USA

As far back as I can remember, clouds seemed to take her to another place on her darkest days. We'd sit on the porch and watch their strands drift across the sky to the rhythm of the wind. She seemed to breathe in another place, another time — far from the shards of a shattered life.

Age robbed her of what was left. Alzheimer's had pecked at her brain like vultures, silencing her pain, scattering her thoughts into her darkness. She'd forgotten the little joys she'd had. Her kids. Her grandkids. Her beloved cats. Her favorite tv shows and movies. Her brother whom she so adored.

But she never forgot about the clouds. I'd call her daily, blow clouds through the phone, listen to her laugh as she'd blow clouds back at me. It's the only time she laughed anymore. She's been gone for years. But not a day has passed that I've not looked to the sky, heard her laugh in the breeze, and felt her presence among the clouds.





LOOK TO THE SKY

Koyel Mitra

<https://www.facebook.com/koyel.mitra.7982>

How insignificant I am
in this vast world of creation!
Look to the sky-
it is so limitless and powerful.
It weeps with me
when I am doleful
in the form of rainfall.
It smiles with me
when I am cheerful
in the form of a sunny day.
It portends a doom
when I face untoward situations
in the form of storms.
It pacifies me
when I become perturbed
after braving a storm
in the form of a clear, blue sky.
I always look to the sky-
it is my best friend ever.

DANCING STARS

Jane Fitzgerald

<https://www.facebook.com/JanesPoetry/>

https://www.amazon.com/stores/Jane-H.-Fitzgerald/author/B01MSW2FLO?ref=ap_rdr&store_ref=ap_rdr&isDramIntegrated=true&shoppingPortalEnabled=true

If I could fling the stars
Sprinkling across the heavens
A string of wildly dancing light
Proclaiming my love for you
If I could make the stars a message
They would swirl in vivid blues and golds
Waltzing gracefully through the Milky Way
Swinging in and out of Saturn's rings
A rumba into black holes recreating light
Twirling love like swirling dots from a disco ball
A sweeping beam illuminating the darkness
Always streaming towards infinity
Searching for love beyond earthly bounds
The devastating moment your essence disappeared
The stars ceased their feverish masquerade
Becoming steadfast constellations once again
Static like my broken bleeding heart
Alone and dim among the celestial display

Journey
Home



JOURNEY HOME – JOHN GANSHAW – UNITED STATES

Finally, I'm on my way home, somewhere between Seoul and Detroit, sitting comfortably in a Delta One Pod, gazing out the window. You can see for miles and all that is below me are pure white puffs of white, the sun cascading off of them and gazing back at me, highlighting the tanned fingers that type on this keyboard. It is so hard to imagine that I am here above the clouds when I have been in the depths of hell for so long. This is different from sleeping on the floor in a Cambodian prison. I thought that being on the way home would bring a sense of freedom to my realm, yet I am wiping away the tears of pain, hurt, and everything else that came with these past 16 months. It wasn't too long ago that I thought my head would be resting on these clouds, using them as my pillow but now all appear to be different.

I sat there gazing out the window, dreaming of all that was, all that was still ahead of me, thinking what now. Deep, lost in my thoughts when out of nowhere I heard a voice, "Would you like some more wine." I was startled shitless and jumped a mile high bringing a whole new meaning to the mile-high club. The attendant was just as startled by my reaction, but we both got a laugh out of it. This will be my life now, being startled by the slightest noise, voice, or sighting. I slunk back into my seat, watching my fingers move across the keyboard, effortlessly recording the thoughts running through my brain. I did take some time out to notice that the attendant did give me a very healthy pour, and for that, I am more than grateful. On the journey back, not even sure what that means anymore, I am leaving my Cambodian home to find time to recover and right this old sea-worn ship. I had no sooner found myself and it is now in need of some repair. At least I have a bag of bones that can be mended, unlike one or two people I know.

My friends are asking me how I feel now that I have started the journey back and I can best explain it like this. The physical journey will be an easy one; I got on this plane and will be back with family and friends in a matter of 20-plus hours. The mental and emotional journey will take a lot of time; time to adjust to the trauma, treatment, and time to come to terms with how the person you loved so much could betray you. So, this journey will not be a Sunday walk in the park but more like a mountaineering expedition. We have only so much control over life, if you want to live life to the fullest you must accept that there may be a shit storm now and again. I just happened to find the shit storm to end all shit storms.

Even now, as I begin my journey back, such positive experiences begin to happen, mostly the most mundane having such an impact on me. I will begin last evening, which in itself seems like an eternity ago. I was waiting for my taxi to pick me up from the hotel when I ran into the British Ambassador, a lovely lady. During my time in Cambodia, we became acquaintances. I dare say friends when a very dear friend of ours passed away. She was a guest in my hotel, the hotel where we had the

JOURNEY HOME – JOHN GANSHAW – UNITED STATES

wake. It was just the beginning of the Era of Covid and meeting her, at the wake, all brought a sense of life to such a dire situation, it was death, after all, that is probably the direst of situations to ever be encountered. Though we had only met that one time she has been there through my entire ordeal. Anyway, she knew that I was leaving and heading home, and she stated that she would like to keep in touch, genuinely. It wasn't empty words coming from her lips but heartfelt sentiment. Christ this is a good pour of very good wine, I'm waiting for the fasten seatbelt sign to illuminate. The second impact happened when I was going through immigration, and I knew it wouldn't be easy. It took a few minutes and some phone calls, probably to make sure that my exit Visa was in order and that I truly was free from prison and able to leave the country. Each one of the agents at immigration treated me with the utmost respect and I knew they read the charges, Blackmail and Sex Trafficking. By their looks and demeanor, I could tell that they knew the charges were false and I was a victim of the common yet not-so-common scam. Those who partake in illegal activities are cunning to have others who are innocent take the fall. It was when I was walking away that the one agent looked me in the eyes, saying "Good Luck to you." Generally, I would just chalk this up to his being nice but the smile on his face and the look in his eyes were real, you could see the emotion in his eyes, the sense of caring, and the sense of knowing. These times have been so difficult for me, to be accused of a crime so hideous and disgusting is still so unbearable. To know through the actions above or messages I receive from friends, messages of encouragement, friends, family, and acquaintances, reassuring me that everyone knows the truth and who was behind this. This goes a long, long way. Perhaps the most touching happened this morning when I was chatting with my friend, legal advisor, and confidant, Jonathon. He said that the effect my situation has had on others is indescribable. He was telling me how it brought people together, to rally for me during this unbearable time of Covid. People not being able to interact or have contact with others, yet they were all coming together and, in the process, forming friendships that otherwise wouldn't have been formed. Jonathon shared with me the feeling that I had. I had these same feelings when I was in prison. I met and am now friends with some great people that I wouldn't have met if this incident hadn't happened to me.

I am still looking out upon the sea of white, little mountains of cotton and though I am flying to a new place, I know I wouldn't want to change anything that has happened to me. What I have learned these past many months I would never have learned if this hadn't been done to me. How lucky am I? You have the worst possible accusation made about you, you spend time in a third-world prison, and you live through the most unimaginable living conditions, yet I have no remorse, hate, maybe a little contempt and I despise a certain ex-pat, but after all I am human. Even now, I truly believe I am a better person than I was before. This

JOURNEY HOME – JOHN GANSHAW – UNITED STATES

experience has provided me with the opportunity to create a new dream, a new fight for justice, and a new life to live. The dreams and nightmares won't go away overnight, the struggle will still be there but in time, maybe I can begin again.



At the age of 53 and after 31 years in banking it was time for John to retire and follow his dream of owning a hotel in Southeast Asia. This led to many new experiences enabling John to see the world through a different lens, leading him to write his story through essays, poetry, and a yet unpublished memoir. John's work has appeared in Native Skin, Runamok Books/Growerly, Post Roe Alternatives, Emphyrean Literary Magazine, OMQ, OpenDoor Magazine, and others. Nothing is as it seems, and experiences are meant to shape us not define us. There is hope, truth, and adventure in life, all leading to stories that need to be written and told.



Noxious
Reminiscence

Out of a blurry windowpane, Milan Alexandre watched rain lightly fall onto the already saturated concrete. He watched the picturesque afternoon view of the town center darken from the weather's effects. It had been raining all day. Milan let out a cough into a crumpled handkerchief he held in his left hand. Remnants of dried blood speckled one corner of the cloth from earlier, from violent convulsions of his chest that had woken him up from his afternoon nap. His cough had momentarily subsided to a raspy exhale, so he thought it wasn't necessary to call for the doctor. Besides, his daughter should be arriving any minute now. That's who he was waiting for, looking for outside of his window, to see her little black sedan pull up and out she climb, perhaps donning the wide brimmed hat she always wore when the weather was inclement as it was today.

Milan was once the chief natural resource overseer at the Hanks Institute of Refinery before his reluctant retirement. Before he held his managerial position, he worked as one of the floor engineers, constructing and alter servicing the oil refinery, laying most of the piping and construction to the large stack, billowing thick, white smoke from its top, off in the distance of the town. It resembled a large cigarette, he always thought, fit for a giant. He craved a normal sized one even though he had given them up five years ago. Milan absently smacked his chest where his shirt pocket used to house his pack of hand rolls, before his daughter and the doctor, in an effort to keep him alive long enough to perhaps see a grandchild be born, pleaded for him to stop.

Besides the cigarettes, the years of hard labor had taken a considerable toll on his health. His doctor had told him on several occasions to take it easy, whatever that meant; Milan apparently held a philosophical disagreement about the definition of "easy." He had been bedridden for the past two days and while his back kept his movements strict and rigid while his coughs persuaded him to buckle over, he felt he needed to get out of bed or else he would die.

His hand was propped up on the window for support. A glass of water sat on the windowsill, one or two more sips left before he had to go into the kitchen to refill it. He was thirsty but did not want the exhaustion that would surely come from moving the mere two-rooms length to the fridge and instead thought it best to impatiently wait for his daughter to arrive before his thirst defeated him. He licked his lips, continuing to stare out into the rain.

The dreary sky was crowded with bloated clouds, their bellies gray – a reflection of the concrete street below – torpid and full of rain. It seemed to Milan it would rain for the rest of the night and maybe even into the morning. The clouds smothered the sun, ushering in night earlier than the day intended. Milan worried if his daughter would be coming at all, even though it was only ten minutes past the time she told

him over the phone she would arrive.

Milan had always enjoyed days like this. In his adolescence, he would slice through inchoate puddles, the sleek, black bicycle tires blurred in the reflection of the fallen rain, his body soaked to his underwear and his mom, even at that age until her own untimely death from an unexpected aneurysm, as spry as ever he thought, reprimanding him about the dangers of pneumonia and being soaked to the bone (oh, what splendid horrors parents – his mother and even Milan himself with his children – used to threaten their children with whenever there was the slightest chance for something to go wrong). At the oil refinery he never minded working through small showers such as the one today or the ones he fondly remembered feverishly pedaling through and would revel in each droplet cooling him off from the day's work, filling the air with dampness and an affectionate craving for his mother's homemade baklava. The rain tapped against the kitchen window, as she refilled her morning pot of coffee, the cold rain fogging up the window's edges, an invitation his mother took to grind up any walnuts or pistachios they had while she left the phyllo dough to thaw on the counter. What he would give now to have the strength to walk down his apartment stairs and feel the rain splatter against his weathered face, his once broad, now deflated shoulders, and feel once more the coolness of the rain, as the water soaked through his pores, soaking him to the bones, as his mother always threatened.

A black car pulled up to an empty parking spot in front of a standalone apartment building. Analise Alexandre sat watching the windshield wipers swipe away the drizzling rain at a pace much faster than the rain was falling. The car sat idle. Analise stared out at the droplets being cut to pieces by the pacing wiper blades.

It was always a chore to see her father in his current condition, she thought. A chore she felt was a prioritized importance, as her father, throughout her life, never swayed away from giving her anything he was capable of giving her, so it was one she didn't mind as much as others pertaining to her life, but it was a chore, nonetheless.

Once a strong man, always a symbol for the strength she believed fostered familial vitality in her, was now frail, confined to a proximity close to his bed, death eminent, very soon. She was the last of her father's children. Her two older brothers died in the war, and she was all her father had left. She looked down at her lap where her hands idly rested. She wore a black cardigan over a simple black blouse and black pants. Already dressed to mourn his inevitable death. Upon realizing her lapse in judgement when absentmindedly picking out her outfit for work this morning, tears welled up in her eyes and she did her best to fight their inclination for falling down her pale cheeks and the soft discolored bags under her eyelids.

For the last couple months, in order to recover from her father's increasing medical expenses as well as keeping herself afloat, she showed up to work six days a week, sometimes forgoing even her one day off to come in and make any progress on the big project her team was working on, and hopefully, reaching its seemingly elusive denouement. And yet, despite the apparent effects of the lack of sleep, she still retained a prominent beauty, although when she let her mind wander back to more simpler times for her, especially with her father who loves to go down old, familiar roads of recollection, she remembers a more bright, vibrant face for her own. Now, wrinkles began to form at the edge of her eyes, the curls in her hair slackened, losing their spring, and her skin lost the sheen it once held in her youth. Nevertheless, even when she was remiss to believe, her beauty was still present.

She was engaged to a coworker, a fellow engineer. Roman Levy, her husband to be, had actually proposed to her over a month ago and within that time Analise had visited her father on multiple occasions, but never managed to bring up this intimate affair. Now, feeling guilty for keeping such information that she knew would only warm the heart of the old man upstairs, whom she saw innocuously peering out his window down at her, she turned the car off and grabbed her long-brimmed hat, adorned with a matching black ribbon tied around the base of the crown, sitting in the passenger side, and entered the rain, making for her father's apartment entrance.

Upon seeing his daughter's car arrive and the straw-colored hat with the familiar black sash first emerge from the car, Milan backed away from the window until he fell into a padded rocking chair sitting next to his bed. Both the back and the seat were cushioned with wool, stitched together on lovely, flower-patterned linen, by Analise's mother. She died from what the doctors diagnosed as an incurable disease. The disease – Milan forgetting the long, intimidating name used to identify her sickness – was indeed curable, however, Milan and his wife possessed neither the funds nor were in the proximity of a more, well-equipped hospital, and thus, she was deemed incurable.

The rocking chair was swollen from years of soaking in the early morning's moisture and creaked any time Milan leaned back slightly in the chair, but he found it impossible to throw out the old relic. His lower back surged with pain at the slightest forward movement of his upper body, so it felt good to lean back, rock in the chair, and so he focused on the harmonious effect the tapping of the falling rain had on the windowsill and the creak the old chair bellowed. He coughed into his handkerchief and reminded of the blood, thrust it into his pocket as to not alarm his daughter.

She came in without knocking, as she always did and how he always told her to

come in and not act like she was some stranger. She placed her hat on the console table near the door and after embracing her father, Milan stifling a cough while wincing to lean forward into her hug, assumed her position at the foot of her father's bed while he fell back into his chair, the crescent feet of the chair creaking with every trip backward.

"How are you feeling?" Analise asked, as she always did.

"Fine, fine."

He was still catching his breath, trying to match his exhales with the steady rock of his chair. Every breath he let out was accompanied by a soft wheeze, a pitiful cry from his lungs from all the times he relished the soothing taste of the tobacco smoke filling his chest; he was now paying the costs of the pain each drag lifted from him in his past. Now, at the denouement of his life, he was forced to atone for avoiding such pain, for he now understood pain to be unavoidable in all accounts.

"Rather drab day, isn't it?" Analise said.

"I love days like these. Your mother and I ... would always set a fire, prepare a pot of lentils or some pork stew or another ... watch from that old, double-pane window the songbirds take advantage of those poor unearthed worms ... lost their home –"

"Has Mrs. Granger been by?"

"Who?"

"Mrs. Granger." Analise repeated. "The nice lady who lives across the hall. Has she stopped by at all?"

"Oh yes, she dropped off supper and helped me ... change the sheets on the bed."

Mrs. Granger was Milan's neighbor across the hall. She was a little old woman, perhaps a little older than Milan (Analise never asked, and Milan never could remember), who took it upon herself to check in on Milan every so often to make sure he was eating and, as she always put it, not turning the apartment into a sty.

"She always makes a fuss of the clutter on the table ... no matter how many times I tell her not to bother." Milan pulled the handkerchief from his pocket to catch a fit of coughs he felt coming.

"It has gotten better, considerably." Milan insisted, upon seeing the concerned look

in his daughter's stare. He began directing the questions to her, as he tucked away the handkerchief under his leg. He asked her about work, always intrigued and proud of his daughter's accomplishments. She was an engineer just like him.

"What was it you told me the other day ... the Institution ... of something or other ... of Restorative Technology, that's it ... They contacted you about something ... What was it? ..."

"It didn't amount to much. Everything we found from the crashed satellite was unsalvageable." She looked down into her lap. She didn't want to tell him that it was months ago. "We're working now on a radio signal."

"What for?" Milan said, intrigued, sitting upright until his back fired warning shots for him not to move any more forward.

"To try and contact one of the sibling outposts. We aren't sure if it'll work, if we have a strong enough signal and frequency, but in theory, if their radio towers and satellites are still operational, they should pick up our signal."

"How long will that take?"

"We're not sure." Analise said. She blushed at the usage of such a pronoun, reminding her of what prompted her to visit her father during the week. She was unsure how to announce it to him. She always found it difficult to talk to her father about personal matters. They could talk about work for hours on end, or any economic or political topic, both impassioned by the conversation, but the moment the conversation shifted to either of their personal life, specifically Milan with Analise's mother and Analise regarding even a modicum of romance of her own, the two spoke in generalities, grasping hollow words and putting together coherent sentences always meaning close to nothing, followed by avoidance of eye contact until another subject was explored. But this time it was different for Analise. This time, she wasn't sure how many more visits she would have left to tell him, how many more times eye contact could go avoided. So, taking advantage of a lull filled with nothing but the white noise from the persistent rain and the crying rocking chair, Analise spoke.

"I'm engaged, dad."

"What?"

"Engaged, I'm engaged." She unfolded her hands to hold up the ring that she was

covering since she walked in.

Milan's face flushed crimson as he looked toward his daughter, all grown up in front of him now. He wanted nothing more than to jump up from exhilaration upon hearing such news, seeing the glint in her eyes, the smile that slowly crept out of hiding in his bleak, poorly lit bedroom, now unable to be contained any longer from her face after such an admission. For so long he worried his daughter was committing herself too much to her work and to his own health. He felt the hot, smarting sensation of tears as he congratulated her and asked who the fortunate man was.

"Roman Levy. He works with me at the lab. I think I might have mentioned him before."

"Oh, wonderful my dear ... I'm sure you have ... Just as long as you are happy."

The jubilation in his demeanor was short lived, however, as he began spitting out a vicious series of coughs, not able to stop until Analise moved closer on the bed to the chair, placing her hand on his back, asking again if he was okay. He pounded a closed fist against his chest, cross toward the betrayal of his own health stealing away the attention from such a joyous moment.

"It truly is wonderful ..." He repeated, as Analise grabbed the glass of water he left on the windowsill and proceeded into the kitchen to refill it.

Analise returned and handed her father the water. Milan asked if the creaking of the chair was bothersome to Analise, but she said she was fine and the two sat for a moment listening to the rain and the squeaking wood.

Suddenly, during one of the forward swings of the chair, Milan took this opportunity to lurch out of the seat, gripping at the small of his back as he took his time to stand up straight. Analise went to her father's side, but he only waved her away, telling her to sit back down. He dragged his feet over to the window and peered out toward the saturated world separated by a rain-streaked window. He made sure he completely caught his breath before speaking.

"Let's go for a walk."

"Very funny." Analise said, still sitting on the bed and wondering what her father was looking at.

"Where is my umbrella? I think ... I left it outside the door. Ana, dear ... did you see

my umbrella outside the door?"

"What are you on about, dad?" Analise asked.

"I told you ... I want to go for a walk."

Outside the window Milan saw two yellow crested warblers chase one another around a light pole before darting up and landing on the drooping powerlines extending parallel to the street. They sat in the center of the shallow arching copper lines, their heads turned sideways toward Milan – their black dots for eyes piercing as they were enigmatic – before they flew off without warning, outside of Milan's window-paned view. Outside of the brief flash of gold from the pair of birds, the rest of the world was dipped in a sepia tone. White and black cars sat idle, parked along the road. White blinds and shutters shrouded the lives of people living in the adjacent windows, not enticed by the prolong rain the way Milan was. The buildings were painted a similar gravel color as the street. Everything seemed drained of color – an outcome of age, Milan supposed. All the black was tinted with a tinge of green, while the white, lighter tones were blemished with a yellowish hue, the kind seen on worn photographs taken on bulky, polaroid cameras, or on the edges of the crown molding to a smoker's residence. All this, Milan noted, doused by the setting sun's final glow, a distant light cascading on the world, invoked noxious sentimentality for those peering out of windows looking for such things.

Milan's abrupt terseness bothered Analise, and she was curious what had suddenly got into her father.

"Well?" Milan spoke.

"Well, what?"

"The umbrella, was it outside?"

Analise did recall the slim bucket outside holding a collapsed black umbrella, not bothered to be tied up, next to the front door.

"You'll get sick if you go out in this rain." Analise protested, but Milan ignored her words, or at least pretended to, and instead pensively stared out of his window to something unbeknownst to Analise. She stood up and stood just behind her father.

"See, it is still raining." She spoke.

"To the bone ... I know." He said, and there was some more silence until he finally

spoke again.

“Do you remember those hideous purple polka-dotted rain boots your mother had bought for you?”

“Yes, I remember, I was five.” Analise said, hoping he wouldn’t get lost in another story he had told a million times before.

“And it didn’t rain again for the rest of the month ... And once it finally did and you started playing ... in the puddles at the end of the driveway ... I think your mother and I were cooking a roast that morning ... I had my flannel on, I remember that much ... a frog or some other scared you white ... your mother had her hair up, that bandana tied with the bow resting on her crown ... It must have been Spring ... We were living in Fialta ...” Milan’s cough interrupted him. “Where is my coat? Let’s go for that walk. You used to love going on walks when you were a little girl ... you used to love swinging in between our arms ... Do you remember the time we were heading ... to I think the bookstore and –”

“Please don’t speak of the past so much, dad.” Analise said. “It’s depressing.”

Guilt flooded Analise’s face as she wished to take back her sincere interjection. It bothered her that he always felt it necessary to conjure memories of the past rather than keeping the conversation on something in the present. She looked at him, to gauge some sort of reaction, but he seemed neither perturbed nor saddened by the suggestion. Instead, he meekly spoke, the fragility in the old man’s voice apparent in the whispering way the words were heard.

“It’s all I have now. It’s all I have.”

The rain filled in the silence as the two stood, focusing on different raindrops before they crashed and joined the other pooling puddles. There would only be a few more minutes before another blink would bring upon the night. The soft amber glow from the light poles outside had already taken precaution, creating safeguarding domes amid the impending darkness. A maroon car drove past, breaking the monochromatic scene the rain, the setting sun, and the drabness of the city composed. Even though the window was closed, the smell of the rain filled Analise’s nostrils. The cool dampness smell of moisture engulfed her senses and sent a shiver down her spine, the kind of sensation one gets from hearing grave news or seeing an accident slowly happen in front of their eyes. She looked at her dad, who was coughing in his handkerchief again, hacking up what little life he still clung to.

“Let’s go for a walk.” He said once more.

In response, Analise stepped away from the window, grabbed his coat suspended on a hook near the front door, and stood with its innards outward, inviting her father to put it on.

She tried helping him down the flight of stairs, much to the dismay of Milan who insisted he could walk himself down, clutching onto the handrail with both hands as he slowly lowered his foot down each succeeding step, careful not to tweak or bend his back in any way. Once they were finally outside, Milan opened the umbrella out toward the street and he and Analise crowded underneath as Milan lead the way up along the road, walking only god knew where. Unable to hold the umbrella sturdy, Analise finally took the responsibility of the umbrella from her father and held it above their heads, letting him focus solely on the surrounding rain and where he wanted to walk, their destination sparking a tinge of curiosity in her. Then, about ten meters from the apartment building, he stopped, and then shuffled out from under the umbrella and into the rain.

"I'll be fine ... I'll be fine." He repeated, motioning for Analise not to follow him with coverage, pushing her outstretched hand away.

He didn't mind the rain, to feel the coldness envelop his body as the water immediately began to soak his clothes, his hair, his dried, old, and blotchy skin. He looked toward the heavens and winced at the water now falling upon his face.

He was never a religious man, never prayed to a god, even during the birth of his three children, the death of two of them, and the death of his wife, but in that moment, he felt, soaked to the bone, what he felt could only be described as rapturous. The sensation to cough that constantly lingered in his chest evaporated. The persistent pounding and rushing of blood to the occipital region of his skull gone. Even the pain in his back disappeared as every droplet hitting the concrete seem to disintegrate upon impact. And even though the sky was flooded with swollen clouds and the sun was now beyond the horizon, he thought he could feel on his face the warmth, the breath of life, kissing him, reminding him of the pleasures he had comprised over so many years, and due to his ever-present mortality, all of the memories that flashed before him, seen in the reflection of every falling droplet of rain, held an even greater potency than they ever had before. The world around him blurred. Analise's mouth formed words, but the words were unintelligible. He thought this was it, he was to die right here.

The next series of moments came to him in snapshots. Stills of his life captured in moments with seconds lost in between. He didn't lose consciousness, but was detached from his body, floating above his physical self, his spirit and mind clinging onto the ephemeral moment of bliss while his body was ushered up the stairs and

into his apartment by his daughter. He watched, floating above himself, his daughter change him out of his drenched clothes, wrap him in a towel before putting on his nightwear. She lit the fireplace and plugged in an electrical heater Milan had lying beside his bed. He saw himself, shivering uncontrollably, his transparent paper skin dyed blue. He sat in bed, a blank stare forward – a glint shining in his iris leftover from the rain's benediction. He saw the tears in his daughter's face and was eventually pulled back down into his body by a jerking cough, the pain residing in his back overcoming the numbness he was enveloped by.

"I'm going to have to call the doctor." He could finally hear Analise say.

"Don't." Milan said, the solemn word startling Analise before she composed herself to further reprimand her father, now that she knew he was conscious.

"– I sure hope you enjoyed whatever the hell that was. What were you even thinking?"

Milan felt sorry for causing her so much worry, but at the same time, he wanted to tell his daughter how she sounded so much like her grandmother.

In bed, underneath the covers he was sweating, yet still cold to the touch. She stood next to him on the side of the bed opposite of the electric heater. She was sweating herself but didn't seem to mind. She was still going on, her voice rising as his commiseration mutually grew. He reached out and grabbed her hand and it was only then did she realize he was also crying.

She embraced him, shared in his tears, and without words both shared a moment of pity for the forces of nature beyond either of their control. First gradually, then abruptly, a change of tone happened in Milan's sobs. The shimmer now radiated again in his reddened eyes, and he looked at his daughter, catching her wet eyes, now wiping away the tears that streaked down her own face, perplexed at her father's capricious behavior. He wanted to tell her how proud he was of her, how she reminded him of her grandmother once more, but could not stop crying. After composing themselves, Analise insisted she'd have the doctor stop by and proceeded to pick up the phone.

"I'm fine, please ... I'll be fine ... I'll be fine."

"Yes, you might be sick." Analise began but saved the rest of her protests that she knew would go in vain. She put the telephone down and promised him she would return soon, in three days, on Saturday morning, and if he wasn't feeling any better, she would call for the doctor without pause.

"I mean it, the last thing you want is to catch a cold or something worse." The last two words trailing off, Analise not wanting to imagine what indeed she could have meant. She shook such dreadful thoughts away as she embraced her father once more, this time to say goodbye.

"If you can, my Ana, please ... whenever you come by again, bring me some soup, I have been craving that for weeks now ... Bone marrow ... something hearty ... Do you recall when we bought that bulldog of a pig from that swine of a man who was passing through town ... I think he said he was from Gaya ... Such a lovely city, do you remember when we visited for the President's parade ... You wanted to sit on my shoulders to watch the soldiers march ... Melvin was still alive then ... Oh, and that pig ... How I couldn't bear to kill it because of how fond you were of it ... We sold it to someone ... on the other side of town, I recall ... I think it was back in August ..."

"Dad. I have to go." Analise said.

"Yes, yes, don't let me keep you too long ..."

Before leaving Analise pulled the electric heater closer to her father and threw another log into the firepit before closing the door behind her. Milan reached over and turned the heater down slightly. It felt good to be surrounded by the heat, underneath his thick comforter, in the warm dry clothes he was now in. He looked toward the window, the rain still splattering on the windowsill. He felt he had to cough but didn't want to sit up and instead hoped the sensation would pass. He closed his eyes and tried visualizing being outside in the rain once more. The feeling of his body going numb to the cold rain, the weightlessness that overcame him as he became drenched in the falling heavens. It was then that he realized that it was not the rain that made any sound, but rather the crying of the ground.

Convergence



Pigtail (noun): 1) “a braid”; 2) “A short length of flexible braided wire connecting a stationary part to a moving part in an electrical device”; 3) the piece of wire that Josh uses to trigger a cosmic event which can maybe, finally, hopefully help him get clean once and for all.

Night spills onto the Bering Sea. I stand on *Mariana's* deck like a god. We've hauled in a hundred thousand pounds of cod; at this rate, we'll finish our trip in days. The two other crewmen sleep while Neal steers, leaving me alone, unless you count my demons.

I check the rigging and the nets. Overboard, an unfamiliar fog creeps in — streaked with purples, blues, and pinks. The colors remind me of Emma's princess dress-up clothes. As the fog rolls past, my own sea-reflections haunt me.

A kindergartner smiling on the monkey bars, waving goodbye to his mom. She'd be back after fishing season, she'd lied.

A tween at the school counselor's office, frowning while filling out a future goals sheet. It's blank.

A teenage boy reading about utopian Atlantis in Mr. Johnson's language arts class, tugging his sleeves over his track-marked wrists.

Though the night wind blows cold, I'm sweating. Soon, the tremors will begin. Then, the nausea.

They don't call it seahab for nothing.

I'm not sure what's worse: the familiar withdrawals or knowing that Emma's missing her daddy. I can't whisper that Daddy loves her. Or that I'm getting clean for good. I'm going to take her to the Cabo beaches where we'll build sandcastles and look for baby turtles. I can't tell her now. But one day, it'll happen.

Sea water slaps away my thoughts. Back to work.

The strangely-colored fog rolls completely away, and the water's the clearest I've ever seen. Every star shines so brightly; entire constellations reflect on the sea's surface.

CONVERGENCE – ALEXANDRA OTTO – UNITED STATES

Then the deck lights die.

Neal lights an emergency beacon where he steers and shouts, “Josh, check the electrical!”

I run to the panel. A loose wire. I try to connect it, but it's dead. Sweat drips onto my shaking hands. Damn withdrawals. Just one hit can stop this. In the darkness, I fumble in my pocket for my emergency stash. There. I'll fix these wires, then have one small hit.

I jerry-rig a pigtail wire, hooking it to the conductor.

The lights don't just fire up. They detonate like fireworks.

Neal's shouting again, something about not blowing up the trawler, but all I can see is a beam of light shooting so high that it hits Orion.

The beam extends from Orion's belt toward his star-bow. The bow retracts, then shoots an arrow of light seaward. The beam blazes the water's surface.

Now I'm seeing things. The shakes come hard, making me drop the packet. Shit. I hit the deck.

Neal's still shouting. I feel my body rising, as if through a force field of light, wave-like, that propels me skyward.

My head throbs. Light blinds me. Slowly, sounds and shapes emerge.

Metal flashes. Machinery whirs. Where am I?

A vibration pounds my left ear. Jolting into action, I sit upright in a white room, turning toward the sound.

Cool metallic legs lead to a wire-coiled torso, then a silver humanoid face with light-beam eyes.

A robot?

I lurch back instinctively. I've never hallucinated this bad before. Where the hell am I?

Atlantis.

CONVERGENCE – ALEXANDRA OTTO – UNITED STATES

The robot's mouth doesn't move, but his telepathic voice is clear.

“What?” I croak aloud.

Atlantis didn't sink under the sea. Thousands of years ago, a beam of starlight reflected on the water opened a pathway to the sky. You reopened that pathway today with your light to our civilization above.

I shake my head in wonder. A large window reveals a world beyond my dreams. Holographic billboards flash notifications in multiple languages. Spacecraft flit about titanium skyscrapers. A purple-pink light show illuminates the sky like that color-streaked fog.

I remember reading about Atlantis's advanced society. An Atlantian mom wouldn't have ditched her kid. Together, we would've built sandcastles first, mother and son, and then fancy, high-tech houses that she wouldn't want to leave. I'd always believed the Atlantians could've helped me.

We already have, the robot says.

I look at my arms. Steady. No track marks.

My head clears. I've never felt better. But how? Confused, I study the robot.

We believe in serendipity, the robot says. *You wanted to come. Your heart sought a better life. We helped you. Now you'll help us.*

He points overhead. Circuit boards alight above me, some with stripped electrical wire. Just like on the trawler. But in fucking space.

It takes me a minute to realize what he's offering. I rise. Out the window, I look for schools for Emma on Atlantis's hard light roadways, so her future goals sheet won't be blank.

Sorry, the robot says gently, with human-like emotion in his telepathic voice. *It's rare to find humans with Atlantian aptitude. We must ensure a proper fit before incorporating them fully into society. You'd have one year in Earth-time to prove yourself before being allowed to bring your child.*

I pace. One year. I count the months I've been away fishing on trawlers and the nights I've been away while high. A year away from coloring pages, riding four-wheelers on beaches, playdates with classmates, scraped knees. A year away from

CONVERGENCE – ALEXANDRA OTTO – UNITED STATES

Mexico. Will she understand that I'm the parent who sacrificed time for her so we could build that fancy home? Or will I be the parent leaving while she waves goodbye from the monkey bars?

The robot studies me, but he knows my answer before I speak.

I've never made a harder decision.

Neal's over me, shaking me hard. "Get up. Boat was hit by lightning. Blew out a transducer. We need to move. You okay, man?"

I lunge for the packet I dropped, then run to the rails and vomit overboard. My body lurches and my track-marked hands tremble as I throw the damn packet into the sea.

I'm not okay.

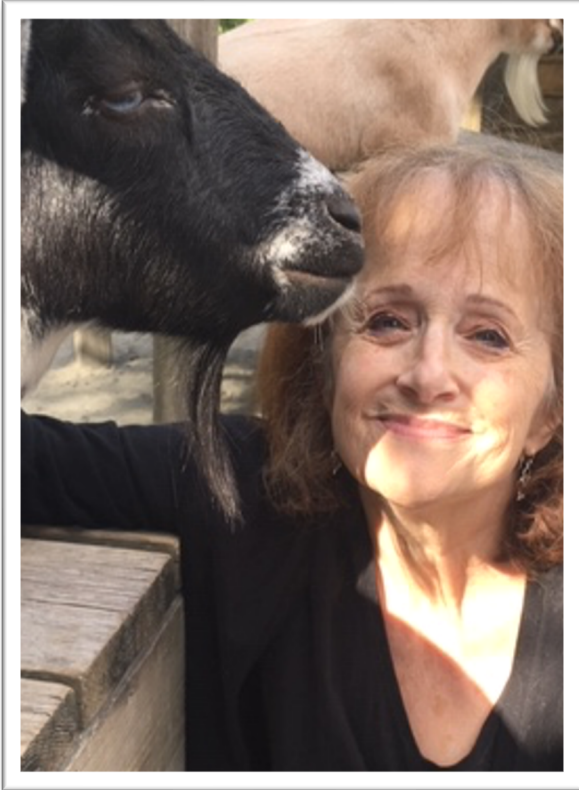
But I will be.

I have work to do. The stars flicker once overhead, casting fire on water. A purple-pink light flickers above, then fades into night. I gaze at Orion's belt again, and I know in my heart that Emma's looking up there too.



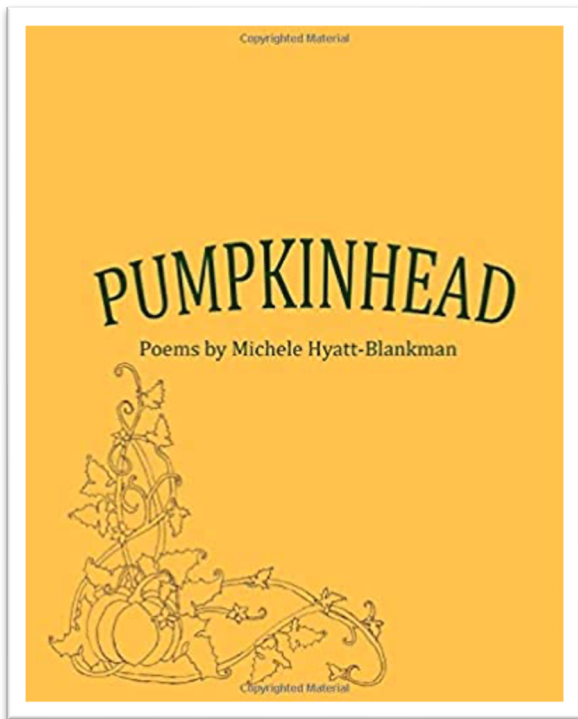
Our
Featured
Authors

Shelly Blankman



Shelly Blankman lives in Columbia, Maryland, where she and her husband have filled their empty nest with three rescue cats and a foster dog. Their sons, Richard and Joshua, live in New York and Texas respectively. Following careers in journalism, public relations, and copy editing, Shelly now spends time writing poetry, scrapbooking and making cards. Her poetry has appeared in *the Ekphrastic Review*, *Poetry Super Highway*, and *Halfway Down the Stairs*, among other publications. Richard and Joshua surprised her by publishing her first book of poetry, *Pumpkinhead*.

SHELLY BLANKMAN – AUTHOR FEATURE



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PUMPKINHEAD

Just didn't seem fair as a kid.
An adult head on a small body.
I was teased in the classroom,
pushed in the halls, jeers of
Pumpkinhead echoed against

the chambers of locker-lined
hallways. I'd sob in the bathroom
stall, wishing my life away, wondering
why my head couldn't be smaller, why
I couldn't be paper-doll pretty. The sun

never eclipsed the shadows of memory.
Not through college or graduate school,
not through marriage or kids. Not until
that day at the fair. Mermaids and
magicians, fairies and witches, a

fantasy world in the woods, children
with painted faces and fists stained with
rainbowed popcorn and cotton candy
frolicking among bubbles and butterflies
with glittery wings and a 7-foot man
on stilts, weaving his way through the crowds.

And on a bench, a child, her eyes
downcast, shoulders stooped. Honey-
blonde hair, paper-doll pretty. What tears
could she be swallowing? I held back

my own as I walked past her. *I love
your hair!* She looked at me, smiled.
I offered her popcorn, bunched in
a wrapper in my hand. *No thank you,*
she said meekly. I wished her a good

day and walked away. A few moments
later, I saw her whisper to her mom and
dash over to a vendor to buy some popcorn.
After all those years, all those tears, I'd
found a purpose to being a Pumpkinhead.

SHELLY BLANKMAN – AUTHOR FEATURE

MOUNTAINSIDES MY CAT AND I

I swaddled you in dreams from birth,
of health and happiness, of
honeysuckle days and lightning bug nights,
maybe someday a student at Duke or Yale.

For now, your frame too tiny for
the massive canvas of colors
that would paint your life.

Cruising and crawling melted
into days of dangling from
paper-thin twigs on wintering trees.

But by the first snowflake, your boots
lay clean at your bedroom door
while you lay in bed for weeks with fever.

An illness we did not understand robbed you
of playground days of t-ball and baseball,
biking and tennis.

Your sweet childhood was now your Everest,
with every crag and crevice a boulder,
every step like quicksand,

the peak poking through greying clouds
like a beckoning finger, your damaged
spirit, a relentless ocean storm.

You didn't know the hardest part of climbing
was never reaching the top. Not really.

It was the sides.
It was always the sides.

I remember the times
I'd settle in bed, a book
in my hands, blanketed

by the sweet silence of
night that would whisk
me away from the

stresses of day and my
eyelids would droop like
drapes as I gently slipped

into sleep, but that was before
our plush lump of a beast, our
cat, white as an unblemished field

of snow, with the low steady rumble
of distant thunder, the om of a
muddied day... my book, his pillow,

each new page, his dominion marked
with the whoosh of his full furry tail.
His nightly soundtrack of purrs drowning

my own efforts to read, my fingers
pushing his paws gently to reveal
words, his paws dancing with my fingers
in this shadowed tango of wills.

Two missions at bay, mine to read, his
to rest or play, that merged over time, but
only because I grew weary of trying to win.

Our cat's gone now.
No flying fur, no purring
to distract me, no paws
to cause me to lose my place.

Just my book and I.
Just my book and I.

SHELLY BLANKMAN – AUTHOR FEATURE

EMPTY CHAIRS

Through the lens of a child, I can still see my aunt's
ruby lips pursed to plant a wet kiss on my cheek, her

long, shiny red nails pinching my chin to keep me from
flinching. I hear the sizzling roast, my rumbling tummy,

young cousins whining for food, offered water until
dinner was ready. And the children's table, wobbly

chairs too big for the toddlers, too small for the teens,
our cross-table talk drowned by adult chatter rattling

like a dentist's drill. Assault on the senses paired with
every holiday. How I tried to stay awake through those

post-dinner tired tales of Dad trudging two miles to school
through five feet of snow, or the time he almost choked

on paper. Now, through an adult's lens, those times are
nothing more than the soundtrack of youth. Dad's gone,

my aunt, too. Cousins live coast to coast, while at home,
our forks clink against dishes in the silence of empty chairs.

Martina Robles Gallegos

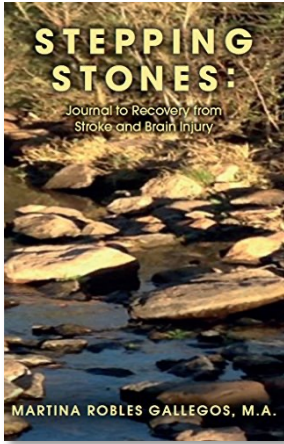


<https://www.instagram.com/Selbor2015/>

<https://twitter.com/MartinaGalleg97>

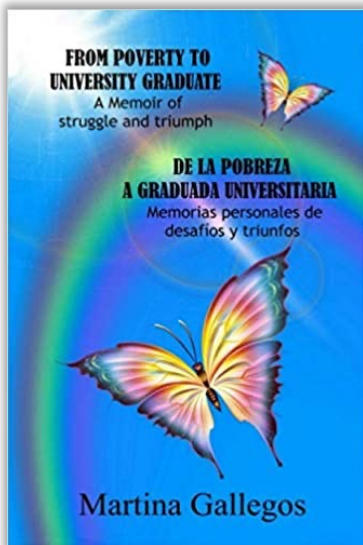
Martina was born and raised in Mexico and came to the United States at 14. She got a Master's degree from Grand Canyon University after a near fatal hemorrhagic stroke . Her works have appeared in the Altadena Anthology: Poetry Review 2015, 2017, 2018, Hometown Pasadena, Spirit Fire Review, Poetry Super Highway, Silver Birch Press, OpenDoor Magazine, The Bloom, OpenDoor Magazine, Central Coast Poetry Shows, WFWP: Poetry Festival, Canada, 3Q Anthology, Basta! and more recently, in the award-winning anthology, When the Virus Came Calling: COVID-19 Strikes America: Published by Golden Foothills Press, edited by, Thelma T. Reyna.

MARTINA ROBLES GALLEGOS – AUTHOR FEATURE

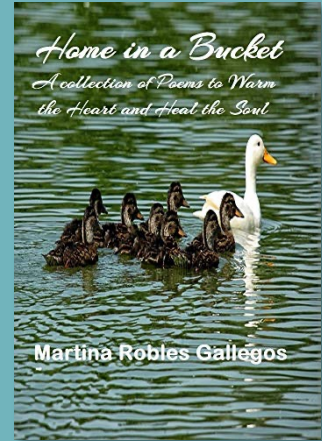


My book is a journey from the time I arrived in this country to where I am today as a stroke/brain injury survivor who faced incredible and life-threatening challenges but who managed to go back to school, resume, and complete a Master's degree against all odds, and is now an emerging and inspiring writer.

<https://a.co/d/hyrcHHI>



<https://a.co/d/iWiqvif>



A collection of poems that will warm your heart for all occasions! These can be shared with your little ones to bring life to what many think as ordinary, seen through the eyes of poetry and art.

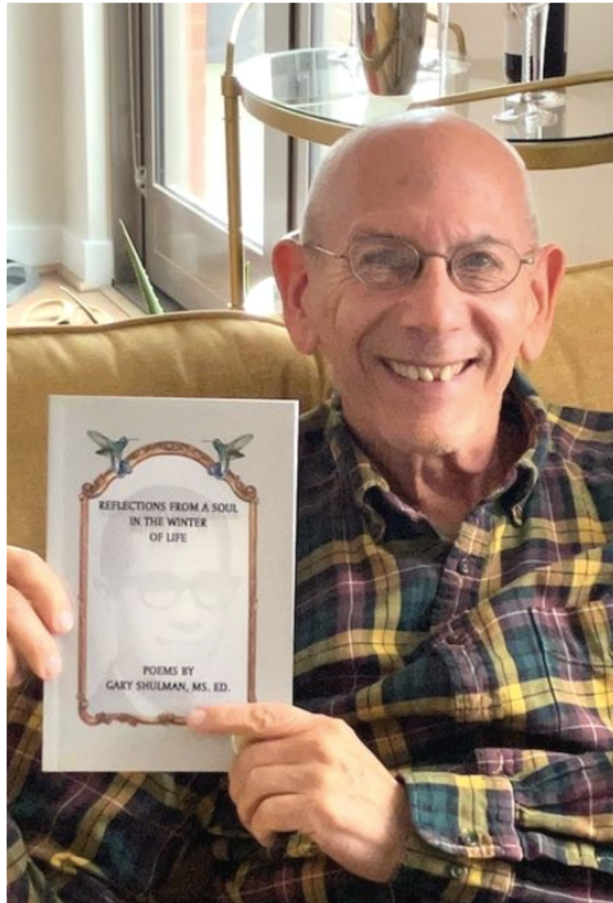
<https://a.co/d/5wSkijf>



Readers will be inspired with these delightful poems created to lift the spirits of those who not only enjoy the beauty of Mother Nature but have felt the warm embrace of the sun and admired its beauty from a window.

<https://a.co/d/cdtnQnr>

Gary Shulman



Gary Shulman, MS. Ed. has spent a lifetime supporting vulnerable families and children. He began his career working with children with and without disabilities in an inclusive Head Start program in Brooklyn NY. He then transitioned to become the Special Needs and Early Childhood Coordinator for the Brooklyn Children's Museum for 10 years. His passion for advocacy grew as he worked more and more with parents of children with disabilities. For over 24 years he passionately advocated for the needs of these parents as the Social Services and Training Director for Resources for Children with Special Needs, Inc. in NYC.

The last 8 years of his working life, Mr. Shulman served as a private Special Needs Consultant conducting hundreds of training sessions throughout NYC and beyond to help parents and professionals find and access the services and systems required to facilitate maximizing the potential of their children with disabilities. Now retired from his advocacy endeavors, Gary enjoys sharing his poetry that he passionately writes with the goal of leaving this world a better place one word at a time.....still advocating for kindness in this world.

<https://garyshulman.jimdofree.com/>

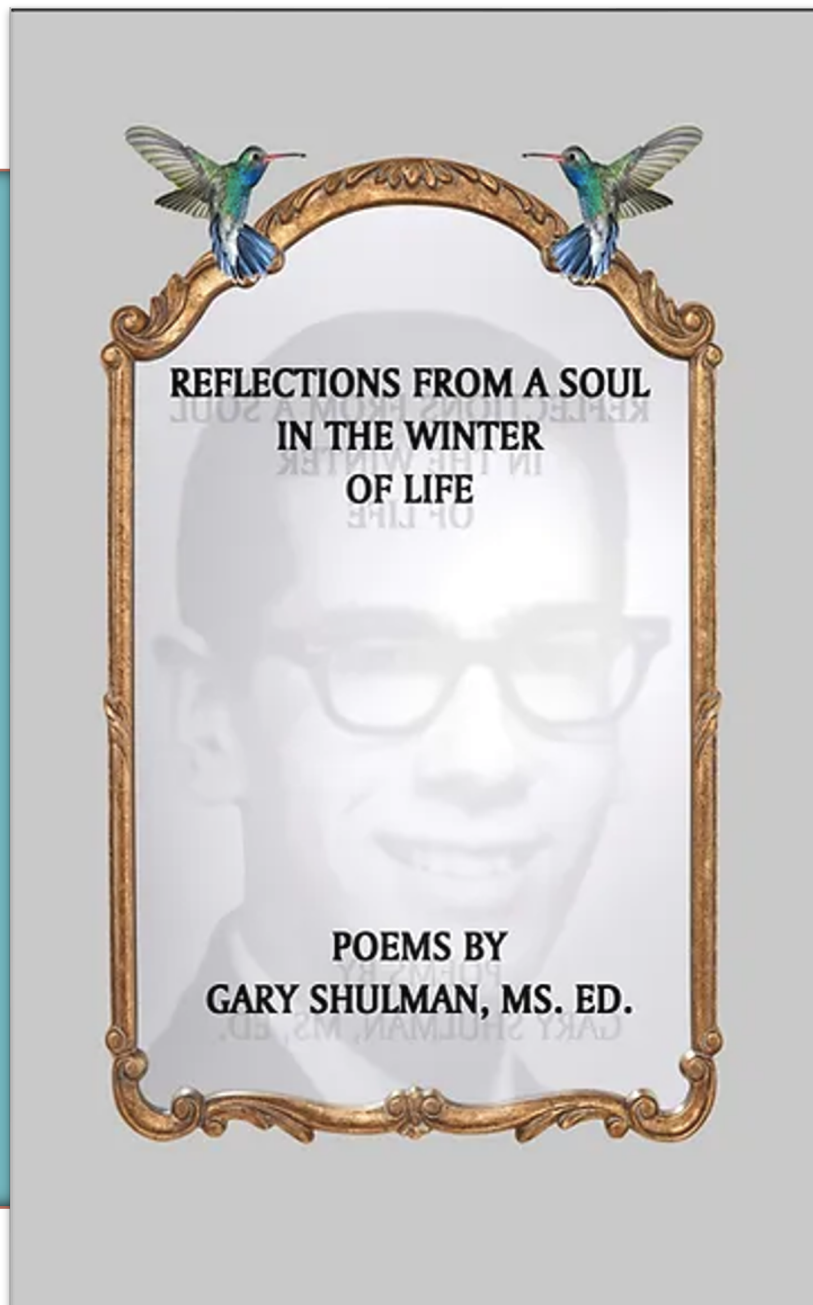
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/144552282999672>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/gary-shulman-ms-ed-84a83415/>

<https://www.arlnow.com/2022/07/28/arlington-newbie-discovers-lifes-simple-pleasures-through-popular-facebook-group/>

GARY SHULMAN – AUTHOR FEATURE

<https://www.poetryislifepublishing.com/reflectionfromasoul>



HERE'S TO THE CHILDREN WHO DON'T QUITE FIT

Here's to the children who don't quite fit
Who run around aimlessly when all the others sit
Who look at the world through eyes unique
And into their souls you'd love to peak
To see just what magic makes them tick
When they look at a tree and call it a stick
Here's to the teens who will not abide
By life's set rules that they push aside
As they rock back and forth in their own special world
While grown-ups grow frustrated with lips tightly curled
Then bursts of brilliance they reveal as they race
While tears of love roll down a parent's face
Expectations often missed but still they yearn
Wondering today what skills they will learn
We hope for the ones who don't quite fit the mold
That the world will be kind as they grow old
We know that the bullies will play their cruel game
Reality is, cruelty sometimes brings shame
But optimism lives in each heart and mind
Of parents and professionals who continue to be kind
With a network of supporters shining bright as the sun
The ones who don't quite fit have already won
Nobody knows the future
So why pretend?
Let's celebrate their victories!
May they never end!!!

GARY SHULMAN – AUTHOR FEATURE

BEAUTIFUL POEM...

This child of mine you stare at so,
Please come closer so you will know
Just who my child is and what I see
when those sweet eyes stare back at me
I see no limits to my child's life
Although I know
It will be filled with strife,
I'm hoping that doors will open each day
I'm praying that kindness
will come his way
You look frightened?
You tremble with fear?
Come, come closer
touch him my dear
Touch his cheek so soft
so sweet
Be one of those people
he needs to meet
Someone who will look
and hopefully see
The skill, the talent
The **ability**
Please come closer
You don't have to speak
Come a little closer
Just touch his cheek
And when you do
you will see
He is no different
than you or me

MISTAKES, FAILURES AND DREAMS UNREALIZED

Lord knows I've had my share in life
Of failures, fiascos and mistakes
All just part of the journey
Like the reality of gives and takes
Thinking I'd always be a stellar success
At everything I tried
Well here's the great big wake up call
I wasn't!!! ... He sadly sighed
But all in all I have lived and loved
Received and given some joy
And sometimes, yes even sometimes
Was a very successful boy!
Nothing here too terribly profound
Esoteric or obscure
Just a very simple truth
Enlightening? I'm not really sure
We all have hopes, dreams and goals
In life we try to obtain
Sometimes never quite realized
The struggle sometimes in vain
But the journey that you take in life
With its intricate winding road
Also brings unexpected wins
Like a Prince born of a toad!
It's not about the fiascos in life
Or dreams that never came true
It all about the journey
Just trying the best that you can do

Our
Co-Creators



Kassie J Runyan



I've always had an affinity for reading and writing. I heard that every good writer is also a good reader. If that's true, then I'm in luck. I was always the odd kid walking down the hallway while reading a book... which may also explain my clumsiness... or had book(s) hidden in various places around the house, just in case I had a spare minute while I was supposed to be doing chores. Nothing has really changed all that much. My writing started in much the same way. Here and there, scribbled into notebooks, starting when I was younger. With the start of my first novel when I was 18. It was almost an escape from the real world at a time in my life where I needed it most. Eventually life got in the way and I put down the novel for over 10 years, picking it back up in my early 30's and finishing it. Poetry is my 'magazine writing.' When I have an emotion or an idea and I have to get it on paper but didn't have time to work it into a book, it came out as a song or a poem. That makes this endeavor with Mel even more special. It's something that we both love to write and read, and we get to help build others up while also getting some wonderful things to read. Best of both worlds!

I have three poetry collections out currently, as well as my debut novel, "The Death and Life of John Doe" All available wherever books are sold! These are for sale along with other reader/writer gifts on my website at [KassieJRunyan.com](https://www.KassieJRunyan.com)

<https://www.KassieJRunyan.com>

<https://www.Facebook.com/kassiejrunyan>

<https://www.Instagram.com/kjrunyan>

<https://www.Twitter.com/kassandrerunyan>

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvSEcLEfE196OE_Ya2LNNN3kjFp82Kt2

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF JOHN DOE – KASSIE J RUNYAN

<https://www.kassiejrunyan.com/thedeathandlifeofjohndoe>

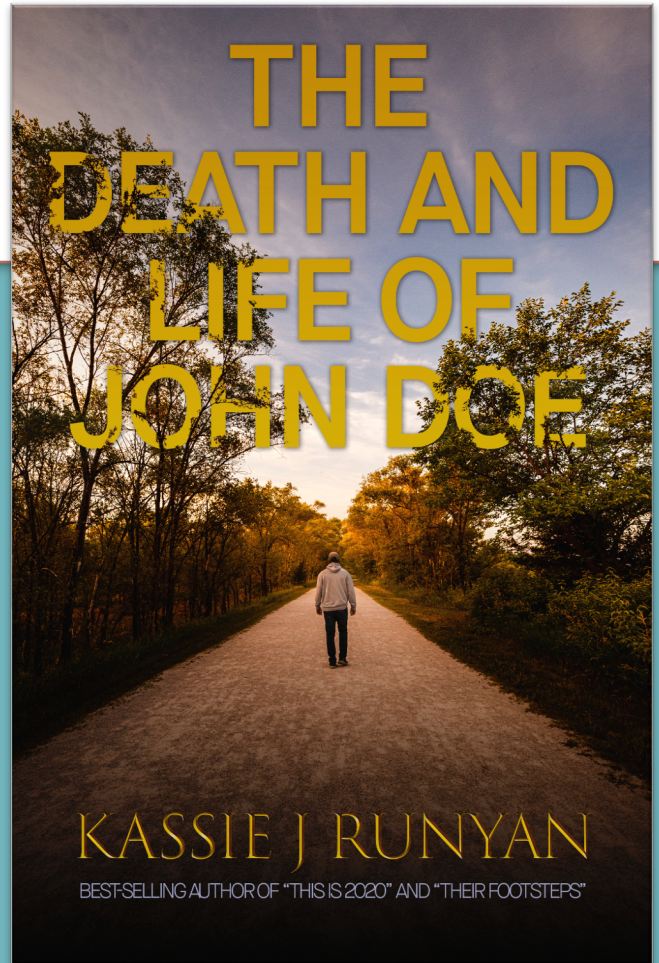
From best-selling poet of "This is 2020" and "Their Footsteps," Kassie J Runyan, comes her debut novel, "The Death and Life of John Doe," which takes a deep look into trauma, the human psyche, and the struggle of living on the street.

Our nameless nomad walks out the front door of his suburban home, leaving his life behind. Not knowing what it is he's looking for... or what it is he's running from. He closes the door and walks into a world full of the pain and joy that waits for him with each step. He keeps moving forward; driven by a desire to find a reason for his life and to discover his forgotten past. What he wasn't prepared for were the dreams.

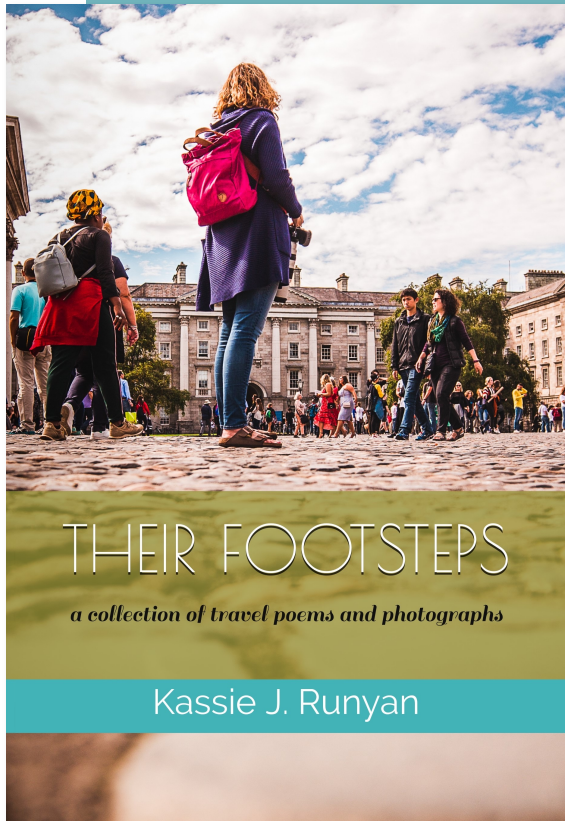
What is your name?

"The Death and Life of John Doe is a mesmerizing book that takes you on a cross-country journey and makes you question your own perception. "

- Joni Rachell, Author



KASSIE J RUNYAN – CO CREATOR



<https://www.amazon.com/Their-Footsteps-collection-travel-photographs/dp/1735514020/>

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1735514004/>



Mel Haagman

I am a special needs teacher from the UK. I live by the sea and love nothing more than walking along the beach with a coffee from my favourite café. I have always loved reading and writing poetry and I am so excited to begin a new venture with Kassie on OpenDoor Poetry magazine.

I have written three books. My first book, 'Open Heart Poetry' was self-published in 2019. This book of poems aims to break the stigma attached to living with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. The first part focusses heavily on mental health and the second part contains more relatable, light-hearted poetry about a range of everyday life subjects.

My second book, Lexical Lockdown: Poems about Binge-Watching, Exercise Mishaps, Fridge-Surfing and other Pandemical Pursuits was written throughout the UK lockdown. It is written in a diary format, chronologically capturing the daily updates from the pandemic in rhyme as well as the difficulties we all faced being in lockdown. It is written in a raw, honest and at times comical way. Lexical lockdown will be a historical keepsake that accurately portrays the challenging times we have faced and are still facing.



<https://www.Facebook.com/girlontheedge90>

<https://www.Instagram.com/girlontheedge90>

<https://www.Twitter.com/girlontheedge1>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjh8b4Y7gSFGKewzPKZH8lw>

LOST IN MIND: FOUND AT HEART – MELANIE HAAGMAN

<https://www.amazon.com/Lost-Mind-Found-At-Heart/dp/191491354X/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Girlontheedge90/>

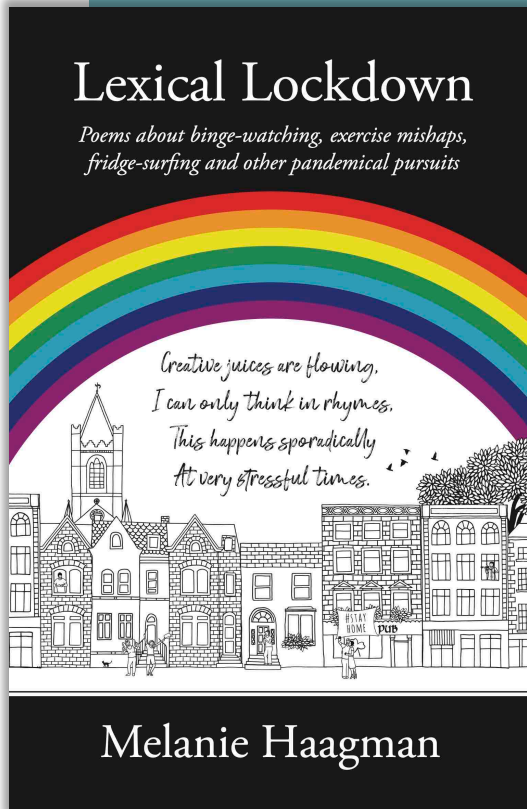
Lost in Mind; Found at Heart really did write itself. Every time I feel a strong emotion, whether it be a negative or a positive one, I find nothing more therapeutic and satisfying than writing a poem about it and of course they have always got to rhyme!

Poetry for me is an innate coping mechanism to deal with whatever life throws at me. I do my best to try and write honestly and always aim to end with an uplifting line. This book reflects that no matter how hard things get, when we are truthful and transparent with our emotions, we can make meaningful connections with others who will in turn help us to get through. As well as learning how to get back up when we fall and realising that this is how we learn, develop, and grow.

It has never been more important to speak out about mental health and the similar struggles that we are facing. I hope that these poems can help others to know that they aren't alone with their feelings. This book is divided into subsections to quickly help you find the perfect poem to get you through the day. Whether you need advice, a little injection of humour, a poem about feelings, down-days, or even friendship! I hope that you can laugh, cry, smile, relate to and most importantly enjoy this book.

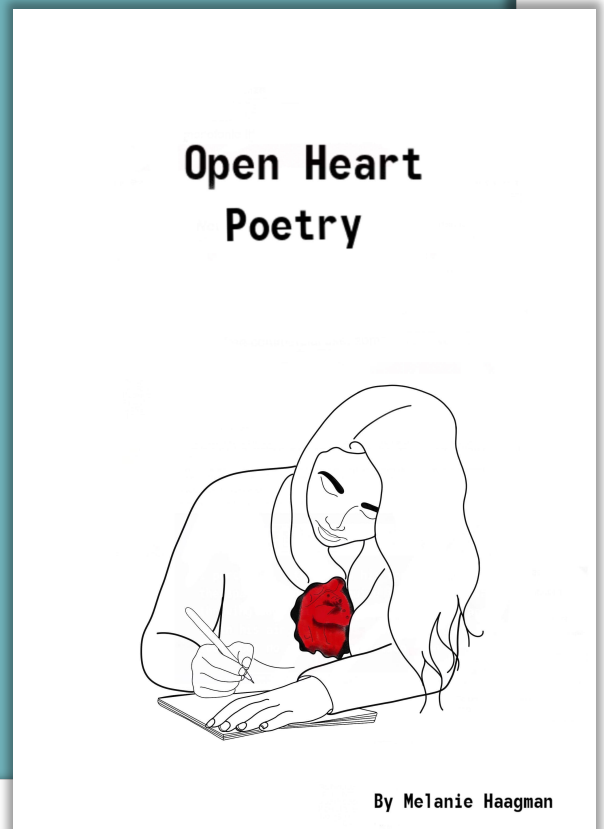


MEL HAAGMAN – CO-CREATOR



<https://www.amazon.com/Lexical-Lockdown-binge-watching-fridge-surfing-pandemical-ebook/dp/B08D6RPYY7/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Open-Heart-Poetry-Melanie-Haagman/dp/1527238407/>





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