

Poetic Matrix

a letter on the poetic experience

Spring/Summer 2012

Edited by
James Downs



Joyce Downs

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Joyce Downs

Once again I would like to thank Associate Editor James Downs for bringing this *letteR* together for our Spring/Summer 2012 issue. The editor must look through all of the material sent in and then make decisions about what to include and what not to include. It is always difficult and thanks goes out to James and to all who sent in submissions. The photos are by my good friend and Yosemite photographer Joyce Downs.

This press continues to publish poetry and other material significant to our culture. Recent titles included Chis Hoffman's *Realization Point*; Grace Marie Grafton's *Whimsy, Reticence & Laud unruly sonnets*; Richard Kovacs *Wheels within Wheels*; *A PARALLEL UNIVERSE two tales of public folly and personal devastation* by Alex Landon and Elaine Halleck, a powerful legal essay and fictional account of the effects of designer sex laws. Due out soon, *Triumph at Last: A Korean-American Life*, by Steven Soo Hyun Kim; an extraordinary memoir of Steven's life growing up in war torn Korea and his accomplishments in America. Due out soon is Art Campbell's 3rd volume of his *TRIAL & ERROR* trilogy. Also due out soon is a paperback edition of Mun Duk-su's *The Postman*. Coming in early summer are Gail Entrekin's *Rearrangement of the Invisible* and Tomás Gayton's travel poetry and prose, *Sojourn on the Bohemian Highway*. Also later this year a new volume of poetry by Joe Milosch and a beautiful book of allegorical prose poems by Kim Shuck, *Rabbit Stories*.

All small presses hold their mission high and of course still need the financial resources to continue publishing. Please look over our website www.poeticmatrix.com and if you see a title or 2 or 3 that interest you, order direct from us. This supports both the press and the author in the best way. Rather than fill the coffers of Amazon, put your money directly towards the support of the authors and the press. Send us an email at poeticmatrix@yahoo.com and we'll send the books out with an invoice. Books are still the best way to look in depth at what is going on in our culture by those who spend the time to go to those depths to find out.

Here in this latest edition of our on-going *letteR on the poetic experience* since 1997, we offer more of that depth from these poets: Gale Acuff, Christopher Barnes, David Caravan, Barbara Siegel Carlson, James Downs, J. Glenn Evans, Mimi Ferebee, Daniel Gallick, David Michael Joseph, Kateryna Korolkova, Karen Mandell, Toti O'Brien, Gerald Solomon, Sharon Wilkes, and Gary Winters in alphabetical order in this Spring/Summer 2012 issue. Enjoy the read and send us your comments.

John

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Gale Acuff

After Sunday School

After Sunday School, I walk home thinking
of Miss Hooker, my teacher there, and her
red hair and white blouse and green skirt and blue
shoes. Prettier than a spotted pony
she is, but too old for me. I'm counting
the fence posts as I walk home. They're like years
and they add up, like the years between us

because she's probably 25 and
I'm only 9 though I feel a lot older.
16 at least, before I can court her
and then she'll be 34, not that I
mind so much but she might and odds are good
that even if we did get hitched one day
she'll die before I do and then I'll be
as alone then as I feel now, although
at least she's still alive, I can see her
every Sunday. When I'm almost home

I stop on the shoulder I walk each way
and shut my eyes and not even passing
cars can make me open them again, for
I want to turn back, maybe catch her in
the parking lot at church before she leaves
and boldly tell her how I feel and risk

losing her forever, not that she's mine
already but she ought to be. Most nights,
I dream about her--I'm driving her car,
say, which is *ours* now, home from somewhere
--the movies, the duck pond, the skating rink--
and she's sitting right next to me, her legs on
the hump but she doesn't mind and my arms
around her neck. I steer with my left thumb
while she adjusts the radio. She wants

something romantic, she says. She dials through
the static to a tune I've never heard
and squeals *I love this song*, and sings along
but in the kind of whisper that she gives
me each night just after we go to bed,
holding each other close and probably
making babies, just how I'm not sure
but I do know it helps to be touching,

I don't know why, but *she* will--she'll teach me.
 She tells me that she loves me *more than word*
can say and I believe her and I say
That must be a heap. Well, that makes her laugh
 and the next thing I know it's morning and
 I wake up alone. I wonder if dreams
 are real and life isn't. That's my best hope.

I open my eyes and walk home, blinded
 for a few steps but then I see the light
 in focus and it's still Sunday morning.
 Mother will have lunch on the table and
 Father will be drinking Schlitz and watching
 golf or bowling or the baseball pre-game.
 I'll go upstairs to my attic bedroom
 and put away my Sunday shoes, tie, shirt,
 and coat and stand there in my underwear
 for a moment and think about Jesus,

Who never got married because He was
 too in love with God, and know I'm lucky
 and, besides, nobody's crucified me,
 at least not yet, and if it comes to that
 I'll do it myself, thank you very much,
 and die for the sins of the world of me.

Hope Miss Hooker comes to the funeral
 --maybe I'll rise then, too, and say to her
You're the most beautiful girl in the world
even though you're a woman and not a girl,
and I'm sorry I died but I had to,
and Don't blame yourself, and Now I ascend
to my Father in Heaven, hallowed be
Thy name, and she'll watch me rise to the clouds
 and she'll reach up to try to pull me down
 and maybe I'll die all over again
 but at least I'll be in Eternity,

which seems to me to be a lot shorter
 than the week between Sunday and Sunday
 and the only chance I have to see her,
 except in dreams and sometimes when I
 lie in bed at night and spread my arms wide
 and moan to the ceiling *Forgive me, for*
I know not what I do. But I'm learning.

Christopher Barnes

ALL THESE PEOPLE WITH THE NAME CHRISTOPHER BARNES ACTUALLY EXIST

The Individual Christopher Barnes 37-39

37. Stephen Talley's stomach's butterfly quivered.
Perry County Sherriff's ground floor –
A show-down Wednesday forenoon. Murder.

Up country of Arkansas
There suffered
Three blood-guilt remains,
One was Christopher Barnes.

"We know very little about the long-term health of clones...studies are
Ongoing."
-Dr David Whitehouse

38. "Where? The Fort Bragg Centre.
OK me to salute you with...
On trumpet – Christopher Barnes,
Blown over from Billy Preston's timing,
Checking in on a jay walk
Via the California Symphony
Well-found in our recess
His modulations for video entertainments,
Hooks bearing the musical 'Mountain days'.
Applause to the echo. This tour overtures
At chummed up houses
Along the streetscaped Mendocino shore."

"...the notion of a criterion of identity; the correct analysis of identity over
Time,"
- Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy

39. Christopher Barnes of Broadway Interiors dreams he's Capability Brown,
Flowering a cultivation
And security fanfare. Gardens in Dubai .
Pursiest majestic stunts, fictiles,
Open air examples on sand, living spaces.
Play-of-light answers,
Quarantined from UV gleams,
A fabricated hot spring dew
- The season ahead of IOUs.

The Individual Christopher Barnes 40-42

40. A halogen arc-lamp
 Wild fired The Guardian,
 Christopher Barnes, a tippler, overlooked
 While on a pooch tug trek.
 Blaze-sweat rashed dry wine bottles
 Plopped corks spuming out damping flames.
 999ers simpered flue-headed
 Pasting bubbles in soot.
 His indoors was reprieved.

“The individual is the true reality in life. A cosmos in himself, he does not exist
 For the State, nor for the abstraction called ‘society’, or ‘nation’, which is only
 A collection of individuals.”
 - Emma Goldman

41. Georgia’s Christopher Barnes is a ‘professor of Conscience’,
 Wrangling that the military froth is a cat’s paw
 To stunt felonies. Repressing Palestinians
 That Ha’retz* folk-tales as ‘The Cancerous Manifestation’.
 Shoals in a flood-tide are US bank-notes
 Purse-stringing racist ring leading.
 He’s answerable in a postbag
 Talking to these iniquities for humanity.

*Ha’retz: Israeli newspaper

“The Day of the Disappeared was started in 1983 by the Latin American
 Non-governmental organisation FEDEFAM at a time when disappearances
 Arose from authoritarian rule. Very little has improved since then. The
 Government practise of kidnapping, abducting or detaining people and
 Holding them in secret has continued and spread as more countries accept
 And justify this crime.”
 - Amnesty International

42. Dead stopped by the photographer Christopher Barnes,
 Scabrous card table, twist-turned chair, radiator
 In a distinguishably stay-away room.
 Tilt-toppling leaves, balding paint, light shrouds ghosts
 In a clinic that sheds eczema exfoliations.
 His are self-existent, diagnostic colourcasts.
 Shutter releases on day-to-day ransacks.
 Overlooked scurf is radiant.
 Prepare for an exposure of someone
 Who doesn’t solidify.

The Individual Christopher Barnes 43-45

43. Behind eyewear, a harmonious face,
Christopher Barnes, web editioner,
Sophomore gazette The Cornell Daily Sun.
Squiggled bee-lines to first-fruits
Have dissolved amplification sweats,
Offshoot currents.
This is the rescript
Feigning deignlessness.

“Economies of scale, divisions of labour, shared knowledge and other benefits
Of cooperation all serve to make life within the body of human society easier
Than life as an independent, autonomous individual. If this were not the case
Human societies would dissolve into a cloud of independent, autonomous
Individuals.”
-Chris Davis

44. Ziploc baggies were empty of Charlie
So Christopher Barnes abducted a black Chevy Tahoe
For a heist at CUS,
The knuckle at Long and Liberty Avenue .
Dazzlement on the parking lot
Where do-alls went wildgoose.
Patrolmen quickened,
Bluing lights, klaxon.

He percussioned into the prowl car,
Backboned himself for aggravated assault.
Visits? Union County Jail .

“Each individual has a right to an individual genetic identity.”
-Dr Harry Griffin

45. Not a man-mountain or a knock-about in a cartoon,
Christopher Barnes was death metal screamer, ghoul-stalker
For Cannibal Corpse. In Buffalo, New York
His vein has a creeps-fiction mainspring. Got the ‘scram!’
Took his parts to 6 Feet Under.
Downloads proceeding, cadences built,
Remains have never been so unearthly animated.

David Caravan

In the Yard

It lies on its back on one of the cobbled bricks,
 next to where a dandelion has pushed up
 through a crack. He's seen them before
 around the yard, their rows of tiny legs
 pointing upward toward the sun, his eyes
 passing over them with the indifference
 of last year's toys. This time he stops.

He gets down on his knees so he can look at it.
 Mama calls it a *roly poly*. He says the words
 a couple of times. He likes how the sounds
 repeat, though he has no words of his own
 to tell about this. He bends down closer.
 And he remembers how one day a roly poly
 was crawling on a stone in Mama's garden.
 How he poked at it. How it curled into a little ball.

He pokes at this one. It slides along the brick
 a little ways. It doesn't wiggle. Doesn't curl
 into a ball. He flips it over onto the legs.
 It doesn't run away. He picks up the roly poly,
 pokes at it again. Something is coming into
 his mind, something hard and real
 like the bricks under his knees, something
 he doesn't want to know. He gives it a final
 poke, and puts the roly poly down.

The Box

Everyone feels it,
 the longing to escape from the box,
 to puff a body up
 until the six hard sides burst
 apart, or let the claws
 you always knew were crouched
 behind the fingertips
 extend,
 so you can scramble up the wall
 and over the top.

Birds and snakes know this,
 and ply the egg tooth
 to the task of breaking shell.
 The sailors of the Arizona

know this as the ship goes down.
 Parolees from Pelican Bay know this,
 as they strain against virtual jail bars
 that are tougher than steel ones.

And now,
 after thirty years of friendship,
 what was soft and round
 in the way that each of us
 contained the other,
 has squared its sides, and grown
 as dense and stiff as oak.

Because the Toilet Is Stopped Up
 I Get Out the Plunger

and as always, I think about the health
 of the planet.

I hear on talk radio that Americans
 have the god-given right to toss

their garbage into the ocean, the soil,
 the air, even their own bodies.

If it clogs the pipes of planetary
 survival, we shouldn't blame ourselves.

It's obviously the fault of the earth
 for not having big enough pipes.

The Don't-Touch Rule

Neighbor girl takes a few shy steps up my driveway.
 She's only about six, and shouldn't be away from her yard.
 Yet here she is, carrying a large-print copy of *Chicken Little*.
 I'm weeding around my rosebushes when she asks,
 "Who puts the sky back?"

It's not a silly question for a six-year-old, so I tell her:
 "The earth will grab the sky in a big, warm bear hug—
 then toss it back up, like a slice of bread
 popping out of the toaster." She smiles and laughs.

Then she tells me her daddy has been gone for—
she doesn't know time, but I figure it's been weeks.
Her mommy has teeter-tottered between crying
and screaming. Once, her mommy even slapped her.

I want to bring her milk and cookies, put arms around her,
let the tears I know are in there work their way out.
But I'm an older man, and this is 2008, not 1958.
I'll have to try to toss the sky back up for her
without the hug.



Joyce Downs

Barbara Siegel Carlson

NOT KNOWING

Walking down the street one night
I found my heart drifting toward
a young Latino woman with a broken
high heel, the tops of her brown breasts

almost heaved out of her coat.
A newspaper sheet came flying
around the corner and clung
to my shoulder. For a moment I understood
that whatever touched me
was nothing I could ever grasp.
I passed a long line of men waiting
for their plates of lamb.
How the sidewalk trembled
under those men who stood quiet
and waited, some steam
from the pavement grate rose.
We all breathed waiting to be filled
as the wind tore down the avenue
not knowing what it thirsted for.

NEAR THE RODEWAY INN

Monterey, California

Maybe because stone lions are guarding
the entrance to Chef Lee's Mandarin House
in the early morning fog,
you can sip your coffee in solitude
on the stone ledge that overlooks
a jade garden made to look like an oasis
by the highway--

That lagoon in the middle,
its craggy hill with a hole
in the top for the water. And those steps
cut into the mountain
that will never be climbed.

Maybe they trace another route
to the islands of clouds you keep driving toward
or the soul you keep reaching for
as it passes through worlds

like the red-gold dragon on the roof breathing out
its flame of clay, or the crow drinking
from a puddle that, for a moment, glows
in the parking lot beyond.

AFTER YOU LEFT

1.

After midnight I woke to people
singing below,

then a car door opened
to the orange glow of a cigarette.

You were gone.

Ashes were falling like snow,
they glowed like a curtain
in the wake of a great love.

2.

The bitter smell of old coffee,
an empty bowl,

where to place the pleasures
of the body, its terrible softness
and memories that cling
like a cobweb,

fingerprints that stain the night
pressing deeper into nothingness.

James Downs

The ghost that will not leave me alone

She is right there just looking at me and I feel a little self conscious under her steady gaze
 Because she seems to expect something of me oh I know you would say that that is to be
 Expected when it comes to someone as willing to give so much to me with very little asked
 In return but it is that ever-kind gaze that unnerves me how could she be so caring
 When I have such a capacity for failure at every turn she has a lot of experience with
 Failure I suppose I am surely not the only one she has conferred her good graces ok I
 Get it there is something of a light inside me and one of my tasks I guess is to be able to
 Bring that little fire to the open night sky and another piece of the puzzle is probably that
 I find a way to engage in a regular way attention must be paid I get that she's still
 Right there looking beneficently over my left shoulder as I type these words she really
 Gives me the creeps but then I was the one who summoned her with my thoughts and
 Wishes all right Muse I'm getting to it I really am

Walkin' down the boulevard a song lyric
 --to my wife, Joy, for all her love and title

I was walkin' down the boulevard
 I was talkin' bout those things so hard
 What is this thing that we call love
 What is this thing what is this thing called love

Where do we go when we want to know
 Do we whisper or do we shout
 Why oh why are we here tonight
 What's this love where do I go what's it about

I know it's not easy I know it clamors for hate
 But nothing works right if you go out that gate
 Why do we give into all we don't want to be
 Aw don't let yourself be swept out on that sea on that sea

What is this thing called love I know what it is
 It is you it is you it is you it is you

Where do we go when we want to know
 Do we whisper or do we shout
 Why oh why are we here tonight
 What's this love where do I go what's it about

I was walkin' down the boulevard
 I was talkin' bout those things so hard
 What is this thing that we call love

What is this thing what is this thing called love
What is this thing that we call love
What is this thing what is this thing called love

A Charmed Life

I go back into the forest
Where big trees are
Susurrating and
I am still

They know what I mean by my silence



Joyce Downs

J. Glenn Evans

--25 January 2012

A WARM WIND

A warm wind blows
Across the prairies
Up the mountains
Through the valleys
Among the towers

The farther it goes
The warmer it gets
Until it ignites a spark
That builds an eternal flame
In the hearts of those who cherish

Political justice
Economic justice
Criminal justice
For all peoples
Of this land and the world

We're the Justice Party
We're running Rocky Anderson
For president and in the next election
We'll run senators representatives
In states counties and cities

The naysayers say
You won't hurt our
Democrats and Republicans
We're the 1% we'll outspend you
With our corporate and banker money

But they gave us Homeland Security
They gave us the Patriot Act
They gave us the NDAA
They trashed our Constitution
Yeah, we remember all that

We are the 99%
We cherish our Constitution
We cherish our liberties
We cherish our freedoms
We cherish justice for all

Mimi Ferebee

rough seas

that was when i thought
my senses, my sight, the essence of smell
& touch, had flipped inside, out
that the core of me had somehow escaped,
leaving its shell, that frozen mass of fear,
a withered cornucopia log left standing,
helpless

it was then that i saw my spirit,
with my head cocked, mouth clamped
open, i watched her slither,
observed the golden hue of my *good*
& she floated on, to bigger,
better worlds

by then, i had come to,
had learned that all my schooling,
my peace-giving, my endless deeds for others
& the never-nothing i gave to myself,
all of that would drown,
it would flush, mowing into the swell
of her

& for a moment, i felt like crying,
i thought of all the things that could have
gone differently, i imagined my future,
a mirage housed within the waterwheel
before me, it was a magic mirror,
an oracle that spit in my face,
when i pleaded for fair deliverance

though, instead of pouring out of my eyes,
my tears rolled back, liquid tumbleweed
that pushed down to my throat, scratched at my tonsils

soon, a gurgitation, large as the sky is wide,
as black & heavier as oil, spewed from me,
spraying forward, & afterwards, i wiped my mouth,
shook the excess gunk into the sand,

i hawked a loogie into the sea, walked away laughing

Daniel Gallick

She Came To My Office.

She Quipped, I Need help. I said, I need you.
This startled her. Then, she laughed out loud.
I was very hurt by her giggling.

Yes, I am an older man, yes, I am not handsome,
and wear glasses, yes, I am only a lawyer for the poor.
But why was she so crass?

Then I asked her this. After she stopped laughing
she started to cry. Said she was schizoid,
said she never had a mother, said she never had a father,
said she was so alone, and needed a man to pay her bills
and keep her warm.

I quipped, I need a woman who needs a lot, I need a lady
who has maladies, I desire a lady who wants it quick.
She kissed me then. Her hug was soft. Her desires were endless.
Right then I asked her if she was right.
Then I Asked For Her Hand In Matrimony.

April in Summer

The best woman
you haven't seen
is in your. This
said by a man
whose name
is nameless.

He is here
when he was
there. She's the
same woman who
is never here nor is
there. Can you share?

Patience

She lifted the waist
of my trousers. Jilly said to me,
I never liked how you wear
your pants.

We were alone.
I decided to do the same
to her. She slapped me.
I laughed.

We never saw each other
again. She was so simple.
I never liked her again.
She in turn

came over one day.
I was sixty. She said,
“I never liked you
until today.

You came in a nightmare.
Now, I see it all. And I
want to see it all
tonight.”

David Michael Joseph

Running Down My Thoughts

I walk down the sunny side of a dark road
 My secrets are being screamed out of my eyes.
 Fear has become my travel companion.
 Where did all the time go?
 Where are my memories?
 As I pick up the pace I think of a better time.
 When me and my soul got along.
 It's been a long time since the crows sang
 And the Robins laugh.
 Why must I break the news the world is not a three part act.
 As I stroll in my ill fated ignorance.
 My mind races ahead.
 I follow, hoping to catch it.
 But my brain escapes me.
 I finally catch it.
 But it's too late.
 I am already mad.

Standing Still in Palos Verdes

I followed the leader
 But he was following someone else.
 I asked the wise man for answers.
 He said he had to think about it.
 I asked the strong man to give me to give me a hand.
 He said he had to ask the stronger man for help.
 I asked the captain to take me across the channel.
 He said he had to ask the first mate to take the wheel.
 I tried to read the dictionary backward.
 I tried to run a mile but found I was running in place.
 I prayed to God for help.
 He was in Palos Verdes playing golf.
 With Donald Trump and John Elway.

Walking On Glass

Wayward steps and incomplete motion.

These are the emotional triggers of my existence.

Several transitional moments lead to my downward spiral.

Who am I but an average man with a great man dream?

I chased my masterpiece to see it crawl away wounded.

My dreams have become nightmares.

My aspirations have transformed to chores.

My goals disjointed tasks.

Why does a man choose suicide over dishonor?

Why have I chosen reality?

Kateryna Korolkova

An address

There are those who
have such propensity
for hurting others

stepping on spiders
simply to
alter the sidewalk

For them, it is like
scratching an itch

On being the wrong one

Picking scabs is an art, like folding faded love
letters into origami cranes. I once wasted
an entire afternoon tracing my finger

round the rim of a tea mug, brooding
over patterns, clouds floating
out of the drooping sky

The look on your face, crumpled
in a drawer, sighed sadly, a lone
moth nibbling its lash

Fluke

Once upon, I was a fish swimming in a love-muck
puddle, thinking I might be a good catch
goggling my eyes and fluttering my stupid
fins for any gawker who would pinch my body
mid leap, bringing me close to devour the rhythm
of jerks, lick the luster out of my eye goodbye,
never looking back at the pile thrashing
on the ground. Each time I would struggle

back into the murk, reapply the shine, relearn
the tricks. But as years passed like pedestrians
clicking their heedless heels on the pavement
I grew weary of waiting and began watching
the ocean far out in the horizon. Resolving to quit
flipping around, I crawled out of the hole and slowly
learned to balance. My fins changed into toes,
toes grew feet, feet grew legs, and I sprouted
like a stalk, into a life. Stretching two brilliant arms
I squinted my eyes and aimed right into the clear--
now I ain't ever comin' out.

Karen Mandell

Heirlooms

I tend my tomatoes and peppers, but haphazardly:
 They're heirlooms and so need special care, polishing of leaves, perhaps,
 rich drafts of fertilizer, protection from bugs, mildew, decay.
 I didn't give them what they needed.
 They stand shriveled, exhausted, while I pluck their meager fruit,
 my scant harvest. Like ancients with their staffs, they lean on their stakes,
 testament to my lapses. My neighbor's tomatoes push through their metal cages
 like scrappy puppies. Up to the moment hybrids, disease resistant.
 I think mine have more taste.
 I can hold my whole obliging harvest in the palm of my hand,
 a dozen teardrop shaped tomatoes, four squiggly green peppers.
 Medusa could pin the tomatoes to her ears; they'd swing, orange lights,
 as she faced down the heroes, turning them to stone.
 One couldn't just eat them.
 Though you did. Along with the peppers, whose shapes
 signified an alphabet older than Phoenician or Sumerian.
 We could have unraveled the mysteries of the stars or the spice routes.
 But who could deny you: a mother must give her heirlooms to her daughter.
 You delighted in their dollhouse size. Like the tiny tailor who vanquished the flies,
 they weren't slackers: tomatoes spurted, peppers crunched,
 resilient seeds lodged in your teeth. All as it should be.
 Except. I left my plants too much to their own devices.
 I didn't tell you that. You were always good at connecting the dots.

Apple

I pick an apple resting in faded paper straw
 from the tiered baskets in the cafeteria,
 a macintosh, red fading to green, a freckle colored knob
 up near the stem. In my coat pocket it's cradled by my glove,
 nudged by my ballpoint, jostled by loose change, a foil candy wrapper,
 grocery receipts, and a page extolling deltoid and triceps firmers
 furtively torn from a beauty parlor magazine.
 It won't be a lonely apple.
 As I walk, it rubs up against chocolaty lint
 and the pen gives it a nasty poke.
 Later my hand cradles it when I feel for my keys,
 its surface cool and grainy from its dusting of crumbs.
 It needs a good rubbing and someone to tend to its bruises,
 flat brown spots that soften at my touch, one puncture wound
 sporting a blue dot at the center.

Poor baby should be eaten and put out of its misery.
 Even if the glove blanketing it has been everywhere,
 including a stint in the road last week when it dropped from my pocket.
 No, in our universe a powdery layer, fine as bone meal, covers everything.
 There's no washing it away; it always comes back.
 I would never not eat the apple.

Mother and son

Your father and I listen as you tell us that you're torn
 between music and writing; notes and letters spin around you,
 nudge up against you crying pick me, pick me like the millions
 of cats in the storybook we read when you were three.
 When you despair, saying you have no musical talent,
 not really, I jump in, *you do you do, you're the best*,
 brandishing words like the toy broom I used
 to sweep monsters out from under the bed.
 I have lost the ability to comfort.
 You tell me I know nothing about your music—
 I can make no judgments. You're right of course.
 I sit in your kitchen, blinking, powerless.
 I want to squeeze you back in time through the eye of the needle,
 make you small. Then you let me believe I could fix, make better.
 Maybe lies even then. But I'd say, if you want to go out you have
 to put on your jacket. And you did. I zipped it up, making sure
 the metal didn't touch your neck. I pulled on your navy stocking cap,
 I made sure your socks weren't too small, your waffles too cold,
 your hands too dirty, your hair too greasy.
 I placed shields around you, talismans,
 warding off the evil eye. I was very busy.
 Now I fold my hands across the empty bag of my body.
I want to do for you.
 Words my own mother used, generations of women,
 standing one behind the other in sagging rows.
 I rise, push in my chair, and get in line.

Chaos Theory

I stand by the sink, shot glass in hand,
 arm raised in tribute to the purple liquid, dietary supplement,
 juice of south Sea Island fruit, fresh pressed,
 extra virgin, like the finest olive oil, like the oil flung
 into the fire by sacrificial priests, hissing as it
 strikes the flames and the stone altar.
 Wildcrafted, the label says, and although we're talking Tahiti,

I picture rag-wrapped crones plucking medicinal herbs,
 fingers knobby, skin around joints shiny and red.
 I drink, swallowing the viscous liquid that tastes faintly of Limberger cheese.
 You're watching me with the unerring ability of the young adult son
 to hone in on the suspect activities of his middle-aged parent.

You say,
 "Look, it's like the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle,
 by observing the natural world you become an intruder and
 all your observations become worthless,
 tainted by the effect of your own presence.
 You take this drink and then watch to see what feels better
 and of course you think you do.
 Or," you say, reaching for the butter, your arm from
 elbow to fingertip longer than your entire body at birth,
 "consider Chaos Theory. Everything has an effect, even that drink,
 but it'd take eons to measure.
 To us it appears random.
 Think of two toothpicks moving the earth.
 They'd do something, but how much?
 Or imagine two butterflies fluttering their wings in the bushes
 under the windows, eventually saving a giraffe grazing the veld.
 How? By adding to the wind current which becomes a dust storm which
 blows his scent downwind from the lion.
 Actions unmeasurable but not meaningless. Your drink will do something,
 but nothing that will make any difference you intended.
 The increments too small, the time too short, the effects too random for our
 comprehension. Circumstances beyond our control.
 Maybe in twenty years you toenails will turn strong and thick,
 unexpected recipients of the juice effluvia lapping through your veins."

You remove four cheese and bean filled tacos from the toaster oven
 and smile at me with those black Tartar eyes, gift of
 some unknown ancestor from the Eurasian steppes.
 Nothing is wasted; characteristics, unexpected guests,
 turn up generations after the traveler from beyond the Volga
 stopped in the town on the Baltic cliffs
 and, by coercion or pretty words, had his way with my relation.
 And by chance changed the course of history.
 He wanted to stop at the village three leagues down the road,
 but the wind picked up, grit stinging his eyes and matting his horse's braided mane.
 He'd rest here. An almost inconsequential change of plans.
 What did it matter? Just travel twice as far tomorrow.
 Except the girl in this town was related to me.
 She had reached the crossroads and could either walk home across the field
 or follow the cow path.
 She'd take the path. Why not?
 The sun was stronger heading west though the field route shorter.
 She made her choice, this instead of that, a moment's thought.
 If she had crossed the field, she'd hear locusts and mice and earthworms
 determined, unyielding,
 wildcrafting a different story.

Rose has a new walker

We buy it online. She got her old one,
 standard issue gray aluminum, at the hospital
 after she fell at Susie's house last summer.
 It's a man's walker, and she holds her elbows out like bent wings
 when she grasps the handles. It's too wide for her.
 I toss out the question one day, if you had a new walker
 what color would you choose.
Blue, she says, just like that. I order blue.
 When it comes, we connect the hand brakes,
 attach the basket and the seat,
 pull the plastic off the wheels.
Can I return it, Rose says.
 Absolutely not, I tell her. It's from the Internet.
 She feels better knowing there's no choice.
 But it's always good to try again.
Maybe I won't need it. I ride the exercise bike now.
And in Chi Gong class I stand up longer.
Before I did the exercises from the chair.
Anyway, it's not blue. I think it's black.
 So for that we'll return it? It's navy.
 Under the lamp we compromise on navy black.
 I tell her to try the seat. But always remember
 To press the hand brakes when you sit down.
 It's like the brakes on a bike.
 She doesn't get it. She never rode a bike, she says,
 she roller skated everywhere, to the botanical conservatory,
 to the library. She tightened the skates with a key she wore
 around her neck. When they broke, and that was often,
 her father would fix them, *a tragedy you kids never met him.*
 I ask Rose to push the walker in the hall.
 She can't help smiling; stately, royal she glides like the King's barge
 down the Thames. The waters part before her; I hear Handel's music.
It's nice, she says. *But what should I do with the old one. A shame to waste it.*
 It'll be a spare, I say. Maybe we'll take it in the car when we go out.
 Remember when Daddy taught me how to ride, I say. Running beside me,
 his hand on the fender and then letting go.
Of course I remember, she says, *he taught all of you.*
 And then I was free to pedal around the block, up to the drug store,
 turn right, turn right again, over and over, centrifugally
 pulled by the gravity of home.

Rose at last

It wasn't hard to find him—
a trail of feathers,
so like the other trails she'd followed—
 crumbs dropped by their children,
 the path from Chicago's Westside to Northside,
 with detours around the Lake.
As usual, he sat behind his sewing machine,
his work draped across the table,
the whirl of the machine like the whirl of wings.
Angel wings.
"Martin, is that what you've been doing?
Fixing angel wings?"
"They come to me, feathers falling off.
How can I say no?"
"And do they pay you? You've never charged enough."
He answered around a mouth full of pins.
"They've already paid.
All of us here. Paid in full."
Rose knelt and picked up stray threads
And bits of fluff, her own wings,
Sprouting behind her, perfect and new.



Joyce Downs

Toti O'Brien

GYPSY

Yes, each morning
I clean up the miles I
drove yesterday
for a fair account I
restart from
zero.
So each morning is
clear each day
a new one.

It is sweeter
than love the sense
of being home
anywhere while
walking the unknown.
A small square
a store a gas
pump and here
I belong.

I live far from
the ones I love.
When they die
do they go much
farther? No.
This exile of mine's
like being dead
through the living or
between the dead
breathing still.

For all goes
from a virtual place
to another
in the treasure box
of my mind.
Memory with my
gypsy blood is
what I have got.
All is loss
all is flashing by
and I like it so.
All is gone
is a snapshot

like a train seen
 between two houses
 a small piece
 at a time.
 Like a house
 we see from the train
 a light through the
 window
 fading in the dark.

All is say hello
 say goodbye
 I thank and forgive you
 with my first hand
 shake.
 Do I build?
 Sure, but soft:
 a tent in the desert
 one more page
 in the scrapbook
 of dreams.

OVER AGAIN

I'd like to
 restart years ago
 when America
 was a faraway place
 filled up with
 love promises

not a close by
 surrounding
 that all of my affections
 have left

*

Yes I'd like it back there
 vibrating
 with hope
 at least
 possibilities

not here now
 when all has
 been learnt
 the loop tied

*

Now I know that
the gifts to look for
are those I can give
the needs
those I can feed

now I am the source
I'm the bearer
I've been found
I've been born

*

But I'd like to return
to the limbo
the blueness
called
before

while I stand on
harvested soil
all fruits ripe
the sun set

*

and my handful
of dust

HOUR GLASS

Drops of blood on the floor
dried up into crystals
perfect dots
like planets
or stars

On the modeling stage
I'm holding my pose
while the minutes
go by
night will fall

Life is sand and I am
the hourglass

easing time through
my body
my soul

Nothing else to do
but stand
quietly the
invisible
flow

and the reckless loss
of myself
dripping back
to where I
came from

THE MOVE

The white earring
peered out from under
the bed where it lay
just against the wall
by the power cord

The red one simply
materialized itself
on the wooden
platform
in front of the attic

When and why
I wore it up there
I cannot remember

Likewise
for the missing fragment
of a silver dangle
no more than a mili
meter large

Oh these long gone treasures
were magically
coming back to me
like gifts while I finished
to clear my house

that was sold
my world was exploding
apparently
I was bound to
nowhere

But these tiny presents
of memory
filled me with joy

as if telling with
a childish voice
that nothing really
disappears
it hides only

momentarily out
of sight indeed close
for whatever truly
belongs
is forever

for life never dies

Gerald Solomon

Niceties

Utamaro, ink-brush in hand and lost to the world,
eyeballs from zero his thirtyish woman,
enticed onto supple mulberry paper.
(So many years on a kitchen wall,
grazed by smoke and sun each day.)

She's good for politeness and well-kept skin.
18th. century decent, ready-made creature
for customers at the drop of a hat.

Sly dog — my artist takes ochre for the walls,
olive for the clean bare floor-boards,
and parting the silks on lonely thighs,
feints his nicety, suave in violet, black squiggles.

Her well-fed gentleman now, plumply lunging,
in a flurry of robes, (indigo, persimmon) —
his huge pleasure stands beside her, waiting.

Then gripping her he says to me sideways:
"What I'm doing here's just for now,
I'll forget this all in good time"....

Seems we take his part in this, hers too.
What they're up to's more than droll —
persons eluding *double entendres* in a tidy room.

Nearby a small perfect kettle steams,
ready for their refreshment and the day.

At The Met.

This painter thrives on his own pressure.
Glares at all and sundry,
avid of what's really here.

Lets us look over his shoulder
where all walk in — a public space
for what's private like sex and fear.

This one: a woman, eyelids curve in sleep.
Young lovely roundnesses, complete.
She's happy to be separate and alone.

He's taken in all sides of her,
 spreads them in full view —
 can't look enough to sate his will to know.

Paints her onto grass green and crude —
 white blatant daisies, too big,
 expletives of earth that will not wait.

She's gone absent from her body
 that was born to continue.
 Asleep, she dreams strangely to be herself....

Back home, on my work-table:
 tulips I bought today cram a jug, living red.
 Driven by water, lush tubes spread,
 expressed by sexual flood.

Not Still Life

Drawn out of a stiff hog brush
 it gets to you, his invention.
 Flat on the ground his gored horse croaks,
 great yellow horse-teeth bared.
 Stuck in its paint!
 Grey paint white paint black —
 paint of blood and crud stirred.
 A painter put it there.

Wide-eyed Picasso's fixed stare!
 Fact and fiction that crash head-on.
 He says I must, bystander,
 be part of this disaster.

Another: on her brash couch this blonde broad.
 Stretched out, she's pink-on-lime-stripes —
 starkers, and *she* out-stares your artful lust.
 Unabashed....
 A bare light-bulb swings like a testicle
 over her bare face.
 She too, thick pigments.
 Even harsh shadows here are garish.

Inextricable! You know this glue,
 act and idea, in everyone's wrangle.
 What mind's grip on the true will deter
 what necessity has stashed?

Still, relief gets in sideways.
You notice how passing amusements
can make the best of things —
that, and a tendency to forget

Sharon Wilkes

Avalanche

Suddenly the snow was not tickling my nose
nor gently brushing against my lids and lashes. Its white softness had turned to thorns
churning in the brew, spewing out a web from which escape seemed possible but wasn't.
Cold and fear crept between the layers reaching through the flakes. Animals howled above
my coffin. Wind pinned me to buried birches.

Is anyone tracing footsteps?
I'm here, hiding with the foxes.
I strained for sounds of searchers.
Sweat, dirt and snow covered my glasses
so only death could find me.
I breathe in whispers and try to swim
but the snow is like cement.
It seems an eternity, but there's no clocks
in this hollow and no Toto to lick my tears.
I'm a hostage to the slope.

Mare's Funeral

Rocks of hail and low cloud cover
bury this chapel in dusk
but it's only noon.
I read my poem, "Dear Marilyn..."
and tell them that I'll miss her.
The sitting statues are moved.

Afterwards,
I see the pictures,
her in grade school
then in the senior years.
"Her hair is different colors!
Did she bleach it?"
I didn't know.
Perhaps the medications.

I winced when I saw the box,
mahogany, engraved with dates,
smaller than a litter box
larger than a match box
filled with cups of sand,
devoid of warmth
absent a friend's touch
what's left of her.

Lost

Mother hitting father.
How did I stand it?
Dad with tears,
his body wasted with
the cancer.

It crept up slowly,
mom's bizarre behavior.
Coming into my room at night,
crazed, checking locks on
doors and windows,
telling me in anxious tones:
"Turn off the fan,"
although July's heat was steaming,
a Seattle aberration.

She snuck out once,
stealing the car keys.
We were traumatized to see the car gone,
but she, of course, wanted to know:
"Can I still drive?"

Her forcing dad on daily walks
Going to Seward Park, the only destination,
feeding ducks with old bread,
watching children on swings by picnic tables,
me not minding fall's slow drizzle.

Dad had his cane,
trying hard not to fall.
We hurt for dad:
"He can't take walks!"
He sides with mom.
"I need the exercise."
We take the walk.
It's better than her nagging.

Can this be mom?
The one who wrote endearingly,
"Letter to my children" and
"Letter to my husband?"
She must have known.
She saw it coming,
putting up a front for my friends.
But all day long we hear her repetitions,
forgetting in five minutes what she just said.

My sister and I, in Berkeley and in Denver,
constantly tired from weekend flights.
We creep out at dawn, taking the bus to town
hoping for a few quiet hours before they wake
and dad with no energy to shed night clothes.

Now mom's wandering the halls of Sterling,
the Alzheimer's wing.
I visit, bringing Bomber, her cat.
We sit in the courtyard,
Me watching patients dash for lifts,
they feeling trapped with nowhere to go.
And mother, not remembering Bomber,
but pleading, "When are we going home?"

Gary Winters

cigarette girl

a slender girl with no front teeth
was picking butts
out of the boulevard gutter
scrutinizing each one carefully

pinching them between her fingers
squinting at them
swept away by impulse I asked
if she'd like to have a fresh pack

she glanced at the crumpled discards
in her pale palm
then gazed at my blue NAVY hat
and said she preferred menthol cigs

if I would like to buy menthol
for her, Lisa
we could go to the corner store
and she'd tell me top secret stuff

she said I was handsome and thought
she could trust me
behind the aviator shades
that always put dents in my nose

what a glorious stroke of fate
agent Lisa
at my side strolling down the street
on our quest for cool cigarettes

she strode with legs that covered ground
like an ostrich
dashing across white desert sands
on a mission of consequence

breathing fast she had lots to say
wild, unconstrained
her ideas came rushing out
a torrent of creative thought

she told me undercover things
for we warriors
plunging into uncharted lands
places of dark shadows and dread

evil forces of confusion
were running us
into the house of the hungry
so play your cards close to your heart

I bought some mentholated cigs
for the lady
she lit up and took two short puffs
then extinguished the glowing tip

she didn't like to smoke that much
is what she said
a woman who indulged her vice
but only to a certain point

her people were Hawaiian kings
she informed me
proud and large in mind and body
I believed her every word

we kept on walking to my house
it wasn't far
she met my white-haired housekeeper
and told her she was beautiful

at dusk she went to my backyard
weeds two feet high
waded into them and began
pulling them in the far corner

you can plant a garden she said
me dumfounded
she was absolutely correct
so next day I planted carrots

then radishes, Swiss chard, squashes
chili peppers
and cherry tomatoes galore
where do you stop something like that?

the only request Lisa made
dead serious
could she come occasionally?
day or night all the same to her

she always had a fresh wardrobe
and a new voice
a mobile one-girl vaudeville show
better than a TV sitcom

our conversations flew nonstop
on wings of bliss
possibilities were endless
new concepts sprang out fully formed

and danced before our shining eyes
breathlessly bright
heartfelt songs artfully unleashed
melodies of spiritual joy

I could go on there was no end
brand new concepts
that came from a scrounging dreamer
who didn't smoke much anyway

the bright days turned into winter
and then spring came
once Lisa slept on my sofa
assuring me it was all right

what happened next is hard to say
almost unreal
it seems she was making her break
the cops got a Be On Lookout

local police picked Lisa up
dragged her away
no more freedom now for dream girl
diagnosis: schizophrenic

for months they filled her up with pills
that made her fat
tinkered with her brain chemistry
to fit in with society

I talked to Lisa's caseworker
beware of her
he told me in a low cold tone
but wouldn't deign to tell me why

one day she showed up at my door
just to say hi
gone were the flamboyant costumes
the make believe spy characters

she said she owed me one dollar
didn't forget
she couldn't stay and off she went
her methods changed to fit the times

she headed straight for a dumpster
on the corner
to explore its deep mysteries
climbed inside and rummaged around

came up with discarded speakers
wires hanging down
tucked them under her arm and left
no need at all to plug them in

calling special agent Lisa
keep your head down
walk in a straight line don't look up
don't let them see your warm brown eyes

I watched her from the front window
shuffling away
hunched, bent over with a gray shawl
pulled over her head in disguise

another endangered species
a dodo bird
heading straight for its extinction
but not yet--oh no, not quite yet



Joyce Downs

Author Biographies

Gale Acuff “I have had poetry published in *Ascent*, *Ohio Journal*, *Descant*, *Adirondack Review*, *Worcester Review*, *Verse Wisconsin*, *Sequential Art Narrative in Education*, *Poem*, *South Carolina Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Maryland Poetry Review*, *Santa Barbara Review* and many other journals. I have three books of poetry: *Buffalo Nickel* (BrickHouse, 2004), *The Weight of the World* (BrickHouse, 2006), and *The Story of My Lives* (BrickHouse, 2008). And I have taught university English in the US, China, and the Palestinian West Bank.”

Christopher Barnes “In 1998, I won a Northern Arts writers award. Each year I read for Proudwords lesbian and gay writing festival and I partake in workshops. 2005 saw the publication of my collection *LOVEBITES* by Chanticleer Press in Edinburgh, Scotland. I have a BBC web-page www.bbc.co.uk/tyne/gay.2004/05/section_28.shtml and http://www.bbc.co.uk/tyne/videonation/stories/gay_history.shtml (if first site does not work click on SECTION 28 on second site). Christmas 2001 The Northern Cultural Skills Partnership sponsored me to be mentored by Andy Croft in conjunction with New Writing North. I was involved in the Five Arts Cities poetry postcard event which exhibited at The Seven Stories children's literature building. In May I had 2006 a solo art/poetry exhibition at The People's Theatre, http://ptag.org.uk/whats_on/gallery/recent_exhibitions.htm The South Bank Centre in London recorded my poem "The Holiday I Never Had"; I can be heard reading it on www.poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record.asp?id=18456 I have written poetry reviews for Poetry Scotland and Jacket Magazine and in August 2007 I made a film called 'A Blank Screen, 60 seconds, 1 shot' ...see www.myspace.com/queerbeatsfestival On September 4, 2010, I read at the Callander Poetry Weekend hosted by Poetry Scotland.”

David Caravan Following a career as a State Department analyst, David Caravan retired to a cottage on his sister's avocado farm in Fallbrook, California. He currently proofreads and edits foreign policy articles for a network of scholars and fellow State Department retirees. He has recently begun to send out his poetry.

Barbara Siegel Carlson's poems and translations have appeared in *NOR*, *Mid-American Review*, *Poetry Miscellany*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, and others. She is a translator of *Look Back, Look Ahead*, Selected Poems of Srečko Kosovel from Slovene with Ana Jelnikar (Ugly Duckling Press, 2010). She was the Discovery poet for *Cutthroat* in 2010 and is the author of a chapbook *Between this Quivering* from Coreopsis Press. Carlson lives in Carver, MA.

James Downs is Associate Editor of Poetic Matrix Press. He has had a chapbook *Where Manzanita* and a full volume *Merge with the river* published with the press. He is a budding song lyricist, a loving step-father and grandfather to his dear wife Joy's daughters and grandsons and he digs his cat Belle de Bayou. James lives in a paradise called Yosemite National Park in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

J. Glenn Evans Poet, novelist and political activist. Founder of *PoetsWest* and Activists for a Better World, hosts *PoetsWest* at KSER 90.7FM, a nationally syndicated weekly radio show, and is author of four books of poetry: *Deadly Mistress*, *Window in the Sky*, *Seattle Poems* and *Buffalo Tracks*, author of two novels, *Broker Jim* and *Zeke's Revenge*, an essay book, *Uncommon Common Sense*, is a former stockbroker-investment banker. Part Cherokee, native of Oklahoma. Evans has lived in Seattle since 1960. Worked in a lumber mill, operated a mining company and co-produced a movie, *Christmas Mountain*, with Mark Miller, co-starring Slim Pickens. Evans, an award-winning poet and in addition to poetry books and novels has written numerous political essays and is the author of several local community histories including a history of Seattle's Pike Place Market and has been published in many literary Journals. Listed in *Who's Who in America* and *Who's Who in the World*.

Mimi Ferebee is the editor-in-chief of RED OCHRE PRESS, overseeing the publication of both RED OCHRE LiT and ROLiT NEWS. A graduate of the College of William and Mary, she received degrees in both English (emphasis in Creative Writing and Literature) and Psychology (emphasis in Behavioral and Developmental Science). Her literary work has been featured recently in several journals, magazines and reviews, including Onè? Respè!, Decanto Magazine (UK), Both Sides Now, Flutter Poetry Journal, Leaning House Press, and Caper. Her chapbook, BLACK MEMORIES, was published as a series by Bewildering Stories (2011) as well as her full length English-Spanish poetry collection, SERAGLIO, by Patasola Press (Fall, 2011).

Daniel Gallik's novel, *A Story of Dumb Fate*, is available through www.amazon.com. The author has been published in many online and college journals. Check his works at www.dangallik.com.

David Michael Joseph "I'm a Filmmaker, Poetry/Short story author and Screenwriter from New Jersey living in Los Angeles. I always include poetic prose in my filmmaking. I have created four short films including *Shadows of Sepulveda* and *C.A.k.E.*, the most recent. Other works have been published in: *AMULET*, *THE ULTIMATE WRITER*, *CONCEIT MAGAZINE*, *Danse Macabre du Jour*, *Threshold Revelations Issue 21*, *The Malaysian Poetic Chronicles* and *Off The Rocks and Newtown writers*."

Kateryna Korolkova "I am a 22 year old student of Literature. I work as a reading teacher at an educational center where I spend many wonderful moments with children of all ages, hoping to instill the same love of reading in them as I have in me. Poetry and prose are the things which have molded my life and inspired every moment, good and bad. I've been writing poetry for two years, and I am hoping to break out into the poetry world as it has broken into me. When we can put all our longings, feelings, lacks, and loves into words, our world can be better understood and better loved."

Karen Mandell "For several years, I have taught literature and poetry at Newton MA Community Education, Lifetime Learning. I have two chapbooks, *The Story We Think We're Telling* and *Rose Has a New Walker*. I recently completed a book of interconnected short stories, *Clicking*. I've been published in various poetry journals, and my story *Repotting* will be published in the spring/summer issue of *Persimmon Tree*."

Toti O'Brien is an artist, performer and poet born in Italy and living in L.A. She's published 2 volumes of short stories, 2 children books and a collection of essays in her mother tongue. She's contributed articles to Italian underground magazines - a few poems to anthologies and literary journals in the US. She regularly reads and listens to others in Los Angeles' many poetic venues.

Gerald Solomon was born in London and studied English Literature at Cambridge University. After a short spell as sales assistant at a bookshop in London's Charing Cross Road, he worked as a producer at the BBC. Subsequently, he helped found General Studies courses at Hornsey College of Art, and this led eventually to an enjoyable period teaching poetry at Middlesex University. He retired early in order to paint and write. His poems have appeared in numerous magazines in the USA and UK including *Stand*, *Numinous*, *The Baltimore Review* and *The Muse* as he prepares his first collection. He is married, with four children, and lives in Manhattan.

Sharon Wilkes has a B.A. from University of Washington and an M.ED from Colorado State University. She recently retired from Metropolitan State College in Denver as an Internship Coordinator. Ms. Wilkes helped students secure internships in marketing, political science, management, art, and engineering. Sharon was brought up in Seattle and has lived in Denver for many years.

Gary Winters "*cigarette girl* was SDBAA finalist for Unpublished Chapbook 2007; the poem then was published in *Talkin' Blues*. You may find another volume by Gary, *The Deer Dancer*, available from *Sunbelt Books*.



Joyce Downs