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44TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

The Poetry Workshop

October 22, 2017

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Marilyn Thornton Schraff

Subbing 100%

Subbed in a third grade classroom during the late 1970s.
Passed out folded note cards,
told children to write their name on both sides.
Couldn't believe it when I looked around the room
found all boys were named Johnny Bench,
all girls named Farrah Fawcett.
Called roll, no one answered present.

Those mischievous little smiling faces were precious,
truly enjoying their comradery.
It was Friday.
Played game to review for week's spelling words,
gave children spelling test.
Everyone received 100%.
Told children I could not put grades in grade book,
no students were named Bench or Fawcett.

A boy spoke up because he'd never made a 100%,
told me his name,
wanted credit for his achievement.
Each told me his or her name,
wanted marked present, and an A in spelling.
Challenging experience for awhile.
All won in the end.

Jill Lange

Zinnias

planted some zinnias today
nothing special—

a warm day,
a little extra time,
I stopped to buy pansies
the garden center didn't have,
so I brought home zinnias.

freed old clay pots
of dry winter-stems
not about to sprout again.

now multicolored zinnias
are rooted there—
adding their essence
to the mix of fern fronds
and violets by my porch.

a little effort, nothing special, nothing more—
but as I sit a while breathing
in the May evening air
I feel the touch of a garden diva
as she dances by.

Rebecca Ferlotti

Short North

I try to keep at least one spot on my body un-rained,
but the sky is sobbing –
wind-clogged ears,
broken, red umbrella.

I follow clouds
to an old woman
sipping airplane vodka bottles
in her pristine car
parked next to an expired meter.

I flip a playing card stuck to the sidewalk
with my sandal,
and stare at it while the hem of my dress
thrashes into a puddle.

Geoffrey Landis

Shout

I have to shout.

I have to shout
inside my head.

I have to shout
inside my head
to drown out the voices.

I have to shout
inside my head
to drown out the voices
of sanity and reason.

I have to shout
inside my head
to drown out the voices
of sanity and reason
so I can reach the madness.

I have to shout
inside my head
to drown out the voices
of sanity and reason
to reach the madness
in which genius is hidden.

Rob Farmer

ON WALKING WITH HOUND THROUGH RAINY FOREST AFTER LEARNING OF A COLLEAGUE'S DEATH

She doesn't reflect the loss in my shuffle,
loss not of the person,
but of time shared in experience,
tapestry now shattered by age and death.

The woods still drip with the night's rain,
dark background for my solemn review.
Our work, a slice of the world revealed,
an experience unrepeatable.

She works trailside, nose to litter,
senses fixed to the morning's fragrance
strong beneath ground fog,
remnant scent of squirrel.

Perhaps it's best to simply join her in sampling the morning.
In a hound's way of knowing she points out plants
that have escaped my memory,
moves me towards a grounding present.

As she notes,
the next thousand years
will bury it all anyway.

Kathryn Brock

Aunt Kittie's Silver

Today I polished Great Aunt Kittie's silver.
Kittie raised my mother from infancy
after her mother died of diphtheria in 1911.

Mom had many memories and stories
about Kittie's scandalous youth, beauty and wit:
How Kittie divorced the husband her father chose for her
because he beat her. Divorce was a disgrace.
Worse yet, later she married the man of her choosing.

Mom treasured the silver; it was
all she had of Kittie's belongings.

I can't remember my mother using the silver
and was surprised when she gave it to me
late in her life.

I have never used the silver. I'm more
of a stainless steel kind of woman.

The tarnish was almost black,
because the silver had not been used
or polished since the 1930s.

I polished the silver to a shiny glow
and put it back in its flannel cover,
and gave it to my daughter.
She entertains much more than I ever did,
and maybe the small treasure
will remind her of her grandmother,
Aunt Kittie and me.

Fred Schraff

Settling

A contestant in a game show
faced with a choice
of taking current winnings
or risking all for a larger take
often "settles" for less
rather than risking all.

Audience reactions are mixed
but many recognize prudence.

People in life's game of choices
traverse a one-way sequence
of personal possibilities
with the notion:
less than sought is nothing;
more will come with persistence.

Results vary.

Len Seyfarth

Junipers

The gentle, July-flavored rain,
hesitates, begins again.
I nose the kayak onto a shelving, granite beach,
climb over the logs into shaggy evergreens,
hundreds of them, more slender than Christmas trees,

filling the ground with wispy, cloying branches,
last year's wonder,
this year's fruits.

I weave through spider-web veils, draped through openings in the undergrowth,
hold up my arms to slice them away, these sticky tangles,
with lingering musk of deer, bothered from their noon rest,

crushing twigs underfoot, stepping where no one has yet trampled this year,
the acrid smell of lightly-crushed juniper berries,
hard as marbles, scented soft as rain.

Soft, the junipers.
Junipers.

Roberta Jupin

STONE

A white stone rests
at the bottom of my well.
Look into my eyes and
you will see it there -
pale,
luminous,
lit from within,
a sheer moon disc
in my dark night.
It is heavy with
the heat of hope.
It is The Source.

R. Ferris

comrades

re reading the t ang poets
li po
tu fu
friends

remembering
centuries
and decades

long gone

sudden
wetting
of lower lash

M.A. Shaheed

Conclusions

My conclusions are being drawn slowly like
the bows across the strings of the Stradivarii.
Like the black ant that creeps across the
rock at midnight.

Bringing back the tantrums that had been
thrown. Thoughts that were manhandled
resumed their natural
course.

All the while Scorpion Peppers flavor my chili.
Bargain bread is used for dipping.
My thoughts are published inside my head
while my words ache.

Sentences slip through my hands as my
balance is challenged. My grip on
life can sometimes be
questioned.

My mind is made up by sounds in
succession, by repetition and iteration.
My generation has been
redacted.

Arlene Ring

Karma and Grace

If you did it
then I want karma
What goes around
comes around
If you can't take it
then don't dish it out!

But if I did it
then I want grace
I didn't mean it
It was a joke!
Can't you cut me a little slack—this once?
Hey, nobody's perfect....

Mary Turzillo

Earth, Water, Air, Fire

We interred your mother in the earth,
And Caleb Nez, your ancestor, was lost at sea.
We do not put our dead on scaffolds for the birds to eat,
but some do; and why not?

Maybe they will blast your sons off earth's rock globe,
long long in the future when they die,
into the sun's close orbit,
or on an interstellar voyage,
through earth's thin skin of air, then space.

I stand at the podium to celebrate your life:
we celebrate
as if we're glad you're dead--
for you were burned from six foot two,
a hundred eighty maybe,
to contents of that modest china urn,
your name and dates
inscribed in copperplate
so those who care will know you lived.

You will not dry and moulder in the dirt,
you will not be the food of sharks and manta rays,
you will not fly millennia and finally leave this galaxy.
You have been exalted by fire.
You were, for the brief hours in the crematory,
an angel made of burning flame,
giving up your beauty
to the earth, the river, and the sky.

Chris Franke

rE the Con Volution

My advice would be
Learn as much as you can
as soon as you can

& use it as best you can,
not necessarily to get rich;
but if affluence should shower,

don't let it steal your perspective:
Down the contour of your nose,
on a cocked head (in a dubious scheme?),

is the wrong point of view.
But all my utopian bullshit
in a dystopian world

may be battling a prevailing wind,
paddling against the current.

Don't learn to follow but to think
what hand-me-down nostrums
that are not any remedies,

if you get my drift:
As were there no problem,
what solution is to be found?

Or what solutions might address
what problems . . . that conjury hath wrought?
Characterization may lead

where solutions reign intractably.
Oh, what ill-considered may sire
out of some Pandorean box!

As some may see, may things
get terr'bly convoluted.

Adrian Schnall

Conversation

What to say
when she's uttered no human sound
for months, except the grunts
you've tried to turn into words.

What to say
at two AM, when the ER doc's
first question is, *Do you*
have her power of attorney?

Her face a portrait of tranquility,
lips and eyelids pursed in symmetry,
hovering at the edge of absolute peace.
You will your own mouth to move, speak loud

in her left ear, the good one, though
not good at all with no aid there,
Mother, it's me. Can you hear?
Do you know who I am?

Silence -- you look around, ashamed
at how it must look to shout
in your mother's ear at two AM,
your mother dying before you,

when through the harmony of beeps
a single syllable sounds,
a couldn't-be-clearer *Yes.*

You feel your color rise, you haven't tried
to hold her hand. Under the covers you find
a motionless damp rag, you squeeze --
not the slightest stirring in reply.

Your fingers speak, you can only pray
she understands. Her face is stone,
lids placid, nostrils with oxygen prongs,
mouth as if it had never spoken.

A minute by the clock, your tongue
breaks loose. *Mother, are you okay?*
And clear as before, all matter-of-fact,
those marble lips say *No.*

Carolyn Ritchie

UNCELEBRATED

In the souls of ancient trees live
the memory of more real worship.
Around us a ritual we would not understand
moves toward an ecstasy we cannot feel.

Between the trunks, overlaid by leaves,
a dancing memory or power ignores us, too--
its truth unidentified, rite unremembered,
a film persisting just within our line of vision.

Our own rituals are rehearsed without thought
and with dampened access to our vegetable selves.
We live on an earth teeming with a mystery we do not address
and so leaking whatever energy we carry or encounter,

and the abandoned holidays move under the ground
like restless beasts, brooding roots.

Doc Janning

TOGETHER

I awaken
as from a dream
to see You
—
dreaming
—
beside Me.

Drawing you close
I feel You breathe.

Morpheus calls,
I close my eyes,
as I nestle
and spoon
to dream
—
with You.

Jim Bolce

September 1942

Mom saw the men in dress Navy uniforms
Park their car in front of the house next door.
An officer and an NCO, they walked
To the door, rang the bell, and went in.
Mom knew what it meant. The next morning
After breakfast, she made her call next door.
It was then that she heard all about it.
The officer told her, our neighbor, that
Her son Dan, a Navy fighter pilot, was lost;
His plane had gone down; he was missing,
Presumed dead. They didn't say where, but she
Knew it was in the Pacific. For months, their letters,
Back and forth, went through a Fleet Post Office
In San Francisco. Returning from a mission,
Dan's squadron flew into a tropical storm.
All of the planes came out except Dan's.
A couple of pilots flew back to search
For him as long as they could ---- nothing.
Before the Navy men left, she asked
If they had a gold star decal to replace
The blue one in her front window.
The officer answered, "I'm sorry, gold stars
Are for men lost in action. Your son
Was on a training flight." The Navy men
Expressed their sympathy again and left.
That afternoon, our neighbor put on her coat
And hat and walked to the five and dime
At the square where she bought, for twenty-nine cents,
A gold star decal. As soon as she got home
She scraped the blue star from the window
And, with tears and pride, pasted in its place
The gold star.

Dail Duncan

Blessed are the Slow of Speech

for they shall love listening

words meaning books authors

and be comfortable with silence

Bob McDonough

People Who Live on Dirt Roads

Never use a car wash; they want to build up their own top soil.
Home school their kids to save on laundry.
Grow their own fruit and vegetables and continue to make good use of them after eating.
Always save a cookie for their UPS driver.
Are on first-name terms with their pork chops.

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