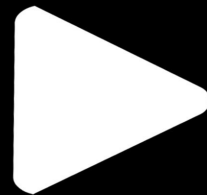


# PLAY



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# RED WOLF JOURNAL

ISSUE 4 WINTER 2014-15

# PLAY

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Editors

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## PLAY: AN INTRODUCTION

*Now in myth and ritual the great instinctive forces of civilized life have their origin: law and order, commerce and profit, craft and art, poetry, wisdom and science. All are rooted in the primaeval soil of play.*

Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*

We play

With our toes, with our minds; alone, with others. We work at play, play at work. We are very serious about our play. (sometimes). We know it when we see it, when we do it, yet it's hard to define. We dismiss it--I'm just playing, we say--but the need is hard-wired into the physical being: play is important. As basic as love, work, death, the evidence of the senses--play is born with us, eats with us, makes love, kills time, and dies with us.

The works collected here center on, celebrate, define, enact:  
play.

PLAY = LIFE

By Margo Roby

Life invites play --  
play sparks an actor's word,  
a child's imagination,  
playful pursuits of the heart,  
playing the field, and playing around.

*Wanna play doctor?*

*she asks--*

*and they explore*

*differences*

*until they learn*

*to hide*

*to seek*

*to thrill*

*to the chase.*

We play for time, for attention,  
into someone's hands. We play chicken,  
fast and loose, hooky, and possum.  
We play with fire, run with the hare  
and hunt with the hound.

*When girl meets boy*

*they play games*

*and the one who catches*

*all the jacks*

*before the ball bounces,*

*wins.*

Play involves risk because life involves risk.  
One child, on the swing, wants to go higher  
and higher, while another sees monsters  
in shadows, and giggles away fright.



*Run, run  
as fast as  
you can;  
you can't  
catch me...*

Play is a song, and music's spell,  
flirting, teasing, playing the fool. Play  
is waiting games, and crawling into dark  
places – just to see what's there.

*Red Rover, Red Rover  
won't you come over  
and I'll show you  
what love's all about*

Play is deeply human,  
stirs memories, leads to regrets.  
We play rough. Careless. Without thought.  
We play endlessly at being human.  
Play is discovering our personal limits.

*You're it,  
but I won't run  
too fast.*

Play is  
practise for... not-play.  
Play is  
life.

## WHAT KNOT

By Nelle Lytle

What knot  
did you tie  
to make a clover chain?

What chant  
did you sing  
as the rope slapped down?

Tell me  
all you were, then  
I'll reply.

Slip; Cinderella;  
Storyteller.  
So was I.

## GAME THEORY

By Brenda Butka

Jet contrails tictactoe across the sky.  
These days  
X marks killshots,  
O is for bullseye,  
no marks for near-misses.  
Hopscotching toward the monkeybars,  
tag you're it for one teetertotter minute  
of deficit attention. No marks  
for near miss. No marks.

There should be no monopoly  
on O's and X's.  
Even bully boys throw down their toys  
at dark  
and head back home and hope  
for hugs and kisses.

## THE GAMES WE USED TO PLAY

By Viv Blake

Plainsy, clapsy,  
round the world  
to backsy, with a ball  
against the wall.  
Hopscotch and skipping games,  
ball games, marbles and the like  
all out in the playground  
in healthy cold fresh air.  
Pontoon, rummy or Monopoly  
On rainy days indoors.  
Cowboys and Indians,  
camping on the island.  
Growing up to team games  
like rugby touch and rounders  
and flirting round the bike sheds.  
Years of Bridge, and adult games  
like chess, Mah Jong and Scrabble  
before the babies came  
with patacake  
and this little piggy went to school,  
to repeat the whole rigmarole.  
Plainsy, clapsy,  
round the world  
to backsy, with a ball  
against the wall...

## OLLIE, OLLIE

By Carl "Papa" Palmer

Giggling, she runs from the family room couch  
where I sit and count, both hands over my eyes.  
“1,2,3,4,5 and 5 is 10. Ready or not, here I come.”

First, in the kitchen, opening and slamming cabinet  
drawers and doors, “No, not here. Not here, either,”  
repeated loudly lifting all four corners of the tablecloth,

again as I look under a chair cushion, behind the curtain,  
then seek into the living room to flip pages of a book  
on the shelf, “She's sure hiding good, where can she be?”

Muffled laughter in the closet, ever her same hiding spot,  
as I pass the half open door, again not seeing her crouched  
smiling presence as I continue my search into the hall.

“I wonder where that girl can be, I've looked everywhere.”  
A tug on my pant leg, I turn around in wild surprise,  
“Here I am, Papa, right here. See. You couldn't find me.”

“You certainly are a wonderful hider, much better than me.  
Now it's my turn.” She counts with covered eyes as I slip  
into the closet, same place I hid when her mommy was small.

## REAGANOMICS

By Zachary Matteson

—*for my sister*

Those summers we vacationed on the Cape blur  
to one eidetic day: We eat our weight in saltwater  
taffy, brave the weedy north Atlantic, survive Hur-  
ricane Bob, and flatly refuse to taste lobster. After

dinner, we *Kick the Can* as long as we can. Parents,  
retiring behind porch-screens, drink gin and tonics.  
Fireflies ignite in the pitch-pines' resinous incense  
like Christmas lights. Our salted skins glisten: onyx

dark or glitter ink. The moon's sad cameo croons  
an old Cole Porter tune. Bramble gathered, we turn  
to the beach, roasting red potatoes in foil cocoons  
like heretics: till they hiss, or are more or less burnt.

The radio tuned to The Bangles' "Eternal Flame"  
drowns out the moon and the ocean just the same.

## THE LAST SPRINKLER DANCE

By Amy Stumpf

We emerged through slamming screen doors  
that our fathers never got around to fixing.  
Bright colored blossoms in pigtails – all arms and legs,  
pushing the season in sensible, well-worn swimwear.  
The cool air shocked still-tan skin, but the low sun was kind  
as we dodged icy droplets and shared freezer-burned Bomb Pops.  
Goosebumps glistened as we giggled and squealed,  
not knowing this would be our last dance beneath the sprinklers.  
Soon, Barbies would give way to boys and broken hearts.  
and friendships would fade and scatter with the leaves.  
But for now, our world felt safe, easy and unscripted.  
Every day was a do-over, and home was as close  
as the next slamming screen door.

## SHOES NOT REQUIRED

By Sara Vinas

It starts somewhere

Sac-

rum

Hip slide and shimmy

Knee bop

Shoes drop

And everything's moving

Grooving

To the beat

Heart, drum, guitar strum

Release inner strings

(it's a cinch)

And get down

Any way you want

Flaunt that joy

No form

All play

Save Arthur Murray

For another day



## OLD LADIES AT PLAY

By Viv Blake

Inside we're all still sixteen,  
dancing to Rock Around the Clock.

Outside we hobble  
our (plural) chins wobble -  
who cares.

We begin the beguine,  
the dance of the era  
our parents were young  
it's all a chimera.

We straighten our form,  
and kick up a storm  
as, abandoned, we fling  
limbs hither and yon  
in a gay attempt at rebirth,  
to tie one on.

## CLOUDY WITH 100 PERCENT CHANCE OF RAIN

By Pat Phillips West

Portland weather sounds  
like Miles Davis, kind of blue, this wind  
staccato, this rain a one-note tap, tap  
October to March.  
When geese chatter about heading south,  
the cat hears his woman mumble,  
*Me too.* She uses the same flyway,  
walks a well-worn path  
to the store for wine and cat food.  
Back in the warm bungalow,  
she pours the tabby some kibble  
neat, no chaser, and sips a generous glass  
of Shanghai silk merlot. Buster notices  
her new habit of talking aloud to herself.  
He curls up on the rag rug next to the woodstove  
for his early evening nap. Then a strange sound  
registers on his radar. He raises one eyelid  
to see her attempt a wobbly soft-shoe shuffle  
his direction. *Forget how much you hate water,  
let's kick loose Gene Kelly style, go tap dance  
around a lamp post.*  
Buster crouches, fixed to pounce.

## NIJINSKY'S SISTER

By Mercedes Webb-Pullman

Write me a poem  
about Nijinsky and his sister –  
leave out the mad dead brother,  
just show the two pitiful children, taken  
and raised by the state, trained  
to dance through agony into grace.

Were they lovers? Or did his lover  
seduce her? Hers, him?  
In that confused triangle  
who was the puppet-master?

Describe the manipulations,  
write me of beauty and confusion  
you who know about the other,  
the unacknowledged sex  
whose lessons are impossible and wrong.  
Did she leap, as he did,  
hoping somehow to break the law  
and stay suspended in the air?

Make him love her; at least  
write me that.

## CHILDHOOD GAMES

By Adam L.

It was fun while it  
lasted, the cheeky squeeze  
in the curve surrounding the stomach,  
childish swats on the pimple-ridden face.

*Humiliation,*

both effected and felt,  
was a perpetuating cycle born into  
itself, — my psychiatrist told me —  
first absorbed by the heart  
as easily as the skin will sweat.

When we played the simple game  
of touching each other's bodies  
too many times, always finishing  
side by side, contact shared  
so ordinarily like the yawn  
grown from a long day's labours,  
I couldn't help but wonder  
if you had enjoyed it as much as me  
or was it, to you,  
a boyish fight.

MATCH POINT

By Ed Higgins

our words

    bounce

back

    & forth.

is it

    still

love

    love?

## IF A DECLARED INFIELD FLY IS ALLOWED TO FALL

By David M. Harris

We drove, once,  
Spencer Brown and Charlie Norris and I,  
three hours to New Britain, Connecticut,  
to pick up Charlie's brother Tony,  
and play canasta.  
We argued about revolutionary ideology, too,  
a complicated set of rules for us to explore.  
Once you know the rules, the world's a simpler place.  
Once you know the rules.  
I was five, youngest of the neighborhood kids, playing  
my first real game, with rules everyone else knew,  
a sort of baseball with four or five players,  
pretty much every kid in the neighborhood,  
and I accidentally hit the ball, hard.  
Someone laughed and shouted,  
"That's a home run!" so I ran  
home. Eventually, my father took me to the Bronx  
to see real games, like Roger taking Tracy Stallard long  
for number 61. I learned the order of the bases,  
the batting order, the squeeze bunt, but never  
how to play well. I enjoy watching sports, even  
playing some, but I am no athlete, no star,  
even when I know most of the rules  
(I never quite got the infield fly rule, but can't feel too bad  
about that). I learned the rules of checkers, Parcheesi, even chess--  
sixth board of six on the high school team.  
Not so good on strategy, but I knew the rules. Card games, too:  
canasta and pinochle with the family,  
more canasta, crazy eights, pedro, hearts in college,  
but never bridge. I never got the hang of bidding,  
a whole separate set of rules. I let B.J. bid for me and,  
often as not, play the cards out of my hand.  
Bidding was too much to think about  
when the real function of the games was to give us a reason  
to sit and talk and drink and talk some more. Maybe that's why

I was better at games than sports. More sitting around, more talking.  
Maybe in the Harvard huddle, before the quarterback calls a play,  
one of the tackles asks, "How does classical Marxism adapt  
to the globalized e-business environment?" but I doubt it.  
Sports are serious and demand serious attention.  
We drove, once, in college, to New Britain, to pick up Tony  
and join the all-night canasta tournament.  
Cards and music were background for our collegiate plotting  
to overthrow capitalism. We never did change the system.  
We were too early to fight the designated hitter rule. We never did  
much beyond talking and playing cards.  
We could understand those rules.

## VISITING MY UNCLE

By Fred Zirm

I sleep in my oldest cousin's  
boyhood bed, a single twin  
built into the end of the narrow  
room – its shelves crowded  
with trophies topped by figures  
frozen, forever serving invisible  
tennis balls, shooting an unseen  
puck, hurling a bowling ball  
down an endless alley, or merely  
stretching arms heavenward  
in celebration of a forgotten  
victory in an unnamed sport.

This was the only private  
bedroom for what was a family  
of eight. Everyone learned to share  
space and effort – one bathroom for  
six children, plenty of dinner dishes  
to scrape and garbage to haul, lots of  
laundry to wash and lawn to mow.

When the youngest died of an overdose,  
was the grief divided or multiplied?

Now all the kids are grown and gone,  
and my uncle has been battling cancer  
for longer than his grade school grandkids  
have lived, each one well practiced at sending  
Grandpa get well cards and crayon pictures  
as the greedy cells spread from colon to  
liver to bone until he was declared near death  
a half dozen times. Today he jokes he awakes  
each morning eager to see where the pain  
will pop up next, where the radiation or new  
drug will next need to be aimed.



His tennis buddies still show up weekly  
to play on his private court.  
Too weak to walk, he rides the lawnmower  
out to watch them and trade barbs  
about someone's lack of a backhand  
and someone else's lack of speed.  
They play in the early evening,  
when the air cools and the light  
gets golden. You can see their younger  
selves in their form, and their age  
in their immobility. No one holds serve.  
They seldom go for winners, mostly content  
to trade shots and quips,  
to savor the setting sun,  
and to rally, rally, rally on.

## HOCKEY FEVER, EVEN IN A CAFE

By Shannon Rayne

At Roasting Bean Cafe:

On the flat screen TV above the Poker Pro magazines  
and to-go lids

Canucks are down 3 points

My Americano arrives with a thick cloud of foam  
the size of a hockey puck, fans cheer from the TV

I feel like I have scored

## DEVIANT BEHAVIOR

By Mark Danowsky

Eventually, you have to stop comparing  
yourself to yourself  
when you were younger.

Tastes change. Admit it.  
Marijuana and Kraftwerk  
no longer equal an afternoon  
well-spent. Years earlier,  
cheese puffs and gummy worms  
like butterscotch krimpets and Mountain Dew  
were monumental discoveries.

Out of town for work  
we purchased local kettle chips  
from a gas station by the motel  
and I felt deviant  
because they contained Trans Fats.

## DOING IT IN YOUR HEAD

By Terry Adams

This candidate for stepsister,  
Sherry, is playing arithmetic games with the son's father  
in the dining room with the potential stepmother  
watching.

Fifteen plus eighty six? Dad asks.  
Sherry flops her shoulders forward,  
opens her mouth, squints her eyes,  
and tilts her head way back until she looks  
like a birdbath.

Suddenly dad turns to son, who is staring at Sherry,  
expecting an answer.

Son stammers           *ninety nine.*

Dad is visibly embarrassed with son, potential stepmom decides  
the cookies are ready. Sherry stops being  
a birdbath and says   *no,*  
*a hundred and one.*

Next question,  
son folds himself backward at the neck,  
opens his mouth like a birdbath  
thinking he'll get the answer that way,  
and dad backhands him off his chair for making fun of Sherry.

Later Sherry explains to her possible stepbrother  
how she says the numbers out loud in her head,  
and she'll show him how to kiss, too,  
if he'll come out in the hallway after everyone  
is asleep. In the hallway she asks if he has been saying  
numbers in his head the way she showed him.

The son says yes.

She says: *kissing is the same thing except you say mmm,*  
*mmm instead of numbers, you squint*  
*your mouth instead of your eyes,*  
*and you don't tilt back*  
*quite as far.*

## DAILY I FALL IN LOVE

By Pat Phillips West

with cheerful baristas who ask,  
*What can I get ya?* They rattle off options,  
write in secret code down the side of my cup.  
I'm the old broad who lives up the street,  
all the guys ask, *How's your ornery cat?*  
I'm crazy for the grinders, blenders, young people  
chatting and shoulder dancing as Unknown Mortal  
Orchestra's *So Good At Being In Trouble*  
spills from the speakers, even the barking dog  
tied up out front. Smoky, toast-like  
mixes with chocolate and earthy. Strong hands  
pull shots. These tattooed wizards work their magic  
with the steam wand, make frothing milk  
they swirl side to side and create a heart  
within a heart just for me. Who knew  
brown could be so many different colors?  
They move behind the counter  
with synchronized precision, lean bodies,  
strong and pleasant like good coffee.  
Their bad-boy grins and come hither eyes,  
rich as an Italian roast, set my teeth on edge.  
I want them, these guys who know  
the meaning of extra hot. I want those fingers  
calloused by heat to slide over me  
with whipped cream and drizzled caramel.

## ORANGE ORCHARDS

By Marie Kilroy

At the far end of the East Coast,  
miles from the metropolis of Miami,  
hangs the southernmost part of Dade county.

I was often told to amuse myself  
in the flat fields and orchards that surrounded us.

I would run through the rows  
of orange trees behind our house,  
weaving in and out like a needle through green cloth.

The fruit hung heavy on the branches:  
sticky sweetness stirred into a perfume  
with the breeze, mixing with the wet earth.

Memorizing my path I scanned  
tops of trees making sure  
the red tiled roofs weren't out of sight.

I was raised in these tiny paths  
dividing the line of land and tree.  
This is where I could grow

on sticky nectar that dribbled  
in tiny ripples through my  
fingertips like candle wax.

It was the only place I could relax.  
Those were long days, sun-filled,  
before the mud-colored boxes lined the hall,

before our family crumbled,  
before we moved far away  
from those heat-filled fruit forests.

AUTUMN LEAVES

By William Preston

They fly  
through purple air,  
flaunting orange and red;  
leaping, twisting, and playing as  
they die.

## CRAYOLA PROTÉGÉ

By Kalyn L.P. Gensic

In the darkness of New Jersey's January  
we awoke to a warm southern landscape  
on the once pristine walls of the hallway.

My brother was eight with avante garde tendencies.  
He colored inside the lines sometimes, but mostly  
he favored spastic sweeps void of such formalities.

At school, he colored his hand's contour like a peacock,  
upsetting the steady rhythm and rows of turkeys  
adorning the third grade Thanksgiving party.

Back with us, he colored a monster with fuchsia tinted wax,  
prey racing to sanctuary beyond the paper's edge.

The day he colored cedar trees cerulean blue,  
the wrinkle separating Dad's eyebrows deepened  
at the refrigerator door display. Trees are green, son.

On that frigid morning when we entered the hallway  
to find the scarlet sun and indigo hills,  
Mom was furious, but she never painted it away.  
I saw her staring into its sunset, her eyes following  
the strokes from the ceiling to the floor.



## LIP GLOSS INSTEAD

By Pamela Sayers

Because my mother loved lipstick,  
I liven up when applying the sheerest rose colour.

But unpredictably, deep scarlet makes me sad.

Her smooth voice is always near;  
with clarity I watch the clock's hands move quickly.

I go to the cosmetic counter to look for the new  
summer colours and a salesgirl asks if she can help.

I kiss a subtle mauve on my lips; I buy a clear lip  
gloss instead.

My mother never wore lip gloss. She only wore vibrant shades.

I buy a new lipstick every month; line them up on my vanity,  
an unsatisfied obsession.

While living in New York she had a Siamese cat named Kimmy,  
who sat on the sofa with her most evenings.

My mother died in September 2004, leaving me  
a box of brooches encrusted with faux jewels, but no lipstick.

Nearly nine years later, I can still see her rouged lips.

From my purse I take out a compact mirror and apply a garnet  
tone; I put on my strappy shoes, grab my sweater.

While walking out the door I remember my mother  
telling me lipstick makes a girl feel pretty.

# FOR MY 40<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY

By Pat Phillips West

I can see it now. A yellow dress  
that lifts with the breeze,  
freeing my thighs  
from their winter dark denim  
prison. A sassy number  
that makes men stare or whistle.  
Untethered, kids at their father's  
for the weekend, I stroll North Mississippi  
Avenue, checking out Gypsy Chic,  
Manifesto Shoes. The Meadow's front window  
stops me, all those stacks  
of pink Himalayan salt blocks,  
I step inside, want to run my tongue over  
their smooth surfaces. Hope anyone watching  
would say, *Look at that broad.*  
I sniff artisan salts from Bali, Bolivia,  
sample one from Brazil, wonky, fresh-tasting  
with a touch of hotness.  
And there's an entire wall of dark chocolate,  
floor to ceiling  
waiting to be undressed  
and nibbled. I sample one  
made from beans grown on the lower slopes  
of the "Mountains of the Moon,"  
on the equator in the Congo, spicy,  
slightly peppery taste. Long on the palate,  
buzzing on my tongue as I continue  
down the street. Sun-drunk,  
hips sashaying back and forth  
to the tune of throaty mating sounds  
playing in my head. I twirl so the gauzy fabric  
brushes against that soft spot  
on the back of my knees.  
I walk like I'm on my way  
to a bonfire

swinging a can full of gasoline.  
Yeah, sunflower yellow  
and low-cut with a flash of tit.

## MECHANIC

By James Berry

Fixin planes no easy art, what with cables an' flaps, ain't just luck;  
we're all about safety, here in the desert, hunnerd miles from Nohow.  
Changin' aircraft oil's a little different than in yer truck,  
there ain't no fly-in jiffy lube and you can't pull over if ya ferget  
t' wire a plug – those bladders o' liquid gold cost more, too.  
AeroShell quarts straight as pawns, black outside red label  
with snapcap childproof top (like a kid might actually drink  
that biscuit honey what takes a half-hour to pour).  
Gotta warm it from winter molasses-thick – five minutes runnin'  
is about right, prop screamin' to go – 'scape from dusty earth...  
Old stuff gushers out the engine, nasty as the day it come outta the ground,  
roilin' and bubblin' in the drainpan, tar-pit of hot, devilish slime;  
Midnight black lake with flecks o' gold – metal from main bearings  
wearin' down to dust as all things...get recovered, recycled, reborn;  
Golden beer to bladder; black bottle to ebony pool  
to oil barrel out back the shop where shinybald tires  
oversee cigarette stubs and damp patches of pee.  
With distant drone, one lone engine on a northern horizon  
lifts me up, drawn like a compass into endless blue sky.

## HOW BILLY WRITES A PLAY

By Ron. Lavalette

He chooses a theme and a pen.  
The nib is crucial, especially  
by the time he hits the third act  
when he makes a fine point  
on a dozen or so pencils for back-up.  
He exposes the characters by stages,  
methodically spilling ink on the script  
here, blood in the storyline there, and  
as their hearts resolve themselves  
from paper into flesh, he beats  
them into submission, his manuscript  
their master, his work their play.

## PLAYING SANTA CLAUS

By Walter J Wojtanik

It smells of mothballs,  
Red velvet with soot stained fur.  
It looked much newer  
when it fit better. It was  
much redder when it was handed down.  
But, the bells still jingle,  
a sound that soothes and placates,  
it resonates from rooftops  
and hillside, taking it in stride.  
Taking pride in the mantle, a duty  
to take the beauty of a season  
and spread it far and wide  
all in a one-night ride.  
I know what is expected,  
I have never rejected this position.  
It is a terminal condition,  
I would expire without Christmas.  
Even if I retired, it wouldn't be the same.  
It is a game I play every year  
from way up here in the frozen North.  
I don the garb and slip into my routine, of course.  
I mean, who WOULDN'T want to play Santa Claus?

## A SINGLE LINE

By Pearl Ketover Prilik

Each morning for eight weeks  
She stood in front of the bath-  
room mirror— door barred for  
privacy and mouthed her line  
until it flowed like honey from  
seven-year-old lips – perfectly  
pronounced, sticky sweetness  
as written for Pooh the Bear  
until the evening arrived and  
she stepped forward on stage  
footlights brightly shining on  
Everyone sitting in the dark ...  
and her lips clamped together  
stuck in silence

## WHEN WORDS COME OUT TO PLAY

By De Jackson

they bump and grind and sway,  
find each other in the dark,  
make sparks and new sparkled  
syllables.

they dance an iambic cha-cha-cha  
or swing or swagger,  
stagger up to the space bar  
for another shot of rum  
-bled phrase.

their days are filled with spin,  
moon-milled whim  
and the frothy-follow-flow  
of the sea. They're free to  
hy  
-phen  
-ate  
as they please, catch a breeze  
to some sillier shore.

Watch 'em jingle, jangle, wrangle  
each other into jaunty jigs,  
two-step schlep their backpacks  
full of giggles to the floor.

Leave 'em to their own recognizance  
and they can tumble, tickle  
peanut-butter-brickle  
even the most frostbitten  
tongue-tied  
soul.



COMPETITION IN THE KEY OF S MINOR

By Patricia A. McGoldrick

The oldest sister  
always  
leads the way  
first to walk  
first to run  
first, the piano, to play

first to hear  
the youngest sister  
play those notes so clearly  
without a minute of practice...  
nearly.

## MY LEFT HAND

By Viv Blake

My left hand  
is grubby and green  
from preparing beans  
of which we have a glut.  
Is scratched from berrying,  
with nails that need cutting –  
they're splitting from quilting -  
unadorned save a wedding ring.  
Spreading ugly knuckles –  
too much piano and keyboard -  
with big brown splodgy age spots  
and meandering blue veins.

No longer plays a solid base  
on clarinet or piano,  
strong and supple to tease a trill  
or vamp a ragtime riff.

My left hand  
has forgotten how to play.

I AM

By Nelle Lytle

and I despair  
of understanding god  
whose every revelation  
is a puzzle  
set around  
a vacancy.

## UNSNAPPED

By Jane Shlensky

Some of my favorite pictures live  
in my head, never taken,  
daydreams and could-have-beens,  
where I mold what never was  
into something like memory.

Perhaps you hold your old guitar,  
thumbing, strumming and tuning,  
the fiddle and mandolin laid aside.  
Your cigarette burns down to filter,  
a cylinder of ash balanced

on the lip of a saucer,  
and you have that smoky, soapy,  
sweaty daddy smell I need.

Perhaps I have my dulcimer  
laid on my wagging knees,

longing for approval and fun.  
Or maybe I have my keyboard  
and feel at ease with whatever  
sounds we make today, knowing  
harmony is contagious.

Perhaps when you clear your throat  
and look up, you will see me,  
and I will know you have a song  
whose words you've sung to me  
since I was small,

something I can play on the fly,  
joining my alto to your tenor,  
sounding good enough  
to make you smile.

## THE COMB

By Terry Adams

Puffing my cheeks like Louis Armstrong summoning the saints  
I mastered the wax-paper comb for her,  
cupping and un-cupping my fingers, my internal fame blooming,  
while my mother listened with nodding praise  
and asked me please go blow  
just like that, down in the basement, because it would echo  
so much better down there,  
and I did it for hours, just for her.

And 40 years later I want to go back and thank her on her deathbed,  
see her puzzled look up at me, which would say even now,  
it really did sound better down there.



Charmaine Lanham at the Dixie Cafe

Durwood Edwards

## THE DIXIE CAFÉ

By Mary Theroux

Bypassed by the highway,  
mislaid in time,  
"The Dixie" held tight.  
On the square  
in Byrdstown, Tennessee  
up the Cumberland Plateau  
hard by the Kentucky state line.  
People divided  
by drawn boundaries  
isolated by musty grudges -  
still Blue or Gray.

Johnnye fried the catfish  
green tomatoes  
hush puppies  
that soothed her aging town  
while businesses died  
one by one.

Then came the music -  
banjo and guitar,  
mandolin,  
a doghouse bass.

They come down now  
from Somerset  
drive up  
from Nashville -  
meet at the borders of their lives.  
Locals, outlanders  
bluegrass and gospel  
playing for tips  
and their own melodic passions.

PLAY

By Amy Pickworth

Lots of things can spook a horse.  
Might have been a snake. Maybe  
it was making a break for it  
or racing a ghost.  
Probably felt good to run.  
Horse got plenty of the cheapest food,

wasn't often slapped in anger,  
but it was always circles around  
the same tiny pasture, one kid  
on and the other yelling for their turn.  
Now the open field, tall weeds  
sprung tight with grasshoppers

>

the list of totally no problemo included

- *last night's mascara becoming this morning's eyeliner*
- *Boy Scout shorts*
- *riding the train 26 hours each way*
- *the painted-feather butterfly barrette, the random zydeco music*
- *we were one of the funniest people we know*

>

All summer, Jesus left the auto-parts store early to go home and sit at the dinette while his wife smeared his ruddy face and neck, his arms, with Cover Girl foundation. She finished him off with black eyeliner, opened a series of bobby pins with her teeth and pinned on his wig. Because he was Jesus he got most of the lines, but the disciples were proud to serve God in this way too, their rounded outdoor voices booming off the concrete-block walls, breaking into real, invisible waves over the bleacher seats built into the side of the hill.

>



So much time was passed  
listening to Side B.

Her father hated those boys  
and they would've been happy

to burn his house down.

*Everybody's gonna be happy*

and that means you and me  
and Leonard Cohen. Afterward

she holed up in a different bedroom  
while across town you stayed up all night,

wearing out the grooves,  
saying goodbye till dawn.

## CAN'T GO HOME

By Mercedes Webb-Pullman

Totara stands defiant.  
Behind him, my old home;  
he still shadows night onto day,  
my father the night man  
my mother ruler of light.  
Tree roots make caves for play.  
My sister climbs up, away  
as new baby cries. The tree stays  
doesn't go rushing inside.  
We sneak from the yard.  
No earthquakes happen, no fires.

From Reservoir Hill we  
can see the tree. Home is  
a dolls house, nappies flapping.  
Ant people, pushing  
toy prams, hurry along.  
That can't be our mother!  
She's so tiny! We lie  
to roll down the hill laughing  
clouds and ground swirl  
in a giggly giddy dance.  
We land in a helpless heap  
at my mother's solid planted feet.  
Anger picks us up, shakes us  
makes us hold her skirt  
tows us home again.

The tree still stands there  
larger, darker, my father dead  
my mother old and weak.  
From Reservoir Hill  
I watch as sunset  
makes a shadow finger of me  
pointing home.

## IT'S NOT THE YEARS THAT SEPARATE US, SWEETHEART, JUST THE MILES

By Doug Hester

Mud leaps into the gears, smears the grease with wet dirt as I splash through the stream. Rubber treads slip on stones then catch, leading the bike up the red clay to a lonely trail. Sunlight rides low under the boughs, a bottle of thin hot glare spilt in the woods, sloshing against tree trunks and dirty with shadow, the yellow and black of hornet fury streaming from a nest too close to the path. The big ring spins with my legs, turning over, reflecting angry yellow, but returning to the dark each time, to the resistance that propels me. Who understands women? I can't get away from this one, my thoughts buzzing as I pedal, trying to escape from conversations that cycle back into play. I shift away and guess at the gear that will climb the next hill and fly between stubborn trees growing among rocks. I pedal faster, passing dry creek beds, broken bottles, shadows from spent days, all easier to replace than repair.

POEM STARTING WITH A LINE BY STEPHEN CRANE

By Pamela Sayers

I saw a man pursuing the horizon;  
dancing with a rapier in hand,  
folding the sky and clouds in lacy  
patterns, I was curious and followed,  
falling into an elixir of moon and stars.

-

## AUTHOR NOTES

**Terry Adams** has poems in Poetry (Chicago), Ironwood, The Sun, Witness, Bellowing Ark, etc. His book is Adam's Ribs, from Off The Grid Press, in Weld, Maine. He restored and lives in Ken Kesey's infamous cabin in La Honda, California.

**James Berry**, MD was born in Lubbock, Texas and formally educated at Rice University and the University of Texas Medical School. He now lives in Nashville and works as a professor of Anesthesiology at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, teaching and caring for patients.

**Viv Blake** is a late-developing poet and quilter living in rural France, recently published in The Book of Love and Loss, and in the first issue of Gnarled Oak.

**Brenda Butka** practices medicine and poetry in Nashville. She has had poems published in numerous journals, including The Threepenny Review, Cortland Review, Slant, Alimentum, and others.

**Mark Danowsky's** poetry has appeared in Apiary, Mobius, Red River Review, Right Hand Pointing, Shot Glass Journal, Word Soup, and other journals. Mark lives in a van down by the Susquehanna River. He works for a private detective agency and is assistant copy editor for the Schuylkill Valley Journal.

**Durwood Edwards** is a musician and photographer living near Nashville, Tennessee.

**Kalyn L.P. Gensic** is a visual artist from Ardmore, OK. Formerly, she was the art and poetry editor of The Shinnery Review. Some of her recent work is forthcoming in Ilya's Honey and Neat.

**David M. Harris** has lately been working on poems in the form of letters, and on ripping out the blackberry tangles that have invaded his back yard. He has also finally gotten the MG running, now that it's too cold to go out with the top down. Fortunately, he has learned to accept life as it is.

**Doug Hester** is an academic anesthesiologist who lives in Nashville, TN. In addition, he is also studying in Murray State University's MFA program.

**Ed Higgins'** poems and short fiction have appeared in various print and online journals. He and his wife live on a small farm in Yamhill, Oregon with a menagerie of animals including three whippets and two manx barn cats. Ed teaches creative writing and literature at George Fox University south of Portland, OR.

**De Jackson** might have been a gypsy, or a pirate in another life. In this one, she's a parent of a teen and a tween, and a published poet who's been paid in garbanzo beans, author copies, and one time, a whole dollar.

**Marie Kilroy** has been published in The Driftwood Review, Lummo Press, and Lines + Stars. She graduated from the University of Mary Washington with a B.A. in English and lives in New York City.

**Adam L.** is learning to write without inhibitions and with utmost truth, which he thinks all writing should boast. He will be a student at the new Yale-NUS (Singapore) in the fall of 2015. Before school starts, he wants to publish his first poetry collection.

**Ron. Lavalette** (Barton VT) has been widely published, both in print and online. A reasonable sample of his published work can be found at Eggs Over Tokyo. Ron. blogs at: Scrambled, Not Fried.

**Nelle Lytle** is a sometime poet. Her other interests are God and courtly love.

**Patricia A. McGoldrick** is a Kitchener, Ontario Canada writer. Poems published in anthologies, including: Animal Companions, Animal Doctors, Animal People; Beyond the Dark Room, an international collection of transformative poetry, proceeds to Doctors Without Borders/MSF; Poetic Bloomings--the first year. Recent titles include: Potato plus an acrostic fiction piece, Best in the Bruce! Poem, Girls and Green Apples, was selected as Monday's poem for week of June 2 2014. Patricia is a member of The Ontario Poetry Society and the League of Canadian Poets.

**Sugar le Fae** (aka Zach Matteson) is a prize-winning poet, translator, teacher, photographer, songwriter, and Radical Faerie. His poems, essays, and interviews have appeared in numerous literary journals in Canada and the U.S., most recently in Plenitude and Bear Review. Sugar has an MFA in Creative Writing (UBC) and is currently pursuing his PhD at the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice (UBC).

**Carl "Papa" Palmer**, retired Army, retired FAA, now just plain retired, lives in University Place, WA. He has seven chapbooks and a contest winning poem riding buses somewhere in Seattle. Carl is a Pushcart Prize and Micro Award nominee. MOTTO: Long Weekends Forever

**Amy Pickworth's** poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Black Tongue Review; Dusie; Forklift, Ohio; H\_NGM\_N; New Ohio Review; Smartish Pace; and other journals. Her book Bigfoot for Women (Orange Monkey, intro by Matt Hart) was released in 2014

**William Preston** lives in the northeastern USA. He is a frequent contributor to the Poetic Asides and Creative Bloomings blogs.

**Pearl Ketover Prilik** is a psychoanalyst/writer/poet in no particular order or perhaps differentiation. She lives on the South Shore of NY, in the U.S. and has had a few nonfiction books published, along with handfuls of poetry and micro-fiction, online and in print journals. Poetry is her language of choice.

**Shannon Rayne** is a MFA student in Creative Writing at The University of British Columbia, currently studying poetry with Ken Babstock and Karen Solie. Her poetry has recently appeared in Poetry is Dead, filling station, and "Alive from the Center," an anthology of west coast writers from Ooligan Press. She is currently assembling "Coffee Stained" - a manuscript about coffee culture through the lens of poetry.

**Margo Roby** spent the first twenty years of her life in Hong Kong; the second twenty years of her life following her army husband around the world with their two children; and an overlapping third twenty years teaching at an international school in Jakarta. Now, Margo lives in Atlanta, discovering life after salaried work and focusing on her writing.

**Pamela Sayers** is an English teacher living in Mexico. She traded in her city high heels for Doc Martens and a different, spicier life thirteen years ago. She writes mostly about what she sees going on around her. She now lives a stress-free life with her happy animals (2 dogs, a cat and a parrot).

**Jane Shlensky**, a veteran English teacher, holds an MFA in creative writing from UNC-Greensboro. Her recent poetry has appeared in a number of magazines and anthologies, including The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature, Pinesong, Writer's Digest, KAKALAK 2013 and 2014, Prairie Wolf, and soon in Southern Poetry Anthology: North Carolina and Poetry Market 2015.

**Amy Stumpfl** is a freelance writer, an avid reader and reformed drama queen. She reviews theater for The Tennessean, and is obsessed with her marvelous husband and children, as well as Nashville's amazing arts scene.

**Mary Theroux** lives in a natural-wood chalet in a forest of tulip, hickory, and dogwood in Davidson County, Tennessee. She sculpted in stone and steel for many years but has returned to an early love of writing poetry as a late-life pursuit.

**Sara Vinas** is a worshipper of sun, sea and serendipity (and a good dance beat). Which is reflected in her art and poetry. Her poems have been published in several online publications, and anthologies.

**Mercedes Webb-Pullman:** IIML Victoria University Wellington New Zealand MA in Creative Writing 2011. Published in: Turbine, 4th Floor, Swamp, Reconfigurations, The Electronic Bridge, poetryrepairs, Connotations, The Red Room, Otoliths and her books Numeralla Dreaming, After the Danse, Food 4 Thought, Looking for Kerouac, Ono and Bravo Charlie Foxtrot.

**Pat Phillips West** moved so often even her closest friends asked if she was in the Witness Protection Program. She refused to comment. Her poems appear in Haunted Waters Press, Persimmon Tree, VoiceCatcher, San Pedro River Review, Slipstream and elsewhere.



**Walter J Wojtanik** has been writing poetry longer than dirt. Walt's collection "DEAD POET... Once Removed" has recently been released. He's returned to basics; writing poetry for poetry's sake and steps away from what he calls "full contact competitive poetry."

**Fred Zirm** has an M.F.A. in playwriting from the University of Iowa and has directed nearly one hundred high school plays, but writes more poetry and flash fiction than drama. His poems and stories have appeared in Voice de la Luna, Still Crazy, and The Rejected Quarterly. He lives in Rockville, MD with his wife Robin.

