

The English Department presents
the 2012 Annual

Poets & Writers Anthology

A collection of original composition by students, staff, faculty, and community members at College of the Redwoods. We are pleased to present these original compositions for your enjoyment.

All of this would have been impossible without the hard work and dedication of the following people:

Spring 2012 Student Editors

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Spring 2012

Clara Arndt	“Wind All Night”
	“The Place Across the Road” Prose Prize Winner
Emily Azevedo	“Siren”
Ann Elsbach	“Lullabies”
Michael Bickford	“A Marriage”
Jennifer DaParma	“Fourth of July in Shelter Cove”
Benjamin Green	“Astonishment”
Dianna Heimstadt	“Lesson Planning” Poetry Prize Winner
Doug Ingold	“The Dance Lesson”
Ginny Jaramillo	“Ode to Joy”
Vinnie Peloso	“On the Mattole, June 2011”
Meghan Sills	“Poems”
Bri Stretton	“A Rhyme for the Restless”
Joy Worrell	“As Flowers Go, Goodbye”

Poetry prize is generously sponsored by Northtown Books

Prose prize is generously sponsored by Booklegger Books

Honorable Mentions:

Rebecca Ashbach	“On Storms”
Denessa Cardona	“Inspiration”
Chad Diehl	“Adventures in Speed Dating”
Thomas King	“Corrosive Thoughts” & “November Owl”
Vanessa Pike-Vrtiak	“There Is No Difference”
Jennifer Potter	“This Condition”
Patti Stammer	“The Chair”
Kathleen Hanna Zinselmeir	“How Is a Raven Like a Writing Desk?”

Clara Arndt
WIND ALL NIGHT

Wind all night
In the blue grey day my horse leaps and kicks in defiant joy
And the willow leaves are a school of yellow green fish trembling, flashing
The orchard is abandoning itself to winter
pear leaves yellow on the green fall grass
orange red nectarine leaves, narrow and curved though the tree bears
Small fruit that rot before ripening
And I may take it out with the chain saw this winter
But that is past and future
Now there are windfall apples
Late and sweet,
All the gathered light of the year.

Clara Arndt

THE PLACE ACROSS THE ROAD

The land is there, a creek running along it, the big trees cleared to the boundaries. It looks like forty years ago, or sixty, like a certain version of heaven. Most folks who come here say something about its beauty, and some are even more direct and say they want to live somewhere like that someday. The big old farm house looks exposed right now; they have cut away all of the big shrubs so that they can more easily do the remodel. It is next to the road, a little bit too close, because the road used to end here. There was another bridge, probably down by the old Howard Place. It went out and they rebuilt it here, perhaps an unfortunate choice. The creek jumps the bank down at the old crossing anytime there is a good hard rain, and several times each season it floods the road till the tide goes out.

The land came into a local wealthy family thirty-five years ago. It has been out of work, so to speak, since Sophie Williams died. The wizened old apple trees that hardly bear anymore were planted by her, the old poultry house held her hens. All of the old timers in Freshwater remember her out in the fields hoeing at thistles when she was 80. I would give much to have met her. Her kind, those who know, because there was no other choice, how to live from the land, are nearly gone.

It is owned now by people who make their money selling cars. They know how to work, and perhaps a bit about ranching, but not in the same way the old people did; they buy things new and the way they want them.

I like them though; they seem nice.

There is a man who shares the Williams name, Scott Williams, who cuts hay around here. He and his wife, Loraine, are tenant farmers, and when I called him last year about making hay

in the meadow below our house he knew immediately and simply what I meant when I said it was across from the old Williams place. I wonder if he is in the family; if by descent it could have been his. He could really use it, put it to work; but how would they even pay the taxes? To bear the weight of a modern life it would be degraded. Too many cattle, or a subdivision. The wealth of the present owners is what keeps it from development into rural residential lots, pure and simple. That is what is singular about this place. It hasn't happened yet.

In fall, on the full moon I went out in the night and wandered around the old place. I have been there before, but never at liberty to linger at my own accord, and I wished to go feel the ghosts, to go back beyond the house, back by the big barn and the poultry house, the pens for managing cattle. Everything was rickety; it looks fine during the day but each post I touched felt wobbly, the fence boards weak and rotting. As a working place, it has long been disused. The owners run some calves each year for tax purposes and the perimeter fences required for that are all right, but the rest is falling apart. A caretaker, a mechanic in the family business, lived there with his family for 30 years. The land and house received little attention other than that which kept it looking respectable and inhabitable. The land doesn't care. It has taken the opportunity to go wild around the edges.

In late November, before they were damaged by hard frosts, I walked to the rose bush that grows big and wild in the upper pasture and gathered the red hips for tea. Those that have already been hit by the frost are soft and tangy sweet. The rose grows where a little stream starts, and some nostalgia left it here, along with a few alders further up. I followed the little crick down to where the land borders Freshwater creek, where maple leaves glow bright yellow, orange against the browns and greens. In winter the willows along the creek have lost their leaves, and the lichens on their branches tell their story. I hope the new people love the pastures, the wild

willow thicket along the creek, the falling maple leaves, and do not feel too much an urge to straighten it up.

In Spring I rode my horse around, through a left-open gate to the place where the land slopes down to the creek that in the time of the Williams was full of salmon, steelhead, lamprey eels. This year we have seen one exhausted, dying, female coho. I hope she had a mate; I hope there will be babies. I hope they will go to sea and return, that the center will hold.

The daffodils bloom and the painter has been here scraping. The old house will be made handsome and bright again, and I hope that it is a brightness that can bear its own weight. I hope those who live here will live within their means, and be contented; that their dreams are of the land. In the sunny, late winter day they have planted some new fruit trees to replace the three old apples that have grown too old to bear.

Emily Azevedo
SIREN

Lie with me and watch me sing
what lively eyes sweet music brings
to farming boys, sons of Kings;
my words, my hands, spark life again.

Soft their skin, yet all do bear
bruises, scars, and bloody tears,
we dance, we stumble up each stair
our thoughts dismiss tomorrow's pain.

This moment is a gift to me—
to be the wave upon your sea,
the fruit of your forbidden tree,
the fire to yield your cursed rain.

But barren fields of Spring do know
that dusty boys must learn to grow,
while on the wind their minds do blow,
dreaming of my whispered feign.

My gentle voice brings forth the violence
bursting out upon my absence
Alive and Hot in aching silence—
with sweat, they long for nights I sang.

Ann Elsbach
LULLABIES

I don't have a voice
But the weight of my baby
The tug at my breast
Pulled lullabies from deep inside.

I did sing to my baby:
Israeli lullabies of workers in the fields
French lullabies of a bee falling in love with a butterfly
Lullabies about a deer who turned into a woman

I don't have a voice
But lullabies unwrinkled her brow
Gentled her breath, fused us as one -
Soul descending into matter.

I don't have a voice
But Soul hears with eternal ears.
Sometimes, she still asks me to sing
Lullabies.

Michael Bickford
A MARRIAGE

Creaking, groaning, both as one,
a howl of laughter, crack
of sudden grief, a deep exchange
of growling sobs, an argument of ringing
timber strings, soaring high-hoarse
baritone, then rumbling
bass to shake the ground—

the two madrones had long ago caressed
away their paper bark and pressed
their human-shining skins until
they strained against the heartwood at their cores;

their separate paths to light
a century in mute acceptance
of their intertwining lives, now grown
together at the mid-point of their trunks,
and joined in joy and pain, they bow
as one before the virtuous winds that bow
them each against the other's inner grain
in spires of ascending song,
the children of their roots.

Jenniffer DaParma

FOURTH OF JULY IN SHELTER COVE

They came out of their houses
turned off the televisions for
a couple hours to watch fireworks
to stand there at dusk with
the hills a pale gold and wait
for the world to turn black before
the first one flared up there
spraying magenta and blue
followed by a series of blasts and
high-pitched whistles and lots
of bursting bright white
before they headed back inside
to continue their routines and later
when they recall the evening to their
friends what they'll really remember
is the warm breeze that night
and the perfect crescent moon rising
and pouring light on the waves.

Benjamin Green
ASTONISHMENT

It is not too late:

to observe how
the blankets of fog unfold,
unroll over the ocean to obscure
the lichen-spattered sitka spruce
growing unkempt on
the winddriven, sea-eaten blufftop--

or to know,
as a man knows rivers
he has stood in and fished,
how the rain-worn shape of sky in storm
resembles a blue blade or a wing of clarity,
the spilled light as palpable as smoke--

or to remember the swollen taste
of the sweet dark puddle
at the end of a thorn
we call the blackberry--

or to think on how things reveal themselves,
unconceal, bring to view:
the small creek crawling with salamanders,
the pond scummed with their egg clusters,
the sudden shimmering appearance of trillium,
the awkward creak of geese, southing (always),
the spark of a robin untangling a nightcrawler
from dew-crowned blades of grass--

(but *that* is just another form of dying
in the middle of this green joy)

(and I am strangely grateful for it).

I am stuttered, again.

Dianna Heimstadt
LESSON PLANNING

I sit on the table top
where the kids play Mancala.
We keep losing the marbles, so
the objective of the game has become
to have the first turn
more than anything.
Maggie loses, mutters,
you bastard
then to me, so sweetly,
Miss Dianna, what's that mean?
and the whole room closes in
for the revelation. Yesterday, we covered
female dogs. Before that, what it really means
to be damned. I tell them to
watch your language, then explain:
It's if your parents weren't married
when they had you, if
your dad isn't around
after that part.
It used to mean a whole lot more
than it does today.
Well, this was excitement. The
girls shrieked with delight,
I'm a bastard Miss Dianna!
Miss Dianna, I'm a bastard too!
Miss Dianna, my dad's in jail till I'm your age,
does that make me a bastard? Are you?
Trigger is pulling at my elbow, he sees
a stranger outside.
He leads me to the window
all the kids think is bulletproof
even though I keep telling them
it's only plastic.
He points to Ruby's grandpa who
they see every day
but still always think of
as a stranger.
I reassure him before he replies,
What if he was though, Miss D? Miss D would you
take a bullet
for me?
For this, I have nothing prepared, but I try,

*I would if I could
but those chances are so rare—
more often it's the bullet
that gets to choose.*

So before you question me
for teaching these curse words
to your children,
please consider,
we learn them backwards
before we even touch
on death, that my objective is
to have the first turn
more than anything.

Doug Ingold
THE DANCE LESSON

(This excerpt is taken from Chapter 13 of *SQUARE*, a novella. The story is set in 1953 and is told by Tim Holter, a thirteen year-old boy.)

Like I said, Somner, me and Trauber been together since first grade. I don't remember Somner from first grade. He was there, but he was in the other class. Some years all three of us was in the same class. Other years I was better friends with one than the other. In fourth grade they were both in Mrs. Newman's class and I had Miss. Rich. Miss. Rich was about a hundred but she was a nice lady. She'd been my mom's teacher in fourth grade. She wrote a note on my report card at the end of the year. The note said I could do better than I did.

Seventh grade was hard but fun. Before that us and the girls did the same things. Now the girls had home economics and we had wood shop. We made things with power saws, drills and sanders. I made a tie rack for my dad.

Another thing was recess didn't happen anymore. We had gym last year instead. There's a gym class for boys and another one for girls. In the fall we played softball or flag football, in the winter basketball, in the spring track and field. On rainy days we did calisthenics. We use the boys' locker room and have to dress for gym. Coach Paulsen made us take a shower after every class. He comes around, "Holter, you take a shower?"

One day last winter, Coach told us to not dress for gym. He made us take off our street shoes and line up on the gym floor in our socks. Coach stood on the stage. He always wears a blue sweatshirt, and he's got a whistle that's on a lanyard round his neck.

“Okay, boys,” he said. Coach Paulsen’s voice sounds he’s talking through a bullhorn.

“Listen up. In about fifteen minutes Mrs. Clendenen will be bringing the girls in here for a dance lesson.”

Hearing that my stomach got tight, and I could feel it start to squirm. Some guys groaned real loud.

“I thought we’s gonna play basketball, Coach,” Ted Bonner said.

“The curriculum calls for dance lessons in the seventh grade, and today you’re going to learn to waltz. Even you, Bonner.”

The groans got louder and Coach Paulsen gave a blast with his whistle.

“Now put your feet together and listen up! You are facing the girl and she is facing you. You got that, Bonner?”

“Yes, Coach.”

“Think of it this way. You are standing on home plate facing the girl who is standing on second base. Your left hand is holding her right hand at about the shoulder level. Her left hand is on your right shoulder and your right hand is resting on her waist. I said resting on her waist. I did not say you got your arm around her. I did not say you are squeezing her like a pillow. Your right hand is resting lightly on the girl’s waist.”

“Coach?”

“What Carter.”

“If she’s on second base and I’m on home plate, I can’t touch her at all.”

“Five laps, Carter.”

“What?”

“You heard me. Followed by ten pushups. And that doesn’t mean you don’t keep listening while you run. Each of you boys is going to dance the waltz today with a girl and if you don’t want to look like a fool, you had better listen up. And that means you too, Carter.”

“Yes, Coach.”

“Where you standing, Bonner?”

“At home plate, Coach.”

“That’s right. Feet together, feet apart?”

“Feet together.”

“And the girl?”

“Second base.”

“Good. Where’s your left hand, Somner?”

“It’s in his pocket, Coach.”

“Very clever, Graham. Ten pushups. Where’s your left hand, Somner?”

“Ahh, on her waist?”

“Right hand is on the waist. Left hand is holding her right. What level?”

“At the shoulder, Coach.”

“That’s right, Somner. Straighten your back, Graham. That one does not count. Still got ten to go. Shout out those laps, Carter. If I don’t hear em, you keep runnin em.”

“Two!”

“Okay, now, everybody. Feet together. Put your hands out in the approximate position they would be in if the girls were here. Now, before I put the music on, we are going to go through the steps. In the waltz the rhythm is in threes. One, two, three, one, two, three. So, that’s all there is to it. Three simple steps.

“First step you slide your right foot to first base. Go on, right foot to first base. Second step you slide your left foot over the pitcher’s mound to second base. Third step your right foot steals from first to second.

“Where you standing now, Schwartzentraub?”

“Second base, Coach.”

“Feet together, feet apart?”

“Together.”

“Good, so everybody look at your feet. They should be together. Now, Holter, where’s the girl?”

“Ahh?”

“He’s standing on her, Coach.”

“Three!”

“That’s right, Bonner! He would be standing on her if she wasn’t dancing too. But she’s been doing the mirror image of what you been doing. When you go forward, she goes back. When you go back, she goes forward. So, where’s the girl, Holter?”

“Ahh, out’n left field?”

“I hope not, Holter. I hope she’s in centerfield; otherwise, you’ve dropped the ball somewhere.”

“Okay, Coach.”

“Now we got to get back home. Left foot slides to third base. Right foot slides over the pitcher’s mound to home. Left foot steals home from third.”

“Four!”

“Where are we now, Ellis?”

“We have returned to home plate, Coach.”

“And the girl?”

“She has returned to second base, Coach.”

“Now what?”

“We start over?”

“You start over. Got that Carter?”

“Five!”

“Coach?”

“Yes, Schwartztraub.”

“Isn’t that six steps?”

“You could think of it that way, Schwartztraub.”

I had to dance with Karen Willis. She’s about six inches taller’n me and she kept looking down at my socks. I think she was looking at them cause they were kind of dirty. That’s because I’d already been out checking the trap line that morning and I always wore big old boots when I went out there. She was kinda pushing me around while we danced. Her feet were bigger’n mine and I had to be real careful not to step on them all the time.

Ginny Jaramillo
ODE TO JOY

This must be the time of year
when Beethoven wrote his 9th symphony...
The sky is so full of sun
that it spills on the earth,
pouring jewels of early joy
on every leaf.

Every stalk is pulled heavenward
on radiant strings
strumming a crescendo.
Every petal is an open mouth.

This must be the time of year
when Beethoven's scowling brow
smoothed...
as he heard music
in the movement of light.

Every color stands on tiptoe.
Every luster leaps.
An audience of longer days
bursts into applause.

Vincent Peloso
ON THE MATTOLE, JUNE 2011

For Cindy

You pour some of his ashes into my hand.
I want to swallow them all.
An antidote to grief, a pill to alleviate sadness,
death's anti-depressant.

Instead, I lift my hand to the light,
examine each grain carefully, say his name aloud,
and thrust my arm into the river
to watch the ashes swirl away.

Wiggling my fingers goodbye,
I lift my arm and notice stray grains
stuck in the hairs around my wrist,
the crevasses between my fingers.

Quickly, discreetly, without any thought,
I lick these off, tasting only my sweat
as burned bits of bone dive into me
where he now swims within.

Meghan Sills
POEMS

are unstable
pill poppers that
can't make up their mind.
Often get mistaken
for rambling thoughts
and go to trial for
having sex in public
places. Many have
tattoos and are a
bad influence on
your children. The
last one I saw caught
a ride to Greenwich
Village from a trucker
who reeked of booze.
If you ever see a poem
in your neighborhood,
please call the fire
department to put
it out before it
spreads like wildfire.

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Bri Stretton

A RHYME FOR THE RESTLESS

I am a northbound Greyhound, diminishing
up the 101, leaving your sight.
I am a broke-down rust-dappled Buick
pulling a trailer with all its last might.
I am a settler seeking a simpler land,
emigrant restlessness yearning for liberty.
I am a wayward child christened in flight.

I am a cigarette seeking extinguishing.
I am the lamplighter putting out lights.
I am a house-kept tiger left starving
to paw at the door and crouch for the bite.
I am a train whistle piercing the night.

I am a black-and-white battery TV set,
A laugh track and lantern to brighten the night
Repelling the hungriest of loose tigers,
To whom no one listens, and whom no one likes.
I am the new moon, shining black-bright.

I am the new moon, crouched out of sight
Nestled in darkness, awaiting the pushing
That heralds the moment I'm birthed into light
beaten to breath, cut from my moorings,
I am bloody mother sky, smiling delight.

I am the child who hears not Mother's singing,
but is lulled by the rumble of trains passing by.
I am a southbound Greyhound, reluctantly
leaving the redwoods for valleys of wine.
I am the tiger, pregnant with hunger,
hiding in shadows to birth the mind's monsters.
I am the newborn moon, needing no light.

Joy Worrell

AS FLOWERS GO, GOODBYE

For my resting day
Rest me in the bright yellow flowers of Spring

Daffodils, jonquils, narcissus
Remember my dancing days in the windy fields
My prancing school-girl giddy days
Dancing in daisies
And mustards and poppies
Bring a bouquet of these wild things

And please bring some lavender lilac
Not a prize lilac, elegant but empty of scent
I'd like some sweet imperfect blooms
Grown along somebody's fence

And roses! How I love roses
Rest me in roses
Full and bursting
Long-lasting petals of satchet
Soft, like cool satin lingerie

I would ask for a wreath of white apple blossoms
Fragile on the twig
But their beauty is as brief as breath
Leave them on the tree for maturity

My pungent Daphne will take their place
And last a fortnight
Put a cluster close to my face
And you may hear a sigh
As I say, "Thank you and goodbye"

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Rebecca Ashbach
ON STORMS

I have never enjoyed storms, but somehow, when they were over, I have always been grateful for them. One particular wind storm brought immense destruction to our county. I was twelve when it happened, staring wildly out windows, watching huge, seemingly immovable trees bow to the ground in homage to ninety-mile-per-hour winds. Tangled strands of curly, brown hair flew in my face, blinding me in my search for shelter. My 1960s style house creaked and groaned as if experiencing some unbearable pain or sorrow. Looking back, it is clear that I should have trusted the house -- it was built to withstand any major calamity after the previous owners' last house was carried away in a flood. Nevertheless, the storm was terrifying, and I ran and hid under a table. I sat there, hugging my legs and trying desperately to imagine it away. Raising my head from my knees for a moment, I chanced to see a large piece of wood picked up like a leaf and hurled off of our porch. One of the tremendous pepperwood trees in my yard crashed into my house with a thundering sound, and the whole building shook. The fallen tree trapped our cars, and it took an entire day for us to get it removed from the driveway.

Storms take many shapes. Not only are there storms of wind and rain, but there are also personal tempests of many sorts. Cancer, unexplainable illnesses, depression: all these are storms, too. Everyone experiences them, though some are granted to have fewer and less severe ones than others. But even though they seem terrible, I would not give up the storms I have gone through for anything - they are put in our lives for a purpose: a purpose for good and not for evil.

At age five, I developed problems swallowing, talking, and breathing. At first, my family considered me picky. Sitting at the gold-speckled façade of the kitchen table, I would try to eat, but nothing would go down. Coughing and gagging, I would run to the unevenly tiled, green and

white counter, grab the garbage and spit out the food. Liquids were okay, and occasionally, if it was soft or pureed, food would be possible for me. "What a drama queen," I'm sure my parents thought. "That's probably where her brother got his antics over yams." But finally, after several days of just getting worse, we went to the doctor.

He was a nice doctor, my pediatrician. Rather old with white hair and a friendly smile, he was what I imagined my grandpa would have been like if he had lived long enough for me to know him. The usual procedures were followed. He looked in my ears, looked in my mouth, and pronounced me to have a sinus infection. But after several weeks of pink, supposedly cherry-flavored medicine and no results, he referred me to an ENT specialist. This doctor was not as nice as the first and was rather unused to children. I gagged at the long scope that was down my throat, but he found his discovery to be so interesting that he had Mama and Jonathan come look, too. In my airway he saw a massive chunk of ... something, all clustered around my vocal chords and almost filling my entire throat. He referred me to another specialist at the University of California, San Francisco.

For a year, my mother and I traveled back and forth from Santa Rosa to UCSF every week. Doctors delved deep into their medical studies, trying to find some hint or clue as to the mystery in my throat. Many times I woke up at night coughing, just to find blood on my pillow and coming out of my mouth. Many times I looked wistfully at the food my family ate as I slowly sipped my vitamin drink. Many times I walked down the white, sterile halls of UCSF, my hand firmly grasping Mama's. Many times the familiar, pungent smell of rubbing alcohol and numbing spray nipped at my nose. Many times they sent the dreaded scope up my nose and down into my airway. Many times the nice, young, black-haired doctor peered at the growth with confusion, always with a new doctor accompanying. When I gagged, they reminded me

that it would be out soon, and told me to “say *monkey!*” Then, “Now *ah ah ah ah ah!*” My doctors were giving up hope; they could find no solution.

Then, when I was six, I saw another doctor, in another division. Instead of white halls, these were green halls. No colorful paintings or children's books decorated the room. Green plastic chairs with wooden arms lined the wall and made an island in the middle of the room. They were cold to touch. I was bored and hungry. The green carpet was ugly, and I nudged it with my toe. Like my growth, it would not budge. After waiting for around an hour, I was called in. Now it seemed usual -- numbing spray shot up my nose and brought tears to my eyes, and the horrid scope was sent to its place once again. The doctor yelled at me for gagging while being scoped, but said two words that saved my life: vascular lesion. Vascular lesions are rare. The variety growing in my throat was rarer still. Instead of growing outwards, pushing itself into a lump on my neck, it grew inwards, clustering around my vocal chords and filling my airway. Very few doctors knew about these things, and even fewer how to treat them. If not found and treated, they lead to death. In my case, it blocked my ability to swallow and impeded my breathing. By the time my doctors diagnosed and treated me, I was twenty pounds underweight.

My mother researched my condition and found a doctor who specialized in vascular lesions. Soon, I was sent to Arkansas Children's Hospital where Dr. Milton Waner practiced. The nurses were kind, and the surgeons skilled. The hospital, instead of looking harsh and glaring, looked warm and cheery. The days of white, sterile walls and adults standing like grim giants over my head were gone forever - these were the days of color! Children were all over, and now I was no longer the one person who lowered the average height by a foot. Even the adults did not seem frightening. There I began a series of surgeries that lasted for over a year, and soon, life began to look more hopeful. These were laser surgeries: very intricate, precise

operations that excised the rapidly growing mass. I began to eat and breathe more easily. I could talk and be heard, instead of making the hoarse whisper that resulted from the cluster around my vocal chords. I finally weighed in at forty-five pounds, culminating in my slightly post-mature graduation from car seats. Now, at nineteen, I have very few problems with my condition, although there is still a chance of it once again becoming an issue for me in the future.

The trunk of the tree that fell in the storm six years ago still lies on the ground in our front yard. It was far too large to be easily removed, and now I look on it as a tribute to past troubles. The massive root structure stood bolt upright in the middle of the yard; it was obviously dead. As with me, there seemed little chance of survival. But slowly at first, and then sprouting out in green majesty came hundreds of little trees. Pushing through the hard bark of the fallen giant and thriving in the new light, many little pepperwoods now fill my yard with green, young life. This is the purpose of storms.

Denessa Cardona
INSPIRATION

What inspires you?
What inspires me?
Picking up a pen isn't nearly enough drive
and as that bottle of whiskey might keep your poetry
alive

I want to know what inspires you?
What inspires me is that moment
when the dam in my mind breaks
and waters of creation can finally flow out
and I promise you

man, I shake
when I can end that drought
I'm free again

Letting my mind bend
as light does in water

the air my son
and the waves' shift, my daughter

What inspires you and
what is your definition of creation?

Is it the chemistry of your waters?

Is it a quick passing sensation?

Is it a dream forgotten only to be dug up late in the day?

Like there's no expectations,
it just occurs

during a hot cup of coffee or orgasm déjà vu

You respond, "Make sense woman!

What inspires you?!"

I'd say you're too good to be true

and nonsense or not knowing is
the only truth

Chad Diehl
ADVENTURES IN SPEED DATING

My college days were numerous, as I went to the local community college for about 8 years (hey, setbacks are allowed) before getting my AA. Only twice did I notice they had put on a speed dating event. I'd never heard of speed dating before. For those of you who don't know what speed dating is, it is a little game of two to three minutes sitting at a table and talking to the other person the basics about yourself and getting to know that person, in turn. You can't mention your name; you have a number tag on your chest to identify yourself. Then, when time is up, you switch to a different table and repeat the process. After each visit of the person you sat with, you write down that person's ID number if you liked them and what they said, or not, and vice versa with the person about you. If you and that person have both written each other down after the tallies have been added up onto a master list, yours and that person's phone numbers are given to one another. I hear it's big down in the cities all the time. Nowadays, whenever I think of speed dating, the first thing that comes to my mind is Steve Carrell from *Forty Year Old Virgin* with the speed dating scene.

Talking about it and being easily convinced by coworkers and friends (as I usually am among other things....), I went to one of the speed dating sessions, along with another friend of mine. Sure enough, I met someone, but didn't get any numbers. The girls stayed at the tables and the guys moved around when time was up.

It was held in the cafeteria, and it was rather warm for a March evening. I saw a girl I had in my math class one semester back, so I sat with her and made small-talk for a bit while waiting for more people to show. On occasion I looked over to see my friend chatting it up with a girl a few tables over. Eventually more people showed up and things got started, each round lasting

about five to seven minutes or so. I'd say there were probably around ten to twelve tables set up for the event, and just about every one was taken. By the time I got the hang of it, I hadn't made any progress on which numbers to write down for possible future dates, and the evening was almost over.

The last session of playing Duck-Duck-Date at the tables was very odd for me. I looked around to see if there were any tables open, and sure enough, there was one. However, it wasn't the table I was expecting to get. Some of my sister's friends were there and had been sitting at tables, and I had intended to hit at least one or two of them up.

Alas, I didn't get my chance, even for the last "date."

I looked at the last table that wasn't taken, and sitting there was a cute little blond girl: skinny, small, with piercing blue eyes and a very innocent look about her... until you got to know her and found the devious side, which I knew she had from personal experience. As sweet and nice as she was, there were a few things I knew about her that would not jive together for the two of us. Some of her friends I knew, and I would have much rather gone out with one of them (or two or three for that matter).

I inwardly sighed and sat down, suddenly with a weird, awkward feeling in the pit of my stomach. I looked at her; she looked at me.

"Hi..." I said, stretching out the syllable, looking up at the ceiling every once in a while, eyebrows arched and waiting for her to say something.

"Hi..." she said right back, in the exact time-delaying tone of voice.

"How are you?"

"Good," she replied, and looked at me. "And how are things with you?" She looked around, as if she was expecting someone to be watching us.

I shrugged, not knowing what else to say. “Eh, ok.” I wasn’t nervous, but what else could you say in your (then) 23 years that you haven’t already said to your sister?

“Good” was all she said. I noticed she had a finger going around in a circle on the table, trying to--obviously--make the *most* of the two minutes of our “date.”

The only thought I had going through my head was, Damn, why couldn’t it have been one of her friends?

So, yes, to complete the evening, I dated my sister for a full two minutes.

The sad thing: I didn’t even get her number.

Thomas King
CORROSIVE THOUGHTS

At night, corrosive thoughts come out to play.
The night's their renaissance from years gone by.
I pray the morning comes quickly to eschew them away.
Can peace be restored to where I lie?

At night's their renaissance from years gone by.
A frenzy ensues to eat what they will.
Can peace be restored to where I lie,
as thoughts erode pathways getting their fill?

A frenzy ensues to eat what they will.
I see what looks like endless hues of gray,
as thoughts erode pathways getting their fill.
I pray to feel the yellow beams of day.

I see what looks like endless hues of gray.
I pray the morning comes quickly to eschew them away;
I pray to feel the yellow beams of day.
At night, corrosive thoughts come out to play.

Thomas King
NOVEMBER OWL

An hour before the day's last light,
and lasting all through the night,
an owl was calling me—an owl?
Onward I follow with a cowl;
 November mist's intense tonight.

Torrential fog is hard to fight.
Toward the call I push forthright.
And t'ward me—at me—flies the fowl,
 calling me as fall keeps falling.

The damp November air does bite,
and in my conscious the calls alight.
The epiphany my thoughts afoul;
t'is more than a Great Horned Owl,
reminding me past twilight,
 calling me as fall keeps falling.

Vanessa Pike-Vrtiak
THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE

He was surprised when I disrobed the contents of the room

And I will let him remain surprised.
Trailer trash can spark, even without practice.

He will tell me that, as an audience member,
I shook and shanked the subconscious out of him
leaving him penniless. and like a beggar
he pressed his notebooks to my lips
hoping to transcribe predictions of next season

and I will kindly remind him
that there is no mystery to being a poet
that from me to the dirt on this floor
there is no difference.

he must know that I have found a way
to tremble with the scorched influence
of the beginnings

there is no difference
from bed rock to lava,
to the crusted flow that reigns sideways
blood diamonds and all,
from continents calling for thunderstorms
to starving mountaintops bleak with snow,
from polluted rivers to being buried anonymously
there is no difference.

human beings strike together
like loaves of bread to the starved
and when the moment comes

it comes.

From here to Providence, Rhode Island
I will decorate my tiny fingers
in train cars and they will trace
yesterdays along a roadmap
leading me to your door.

And even in the rain, in the sharpest

most ugliest of places, I will recite you poems,
as I have done for years, waiting for you to hear them.

knowing what it means when you finally do.

Jennifer Potter
THIS CONDITION

For years you've hung,
clung to your hinges,
creaking and rattling
with the pulse of
other motions.
What manacles are these
that fasten you
to a stark,
white-washed wall?
A tasteful frame,
faulty screws,
boards set firmly
by matronly hands.
She hovers in your way,
having her own.
Those polished fingers leave
prints on your worn handle.

Patti Stammer
THE CHAIR

It was a beauty in maroon Naugahyde, a post-war, first home purchase, as advertised in the 1949 issues of *Good Housekeeping*, *Sunset*, and *Look*. It was a La-Z-boy recliner, chosen to complement the soft gray sofa and the forest green carpet.

I watched *Howdy Doody* and *Flash Gordon* in that big chair until dad got home and wanted to sit. After dinner it was *Texaco Star Theater*, and Uncle Milty, laughing at things I didn't understand. It didn't matter; I was snuggled next to my dad in his big red chair. A family photo shows me holding my baby sister in dad's chair. Over the years it became a member of our family, photographed and pasted into albums along with the relatives, kids, the cats and dogs. The wall colors changed, the other furniture changed, but dad's red chair was always the same. It moved four times with dad, and the fifth time without him.

Many things mystified me growing up in the '50s. I was a long on curiosity, short on common sense, and I asked a lot of questions. As kids we pondered the origin of that big red chair. Naugahyde? We were certain that somewhere a Nauga had given its life for a comfy spot for dad's butt. I didn't know it was a brand name for vinyl until I studied marketing in college. The 'History of the Naugas' is now on the internet.

In 1958 we moved from my parents' tiny first home, to a new house on a cul-de-sac. The red chair was relegated to the family room. The living room was perfect and off limits to anyone except company, prom photos, and the most perfect of the two Christmas trees my mother decorated. One tree was silver balls and aluminum branches; it matched the white furniture and the silver stuff on the mantle over the fireplace. The real tree with its dead needles, kid

creations, sticky popcorn, and cranberry chains kept company with dad in his chair. The living room was sacred ground. No cats, no dogs, no kids.

I was seventeen when I left home for Colorado Woman's College to become a refined young lady. Most of the lessons learned from those two years were by my parents; never let a shy violet off the leash and expect the same to return. I'd changed faster than things at home; mom was still a nurse at Stanford, my sister was growing tall and cute, and dad was still in his chair, usually with a beer in his hand.

After my sophomore year, I came back for the summer to the third home of the red chair, an apartment with a swimming pool. I remember nothing that summer except swimming and writing love letters to a boy in Colorado. I wrote in peacock blue ink and dotted the I's with little hearts; he sent me lines from *The Prophet*. I got poison oak on the backs of my knees from wearing short skirts and the only chair I could sit in was dad's. Calamine lotion didn't stain the old Nauga's hide.

This was also the summer I realized both my parents were drinkers. My sister, still living at home, realized it sooner than I, and took the brunt of the fall out. I was off the leash for good, ready to roam. I moved to San Jose with my roommate from CWC and started college again. But neither of us really wanted to go to school, so we quit and took dumb jobs, ate 15-cent McDonald's hamburgers, and learned how to party. I didn't see much of my parents until the holidays rolled around. That's when I learned they had moved again. This time into the manager's house of the Vagabond Trailer Village, a place my dad helped build when he mustered out of the Army in 1947. New house, new rugs, new paint and furniture, and the big red chair with dad's butt firmly planted in it. Mom now had a recliner of her own, hunter green, to match the maple furniture and ruffled plaid lampshades. They had switched to martinis.

I moved a lot in the years between 1961 and 1966. Everything I owned fit in the backseat of whatever car was available. When I moved to Arcata, my stuff came on the Greyhound, and I found my way around Humboldt State University on roller skates. My family was far away, I was on my own, paying my way through the last years of school. When I turned 21 in 1965, my mom gave me her 1959 Opel, and I had wheels for the first time. My life, politics, and friends changed in ways my folks couldn't understand, even if they had been able to see me through their blurred vision. I didn't see them either; I was as selfishly blind as a twenty-something girl looking for a husband could possibly be.

I met a nice man, married, and had a daughter. My sister married and also had a little girl. The photos from our wedding showers, parties, and baby showers all had something in common...dad's big red chair. Sometimes it was just the footrest sticking out in the corner of the photo. Lots of details about my dad were lost to my myopic self interest, but I have visions of shoes resting on that recliner, marching a parade route thirty-six years long: Hush Puppies, loafers, cordovan wing tips, house slippers, canvas deck shoes, and short little man-boots with zippers on the side.

I wish I had known my parents better, been less self-involved, hadn't thought I knew more than they did about everything. I wish I'd asked more questions and taken their advice more than I did. It wasn't until I became a parent, with my identity defined by parenthood, relegated to the role of an appliance like the toaster, or the blender, that I started to notice my parents. I began to understand how my walking in the door and plopping into a chair, unconscious of whatever they were doing, could actually be annoying. I also began to listen to faded, unrealized dreams that came from the two reclining chairs in front of the television, always mumbled into the ice cubes. Even with my litany of regrets, I knew I would never spend

my life in front of a TV in a big recliner, no matter how tempting its big pillows and soft welcoming arms.

When mom died, not much changed until he got sick. For reasons I've never understood, he chose to go back to Tennessee to die. He drove east in a big Winnebago, and I drove north with his red chair in the back of my pick-up. The chair lived with me for many years, in a huge work space in an old creamery where I escaped; I made art, collected junk, and never had to clean up.

When I finally moved from that space after 18 years, I gave the chair to a young couple beginning a new life together with love, and not much else. I told them the story of the chair and pointed to the small hole in the right arm, made by a pencil jabbed into it by either my sister or me...probably me, as I was older and stronger and that old Naugahyde beast was tough. It was the only flaw, except for the places worn smooth by my dad's life. My gut turned over as the chair drove out of site.

I curled up in a huge, lumpy, faux-leather recliner not too long ago while shopping with my daughter...my granddaughters wedged in there with me. I must admit it was like lounging on huge soft bosoms; mommy-arms rolled us into a ball of giggles. It was pretty good. Oh, how that La-Z-boy temped and comforted my aging body, and tried to lure me to the checkout counter.

I chose instead an Italian leather sofa as soft as a baby's butt and the color of Snow White's apple. I love this luscious red sofa. Yesterday my sister e-mailed me a photo of her beautiful grandsons, snuggled in a dark red, recliner with their granddad. The title on the photo said, "Think it's genetic?" "No," I said. "Not genetic. It's cow hide."

We are both Naugahyde-free zones; No Naugas have been harmed for our comfort.

Kathleen Hanna Zinselmeir

HOW IS A RAVEN LIKE A WRITING DESK?

As I sit at my own writing desk
And watch the birds outside
I know
It is the journey taken
With both wing and pen
The rising above
To look at life
With another view
The darkness
Of ink and wing
That illuminates
The earthliness
And the desire
To transcend.