

# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME  
30



#7

# Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 30, #7

We shall wander gingerly  
down the stairs and sit  
in the corner by the platform  
which awaits our turns.

You Will Always Be There — Barbara A. Holland  
Hudson Heritage Festival at Kingston, NY  
September 8 & 9, 1979.

# WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 30

Number 7\*

Designed, Edited and Published by Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel  
Thomas Perry, Teaching Artist

## c o n t e n t s

|                       |    |                            |    |
|-----------------------|----|----------------------------|----|
| Scott Owens           | 4  | Linda Umans                | 14 |
| Donald Lev            | 5  | R. Yurman                  | 21 |
| William Corner Clarke | 6  | Hal Sirowitz               | 23 |
| B. R. Strahan         | 10 | David Jordan               | 25 |
| Karen Douglass        | 12 | <i>Cover, frontispiece</i> |    |
| John Grey             | 14 | <i>and endpage are by</i>  |    |
| N. A'Yara Stein       | 16 | <i>Barbara Fisher</i>      |    |

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## Paradigm — Scott Owens

We shall wander gingerly down the stairs,  
careful to keep our hair in place,  
clothes unwrinkled and properly arrayed,  
having dressed to suit the occasion,  
whether confirmation or bar mitzvah,  
graduation or wedding, whether getting  
asked to dance, speak, take our turn  
at the podium, childbirth or death, recognition,  
promotion, resignation, the final unctuous  
memorial. We sit in the corner  
by the constantly busy platform, rising  
or falling, expectantly waiting our turn.

## I Kept Missing — Donald Lev

I kept missing this little road I was to turn down on.  
I would go past, turn around  
and overshoot it again and again

but I finally got to the place  
which was a temple dedicated to the gods  
I should have been worshipping  
when instead I was turning aside  
looking at things not particularly holy.

I have waited for the thunder and lightning  
to subside, the heavens to relax their anger  
before I embarked on this,

which is the poem  
so real it scratches.

## Memento — William Corner Clarke

Yesterday is forgotten, but then  
It had no outstanding features  
Nothing to get caught  
In this particular  
Fragile net of memory —  
The mind of this old woman  
Now dozing by the fire

The subtle threads are slowly fraying  
You can sometimes see them parting  
In the vague surprise  
Of her waking gaze  
Things take place like whispers  
Just out of hearing  
Sons are strangers  
Her house, another's home

Yet somewhere  
In her dressing table drawer  
Among the years of odds and ends  
And piles of dead  
Relations' photographs  
There lies a scented Valentine  
Preserved inside a scented envelope  
Postmarked Paris 1934

Most things get smaller  
As the years pass by  
And so many tiny details  
Of the darkening days  
Just slip right through the holes  
But somehow this  
Just stays too large to lose  
Becomes more fragrant  
As it fades

## Slippers — William Corner Clarke

Those old black  
Shapeless slippers  
Just keep hanging on  
The elastic snapped  
The velvet scuffed  
The soles worn thin

Cast off to sleep  
They lie forlorn beside her bed  
Like twin familiars  
Living only for the hour  
When they'll be called to service  
Once again

And then I see her shuffling  
Full of suffering  
From room to room  
The slippers slouching  
Round her feet  
Huddled close to keep at bay  
An ancient cold

## A FALL OF LEAVES — B. R. Strahan

*"As a generation of leaves, so is that of men." Homer*

The people with the accents,  
the ones who "came over on the boat",  
are all in "homes" where they gossip  
about children's lives  
and forget their own.

Malka complains about her son;  
"He never visits, never 'phones,  
only a card on my birthday and *Yontif*."

Elsa dreams of children playing in snow  
and long hours at the Singer, her sweat  
mixing with miles of sewn cloth.

In her mind *Golda* still lives  
in a row house in Flatbush  
with Jack and the scent of Sabbath.

At times they play cards, Mah Jong,  
bingo. . . The numbers are called:  
Some win.  
Some lose.  
Many are taken but few return.

## Domino Trail — Karen Douglass

Essay in flesh, skin staples  
and a gunshot wound. The boy  
pulled his own trigger. Living  
felt like a whipping, like

constant hunger. The bed,  
tame as a sleeping cat, and  
big hard words block the view—  
love and remember. A newborn

woke and stretched, back arched,  
fists to his head, mouth open,  
ready. Not ready now. Get up.  
Rinse off. Go on.

A domino trail of hours  
in a hospital pavilion.  
Daylight stacks its minutes,  
knocks them down again.

## Your Missing Child and the Rescuers — John Grey

You see them in the way  
you've never seen them until now.  
It's as if the plumber,  
the electrician were just  
ghosts before  
and here are their real selves,  
their bones, their flesh,  
plucked out of the nothingness  
of this town,  
marching off together into the woods.  
You can hear them in the distance  
busting through the bracken.  
shoving branches aside,  
stomping down the snow.

You can put faces  
to all that noise  
whereas in their ordinary lives,  
their dull jobs,  
they were as faceless  
as the wind.

Even the ones who do not  
find the missing child  
will have found something  
in the moon-drenched woods,  
in the fields and farm-lands.  
They will have found their way to you,  
lost to them all these years.

## The Possession of Tulsa County Library — N. A'Yara Stein

Whipped by rain and wind, Mexican migrant workers  
sing high like coins dashing in a rich man's pocket.

Clumped bags of clothes as legacy, they smoke  
cheap Indian trader tobacco while gaudy crows  
careen against the silvering sky.

They do not weep because the universe is full  
of stolen and murderous conspiracies. It's romance

...First off, let me say I was not cheating...

as we push each other through revolving doors.

Their hearts dance still: secret, tall inside membranous walls  
passing wonder without predictable surprise.

I climb slick steps curving above this tired fountain  
where old men come daily to own the second floor,  
pull chairs into a wide circle to grunt gossip  
and spit delicate streams of brown juice into Styrofoam cups.

...The best work, I recall, was in the oily sun of Canute, Oklahoma...

Amid thick stories of mavericks and miners,  
there is no honor in frosting, fluff, or formality.  
They are afraid of capsized rowboats, nocturnal seas,  
drunken captains, and sunken dreams.  
Fingers over my mouth, I rise again,  
find young blacks clustered over morning papers.

...Everyday, make the light of the universe work for you, turn it into life...

Failure should generate a cooler exterior,  
feel like running water, or falling rain.  
Suitcases packed and ready between their feet, they pretend  
Wall Street waits, expect that important phone call  
any time now. They smell of cinnabar, waterways,  
and international flights. On the top floor, solitaires stare,  
braced for polar rain shifting briskly in from more westerly states.  
Goethe, Krishna, Hume and Buddha snake around;  
they shuffle away the long hours in spades.

...never found evidence to put those O'Banion boys or me away for good...

Three vagrants drink gin, recite numb words  
back to me in one of my own images,  
try to make some meaning with the smallest movements of mouth.  
The strongest taste is what they're after,  
expecting the worst and not getting it —  
the subtle formality of a bud that never blooms.

I think of their heads heavy-soaked in reverie  
that hang like echoes on a mid-winter day,  
how we all root in distracting, shifting patterns,  
follow with envy's eyes the fury of falling water.  
We don't ever wish to stop these luxurious, engulfing spirals,  
these cuddly and ruthless musings.  
I say, let's put faith in all that makes men smile;  
believe in the minefields called desire.

## Those Who Love You Can Take the Train — Linda Umans

An acquaintance friend is dying  
Charlotte is dying  
I am trying to make her an inch more comfortable.  
Her inconstant constant companions  
have spent her last summer away  
*can't bear to see her in that state*  
still claiming credit as friends.

I am carrying mango juice  
papaya mango breakfasts  
a favorite meal remembered  
from a long ago trip to Costa Rica.  
Now the luscious color beams from the bodega wall.

Each station  
A rapid transit dreamtime  
Sense memories dancing  
Always coming back to where I am  
Waiting for my stop

I join the community as dedicated visitor to *Miss Holton*  
and I bring flowers too.  
I fuss with the irises and pompoms,  
talk to her and the television presences expounding from the screen  
when she has stopped speaking.

I adjust her blanket.  
The vocals of other islands are background music  
where summer is ebbing into autumn  
in upper island New York.

## The Rebel Poet — R. Yurman

kicks spilled coffee grounds  
along the kitchen floor  
and calls the heavens down  
upon his daughter's head

Dinner with wine and guests  
the lamb chops he never got  
enough of as a kid  
His wife cooks he serves

"Happiness is so bourgeois" he says  
"Make your statement then die  
gunned down on some deserted street  
revolution pulsing in your blood"

Chasing his lost *authentic voice*  
he rolls a shopping cart stuffed  
with toys across a parking lot  
the family car idling in a numbered stall

## The Barbara Holland Shuffle — Hal Sirowitz

To put it in your imagery,  
there was not much 'Ginger'  
in your steps. You walked  
like a wooden soldier  
controlled by a child  
who lost in  
whatever game she started  
out playing. Your gait  
was slower than a turtle  
on an off day. But you  
could still toss out  
those images. We'd meet  
at a coffee shop, the same one  
that later barred you

for leaving blood  
on your seat. You  
didn't know where  
the blood came from.  
But you knew where  
your images came from—  
Directly from your brain.  
If only the body would behave.

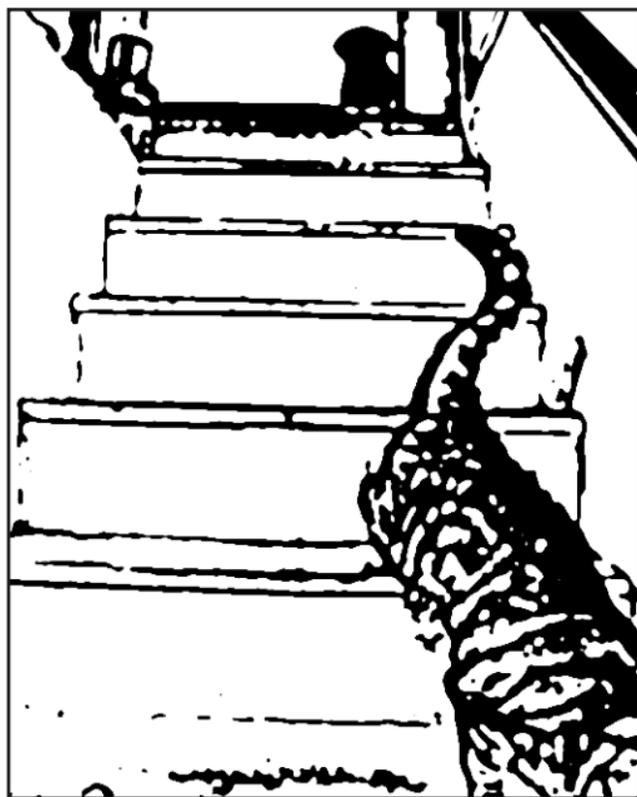
## The House on Wrong Way Road — David Jordan

Misheard a song line,  
thought it spoke  
of the house  
on Wrong Way Road.

Even with wrong ears  
it was a right song.  
I have lived years  
in the house  
on Wrong Way Road.

It's the house you reach  
when you turn left  
in life where  
you should have gone  
straight. Maybe you veer  
toward beer, crosstabs,  
sweaty sex, away  
from quiet child, cool wife.  
After you tire  
of hangovers, begin  
to fear your speeding  
heart, learn sex betrays  
us all, you wind up  
at that house  
on Wrong Way Road.

It's a big place,  
set back from blacktop  
in dark-leafed  
trees. Sunlight seldom  
comes. It's lonely  
there. Only you, ashes  
of what was, shadows  
of what might have been.



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