

# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

27



## Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 27, #6

Around his Tomb let Art and Genius weep,  
But hear his Death, ye Blockheads, hear and sleep.

Samuel Johnson  
from *The Vanity of Human Wishes*

# **WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream**

Volume 27

Number 6\*

Designed, Edited and Published by Richard Spiegel & Barbara Fisher

Thomas Perry, Admirable Factotum

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To Enid on Her 63rd Birthday - June 28, 2006 — Donald Lev

Again there were already stones on your monument when we got there!

We got a break in the weather. Now rain resumes.

Yesterday I stopped in Brooklyn Heights,

to say goodbye to my old shop steward — cabbie turned  
public defender Bob Zuss — you met him at least once —  
and of course knew his poet brother Mark.

He was born same year as you, '43. He outlasted  
his cancer three more years than you did yours.

There were other ex-Dover drivers there. One of them  
had written a poem we published in *Poets*. It's a  
tiny, tiny world — especially as I ran into Les  
Weichselbaum on the street outside the church.

I didn't tell Barbara for reasons you know well.

I asked Barbara if she believed in God.

(I had just been reading Larry Bush in the new  
*Jewish Currents* relate how, in spite of the  
allurements of Reconstructionism, he  
had decided to stick to atheism.

Barbara said she didn't believe in God,  
but did believe in Heaven.

I said that would be good, if there was  
a Heaven, to know you were there.

She said she believes in reincarnation too.

You could already have been re-born.

If so, who am I writing to? I feel  
you in my heart, dismissing  
this question.

cancer, too.

**don't call him out his name — will inman**

some fifty men living protected  
from the world, from themselves,  
recovering from heart surgery but most such  
still smoking, fed three meals a day, given  
prescribed meds or taking them on their own,  
some for physical conditions, some  
for mental imbalances — he assists in managing  
the lot.

some are old — he keeps them  
waiting in line for meds, aggravating bladders  
getting them anxious about wetting their pants,  
one or two will complain. he takes it  
personally, blasts them for lack of control, for  
blaming him. he forgets they're in his charge.

he has cheerful greetings for each  
as they reach him for pills, they  
for the most part respond in kind, though some  
want to row, he may not suspect how bitter some  
may feel. he has the power. for some, their  
situations are self promoted, for many  
they cannot help being where they are, he  
needs to understand how they feel, this tribe  
of bitter old men. Amazing they can be cheerful  
as most of them most times  
are.

## Trade — Anselm Brocki

"Don't miss the hangovers, shakes, or stomach pains," Willard says to Harvey in a swivel stool-chair next to him at the All-Nite, the heat lamps above the order window making their whiskered faces younger, less weathered, "but I sure do miss the business of sherry all day and hard liquor with women at night."

"Hell, I was real busy all the time, panhandling for sherry, odd jobs for the hard stuff. Had me a real trade, lifting bottles or glasses slow day in and day out. Had something to do every minute, gettin' drinkin', gettin', drinkin'.

"Now I'm clean, there's big holes in all my days and nights. Just me inside my head, looking out with nothing to do or think."

"Yeah," Harvey says, staring ahead blank.

Samantha Haiku — Joan Payne Kincaid

*August 24, 2006*

old Siamese  
taken out doors  
to memorize

aware as ever  
the dying cat  
studies a bee

lying in the grass  
nearly at an end  
she memorizes

old cat in the grass  
taken outdoors as a gift  
observes everything  
bees, flowers, birds, wind, sunlight  
to take along with her

nearly at the end  
aware of everything  
memorizing

## Traveler — Joan Payne Kincaid

I could hear the whistle of trains. . . A traveler is hurrying towards the nearby station; and the path he is taking will be engraved in his memory by the excitement induced by strange surroundings, by unaccustomed activities, and the farewells exchanged beneath an unfamiliar lamp, still echoing in his ears amid the silence of the night, by the imminent joy of going home.

*Marcel Proust*

Now the old computer is dying  
some of the best years you wonder if it's too hot  
in the 90's to turn it on  
no planting now it's June you knew it would be *too hot!*  
The Island is hot as any island anywhere and the Alaskan dream starts again  
she remembered Bayview Avenue full of life and darkness  
and the eternal harbor its boats that were a Grandfather's obsession;  
so hot she is spelling things dyslexicly  
the children were babies and the animals

if you sit still as a corpse and don't move it's bearable  
be a little teapot like the child's song the ice cream truck plays all summer;  
she could not reach out to someone who was no longer there so early  
passing the block causing the Doberman to *lose it*  
the Doberman limps arthritis it seems only weeks since he was a pup

the way they live up there in enclosed building and no one can get in or out  
through the drifts and ice they say is melting away penguin polar bear seal  
she is in her mind one with them with inescapable relationships bumping into  
each other in halls and around corners the way they do on all the Star Trek space  
ships lost or gone for decades  
the man in the computer store warned it could explode above one hundred

that entire morning gone to tending failing animals who keep on loving  
as much as when they were little; trying to complete something before the PC  
crashes every day . . . as if the brain will lapse along with it;

there had been dental appointments (without anesthesia), lunch with a college chum in from Colorado, a visit to a sister long having been put off due to time lack,  
even so, despite the humid temperatures the day speeds by with such choices as write or submit rarely time for both

Where were you in May when planting was essential beyond a kitchen garden? No one came to visit . . . and won't this summer either too hot for New York City so who would see the flowers anyway? But they were bought as tiny things in May, their futures set on the porch: if you just watch the Yankees losing streak and let the living room a/c do its thing it's almost a renewal or study the *future* canvas she seemed to disappear at the age of six months from both sides of the family, of course it was they who did the withdrawing once her father died, they considered her a rock around the neck of a once small-town glamorous mother who flapped her way through life, the Charleston and Lucky Strikes all the way to cancer. Once she rose from a cocoon with a surreal burst of energy to plant some seeds

that summer you thought she might make it . . . what was it . . . petunias, portulacca she loved and knew flowers well though when he passed everything was let go; (still she mopped with a cig and cooked to provide an oasis for my unlikely reality); in the best of times she preferred her own head

and other than such appointments there was the way each day vanishes like clouds floating away or water down a drain . . . or that awesome shape shifter who dissolved into water . . . caught in a pail;

after they move she seems to be reading one hundred greatest books for years borrowed from the library dreaming she was Scarlet or some creation of Mann or Dostoevsky after he died, she never really came back; there are so many telling one how to sing, where to go, when to perform, how to survive . . . the local Countess' scholarship, suddenly from Welfare to silk; the artist always beholden one way or another nearly un-survivable; there was the commute to a settlement school on the lower east side, Juilliard teachers, the setting sun late spring with opera characters madly in love

made her lonely and passionate to be there, sitting there at in the dark in awe of the local Italian girls who didn't have to study what Mimi or Violetta were saying before she even knew romance she observed herself move with amazed detachment . . . as if some thing was saving her from danger . . . a child alone on trains, walking through strangers . . . a certain light around six thirty at night brings it all back vividly as if it were now;

She decides not to read Proust before writing because everything winds up being memoire. Maybe at dusk you could take a few zinnias out and pull up the for-get-me-nots that crowded out May.

**three weeks — Michael A. Flanagan**

work and home,  
meals to cook  
and eat, he  
had to find a  
stapler, attach  
checks to bills,  
find stamps, find  
the mailbox, the  
television was put  
on sometimes at  
night, the radio  
in the car, he  
had a child and  
a wife, a tele-  
phone that rang

three weeks he  
failed to find  
time to look at  
the sky, the many  
shapes, the great  
dark clouds moving  
with great speed,  
the oceans of  
blue with white  
streaks and pur-  
ple and pink, the  
moving sun  
until  
it sinks and is

gone, twenty-  
one days buried  
without honors,  
other things,  
but not the sky

## On Reading Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" — Joanne Seltzer

War used to be a guy thing, and the dead  
members of a club endowed by Cain  
and Abel, characters with nameless wives  
who shared the grief but not the pageantry  
nor the celebrity that follows triumph  
nor the post-traumatic stress of peace.

War used to be a chess game lost or won  
by boys deployed as pawns that marched in step  
with fife and drum, banner high until  
blood spilled on color-coded uniforms  
and cries of pain turned into death rattles  
and birdlike silence hovered overhead.

War used to be romantically perceived by Byron and his like before they found quietude while volunteering for intrusions, forays, raids battles, wars and other forms of bellicose expression and other triggers of adrenaline.

War used to be one cannon pointed at another, eyeball at eyeball, amputations, tombs of unknown soldiers, row after row ID'd from name tags found at Gettysburg and pastures bloodied less: Fredericksburg, Antietam, Shiloh, Malvern Hill, Bull Run.

But modern war is fought without the smell  
or sight or sound or feel or taste of death  
by soldier boys and soldier girls recruited  
for the key to heavy-duty doors  
that open on the new reality  
of bodies bagged and flown far from their fall.

## At Death's Door — Bill Roberts

I have cut my hand badly  
Playing at the forbidden place  
On the way home from school.

I start to run home, crying,  
Dripping blood all down my front,  
Cursing the all too familiar sound

Of a noisy ambulance  
That races past me in the street,  
My mother applies a fancy handkerchief

From her purse to the cut  
And walks with me across the street  
To the Emergency Room entrance

Of the old Georgetown Hospital,  
A blue-faced child in a nurse's arms  
Is being carried from the ambulance

To the same door we seek  
I have watched death go through this door  
Too many times at my young age,

But this is the first time I enter.  
The thought of my own mortality  
Descends suddenly, and I begin to pray.

**Late November — Robert Collet Tricaro**

*For BB*

Only the rose's gray thorns  
remain. The eyes  
of jack-o-lanterns, spent  
and fallow, stare. Curbside  
maple and sumac have turned their  
smokey, ochreous faces  
away; their acid sours the air.

No passion in dawn.  
I hear twilight  
in daybreak's song.

## Sentence — James Penha

The banished poet Li He Qing  
mourned bitterly  
the death of his beloved crane  
for no man's exile  
should outlast  
the symbol of longevity itself.

## Courtney Lee Weida

sometimes we need things to be whole,  
even hatred.  
in my head (heart?) i deny this,  
but it \*was\* my father who  
first taught me to use  
the pottery wheel.  
i remember only my own hands  
turning clay  
and delicateness swirling.

sometimes i imagine him  
centering things for me  
on the wheel so i could hold  
the clay.  
still, i usually deny  
this happened at all  
thinking instead about  
what didn't happen,  
what he didn't do.

## A Chaucerian Scholar — Edward J. Rielly

He translated Chaucer, cried  
at the plight of Indian chiefs,  
came late sometimes to class,  
left early from time to time,

knew more literature than one could  
shake a stick at, almost always  
seemed red-faced, and his hands  
rose and fell like frail sheets

of paper. We knew well his affliction,  
the demon rum if we wanted to be  
poetic, but never smirked, complained,  
or cracked jokes at his expense.

He was a kind and gentle man, only a little failed as a priest. I last saw him in his hospital room. He was grateful, as I was, but for different reasons.

## Hard Evidence — David Michael Nixon

So far,  
there is no way  
to know what the dead know,  
but I know a way to find out —  
join them

## Instructions To Be Followed at the Time of My Death — Ron Singer

The service is optional.  
Cremate me,  
that would be best.  
Have a party  
in the living room,  
but, for god's sake,  
no matter how cold the day,  
don't make a fire!  
Not only would that be  
in dubious taste,  
but our faulty chimney  
would smoke out the guests.

*On the Film Thank You for Not Smoking — Donald Lev*

Practically a one man show  
By an acrobatic humorist —  
a Mark Twain on ice skates.  
What a performance!  
He touched all the bases.  
Who ever told anyone that tobacco was good for you?  
Or booze, or horseplaying, or schmaltz?  
I wonder if he would take a job fronting for  
My favorite advocacy organization: DDAM —  
Drunk Drivers Against Mothers?  
A good show, I enjoyed immensely,  
written by William Buckley's son;  
how could I?!

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