



Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME
31

#9

Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 31, #9

He loved to listen to Sousa marches,
loved to watch the high school band

Ida Fasel

ALWAYS FAITHFUL

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WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 31

Number 9

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I Was At Gramma's – Ruth Moon Kempher

upstairs, looking out the bedroom window
(everywhere blossoms of lilac, lily-of-
the-valley) almost June, when
as I thought of you, O

the Junior Band marched by
practicing, down Howe Street
for the parade to the neat graves –
not like our family's up on Italy Hill –
to the new downtown place –

one little girl in a granny gown pranced
knees up, showing new sneakers
banged her cymbals with lust
out-of-school almost —
she was proud. They won't go
far as the old place, on the Hill
that Band, or the vets in cars —
it's too far, past trees and cows
but someone puts flags there, anyhow.

Anxieties – David Chorlton

Several thousand years ago
I heard a twig snap
so I ran
to save my life. Ever since

I've listened for the sound
and remembered the way
the creature looked around
when I had gone. I still live
in his eye,

still think of him waiting
although I moved into a city long ago
and survived

through purge and inquisition
when my name was top
of their lists. I was lucky
in the wars, but I listen
for the air raid warning from two lifetimes away.
Now I'm anxious

when I leave the house
that the gas is on
or the garden hose is running
and I won't be back for days.

Is there enough coffee to last until weekend?
Will the stain ever come out of the new shirt?

Worry, worry. Hurry up
or we'll be late. And if the power
fails in summer
we're going to burn the way
the medieval priests told me I would.

The more nervous I become
the smaller the causes are.
Evolution's had its way with me
and left a need
for something to look out for
while the diminishing world
spins from darkness to extinctions.
It isn't a twig I hear cracking

but trees falling like heretics
in a forest refusing to pray
for its own survival.

The wild animals

I once ran from
have nowhere to run to themselves.

Worry, worry. Hurry up.

It's getting late
and there's no medication
to help, and yet I never

give much thought to the Apocalypse;
it's all I can do
to hold myself together

when I can't quite remember
whether I locked the door
to keep the demons out.

Commencement – Scott Owens

They called his
name.

He walked across
the stage,

then marched down
the aisle,

his high school
band playing

Pomp and Circumstance

but everything
seemed the same.

He wasn't suddenly a
writer

or architect,
surgeon or engineer.

He vaguely knew
that something

was ending, but
felt nothing

beginning, only a
sort of standing

as if in the middle
of an intersection

with endless roads
leading away

and all the lights
red at once.

Tsidibumbum – Bill Freedman

Grandpa
sat daybreak till he drooped to sleep
in his padded rocker, propping,
like a country shack its chimney,
his smoke-black skullcap,
raising signals to his God.

On the rocker's arm,
he drummed parched fingers
like beginning rain. Tsidibumbum,
he would chant and whistle,
music in a sleeve of air
severed from the garment
of their beating,

as though he tunneled back
to childhood, the cow's
soft teat like fingers,
his father praying like a windstorm
while his mother swept,

when what he knew
was that he'd mixed
the Wheaties and the Corn Flakes
yet again, so thoroughly this time
it would take me years
to separate their unsweetened
wrinkled faces from his own.

Learning to Read – Bill Freedman

What moved me, in Newark,
reading Dick and Jane,
was grandma's farm.
Spot was good; the dog could run.
Dick and Jane were good;
they were curious, easily distracted,
and perceptive.

In the morning, Dad smiled
and waved his way to work
he loved no less than Mom.
At 8AM she was fresh and glowing in
her apron,
one grateful azure eye on Dad, another
on the Hoover, whose whirr and whirl
she sang to, like Cinderella
ash and sibling free.

But it was Grandma's farm
that tightened chest and throat,
widening green as paradise and envy
when we turned the page,
stopped the engine of the '47 Dodge
and stepped outside.

Memory blurs. I don't recall
If Grandma spread her pinkish pudgy arms
to greet us at the milk-white
picket fence red peonies peeped through
or in the field. But I recall those arms
and feel them, her soft bunned hair
zoned and ordered as the puff-cheeked
orchard trees behind her, appled
like a sky of scarlet stars.

We visited the cows and milked them
as I did this dream brought home in pails
my mother's mother soaked her feet in,
turtle shelled and twisted
as a mob-mocked mandarin's unbound.
Eyes pacing in a cage of iron blue hair
Stared at fossil hands and finger roots
green of envy page, and paradise
concealed beneath those trees

Ants Hauling Ass in La Paz – Jari Thymian

Heard the news Who found this katydid? I have six strong legs
. My cousins are on the way We come from a long line of strong
jaws Let me carry for a while Take a break Heard the
scouts found this one What if we flip him over? I've dreamed of
wings this size. (Scuffling feet) Whoops Rotate positions
. Carry word up the hill How much farther? Enlarge the
tunnel entrance How far? There'll be a feast tonight I love
wing chips

Wabuska at Dawn – Arthur Winfield Knight

I had a professional driver take me and Kit to the airport in Reno when her mother died so Kit could fly back to Pittsburgh for the funeral. I walked Kit into the airport at five in the morning, both of us exhausted, so she could catch a 6:30 flight. Terry picked me up when I came outside again.

It had been less than twenty-four hours since Kit's sister-in-law called, saying Helen died, but it had been coming for months. Helen checked herself into a hospice three weeks earlier.

On our way back to Yerington, Terry and I stopped at a small casino in Silver Springs. She had coffee with Bailey's Irish Cream and I had a glass of Chardonnay and a lone guy watched TV and drank beer. Terry put a few quarters into a slot machine while I sat at the bar, talking to her. It must have been six a.m. You could drink twenty-four hours a day in Nevada.

Coming through Wabuska, I could see the steam from the hot springs geyser hundreds of feet into the air and the sky at dawn was a vivid yellow and orange, it was magnificent, but the steam vaporized on the road so it was treacherous.

I told Terry, "I'm glad you're driving," then I slumped back into my seat, and neither of us said anything else.

I Know the American Dream – Wayne Hogan

Yes. Oh yes. The
American Dream. I *know*
the American Dream.
I know the deep sleep it takes
to be in, know how you
can start off really very small
and still grow to be very tall,
know that in the American Dream
you can walk into any drug store
in America and order
a pineapple milkshake made
with real ice cream

topped with a fresh bright-red cherry,
its stem still stuck in it,
know that in the American Dream
there's always a Will Rogers
to say all politics is applesauce,
and that he's still not met a man
he doesn't like. The American Dream.
Yes oh yes. I *know*
The American Dream. Its long, wide
Mississippi rushing to the south,
its people, the people, yes,
going west on Route 66, stopping
in Santa Fe along the way.

Forever Stamps – Arlene Mandell

Somewhere in a steamer trunk rests my father's stamp collection. I recall glassine envelopes filled with cancelled bits depicting turquoise-colored fish and coconut palms. Some stamps with faces of kings or queens. Others with German words.

Six decades later stamps adorned with the Liberty Bell–Forever Stamps—cost 44 cents, USA FIRST CLASS. Peel off the backing, no licking them anymore.

After his day in the wire factory Daddy would sit at the kitchen table, using tweezers and tiny hinges to paste them into his book. Sometimes we looked up the countries in our atlas, places far from Brooklyn, like Ceylon and Mozambique.

Though nothing is forever, images of squares with exotic birds still cling, as though held by translucent hinges.

One-Man Band – Bill Roberts

A light mist doesn't dampen the concert
under a bridge by the Seine,
pausing en route to yet another art museum
on this snappy cold autumn day.

He leads the band, plays all the instruments,
alternately and sometimes simultaneously,
familiar French tunes, with violin,
accordion, harmonica, trumpet, clarinet,
flute, tuba – yes, tuba, too! – and piccolo,

time kept with a bass drum he hammers
with busy left foot. Oh,
he sings softly when squeezing his
ornate squeezebox or
bowing his gleaming Stradivarius.

No one else stops for his concert,
beating us to the artwork.
I place a ten-Euro note in the maestro's cap.
Using his entire mismatched orchestra,
he plays the American National Anthem,
as we stride off arm-in-arm into cool mist.

High School Band Practice I – Carol Hamilton

Every school day,
September to June,
the air is swatted red, white and blue,
hulked up with shoulder pads
and squeals of American girls,
full of astonished tire treads left behind,
full of chrome and long legs
and all the trappings necessary
for survival here.

High School Band Practice II – Carol Hamilton

Today the notes punch through fog,
pugilistic with as little coherence
as the addled ex-fighters logic.
The drummers are emphatic
and from this distance
their rhythms have the sound of sticks
beaten into submission. The referee
cannot pull them apart. But the bell
will ring soon, the match will end,
and someone will be declared winner.

Performance – Carol Hamilton

Each year they line up
with hyper military precision,
march in lock step
right off the field,
the drummers never missing a beat,
their totem calls crisp, assertive,
Then row on row, all uniformed,
they vanish into the milling,
waiting crowd of sideliners.

High School Bands at Mardi Gras – Carol Hamilton

We went to a tacky West Bank parade, the garish floats painted with last century's colors, faded. Plastic glasses were tossed along with beads, the empty shell sounds rolling to us across concrete. The bands, though, stopped to dance, gyrate, hip hop. Some of the girls fell out of their scanty, spangled costumes, and there was even a midget majorette. The boys were all in black. They frenzied up to their music, the drums beaten with a vengeance, beaten to death, a wild angry battering against the silence of empty houses, their echoes slammed out to fill the dead streets lost to mold and paperwork and a long, long season of mourning.

When My Father Died – Margo Roby

he did not pass
from existence;
he only ceased
to be

present.

He was not here
one moment
gone the next,
but remained

vanished
into shadowy recesses,
waiting for me
to discover
his reflection

leaving –
transitory and uncertain –
him.

When my father died

I did not lose him
from my life;
he only ceased
to be

visible.

He was not here
one moment
gone the next
but remained

faded
in the acid bath of memory,
waiting for me
to come upon him
bones picked clean

leaving—
shadowy and insubstantial—
him.

The Last to Leave – Robert Cooperman

It was the kind of party
Marion would've loved,
the last to leave, noshing
on leftovers, draining a last
glass of wine, gossiping
or arguing politics.

For like those parties
when we were young
there was good music,
food, booze, sweet reefer
to dream everyone back
to reminiscing about her,
when we'd all been young
and knew for a certainty
we'd continue in that blessed
state, forever.

But Marion was a presence
only by her sad absence,
the reason everyone
had taken off from work and assembled
at a friend's apartment
after the graveside:
to eat, drink, toke, dance
a little, as Marion
had so loved to do;

and most of all,
to remember

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