

# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

26



## Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 26, #4

the high cost of  
living isn't so bad if you  
don't have to pay for it . . .

*the merry flea*  
*from ARCHY AND MEHITABEL*

# **WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream**

Volume 26

Number 4\*

Designed, Edited and Published by Richard Spiegel & Barbara Fisher

Thomas Perry, Admirable Factotum

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Waterways is published 11 times a year. Subscriptions -- \$33 for 11 issues.

Sample issues — \$3.50 (includes postage).

Submissions will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self addressed envelope.

Waterways, 393 St. Pauls Avenue, Staten Island, New York 10304-2127

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<http://www.tenpennyplayers.org>



## The Salt Eaters — James Penha

*In South Tapanuli, Sumatra*

the family  
shares a dinner  
of rice  
and salt  
a few grains each  
of rice  
and salt  
a main course  
of rice  
and salt  
saved  
to last  
a treat for  
the family

## Cinder — James Penha

The child has  
heart to crawl  
among the hills  
and suckle at the heaps  
of refuse remotely  
cuddled by the kindness  
of them better souls  
that know just  
what babies need.

Richard Kostelanetz

C o m P a t R i o t  
K i n d L e d  
B a n K r u p t c y

## Summation — Joan Payne Kincaid

In the security  
of lower middle-ness  
years of accumulation

oceans of dirt  
blind windows  
clothing-pile mountains  
a table where bills  
and documents dine  
the only possible course  
after silent screams  
is run

## The Jewel Thief — Fran Farrell Kraft

He cut quite a figure with his chiseled features and neatly trimmed white beard, set off by his elegantly cut tuxedo.

None would have guessed that he spent many of his days pruning bushes, trimming hedges, cutting grass and edging a garden path.

Among haute couture with faceted gems in pierced ears and on manicured fingers or lifted necks, he was a cut above.

None would have guessed that he had spent many nights relieving rich of well-cut baubles, had he not cut a deal for a 'tell-all'.

## The Mitt — Bill Roberts

I stuff the leather glove  
under the front of my sweater  
and walked slowly  
out of Woolworth's. Cool.

My very first glove,  
a first baseman's mitt.  
My position was third base,  
but I was willing to switch.

Then I realized the star  
of our little guys' team  
the cleanup batter,  
played first base. Exclusively.

After much stomach churning,  
I returned to the store,  
walked swiftly to the counter  
where I had heisted the mitt.

I looked around and, as before,  
saw not a single adult close by,  
then removed the glove and  
placed it on the counter,

I ran from the store, dejected,  
knowing I'd have to borrow  
my neighbor's old-fashioned mitt  
for practice that afternoon. Crap.

## Fine Liquor of Philosophy — Harvey Steinberg

Fragile plum-skin ornaments in pulp:  
inside, the pit keeps  
hard, centered, impervious  
to bruises and worm-breakfasts.

At the tavern of plum-wine, sips  
of "turned fruit" thin memories of home,  
my face so deep in the cup  
I can't hear shaking boards and voices nearby.

It's my choice, isn't it,  
to stop thinking big about nothing, to join  
cronies cultivating laughter,  
to put my small seed among theirs?

I will go to Chen and say,  
"Your second son wore a blue sash yesterday;  
where does he get the fabric?"  
I don't have to ask this question, but I do.  
I'm not buying that cloth anyway.

Is my insistent mingling a keepsake of the Way?

In the corner, a keg of plum wine holds the answer.

## Family Snapshot — Lee Evans

A forty-eight-year old man  
and a one-year-old boy stand  
on a sweltering backyard deck  
in the good ol' Summertime.

One looks up with silent awe  
at the other, who is demonstrating  
forty-eight years of expertise  
hip-swinging the pink Hula Hoop!

I stand before the snapshot,  
and wonder how this scene will seem  
when forty-eight more hoops of years  
turn round, and stand him here like me.

## The Shaman Who Sells Today — Eric Weiskott

will die tomorrow. Monks will chuck his casket  
off the black rock cliff. *The sea, they say,  
will roll him over the edge of This World.*

But today I wait on a wine cask  
in his back room. On shelves, one million jars  
shelter sea-glass pebbles from the musk of myrrh.

Pastels flow  
from pebble to pebble, palettes  
for one million futures.

Robed in purple, he enters,  
gestures, murmurs *One million tomorrows*  
*and one today*. The nearest jar

holds one jag of obsidian.  
I memorize the scalloped edge,  
the curve of noon light on the frozen rolls.

I gaze off the black rock cliff, shaking in the blast.  
He's behind me, shouting *For fifty dollars, sir?*

## Plus Shipping — Anselm Brocki

"It's barefaced electronic robbery," Mr. Clean, the well-off retiree, says to Iron Mike at the counter of the All-Nite. "I called Panasonic. They want \$170 plus shipping to fix my answering machine without even seeing it."

"I don't have that problem," Mike says slowly, without adding he sleeps in the alley.

"I'd have to be stupid to send it to them when new ones are going for sixty," Mr. Clean says. "I could hear it going inside, something spinning, but no result. It's got those special Torx screws underneath and little warning stamps about losing the warranty if you open it, like you're a criminal if you work on your own stuff."

"Pshaw, I had that bottom off in three minutes and lifted off two little mother circuit boards, and there it is—a tiny broken belt, letting only one wheel spin, thin as thread, making a circle no bigger than a fat lady's wedding ring.

"Putting the mother boards with those little pins you have to line up just right took me two tries," Mr. Clean

says, eyes excited, jaw tight, hands acting out the boards being replaced, "but I can hear the sound."

"Did you put in a new belt?" Mike asks.

"Just have to find out where I can get one."

"Bet they charge you \$170 for it," Mike says.

## **New Job — Anselm Brocki**

Saturday morning  
1940. Fifty cents  
an hour as a laborer  
for a contractor. Big  
improvement over  
thirty-five cents  
for pressing pants  
in a men's store.  
Outdoors driving  
a pickup truck  
in the San Fernando  
Valley to a row  
of five hip-roofed  
bungalows finished

yesterday. Easy work.  
Just clean out under  
the houses so they'll  
pass inspection  
and load the truck  
with the scrap heaps  
by six o'clock tonight.

Slide out the 16-inch  
galvanized vent screen  
in the foundation  
and wiggle on my back,  
nose almost touching  
the fresh pine floor  
joists, dragging along-

side a cardboard box  
to pick up 1X6 and 2X4  
cuttings, crumpled  
lunch bags, wax paper  
from sandwiches,  
and a hip-shaped  
whiskey bottle or two  
that fell down during  
construction, making  
a game out of how many  
wiggle-trips to the vent  
each house will take,  
proud, happy to have  
a good job and able  
to pay my own way.

## Pens — Gale Acuff

I found this pen on campus. I find pens almost everyday. I walk with my eyes on the ground, not out of shyness but greed. Well, not *greed*—opportunism, perhaps. 23,000 students on campus forgetting, abandoning, neglecting many items of interest. I clean up after them but I'm not custodial help or waste management—I'm a teacher here. If a student comes by my office and has forgotten a pen I open the top right-hand drawer of my desk and

*shazam*—pens of all types: ballpoint, fountain, and markers. And all colors: I've found black, blue, red, green, yellow, pink. I could make rainbows or spectra. And pencils—I don't use them except to fill in the tiny circles on midterm and final grade sheets, or when the office doesn't give me enough for student evals at the end of the term. A student who comes to my office and doesn't have a pen gets a free one. Call me generous. *Here's your pen back*, one says. You may keep it, I say. I have plenty. *Thank you!* he says. Or she. I recycle them, the pens, I mean. I'm writing this now

with a little gem I found this morning  
on a very long walk across campus. I still

haven't been to the university  
Raptor Rehabilitation Center

—I've been on this beat only a few weeks  
—but I have a campus map and know east  
by the sun in my face as I amble.

Head south means turn right, through student housing  
now housing no students—renovation.

Down Hemlock Street, where Socrates lives—that's  
a joke—then right on Wire Road. I come to  
something called the Facilities Complex  
and walk through the parking lot—it's big and

I need the exercise. I see this pen  
lying there for the taking. I take it  
—I rescue it, I salvage it, I save  
it. Not far away is a penny, Abe's  
profile reflecting sun. Like John Wilkes Booth  
might have said, I couldn't miss it. Pocket  
it (right pocket) and I proceed onto  
the front lawn and a large pond. I want fish  
at the edge and swimming away from shore.  
A frog, a turtle, a duck would be good.  
I walk halfway around the pond and spy  
a trail to the left and off through the woods  
I go. And there's another pond back there.  
The morning's spiderwebs try to paste me.

I take off my cap and wave it before  
me, back and forth, up and down, breaking them  
before they get in my face and creatures  
can crawl down my shirt and compete with my  
body for this space. Shug Jordan Parkway  
must be behind me now. I turn my back  
on the water and cut through the trail-less  
woods and slide down an embankment and head  
for the raptors. I wonder if they have  
dinosaurs. *Velociraptors*. Ha ha.  
I'm looking for Raptor Road. Hell is it?  
Where the map says it ought to be it ain't,  
only a dirt road ascending a hill  
but the entrance is blocked by a steel gate

and the two signs echo *No Trespassing*.  
I'd climb over but I'm not tall enough.  
Tomorrow I'll return, I tell myself.  
I'll ask someone where the Center is. I  
need to ask a person who's like a map.

Technically, this pen isn't mine. It  
belongs to someone else, though I'd thought when  
I stooped to pick it up that it belonged  
to itself now; that's what loneliness is.  
I wonder if I couldn't sight the birds  
of prey because I took something not mine  
to take. I wonder if I put it back  
just what the chances are that it will be

reunited with its master, the one  
who gripped it first between thumb and finger  
and choked out all the secrets I won't know.  
Will it accept me as its new handler?  
It's not my pen but I'm all it has now,  
except itself, and if I don't wield it  
is it still a pen? Am I yet a man?  
It's too late now—it's taken me this far.  
And it's not sanitary, picking things  
up from the ground, but it's not like I put  
it in my mouth. When I got home I rinsed  
it off and didn't write with it until  
it dried. *A Bic Atlantis*. That sunken  
kingdom I'd also like to find. I'll be

walking along one day and looking down  
and there it will be, if I could walk on

water. Actually, this pen's almost dry  
but I've got others. I never buy them  
anymore—I just go for a walk and  
they appear, full-blown, like old what's-her-name  
sprung out of the head of Zeus. *Athena*.



photographs by  
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