

# Waterways:

## Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME  
31



# Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 31, #5

Lately the architect in me is emerging,  
building up a tolerance for  
the way the world is going, not my way

**Ida Fasel**

HARMONY IS A HAPHAZARD THING

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# **WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream**

Volume 31

Number 5\*

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

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393 St. Pauls Avenue circa 1920

## **Rosamond — Bill Freedman**

At five or six, my daughter  
had a friend, she said, named Rosamond,  
forty miles or more away and notable  
for the unobstructed freedom of her life.

Rosamond could have  
whatever toys and dolls she wished for,  
ate only when she pleased,  
left what did not please her on the plate.

and stayed up nights  
until she tumbled softly to the side  
and was eased, with love and tenderness, to bed.

Her great grandfather,  
whom we visited one Sunday every month,  
had a friend named Solomon, he said,  
who walked, if bent and slowly,  
bed to table, back to bed,  
ate unaided whatever he was fed  
and slept long afternoons and nights.

Almost everyone I speak to lately  
has a friend named God.  
I never say so, but I know him well.  
Also, through his wistful stories and descriptions,  
his small friend Rosamond.  
A helpless witness, free of guilt, he says,  
in a town I'd like to visit  
if only, though he never will, he'd let me go.

## Complaint — Scott Owens

The world won't let  
me write  
except in snatches,  
moments  
I steal between  
driving my daughter  
to school, teaching  
classes,  
buying batteries  
and soap,



spraying yellow  
jackets that made  
a home between  
outside walls  
and now have found  
a way in.

I'd like to have  
Stafford's discipline,  
every day rising  
early,  
writing before the  
worries

begin, or Updike's  
freedom,  
starting as the sun  
rises  
and looking up to  
see darkness  
descend, but for  
most of us  
there are sleepless  
children,  
tireless jobs,  
laundry  
and dishes, lawns

that need mowing,  
homes that want  
repair,  
and always the  
worthy cause,  
leaving us little  
time  
or energy,  
inadequate focus  
for what we know is  
almost there,  
leaving us nothing  
but this.

## **Fishing Trip – Christina Cole**

Your aunt Kate  
went fishing one Saturday  
when she was five years old.  
She wrapped the line  
around her hands,  
and stood on the bank,  
hoping that she would feel a bite.  
Then she stepped in the creek –  
the only fish  
she almost caught  
were the minnows

rushing  
between her legs.  
All of the sudden,  
it began storming:  
the rumble of thunder  
and flashes of lightning  
must have startled your aunt  
because they found her  
three hours later,  
floating in the creek,  
the line still wrapped  
around her hands.

## Remodeling — Thomas D. Reynolds

Carpenters strip away  
Layers of paint and wood  
Down to the beams.

This family room  
Was once an elaborate set  
Filled with props,

The backdrop of my best work,  
Inhabiting the role of patriarch  
With dignified vulnerability.

The longest running production  
On the block,  
Ten years, over 3,500 performances!

Actors playing the family,  
Though new to their roles,  
Emoted like veterans.

An occasional off night occurred,  
Resulting from repetition,  
But the chemistry was often electric.

Timing,  
A bit off in rehearsals,  
Became sharp and familiar.

“An overall worthy production  
of a worthy chestnut!”

I raved in my quiet moments.

But now as we survey

The ruined set,

Years stripped away

Like so much tacky wallpaper,

Flower print upon flower print,

Thick with paste,

Familiar lines ring hollow,

Gestures self-conscious,

Brows moist with flop sweat.



Family members  
Stand in the wings  
As if unsure of their cues.

The polished veteran seems  
Once again the understudy  
Desperate to find his mark,  
Stumbling through this matinee,  
Strained and exhausted,  
Forgetting the words.

## **designs — Jennifer Scobie**

a complex blueprint  
to engineer this mighty bridge  
from me to you  
from past to future  
from giving up to having faith

construction is beginning soon  
on this noble design  
and once the connection is made  
the illusion of safety  
is gone

the bold and daring  
can reach inside  
my zone of comfort  
to rattle and shake me

and a new design  
is required once again  
to find novel comforts  
from within them

## Century Farm — Catherine McGuire

The river fog dampens his shirt  
as he walks out — four a.m. The front cedars  
are solid; the rest is mist — an acre of woods obscured.  
As the red barn looms, the whiskery corrugation  
of old cedar planks, he glances again  
at that rotten corner brace. Fix it — right after haying.  
But he's been saying that for years. Cows  
begin their deep, thrumming moan.  
Never fails to stir him, that sound, like keening  
in some ritual bovine grief. They just want grain, he knows.  
The barn's dusty inside is like switching off the fog.

The pungent alfalfa-and-cow-piss tang as rich, in its way,  
as the incense at Mass — though he'd never say that.  
But it heralds his life's rituals as much as brass censers do.

Three years old is his first memory — sitting in a wet cowpat, crying.  
Monster face with flaring nostrils scared him backwards.  
Dad laughing, bent double. Hay-breath cow sniffs him gently.  
When he touches the velvet soft muzzle, he is soothed.  
The cliff-dive of beef prices brings him back — each year  
he comes closer to losing this place. News of billions  
dropped in pin-striped laps brings a gut-wrenching rage.

Bastards. Just drop it, his wife keeps telling him. What can you do?  
But them in their annual new limos don't know shit:  
how land becomes part of you, like genes.

His great-granddad's headstone in the northwest corner, neatly fenced.  
His new neighbors pulled up the daisies,  
planted rhodies down their front path. Pretty.  
But the prairie sun will crucify them this summer.  
City dudes wanting store-display yards,  
instead of working with the earth. They'll learn.  
Unless they have deep pockets to spend on the  
plant-and-discard blossoms — all that's wrong with  
consumer gardening. Then he thinks of Dave's six-acre spread —  
zinnias and marigolds, wholesale. To each his own.

## Dead Branch — William Corner Clarke

Broken  
But not quite severed  
The big dead branch  
Just won't leave the tree  
Moving lifeless in the wind  
It outlasts the season's leaves  
Defies the winter's storms

Each morning,  
At my window desk

I look to see  
If it has fallen yet  
But still it swings in limbo  
Black against the blue

No longer charged by sap  
To reach the edges of the sky  
It sometimes almost  
Touches earth  
Before the wind torments it with  
One more  
Denial of a final rest



I'd like to end  
Its crazy gibbet dance  
With one swift mercy blow  
But I also want to see  
Just how long it's going to hang  
It might even  
Outlast me

## The Life of Plants — James Penha

*The life of plants is based on earth (for their roots grow downward). Their transition from integration to disintegration depends on the rise and fall of yin and yang. — Chang Tsai (1020-1078)*

The lake within the Chinese garden flows  
as if many springs  
and rivers have found there  
home if not yet rest  
and I too  
when you slipped (the doctor  
used the very verb on the phone  
to me) into  
something penultimate.

I tried to steady myself,  
my free hand on the rim of a pot  
holding a bonsai older than the two of us  
put together —  
eddies of swirling currents: I wanted you  
back; I wanted it  
over; I wanted you  
even in a coma in  
my hands there  
not here not even  
in this perfect Chinese garden.

## Hollow Point/Aunt Amy Has Dementia — H. Edgar Hix

In the ending. Again.  
Rabbit watcher witnessing  
the wilting of a mind. Her mind.  
Her significant mind.  
Melting down to cedar bedding  
fit only for sleeping.  
Old food. Shitting.  
Breaking mirrors is good luck.  
Good luck breaking this mirror.  
Weeklong hours.  
Making sure of meals.  
Meds. Not falling.

Already fallen. I jump at the sound.  
Freeze. Prepare for the hollow point.

## HBO Special — Donald Lev

You know the house next door to me  
that's been vacant for years  
'cause they wanted too much money for it?  
It's been sold.  
My new neighbors,  
the Sopranos,  
move in tomorrow.  
I guess they'll want me  
to do something about my lawn.

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