

WATERSHED



WATERSHED

Volume 30, Number 1

WATERSHED

Volume 30, Number 1
Fall 2006

Cover Design

Kris Morton

Publication Design

Andrea Larsen

Editors

Lara Carbonaro

Maritza Castello

Mary Cook

Erik Ellis

Lucretia Fligner

Eric Hammond

Jenna Marsala

Marissa Nunn

Julie Ricks

Joseph Sims

Carolyn Whaley

Faculty Advisor

Beth Spencer

The editors would like to thank Carole Montgomery and the students in Visual Communication Concepts, Fall 2006, for their excellent cover design proposals.

Watershed is supported by Instructionally Related Activities funds awarded by the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, Sarah Blackstone, Dean.

Watershed was produced using Adobe InDesign CS.

© 2006 Department of English,
California State University, Chico

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Windswept	Amy Jirsa	1
Drought in the Hinterland	Jeffrey Alfier	2
I Was the Wrong Way	Jennifer White	3
SF Alleyway	Sean Melody	4
Poets I Have Known	Amy Jirsa	5
Jump	Shelby Goddard	7
Between Rains	Kelly Reeve Smith	10
Untitled	Sharon DeMeyer	11
Confession Number Who's-Keeping-Count from a Self-Avowed Menopausal Lesbian	Suzan Jantz	12
Montenegrin Cow	Pat Domek	14
The Eagle Means Life: an Apache Belief	Nancy Talley	15
Give Me Something Nasty	Jennifer White	16
Deciduous	Shannon Rooney	17
On the Bus, Belgrade	Pat Domek	18
Coming About	Ken Fries	19
The Nothing	Don McCrea Hendrick	21
Untitled	Cara Fox-Galassi	22
The Hour of the Wolf	Nancy Talley	23
I Am My Father's Daughter	Jennifer White	24
Ndikudwala	Suzan Jantz	25
Untitled	Bob Garner	26
The Call	Bob Garner	27
Time Is Not Always Trapped In a Bottle	Jennifer White	28
Summertime Passing	Lara Gularte	29

WATERSHED

Grip	Paula Scholtes	30
Transition	Jennifer White	31
Chronic Déjà Vu	Shelby Goddard	33
Untitled	Cara Fox-Galassi	38
Drenched Air	Kelly Reeve Smith	39
Untitled	Sharon DeMeyer	40
Storm Light	Jeffrey Alfier	21
“-less”	Martin Svec	42
Red Flag Alert	Suzan Jantz	43
Reflecting Venus	Evan Peterson	44
Proclamation	Shannon Rooney	45
Belgrade, Serbia	Pat Domeck	47
Putrefacere—	Jennifer White	48
Heroes’ Square	Pat Domek	50
e.e. cummings Sort of Day	Amy Jirsa	51
In the White of Winter	Kelly Reeve Smith	52
Contributors		55

Across the acre, heady blows the wind.
A leaf attempts to hide a small toadstool,
but one by one protections now are thinned
and screaming whines the painful, twisting ghoul.

Along the ground, a stick spins with her ghost
and ventures out upon the open field,
a giddy dance which ends with clink and toast.
From wind one cannot hope to be concealed.

It beats into the shingles slick with sleet
upon the roof of this old lazy barn
whose aging red cannot hope to compete
against the wind's unyielding, tempting yarn.

Above the stable, skies churn in and boil
and huge indecent clouds start to uncoil.

DROUGHT IN THE HINTERLAND

Jeffrey Alfier

This drought scourges fields to wrench almanacs
of sweat from farmers. Wind frays down to rasps.
Hawks patrol the dearth to target parched mice.
You must be thistledown to love this day,
to ride stilled currents of a soundless air.
That birdsong's just a sparrow singed loony.

Weeds find ways to thrive. Austerity reigns
when farmers spare locks to prop barn doors shut
with crossties from abandoned railroad spurs.
Their wives pare down to halter tops. I'll stare
unrecanting if they parlay a smile;
cheers to the strong one bending for a rake.

In heat, my mind holds court for chimeras:
tractors in the distance appear so small
you swear they were toys in Wiesbaden once;
hay bales are ghosts of ice age ruminants,
huddling their calves in the shadowless light.

Men call our need a *regenlander* here—
squalls that whip dry earth to wild green again.
A sole white cloud won't intersect the sun.
We need gunmetal grays swollen with storms,
their winds slamming doors like cheated lovers,
rebirthing the uplands to lush harvests.

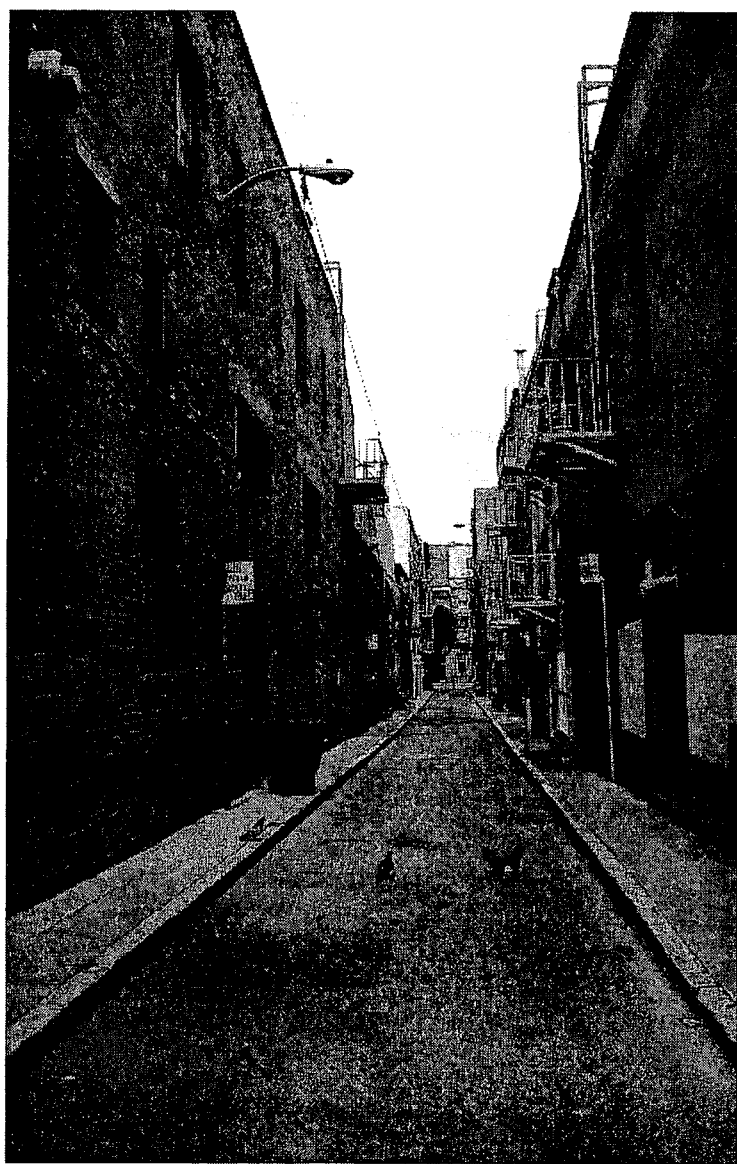
Nothing screams portent in these skies today.
July simmers in hard grace. But next year
rebuilt tractors will shudder back to life
in hands that will keep to the earth they know.
Already, dark sparrows find the bright seeds.

Erzenhausen, Germany

I WAS THE WRONG WAY

Jennifer White

So—let me get this straight—the last sixteen years of you and I were actually sixteen years of you reflected off I? I, duty bound I, the soft vessel for you's ideologies, you's identity, you's brilliance in supporting the incapacitated self in I willing to continue an unhinged balancing act. And when the me in I sang out, the me in you struggled, got jealous, childish, and the me in you thought, "The me in her is not to have an identity, or anything, away from the I in her." But now you reflecting off I backfires exhaustion, a glorious stench of freedom, of burnt rubber on the asphalt of a cul-de-sac marriage, and the me in I soars while drifting vibrantly away from the me in you.



Sean Melody

POETS I HAVE KNOWN

Amy Jirsa

I was born from the same swamp of genes
that created the infamous and lusciously notorious
Edna St. Vincent Millay.
(How could one not be a poet with that name—
a name that rolls like that—
like honey off of the end of a spoon
into the milky tea of your rainy afternoon?)

Since she was family, her poems were read with dinner
and at bedtime by a mother who,
when you compare their girlhood photos,
could be the poet's identical twin, one generation removed.

So there was that.

That was a lot to live up to.

Next came Coleridge and Frost, troubled men with whom
I fell.
Head over heels.

There were a few after that but, surely,
none nearly so heartbreaking.

Then there was Ted Kooser,
a poet whose style lilts and soars
like a hang-gliding photographer
with a telescopic lens.

I sat next to him at a function.
A poetry function, no less.
A poetry function at which I read my poetry, no less.
I dreamed of a smile or a compliment from him,
but when he leaned my way, it was to ask if the host
had pronounced 'Jirsa' correctly, and was I of the Fremont
Jirsas?
'Yes,' I replied. 'And no.'
And I smiled.

Finally, and most recently, there was Billy Collins.
Billy Collins.

The name a cowboy would own.
Or a baseball player, perhaps.

Not the name of a poet whose skill and ease
with something as simple
and as maddening
as the alphabet
is staggering—
is a hard wind in a midwestern summer,
the kind you have to lean into in order to stay standing,
the kind so strong and remarkable
that you wonder where it came from,
but the kind that feels so good against your skin
that you wouldn't even mind drowning in it.

The yellow ribbon trembles against the thick fabric of your jumpsuit, jolting every time your heart makes another attempt to beat out of your chest—thump jump, thump jump—so you stare at it; you concentrate all your attention on the sickening warm yellow, the color of the school bus you sent your only daughter away on each day of her childhood, your heart thumping then just to watch her go off on her own into the danger of the world outside your arms. It's funny now, you think, that you worried so much over nothing, that she turned out better than you ever could have imagined, doing things you would never have allowed her to do if she had allowed you to keep control, to keep her a child in her mother's arms. You stare down hard at the ribbon and hug yourself as though your arms really are as strong as they once seemed to her, protecting her from boogeymen, black widows, and the world. So much of your life disappeared into trying to keep her safe and then she goes and does a thing like this: a birthday present. You would laugh if the knot in your throat wasn't growing larger with every foot of altitude between your body and the earth.

It's ridiculous, you know, to think about these things when all you really have to think about is that yellow ribbon—the exact harvest gold shade, you now notice, of your mother's refrigerator. You remember her standing beside it chopping onions with their yellow skins, or frying potatoes in hot oil. This is always how you remember her and you think how odd that is, to picture your mother and see her back leaning over a cutting board next to an ugly refrigerator. And you wonder how your own daughter thinks of you and you wonder if this will change her thoughts and you wonder if it really matters because there's no way you can go through with it. This isn't who you are. You aren't a risk-taker. You have never once in your life been accused of living with your head in the clouds.

You're a two-feet-firmly-on-the-ground kind of woman and there isn't anything wrong with that, is there? There isn't, except that you've just quoted the phrase your mother used as an excuse for her never having learned to swim. You didn't understand it then, on the yearly family vacation to the lake when you would don a polka-dot swimsuit and run screaming into the shallow water and your mother would sit on the shore and read a book or crochet, even though it was midsummer and no one in their right mind would want to think about scarves.

They're absurd, these thoughts, and you shake your head to rid yourself of them. You concentrate on the yellow ribbon, the center of this tiny world your daughter has forced you to become a part of. "Because you're not dead yet," she had joked. You had tried to smile, understanding that she wanted it to be funny, but you still wondered what she meant, why she would say something like that to you. The yellow ribbon flickers like a traffic signal about to turn red and you remember how that daughter of yours who thinks you need her to tell you you're still alive would roll her eyes when you stopped at them, braking slowly to avoid a jolt. "God, Mom," she would moan, her feet up on the dashboard though you told her a thousand times to keep her feet on the floor, "just once could you take a chance and gun it?" She was a teenager then, not old enough to drive but old enough to think she knew best about every damn thing, old enough to roll her eyes and mock your love, your need to keep her safe. She certainly had gotten her revenge now, hadn't she? Bought you a risk and called it a birthday present. Fifty years of walking this earth and now you have to prove your right to do so—you're not dead yet. The irony makes you sick to your stomach.

"You ready."

The words are sharp and you can't tell if you have been asked a question or given a command. You nod, but your hands grip the seat tighter, until your knuckles bleed white

and your palms pulse crimson. The man takes you by the arm and you allow him to lead you to the open door. He lets go and now it's up to you. You look down through the door at the wide expanse of emptiness spreading out before you, spreading into eternity, spreading into your lungs—and you know that she is somewhere at the bottom of that void waiting for you to take the chance of a lifetime, to stop being a mother and just be, without thought, instinctual. You have to prove yourself to her, to everyone, to the voice in the back of your mind screaming step back, turn around, throw yourself on the floor. Just breathe, you tell yourself. All that matters in the whole wide world is the air in your lungs and the wide blue sky and the yellow ribbon trembling out of your chest, mocking your heartbeat, mocking your fear of what you're about to do. A split second passes like a lifetime—like birthday parties and trips to the lake and swimming lessons—and you jump.

You're in it now, swimming through the impossible air without boundaries, without limits, without any responsibility for anything but yourself, your body in the soaring blue, and the yellow ribbon—the yellow ribbon—which you remember, either just in time or a moment too late, to grasp with winged fingers, and pull.

BETWEEN RAINS

Kelly Reeve Smith

Gecko-blue underbellies
Of pregnant clouds
Cast shadows below—
The cold road winding
Sips pools of midnight rain
That drip from branch tips,
Thick with winter—
The sycamore cries:
All is heavy
All is slick.

A dew-dappled bench
Where no one will sit
To see the single mallard
Circle droplets, fish lips—
The surface rippling
Towards our muddy feet—
Two wet Blue Heelers
Play with soggy sticks.

A young boy,
Blue rubber boots
And yellow jacket,
Runs with his insect net
To catch the mist—
The mother laughing
Stands in smells
Of wet meadow,
Knows nothing is falling,
All is rising



Sharon DeMeyer

CONFESSION NUMBER WHO'S-KEEPING-COUNT FROM A SELF-AVOWED MENOPAUSAL LESBIAN

Suzan Jantz

For instance
I'm walking down aisle number three
at the local grocery store, let's call it Safeway
for the sake of this poem,
comparing the price of Smuckers
or Mary Ellen boysenberry jam.
Or, earlier on aisle one, considering
Franzia White Zinfandel
(in a box) or a tall thin neck
of Blue Nun. Or more likely
it's later, in produce, as I fondle
late summer zucchini, lightly palm
an artichoke's tightness—
which they say is directly related to the tenderness
of its inner leaves. I might thump
a melon or two or nibble
on dirty grapes
as I look up through the top half
of my bifocals, and there, I distinctly see him:
striding my way, all dark-haired, skookum,
muscled cliché of him, wearing a tasteful
lover's chain tattoo around his right bicep.
I clearly make out the stud
of his diamond earring winking at me.
Well, there I am
in my fireweed-fuchsia
sweatshirt, wearing no bra,
suddenly thinking about *Harold and Maude*
and thinking what if ...
when, of course, Cat Stevens comes
over the Safeway speakers, singing
how he "can't keep it in,"
which urges me to come
close to how I'm "gonna let it out ...
show the world that I say what I mean;

mean what I think," when here comes
the pitiful punch line you've no doubt
been dreading—perhaps with anticipation—
and that punch line
is a result of me being a cheechako
in the land of the midnight sun,
where twenty-plus hours of sunlight a day
is like an episode of *The Twilight Zone*
as one tries to determine, *sans* clock,
just what time it really is. This time-quirk,
by the way, has no effect on my equally haywire
menopausal inner thermostat,
which is by now making my cheeks flash red hot
as the guy with the tattoo nears my basket.
Will we go to his place or mine
dances before my eyes
when, instead, I suddenly hear him say,
"Excuse me, ma'am,
can you tell me the time?"



Pat Domek

THE EAGLE MEANS LIFE: AN APACHE BELIEF

Nancy Talley

The eagle lifts
like breath
from a rock near shore
leans into space
lays out
on the upward current.

This fragile network
of matchstick bones
muscle, spittle, and blood
rests on the silent air.

Sliding around
the inward circumference
of an ever expanding ring
she rises
as she moves down the channel.

Rising and circling
circling and rising
until at last
shreds of her image ignite
in the setting sun.

GIVE ME SOMETHING NASTY

Jennifer White

Sorry, this is going to sound perverse,
but, could you give me a shot of your nasty?
I mean your funk, your stank, your
“Aw man, get the hell away from me”
smell?

See, the problem is all mine—
I’ve made you inhuman,
and only you can inoculate me
with your ripeness;
It will evaporate this
Phantom cloak of veneration
I’ve used to cover your
Imperfect humanity.

There’s no need for manipulation to turn us
sour.
There’s no shame in destroying an image
that’s unreal.

Come on, laugh with me, this is a
compliment—
Something to hold precious
in that humble little spot
pooling way deep within you;
that crevasse of tributaries and tides,
of cold self-indulgent pride
locking arms with the warmth of knowing
someone thinks enough of you
to conjure demons of desire;
Accepting as gift, like manna, your stink,
releasing you from a glorified hero
into a being of flawed human nature.

(for A.J.R.)

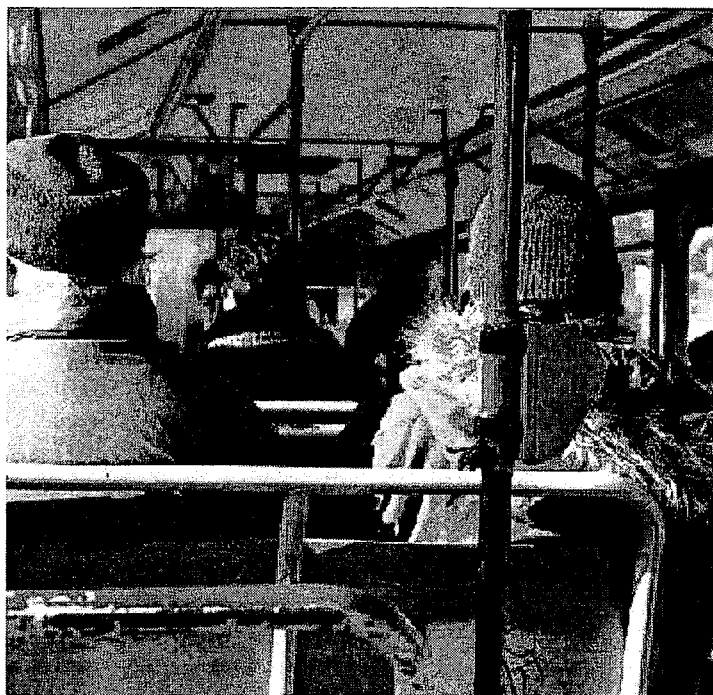
Parts of you
have fallen away from me,
have covered the ground
below me.

Like a half-bare tree,
I stand stark
against silver sky,
while parts of you
flutter down
away from me.

Nevertheless, the love shines through,

and all of you, the entirety of you,
lies recorded within me,
etched within my grain,
carved into my hidden design,

and new leaves in spring
will bear your name.



Pat Domek

COMING ABOUT

Ken Fries

Even on a decent day it can be work
To beat the sloop against the breeze
Especially in salty spray if the chop is steep
Pushing bow downwind
You feel it at the helm and point it up again
Careful not to oversteer, to let the wind behind the jib
Slam the crew with sudden heel and panicked scramble
'til the sheets run free

And so we worked our way toward Bloody Point
Close-hauled 'neath the gray November sky
Heading through unsettled air from Galesville on the Chesapeake
It was our first time out to work the sails, learn the reeling,
practice furling
Boom vang, out-haul, down-haul, topping lift
Cranking winches, cleating fast the lines
While the sloop was heeling in the chill

You sailors know what happens next
The homeward leg requires a "come about"
You loosen jib sheets, whirl the wheel
To bring the bow around and fill the sails
To run or broadly reach before the wind
And glide more smoothly with the following sea

We came about and furled the jib to slacken speed

And then we found the spinnaker, stowed beneath the V-berth
Tied on sheets and halyard
Slowly raised the sock that opened up the billows ... swoosh!
The leaden sky was filled with yellow, red and blue
A lifted circus tent
Pushed by the steady breeze we sailed
Warm and quiet through the sea

Sailing many years
I thought I knew the range of moods upon the water
The lassitude of dead calm August afternoon
The apprehension of the race for port to beat the line of squalls
But hey! There is an unexpected joy
On deck beneath the spinnaker
That comes from simply turning, sailing tall and stately with
the wind

THE NOTHING

Don McCrea Hendrick

Potential nothingness
haunts me
as I try to visualize
my nonexistence.
How could I be aware,
then nothing?

Asleep I dream
images that may or not
have meaning.
Even if I don't remember
all my dreams,
I am still aware
that I am something.

But nothing?
No, that seems not possible.
Nothing is an image
that exists only if I am aware.
Nothing can't be unless
I perceive it so.
I try not to, but The Nothing
will haunt me till I die.

Then I'll understand—
or not.



Cara Fox-Galassi

THE HOUR OF THE WOLF

Nancy Talley

When the wolf, nocturnal creature that she is,
comes at three-plus-some in the morning
to climb rough and up close into my bed
saying—Wake up!
I sigh.

Having grown accustomed to my sins,
finding the daylight twangs
of their reminders almost tolerable,
knowing how the beast will wake me
shake me from my slumber.
I wait.

The bedspread gains a half-life of its own.
The sheets will not lie straight.
They shift as if by alchemy,
change from soft flannel to harsh bark.
They knot, first to the left,
then to the right, before falling,
as forgiving sleep returns,
into some semblance of warm
and simple bodily disorder.

There is a late discovered blessing here.

I find I would not trade my sins
and what I've come to know;
their virtue lies in their familiarity.
I can anticipate the wince,
the old woe and its futility,
and am almost grateful.

I do not want, at three AM,
someone else's sins
warming their cold feet
on the backs of my fleshy knees.

I AM MY FATHER'S DAUGHTER

Jennifer White

my rage like his scours Innocence borne to me and pathetically
I blanket myself with solace that at least the release of my
pitched Incompetence delivers Invisible bruises by clinched
bellows and not by the weight of my fists yet my children fear
my glare just the same and their security surrenders when my
spiked words in torrents charge the tiny space between my
tower and their placid faces

tissue inside heart chambers calcifies and percolates a syrup
of gooey thick self-loathing while arteries harden with guilt as
their bottomless pupils soak up the little girl I once was hidden
under my wooden bunk-bed playing hide-and-seek with his
wrath

tremendously wide doe-eyed dreams prance through woods
too bright to see and childhoods coated in a creamy veneer lay
in wake while thorns on the blackberry shred hope to garnet
glimpses of tart truth

my nose is not as hooked as his but I cut it off just the same and
lose my voice inside the booming of generations taking blame
yet somewhere inside me is a place childlike in size where I
weave awareness and breathe in possibility to stop the way he
loved me and better the love I try

**ndikudwala—in the language of Chichewa:
I am sick*

In the time of rain
When kudu, reedbuck,
Bushbuck, and warthog swell
With greenery come again,
My seeds are dry as desert sand
In Namibia. The spirit
Of my husband—splinter of bone
When he died—enters
My belly, antlers full force,
Wild animal in rut. I am insane
The headman Evance claims.
My children are dead.
Our Malawi village will die.
And yet, I do not submit
To Machika, the cleanser,
Who must mount
And come inside me
To chase my husband to another world.
Machika—who asks only
From me, in payment for services,
A chicken to give Lisario,
His second wife—Machika,
The exorcist, will come
Tonight, stalking the dark like a hyena,
A jackal, a honey badger.
He will come in search of food,
Circle my hut like a hunter.
He will penetrate
The crossroads of my scream.



Garner

Bob Garner

i thought you was outside,
she says

mosquitas,
he drawls back

then takes the nitro

one two three

and still his ribs cave in
the aspirin, she says
thats with the night-time meds

how is the pain?
the same

he says,
the same

we better get you upta logan

call the kids, he says

first time in fifty years
she'll sleep alone

*

you shoulda been there bobby
it was beautiful

he looked real good
just like himself

sitting in that chair

back from the cows
and waiting for the call



Jennifer White

The flies I killed
with my swatter this summer
haunt me.

Nights I can't sleep,
I rescue moths.
They flop around my lantern.
Gathering them in a tablecloth,
I watch them flutter toward the moon.
The ones I can't save,
litter the porch like leaves.

This morning I cross
the Fort Jones cemetery
leading to my family plot.
I place poppy seeds on the stones,
the shadow of a hawk
rumples over the grass.

Clouds are being pulled
apart by the wind,
there is something about
their torn white mouths,
like the dead
who will take my hands some day,
when I will rise,
like a wave out of the hot field.

Grip of the "unbearable lightness of being"
The meaning of it finally comes ... again
Gripped in the void of voidlessness
The lack of emotions flow into outer space
Arms feel like they must be anchored on
Head with bolts or floating off the ol' torso
Yes, ol', I say, no spring chicken again
'Tis a truth, not fable, we pass into phase after phase, life's segues
A friend once saw a dying friend & spoke of her becoming translucent
Yes, a fading fairy, if you will, a fantasy, futures blurred, futures
 mixed, mish-mash
Potatoes, hash browns, frown, bowties, neckties, no ties, carte blanche
Lace, string, no strings attached, string theory, spaghetti string monsters
Theories abound, truths still to be found, revealed in time,
 timelessness
Relatively speaking, spoken, tokens, tokenless, penniless,
 pointlessness
Relatives, schm relatives, wherefores, and hence-to-forths
And silly endless words of worthless prose
But for the writing of it gives
Sustenance, meaning, some order to the chaos
Which surrounds us, pulls us into the entropy prevailing
Zapping our energy which fights against it, lest we fall into it
A virtual "descent into the maelstrom" of time, coming up white-haired
Drained, lighter, wispier, delicate, dream-like, sprite-like, unreal
And gripped by our appearance we shuddered anew
Till acceptance assuages the minimal self
Fusing together with hope what little is left
In tatters to be quilted for others to decipher
And in time brighten with the colors imbued
Emotions renewed, renewable, energy re-energized
Filling limbs with weight, with purpose, with strength
To again tackle in time those things needing to be done,
 to see, to enjoy
Living again in the world put before us, letting the death grip go
And so ...

When I claim the title
 Artist, writer
I can't help the little
 Giggle that rises;
To say that is who I am,
 Reconnects me to this
Great impossibility
Of being what I once was—
 Hopeful—Strong
And able to believe
I could change the world
With twirling words and
Prowling compassion while
 Swimming in vast imaginative waters,
 But ...
Inadequately guarding a thinly tangible possession,
Mine throughout my cyclonic childhood,
The one thing that represented my Will,
The only shield to call mine,
My membrane—my hymen—
I was thrust into chasms of cynicism.
His sword pierced me hard
Sliced right through
And tissue tore
Ripping me
From her
And all
Her
Possibility
 And now ...
Eighteen years later
The scab trickles,
Yet the wound is no longer between my thighs—
It has metastasized to my soul and
Adhered to my brain,
 So ...

That's why
I think I giggle,
And my cheeks scream pink—
It's the fourteen-year-old inside me
Hearing her voice
And the thirty-two-year-old
Recognizing these moments as poignant.

"So, have you found yourself yet?"

Just before I get my key in the door after coming home from the grease-stained no-thinking sweatdrippinghell of financial independence, this is what I hear. I shouldn't be surprised because I hear this every day but I still hit my head silently against the front door before I step back and look up the concrete staircase at Mimi, perched on her "porch" in a lawn chair, smoking a cigarette in the afternoon sun. And I say what I am now resigned to say in a daily admission of failure / defeat / dejection: no, not today, not yet; myself is still missing; I checked under the tables in the restaurant but all I found was used gum; maybe if I get my face on a milk carton someone would be so kind as to return me. I've been unfound for a while and you have to make these jokes or you might disappear entirely.

"I'm sorry to hear that, honey," she says, tapping the long ash of her cigarette into a potted plant she keeps for that purpose, "but tomorrow is another day."

"That's what I hear," I say, although sometimes I wonder.

"Why don't you come on up and have a cup of Joe?" She finishes her cigarette and stands up so the silver hair puffing out from her head catches the light.

"I don't know ..." I fake a yawn, although that's probably not the way to get out of a cup of coffee, because I don't know if I can handle a story today. It's a gamble, these cups of coffee, you never know if you're going to get the standard gossip about who plays their stereo too loud (those boys in #2), who forgets their laundry in the communal dryer (the freshman in #5 with the illegal cat), who puts their garbage in the recycling bin and their beer bottles in the garbage (those boys again), or something personal, confessional, a life lesson with a clichéd moral at the end that has nothing to do with my life. "I think I might take a nap."

"All right, honey," she says, and I'm about to escape into the lonesome darkness of my own apartment when she adds, "Don't worry. You were too good for that job anyway," and amazes me once again. She always knows. She can tell the difference between getting off work early and walking out. I step back and look up the stairs and she's standing there holding the door open for me, so I follow her in.

She's starting the coffee and I sit down at her kitchen

table, my work-shirt still smelling like hamburger meat, and she asks, "So, what happened this time?" Mimi enjoys my war stories, likes to hear how I've stuck it to the man.

"Oh, you know. I needed the time off for Thanksgiving."

The coffee is percolating and she sits down at the table across from me. "Thanksgiving? That's a month away."

I shrug my shoulders and smile, I hope ironically. "Well, I also had to stick a fork in someone's eye today and they frown on that."

"I hear that about the restaurant biz." Mimi laughs her girlish but guttural old-smoker's laugh, halfway between a cough and a giggle.

"Some business type. Ordered a club sandwich and was angry when there was bacon on it. Told me, 'Club sandwiches do *not* have bacon.' So I gave him the menu and pointed to where it said bacon and he still wouldn't admit he was wrong and started making a fuss, and then my idiot boss comes out all smiles and coupons saying, 'Our philosophy is that the customer is always right' and so I said, 'even when they're wrong.' And that's when I had to give it to them, both at the same time, blinded for life." Mimi is in near hysterics now. She's waving her arms like a bird trying to take off and her face is turning purple. I notice that the coffee is ready so I pour us each a cup.

After she calms down and is stirring her coffee, she puts her serious face on and says, "So, now what? The world is your oyster." Mimi is full of these clichés. She always imagines something great just around the corner. Unfortunately, all I ever find are more restaurants. I can always get a job in a restaurant. They accept me despite my failures, despite knowing, as they must know, that I'll quit in six months or less.

I shrug, looking down into my cup, and say, "I don't know—look around. Something will come up." It always does.

Mimi nods silently, her lips pursed like my mother's get right before she lets out a barrage of advice / criticism. Her eyes glaze over and she says, "You know," with that faraway look old people get when they're about to talk about the good ol' days or the Depression, "when I was your age, I could have been a dancer. But I got married instead." She sighs. "Cheating son-of-a-bitch. He thought dancing was 'frivolous,'"

she makes air quotes and a disgusted face, "and I cared what people thought of me back then, stupid kid that I was."

I've heard this one before—it's one of her favorites. It usually ends with advice about following your dreams and shooting for the stars and being all you can be, to which I smile and nod because that's all very nice but I'm not a dancer—I'm not anything.

"Mimi," I say, steering the conversation away from myself, "have you ever heard of chronic déjà vu?" She'll like this one; like most old people she enjoys hearing about diseases she has little risk of contracting.

"Chronic déjà vu?" She searches through the filing cabinet in her head but comes up empty-handed. "I can't say that I have."

"It's a rare psychological disorder," I explain, "I heard about it on the news. This doctor in England is studying it." And I tell her how they interviewed the doctor and he said that for some people déjà vu isn't just a funny feeling you get once in a while but a constant tormenting familiarity. These people go to an amusement park and they're sure they've already ridden all the rollercoasters. They go to a new restaurant and everything on the menu tastes like last night's leftovers. Everywhere they go, everyone they meet, it's all like something they've done before. For these people the doctor surely understood, though he refrained from saying it out loud, life isn't worth living.

"That's terrible," Mimi says, combing her fingers through her frizzy silver hair. "Can they do anything about it?"

"Not yet. They don't know what causes it or anything. Except that it isn't genetic. But that's all they know, what it isn't."

Mimi sighs and says, "You know, sometimes I feel that way, like every day is the same as the last. But maybe I'm just getting old. Do you ever feel like that?"

I swirl the last sip of coffee around my cup, covering and uncovering the message printed on the bottom: "Time for a refill." And I think yeah, once in a while; yes, sometimes; of course, everygoddamday. And I say, "Yeah, Mimi, I do."

Within a week I've found a new job, this time in a pancake house. Waitressing is the same every day no matter where you are or whether you're serving steaks / omelets / pizza / sandwiches / tacos / bratwurst / pancakes, so much the same you don't have to think at all but just follow the pattern, like a robot or a rat in a maze or a bird with one of those machines where they peck the right lever and get a seed.

Today, at the ungodly hour of 6:00 AM when you would think things couldn't possibly have gonetoshit already, I don't even make it all the way into the kitchen before I step in a puddle of syrup. I walk to the sink—step thwack, step thwack—and don't even bother cursingtohell whatever idiot has already ruined my day because I know better than that. I've made that blank stare myself. I start rinsing my sticky shoe under the faucet and almost instantly I feel the look, all bosses have one, like nails on a chalkboard or a slap to the back of the head. "Excuse me." I turn to confront the voice of who I for now will call Manager Frying-Pan Face for the obvious reason that he looks as though he's just been hit in the face with a frying pan—eyebrows up, nostrils splayed out, his whole head pulled back and his chin receding into his neck like he's trying to avoid being hit again. He has his hands on his hips like a scolding mother, like my mother after I got a 2.1 GPA my first semester as a business major and swung, pendulum-like, to art. "Whatever you're doing is against company, and I'm sure, health code regulations."

I do not remove my shoe from the faucet while I explain—the syrup puddle, my shoe, the dire consequences of it all.

He turns off the faucet. "We cannot have your footwear in the sink."

I sense the need for a more detailed explanation—the step thwack, the terrible unholy rhythm, the distraction which will surely be evident in the quality of my work.

"We cannot have your footwear in the sink." He points to a sign above the faucet that says, Hint #47—The Workplace Must Be Clean to Make Fine Cuisine. He clearly has some kind of mental problem, a deadendjob complex, or a littlemanlittlemanager neurosis. I'm no psychologist, though I did major in it for two semesters.

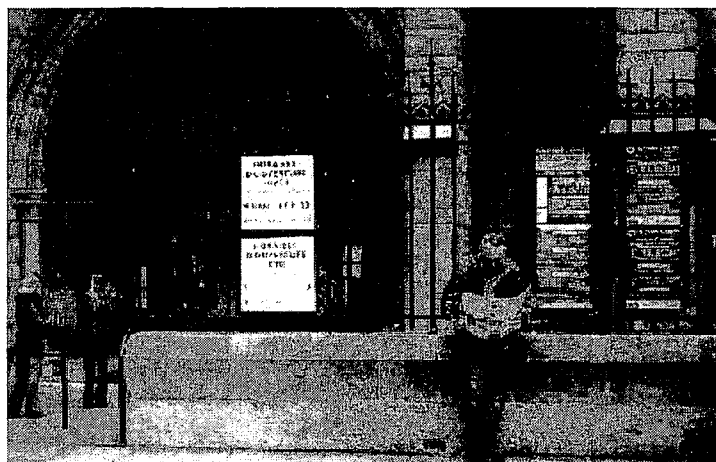
"Who spilled the syrup?" Frying-Pan Face asks, and

when I shrug he yells across the kitchen, "Who spilled the syrup?" A line cook and two dish washers look up and shrug. "Do you know how much syrup costs?"

I don't, but I guess, "Forty-seven dollars a gallon?" because if you guess something exorbitantly high they are unable to reprimand you with the actual cost. It works like a charm. Frying-Pan Face walks away with angry shoulders bunched up under his ears. Bosses are all the same; every conversation, every mannerism is like *déjà vu*. They walk behind people while they're working and look over their shoulders making tut-tut noises or sucking air through their teeth; they quote the company handbook like some people might quote the Bible; they display franchise-approved "Hints" or "Philosophies" or "Mottos" like "If You've Got Time to Lean, You've Got Time to Clean," and "Smile—Put Your Best Face Forward." I shrug to make sure my shoulders don't look like Frying-Pan's and walk into the dining room sporting a now wet and sticky shoe—step thwack, step thwack. This is my life.

*

This is what you do when your self has not been found: you change your major; you change it again (repeat as necessary); you get a job in a bad restaurant after getting cut off to teach you a lesson about not changing horses midstream; you decide it's all bullshit anyway (since you can no longer afford books) and drop out; you quit one bad job and take another; you quit that one too; you repeat this cycle indefinitely because you have to pay the rent and you still hope that someday you'll find one that doesn't feel like a case a chronic *déjà vu*; you survive; you don't do anything drastic like slitting your wrists with a butter knife in the bathroom of the pancake house; you exaggerate; you go to work every day and perform at a satisfactory level but no better, because this isn't permanent, this isn't who you are—you're not a lifer, you're only twenty-four, the same age your mother was when you were born, but still young—you're the other type, just passing through for a year or two or three and a half, while trying to find yourself. If you were backpacking through Europe instead of through waitressing jobs no one would say a thing. Elitistfuckingeconomicfascism. You went to college long enough to learn a few ten-dollar words.



Cara Fox-Galassi

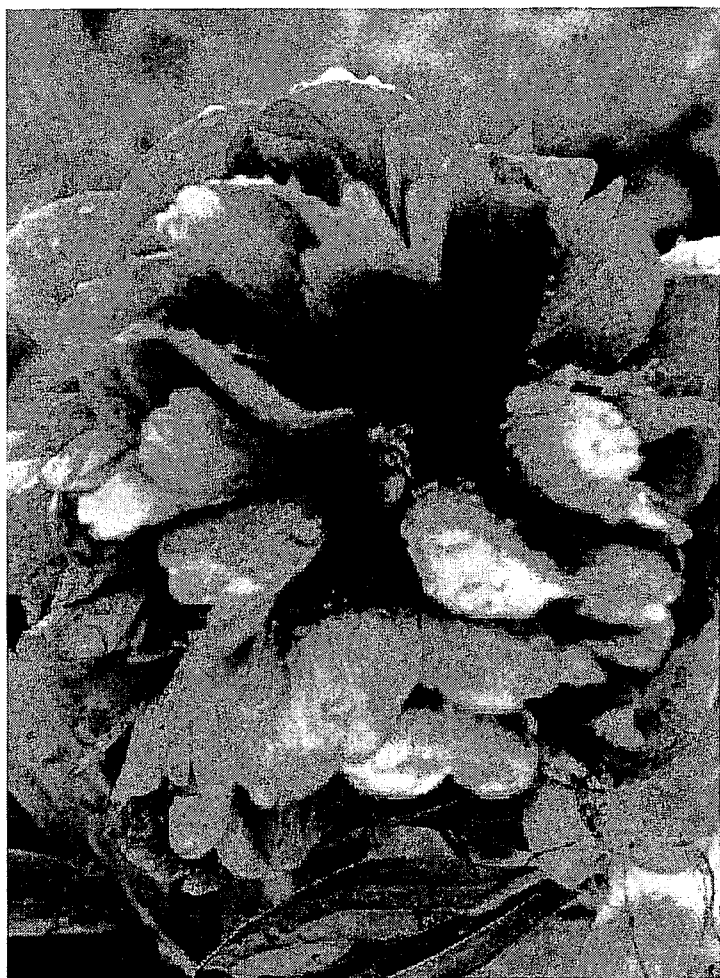
This regret soaks in
Like gutter water
Up pant legs,
Nagging at my ankles
As I walk along
Alone.

I hear the click
Of the lock
Lingering through memories,
Behind closed doors—
Vanilla bean candles
And wedding cake
Beside a bed of roses—
Now embedded
With hidden thorns.

I never noticed before,
How the lock's gold coat
Matches my ring,
Which you will forget
To take back
Because you love me,
Like the drenched air
Loves the rain.

You unlock the door.
We sit on either end
Of our overstuffed couch—
Me, in my underwear,
You, still hopelessly in love
With the warmth
Of my thighs at your sides—

Wet jeans and regret
Tumbling over
And over
In the wedding present
Whirlpool dryer
Of our dreams.



Sharon DeMeyer

Beyond our metal-pipe corral
that stands calm through rust and survives,
I mend dirt roads rutted by squalls.

My grandson, roused from a late nap,
can't wait to drench his new sneakers
in fresh puddles his feet have found,

his mother infuriated
at this boy's primal rite of mud.
The thin limbs of a lightning-scorched

tree, tilted like a drunk giant,
lure his four-year-old hands to flex
and touch leaves suddenly in reach.

I stood by the catchment, watching,
weighing any hint of danger—
shard or branch, or uncoiling eyes,

thinking of a way to explain
why I brand yearlings for shipment.
That's when he grabbed the warbler's nest,

eyes tracing flights of startled birds,
as if his lungs could breathe their songs
into that pale opening sky.

I will never forget the steel that brushed
flush upon the skin of my face.
How he stood in front of me
Hovering like a hangman at dusk.
Time slowed, my heart's beats shattered
Its fragile layers, bursting bindings
Of thick tangled veins, surging—
My eyes sank as the fear aroused him.

Brother was in the next room,
Fresh from Mother's womb, innocent to the touch,
Cradled in his crib, sleeping with animals,
The soft, loving ones with mouths sewn shut.
I wished those statues would tear their stitches,
Save me from him, scream out against him,
I waited for the steel to stop.
It never came, he continued to hover.

At noon, my jeans were unbuttoned,
At two, I could only think of mother;
She left hours ago for my cake and flowers.
She has been gone far too long now
Leaving me with the one she covets,
The one who hisses, "You are safe, stay quiet"
As his roughened hands slip from my neck—
This, my first time, I thought of death.

At night Mother smiled as she sang so sweetly,
But soon the candles and cake were cleared
And she kissed me goodnight. I cried—
She said. She said I was her pride.
All I could see and feel was his steel
Pressing my face, my chest, my thighs;
The others say what it is like for the first time—
But they lie. They lie.

Listen. The wind roaring
Down the canyon is the sound
Of a thousand waterfalls. No water
In the creek, though. Red Flag Alert
It's called in late autumn—this wind
That is hungry, static-charged:
Looking for fire. I was married
To a fireman years before women
Could join the force. Wind
Like this, red-alert wind,
Is a curse, my husband said: the way
It can whip flames
Out of a firefighter's control.
Only once did he admit to me
Its intoxicating effect, the orgasm,
The reason he was willing to risk his life.
Likewise, only once before the divorce
Did I admit to him
I was in love with a woman.



Evan Peterson

I will never develop a knack
for fulfilling
your 1950s expectations. Forget the
frilly apron.
I'm not the wife on
Father Knows Best.
I refuse to play the role
you create for me.
I write my own script,
and it doesn't include
any pretty lines.
I am Godzillita, the dark
swamp creature,
the one who fails to have dinner ready
when you think
it should be. I have failed in so many
of society's exams,
why should this one
be any different?
I get a zero, a cipher, a big fat "F"
for my absent culinary prowess,
for my missing home economic savvy.
Burn me at the stake,
for we are dangerous, my kind,
we Joan of Arcs, full of vile visions
that defy the well-defined
order of things.
Stone me to death
for my deficit
of fried chicken,
my glaring lack
of potato salad,
for my unpolished silverware
and my unsparkling china.
I have sinned, people,
and I know it,

for I had no dinner ready
when the man of the house
came home.
So there you have it—
I'm a harlot, a wench, a woman of ill repute
with a leprous heart, sordid and tainted
to my last breath.



Pat Domeck

The vibrancy of your gypsy body
Thrived for five-tens and four-ones; the
Brilliance of your seven-split tongue
With which you once conversed with ease,
Lay swollen, quivered death's lonely song.

That horrific vomit of a word

PU-TRE-FY

Excruciatingly devoured you
an undeserving end.

Your essence lay scattered,
Muted crumbs in your borrowed hospice bed.
A putridly sweet, metallic scent smothered your French perfume.
Sunlight crept in through your windows and
Cowered patiently in the corners of your room.

You, I claim as sinless as Mother Mary

And, at times,

You viciously sacrificed me like Medea.

And all I'm trying to do now

Is, somehow

Capture some part of you,

Some last memory of you

That isn't attached to the thick

Blots and clots

Of crimson blood

As big as internal organs

That dropped into the toilet

When you vigorously tried

Just to pee.

I need the image of

Your wild, passionate

Portuguese-styled tarantellas

To swiftly sweep away

The sight of your

Tiny emaciated body—

Cancer's carcass—

But my stoic eyes held on
as two shadowless men
Loaded your
Zipped-up dove-white rigidly soft bodybag
Into the cold mouth of a moonless hearse,
And last thing I'll
Remember, replay, regret
Is how icy I feel
When the sun tries in vain
To caress my pale,
Uncertain place—



Pat Domek

it's just an e.e. cummings sort of day
 where everything is big enough as is
and nothing's too important not to say
 and art feels just as mellow as was his

 and life meanders down tortuous streams
and jazz peeks out of bushes here and there
 the story has a line but not a theme
 your raft may bump some rocks, but
 who's to care

where life is art and all emotion rules
where sex is love (parenthetically)
 where those who never think are
 thoughtless fools
 and love's not love unless it brings folly

so live and jive but don't think too gently
so long as life is lived less mentally

IN THE WHITE OF WINTER

Kelly Reeve Smith

We sigh like dying flowers, so silent,
The bright of buds, like love, violently gone
With night, despite the ground that longs for it
To stay—*Please don't forget. Please don't forget.*

But beauty will come down, like rain, and taint
Another ground the same, set roots too deep,
A veil of veins that drip, and seep, and seem
To love the ground they take, forsaking dreams

Of sunny days that break the white of winter.
As love outgrows the rows it loved last spring,
Not even roots can bring the beaming sun,
A gold bouquet, undone on sobbing ground.

The snow consoles what we remember now,
The sigh of dying love, our wilted bow.

CONTRIBUTORS

Jeffrey Alfier lives in Schwedelbach, Germany. His works have been published in *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *The Cape Rock*, *Georgetown Review*, *Mangrove Review*, *Permafrost*, *Red Cedar Review*, and *Watershed*. He is the author of a book of poems, *Strangers Within the Gate* (The Moon Publishing, 2005).

Sharon DeMeyer graduated from California State University, Chico, in 1996 with a BA in English, and currently works in the University's English Department office. She was born and raised in Chico, California, and has lived here all of her life. She enjoys photography as an expensive hobby.

Pat Domek could not be reached for comments.

Cara Fox-Galassi was born in Chico, California, but soon thereafter moved to Santa Barbara, California. It was during her early years that she developed her love for photography. Cara attended the Visual Arts and Design Academy within Santa Barbara High School and received the Jack Baker Award for her work. She is now majoring in Art Education at CSU, Chico.

Ken Fries lives in Chico, California, with his wife Janet. He graduated from Chico High School in 1959. Ken worked for many years in Washington, DC, as a lawyer for US Government trade and development agencies, and moved back to Chico for retirement. He has been writing poetry for the last 10 years.

Bob Garner lives in Chico, California, and is a retired foundry worker, cactus farmer, and rare book dealer.

Shelby Goddard is studying literature and creative writing in the graduate program at Chico State. She is Vice President of the English Honor Society, Sigma Tau Delta, and works as a tutor in the Writing Center and in the ESL Resource Center. She plans to continue her studies and to teach literature and writing while continuing to develop her own work.

Lara Gularte is the editor of the online journal, *Convergence*. In 2005, Lara received the Anne Lillis Award for Creative Writing from San Jose State University. Her work was presented at an

international conference on storytelling and cultural identity. She is currently working on a collection of poems about her Portuguese pioneer ancestors who immigrated to California.

Susan Jantz is finally considered a graduate of CSU, Chico. She majored in English with a Creative Writing Minor and a Certificate in Literary Editing and Publishing. She now faithfully attends Po'Sheen Church for inspiration and to commune with her writing soul mates. She is currently working on the editing and publishing of a poetry anthology titled *Cadence of Hooves: A Celebration of Horses*.

Amy Jirsa's mother used to read poems to her every night before bed and often regaled her with tantalizing tales of her grandfather's cousin, Edna St. Vincent Millay. (When a poet's life sounds that exciting, what else is a girl to do?) She's been writing poems since the ripe old age of eight and hopes that her work has gained in artistry, though perhaps not in purity.

Don McCrea-Hendrick is in his fifth year of studying creative writing at Chico State through the Elder College program. He has completed, on an audit basis, all the classes required for a degree equivalent in English with a Minor in Linguistics. He has a BS in Accounting from Cal State Long Beach, and did graduate work at UCLA and Pepperdine University.

Sean Melody is currently a senior at Chico State where he is thankful every day that he failed those business classes and decided to major in art.

Evan Peterson graduated from Chico State with a master's degree in English and a bachelor's degree in Asian Studies. Evan lives in Chico, California, with his wife and three children. Evan previously worked as an editor for *Watershed* and has been previously published in *Watershed*.

Shannon Rooney graduated from Chico State in 2003 with a master's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies (English and Education). Shannon currently teaches composition at

Butte College. Like Mary Oliver, Shannon wants to “make poems while thinking of the bread of heaven and the cup of astonishment.”

Kelly Reeve Smith will be graduating from CSU, Chico, in the spring of 2007 with a BA in English, an Option in Education, and a Minor in Creative Writing. She’s been supported and inspired by her loving family, her handsome cowboy and his dirt roads, and her little dog, Roscoe, who works hard to keep her feet warm while she writes in the morning.

Paula Scholtes has been working at CSU, Chico, for approximately seventeen years. She loves living in Chico. She loves the seasons and the changes year by year on all levels of life. Poems, ditties, and sayings come to her infrequently, but when they do she writes them down.

Martin Svec, currently majoring in English, is grappling with the meaning of life. He once filmed himself dancing just to see what it would look like. He has direction in life, but he doesn’t know where it is headed. To him, today is just a celebration of yesterday’s anniversary.

Nancy Talley has been writing poems for over thirty years—seriously, for at least twenty of those years. She has published two small books, one of them with a grant from the Seattle Allied Arts Foundation. Two significant events happened to her this year: she took second place in the Pacific Northwest Writers Association poetry competition, and she turned seventy-five.

Jennifer White is a first-year graduate student in English at CSU, Chico. She is attempting an emphasis in creative writing, exhausting every effort to maintain her sanity.

