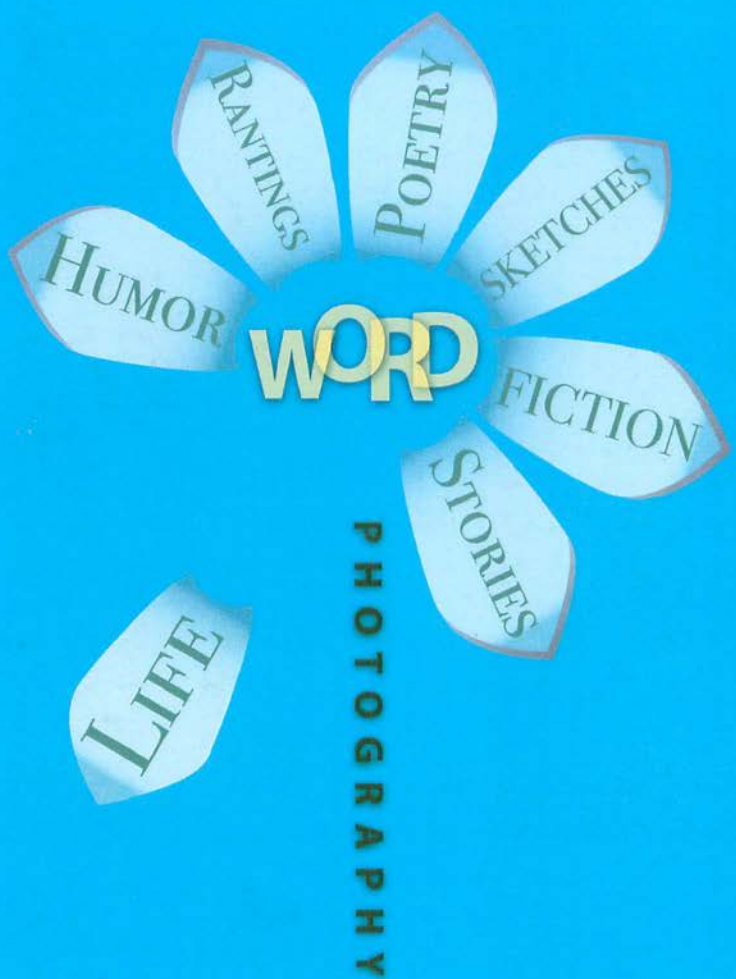


# WATERSHEED



THOUGHTS  
EMOTIONS  
IDEAS  
FEELINGS  
PAIN  
CREATIVITY  
NOTIONS

# W A T E R S H E D

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B E N E A T H   T H E   S U R F A C E

*Watershed*

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*Beneath the Surface*

It was an ordinary day.  
Everyone scurrying to and fro.  
Going about their normal business.

That was, until  
An unseen force began to pull,  
Pull,  
Pull on their homes.  
Faster and faster.  
Nothing was holding them back.

For a breathless instant they hung,  
Staring into the face of death.  
Hanging,  
Hanging.

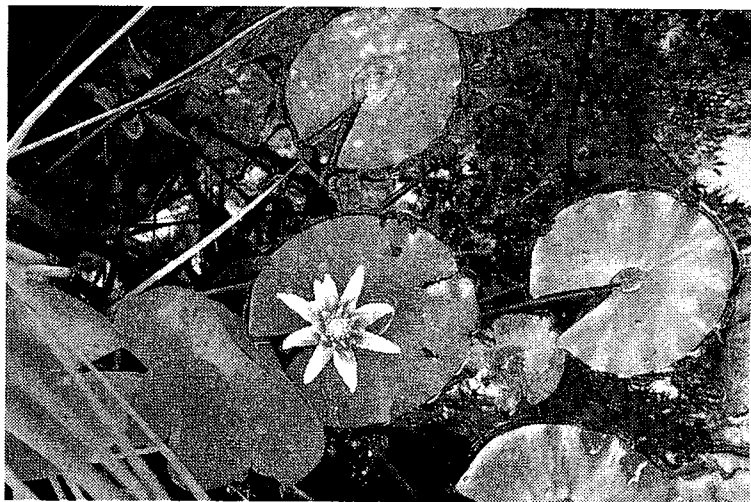
Until another crashed into them,  
The mute screams of despair.  
Falling,  
Falling,  
Until:  
SPLASH.

The droplet hit the ground and was absorbed instantly,  
Taking the microorganisms with it.  
Never to be seen again.

That is, until  
Next season's first rain.

SHELBY MARTIN

*pond flower with two fish*



BETH WATTENBERG

*Sinking of the Fire*

She watches that red ball of fire  
Sink down past the water's edge.

The color reminds her of a desert;  
A time...

The waves crash onto the shore  
Like the thoughts crashing  
In her mind.

The fog rolls in and wraps  
Itself around her.  
An ethereal embrace.

She walks in the woods.  
There are green giants there,  
Surrounding this little one.  
Surrounding her, supporting her;  
Rooting her down into the  
Composted soil of her life.

It has Ended. It has Begun.  
It circles around,  
And in the center—like every time before—

There is her heart...burning red,  
Like the ball of fire  
She watches  
Sinking.

JENNY JOHNSON

## Miasma

*"Forty-five women were killed —most due to burns or asphyxiation  
—after a fire broke out in the female ward of a drug treatment hospital in  
Moscow. The mayor said it was 'a very serious, and unpleasant incident.'"*  
—*Telegraph U.K.*, December 9, 2006

Pretty Russian Princesses shielded  
from needles, spoons, and fermented sugars,  
habilitate in a fortress on the fourth floor.

The thin ones get fur, the fat ones get wool.  
But none of their warm muffs,  
nor tracked arms, can raise the downy white—

—alone.

Retrofit with iron limbs of restraint,  
embraced against the feral fire  
that seeps through the will and wall of women  
over the parapet, slipping through the crenels  
of a barren brick battlement.

Red fur flames lick away the will  
that locked them in for the trip  
as noxious fumes ascend the stair  
two—

three—

four—

five,

how many more to twelve?



Metal grates  
Can't escape  
Easy to asphyxiate

Noses and mouths press along the sill  
Fight for cracks that leak the icy chill

Who will be first to extricate,  
yielding to the listless white,  
the warm cherry lip, teeth, tongue,  
the soft under arm, breast and lung?

HILARY B. TELLESEN

*These Are Not Walls*

I hang my anxiety on walls,  
Because it fits awkwardly next to the lines of my palms  
And the rumble in my spine,  
But my worries can't be picture-framed,  
And my knees weaken when I realize how fast I'm running from the  
struggle,  
That word doesn't mean what it used to...

So I chase after what looks like the light,  
I shove so much of the moon inside me that I collapse from trying  
to measure God,  
And I pray that someday I'll stop boxing myself out of wide open  
spaces...

I've tried living in the distance,  
But all I found were rest stop sermons  
That needed to be heard with a bird's nest full of patience,  
I wasn't ready to listen...

Since then I've discovered that I can assign numbers to every beat in  
my heart  
And still only grasp a single one,  
But that one's going to get me through this,  
Because it claps more loudly than all of the rest...

Now I'm learning how to speak tire tread,  
As I stumble over the vastness of the past,  
I'm ready to leave its field of landmines behind,  
Even though it feels just like a bit of personal history repeating  
When I'm force-feeding my bad habit of beating myself up from the  
inside-out...

But these hands are not walls,  
 They don't come together like bricks,  
 Instead, they brawl with Everyman kinetics,  
 They jackhammer dead ends until they become beginnings again,  
 They are sunbeam weavers,  
 They open and close the distance between us:  
 It stretches from pain to purpose in a sea of fading memories  
     painted on the faces of tea leaves...

And that's where I'll be,  
 Planting seeds between my fingers  
 Until something I can count sprouts out,  
 Like the clouds I've always been able to wrap my head around,  
 Dreaming of ways to hitchhike a Cumulus ride to Your house of  
     tightropes and right answers,  
 Can I come inside?

These poems are not walls,  
 They don't concern themselves with what fits,  
 They fly just like balloons with their cords rooted deep inside of my  
     heart,  
 Like veins pulsing towards You,  
 Like prayers reaching out for the point where all souls meet,  
 And even though my center of gravity beats crooked in the left side  
     of my chest,  
 I've got no balancing act for this massive mess of insecurity,  
 As I fall backwards into Your arms after digging holes for myself in  
     the sky,  
 Why do I keep mixing this mortar?

These dreams are not walls,  
 They are stepping stones leading to Your house of breathing deep,

And now I'm exhaling the kind of sweat-stained heat that only  
radiates in moments of clarity,  
Moments that grow into perfectly unsymmetrical crawlspaces of  
catharsis,  
Where I can sit and think about how often I trap myself in the  
smallest corners of infinity,  
As if the chance for You and me to finally meet in the middle  
will be firebombed,  
If I forget what it means to soak up the morning,  
Piercing dew-drop epiphanies with the whites of my eyes,  
Only to find that I've been dreaming on the wrong side of the bed  
With a head cracked open by dust busters and ego boosters...

And I've been told that if I'm able to part with the most resonant  
beat of my heart,  
I'll know what it means to believe in God...

These prayers are not walls,  
They don't fold in on themselves like last words,  
They aren't worried about what doesn't fit,  
They are just candlelit pilgrimages marching underneath my tongue,  
They are voice boxes full of bombs,  
They are demolition heartbeats,  
They sound like pain,  
They taste like the rain,  
But I've never prayed from the eye of a storm...  
And before last night,  
I had never noticed the way that light bends when a starving child's  
prayer cuts through it,  
I need to look up more often,  
And when my demons try to drown all the moon inside of me,  
I remember that Your house has no walls,

So I blow mine up with a poem,  
A pair of sunbeam weavers,  
And a heartbeat in the shape of a hand grenade...

And when the dust settles on my bent knees and broken seams,  
I want to see Your face,  
Stuck in between my ribs like mortar,  
Holding me together,  
Keeping me upright,  
Because walls never could...

MATTHEW ZELLMER

*Gravity*

Bare-toed on the shore of the world's pulse,  
slow moon rise gives witness  
to a rotating earth.

Thoughts spin like pearls  
from a cut strand.  
Shattering  
into slow whisper.

What is left of your kiss?

Swallow my tongue,  
thick with wayward wishing.  
Rubbed raw, rough, and angry  
With the promises  
You left  
in my mouth.

I've always spun on my own axis,  
never wanted you to be my center.  
Solitude is a fickle savior.  
I continue my small rotation,  
do my best.  
Spit you to the sea.



SHARON DEMEYER

*Greenstone*

His greenstone eyes once glowed  
with light, flared with ideas, focused  
on hammer and nail, grew shiny  
with tears as he leaned over my body.

Precious to me as that ritual stone  
to the Maori, those gemlike eyes  
clasped me to him, bound  
like a pearl nested in matrix.

Jade shafts pierced through layers  
to the core, turned cold  
at what he sometimes saw  
in the rubble-strewn lives of others.  
Captured in level sweeps the detail of worlds.

Today his greenstone eyes,  
filmed as with dust,  
peer from the caverns of his skull,  
look on me as though a lizard crawled  
from my mouth.

As he sits and stares, I wonder  
if Hat Creek in trout season  
slides past his gaze  
or if he explores his own misfiring mind.

Then he shivers, returns to the person  
who lived there before. So far,  
just before sleep, those greenstone eyes  
know who I am, beam shafts of light  
from his heart into mine.



## *Morphine*

Standing with you,  
at the ledge of your existence.  
Staring down that icy slope,  
into the cavernous depths  
of your once-warm eyes.  
You aren't here.  
Despite the loneliness  
of this little room  
my heart begins to thaw.

You have traded this unsettling aroma  
drenched with man-made chemicals  
for the hearty scent of pine.  
The whirring sound of this fan  
for the whisper of waves,  
mixing breath with salt and kelp.  
Shrouded with the colors  
of a living, breathing world  
instead of this pale death  
shrugged against the walls.

This is who you are.  
Who you will always be.  
And when this dream  
ends.  
When the ravenous violets  
sprouting on your toes  
eat their way up your legs.  
When the drip  
stops.

I will scatter what is left to the wind,  
and feel your kiss in the ocean.

*Medicine Man*

I felt better yesterday—  
more yesterday  
than I felt before.

I felt worse  
tomorrow but not as bad  
as today.

Maybe it's the medicine.  
The doctor said  
he thinks the medicine

will help.  
I took some and sure enough  
enough it...

I forget. My mommy's  
just what  
it not used to be.

If  
you say what  
I'm seeing.

I couldn't see for sure,  
not absolutely.  
But then—everything's relative.

Tomorrow,  
yesterday, today, who wet  
where? Next time

bring candy  
cigarettes—the same brand  
you brought tomorrow.

But I'm getting ahead  
of my story.  
Come back yesterday.

And close  
the door behind you.  
We'll talk.

ROBERT NAZARENE

*Particulars*

In the overlap of fall and winter my almond trees look like crippled hands clutching frost. The solid trunks open wide into crooked branches and curl at the tips as if fingernails long forgotten. I try not to work around the trees too much this time of year.

Thirteen months ago arthritis bloomed under my kneecaps and inside my knuckles, preventing me from working my ten acres of Peerless. I had to hire a few kids from the high school to help me with the harvest. Last spring I showed them where to move the beehives so the trees can get pollinated, and how to clamp the arm of the shaker onto the trunks without digging into the bark. They have to shake them without damaging the roots.

This morning the guys are cutting away the wayward branches. There has to be enough space for wind to pass through or else all the trees will pull each other down. After a few hours of pruning, I let the kids go home and walk back toward the house, favoring my left leg; the cartilage is like crystallized honey, sticky and grainy.

Preoccupied with the orchard and not paying attention to the ground, I stumble on an oddly shaped protruding root. Both knees smack into the frozen earth and I'm thrown into a coughing spasm. Hunching over on my hands and knees, forcing oxygen into my lungs, I'm overcome with feeling vulnerable and weak.

Hitting the ground splits open a memory, one I'd rather keep frozen, to the night Esther fell. Except it wasn't her knees she slammed, it was her stomach. Her bag of water had already broken before she came outside. There was no cushion between her weight and the earth. She said she heard crunching. Then blood streamed out from under her nightgown like fat fingers stretching across the frosted ground.

This is not the memory I live with; our son visits me as often as he likes. He comes home to tell me all the things he's done since that night.

Esther and I don't talk about him. And we weren't able to entertain the idea of more children. Somewhere along the way we silently agreed our time's run out, that we'd waited too long to start. Eighteen years ago Esther was a high-risk pregnancy at forty-one, and I was fifty. Our baby was a miracle. The only miracle we'd ever asked for.

Needling pain spreads past my knees into my thighs as I stand up and limp inside to the front hallway. I can hear Esther moving around in the kitchen. I don't want her to know that I've fallen or she'll hover over me. If I let her, she'll try to spoon-feed me and keep me in bed wrapped up in blankets.

It's better between us if we talk about things that remain on the surface.

"I thought I'd surprise you with breakfast," she says, rubbing sleep from her eyes.

"Don't go through the trouble," I reply, pouring a cup of coffee.

"I'm making juice for myself. But I can cook you pancakes. Or sausage and eggs," she stretches to pull the juicer down from the cabinet. The sun beams through the bay window, covering Esther in a swatch of yellow light. Her rosewater complexion, imprinted with crow's-feet and laugh lines, her taut muscles under loose skin, the slight smile playing tag with her eyes all remind me of how long ago we fell in love.

"What are you gonna do today?" I ask her.

"Well, I have to go to the soup kitchen for a couple of hours. Then I'm stopping by the church to help separate some of the donated clothes," she says while quickly juicing a carrot, celery, apple, and ginger into a glass. She swallows some of the bright orange frothy drink before asking, "What do you want to eat?"

"How 'bout pancakes," I say sitting at the table.

Silence returns and we relax.

Esther serves me a near perfect stack and her dentures slip just slightly outside of her smile, "I saw the guys left already. Does that mean you're done for the day?"

"Yep, they're not coming back until Saturday."

"Then you can come to church with me," she says playfully. She knows I only go on Sunday to make her happy.

"Nope," I smile. "I'm going out to the hives to make sure they're staying warm."

"You should start volunteering with me, Clarence. You know it's what we're supposed to do at our age," she rinses out her empty glass in the sink. "And you're walking way too much. The doctor said your knees are too weak to carry you around all day."

"That doctor's a quack. My legs are fine," I wince as I stretch them out underneath the table.

"I'm getting the cream for your knees," she leaves and returns with a label-less white tube. "Let me help you."

"I can do it," I say trying to pull the tube out of her hand.

"I insist, Clarence," she says as she puts the tube of white cream in her lap created when she squats. Then she begins to roll up my pants. We're both surprised at the amount of deep green and purple already there, first on my left kneecap, then on my right.

"What in the world?" Esther's eyes are bright with shock.

"I'm okay. They're just bruises."

"I'll call the doctor's office," she says, "after we put some of this on you."

She empties a quarter-sized amount of the cream into the palm of her left hand, rubs her hands together, and massages it on the perimeter of my left kneecap first, then touches the top of the bruising. Her fingers move around to the back of my knee before she repeats the process with the right leg. Her touch causes me to shudder. It's been a while since I've let her get this close to me, since I've let her touch me this gently. It's been a while since she's tried.

"I remember when I had this kind of bruising." She says as she puts the cap back on the tube.

I nod. I know she's referring to that night we don't talk about.

She takes a long deep breath, "I wasn't going to tell you," Esther pauses, "but I attended a meeting last Thursday. It was a grief support group." She waits for me to say something. But I don't. I roll down my pant legs, stand up, and walk over to the bay window. Out in the orchard the sunlight magnifies the deep grooves in the thick bark. They look like gouges from here, like they penetrate the heartwood. But I know they don't. I know they just mark the surface. I know the trees are resilient. I know they're okay.

After a long silence Esther says, "I'm going to call the doctor."

I can tell she's disappointed. But later that night, when we sleep, we're both a little closer to the middle of the bed.

*Untitled*



KATHLEEN MORAN

*The Aspen Grove*

from his porch he looks out  
on vast fields of aspen trees  
covering the high mountain  
shoulder

stands of white bark gleam  
in cold sun  
dressed in yellow leaves  
shaking in the autumn wind

aspen roots connect  
my son says to me  
like magic  
under frozen ground

thus an aspen grove's  
a single creature  
the largest thing alive  
and growing

the grove endures as one  
he says  
despite damage done  
by pest and storm

new shoots rise as old limbs fall



we are not aspen trees  
my son and me  
and all the rest of us

and surely not an aspen grove

yet we tremble as they do  
when surprised we touch another hand  
beneath  
the unfrozen  
surface of our lives

KENNETH FRIES

*A Wife at Age 12*

Daddy, I know you worked hard,  
Six days a week,  
Two-hour commute each way.

Our neighbors only saw  
A lonely single father  
Not the wife I had become.

I wrapped up sandwiches,  
Cooked your eggs and ironed  
Blue collars, pressed and starched.

When you got home from work  
I had your dinner, newspaper,  
And a cold beer ready.

I brought you food and you brought  
Home a paycheck and a man's needs.

*Of(f) Course,*

I miss him.

And all that's left of him is ash and tiny shards of bone  
in an antique cardboard box atop the mantel with (of all things)  
a checkerboard stenciled on top. And on top of the box—

his *Commander-in-Chief*

cap I bought for him at Dulles—returning from London  
on a plane with a cabin full of smoke two hours out  
from the eastern seaboard. The passengers were terrified,  
of course.

And all I could think of was how charmed a life  
I've led—and my children—his grandchildren—how  
he'd be the perfect one to carry on for me.

My dad.

He was our captain speaking: *Ladies and Gentlemen, it seems  
we've encountered some unforeseen  
problems—the murder of a daughter  
by a drunk driver, a little dash  
of alcoholism and drug addiction  
here and there, two or three messy  
divorces—and by the way—*

the lung, bone and brain cancer  
that placed him permanently atop the mantelpiece—leaving  
what's left of his family just a little off course.

Not unlike a checkerboard, *Commander*.

Never again certain  
which move to make next.

*doc and me*

thoughts burn away at us both  
and beyond dips the foundering sun  
while we smoke cigarettes  
and bounce heels off the tower's great ledge  
thirty meters of nothing but air  
beneath our tired scuffed boots  
spread shattered floors and torn walls  
and our shoulders and hips meet on occasion  
as we sit in the fastness of men side by side  
above the below that makes fluttering guts  
and above all the soldiers and materiel  
with their antennae sprouting like weeds  
and the pair of blackhawks that bank  
'like cowboys, huh?'  
'yeah. riding into the sun.'  
over the river of nebuchadnezzar and babylon too  
and every once in a while  
the neighborhoods cough up their fire  
or dull bursts, but mostly lie still  
our eyes meet just a breath and his say  
that what he speaks is his heart, his confession...  
'...is the worst thing that i've ever done.'  
then stares down at the river or palace or air  
and we let the wailing of mosques speak for us both  
while the breeze takes our circles of smoke

## *A Drinking Conversation with Marie*

"RESPICE POST TE. HOMINEM TE MEMENTO." —ANON.

He sits among an absolute mess at the kitchen table. Red plastic cups. Empty glass bottles. Wrinkled aluminum cans. Soles of his sneakers stick to the cheap linoleum, coated in spilt liquor. The smell of tobacco smoke and something fermented tinges the air from the prior night. Roommates come and go, noticing him sitting there, staring blankly at the calendar on the wall. He says nothing, and they don't dare bother him. But they wonder. That look on his face. You never want to bother a person with a face full of nothingness as the eye of a storm. He always had a short temper for them, anyhow. All the same, he could think only of the last time he saw her. Today he realized it.

*It's been a year since you left, and I miss you terribly, old friend. St. Patrick's day was the last I saw you and never thought for a second that would be last I'd see you, ever. We were still young two summers ago, though. We were all chummy in a debauched beer-scented college town, laughing at the debauchery all the same: those boys stumbling home, sleeping on strangers' lawns, or those unfortunate girls wearing things they shouldn't have been wearing. Remember that house and the live band playing "Freebird"? The box of watery beer your big brother got for us, that box we took turns carrying around town all night? That stuff makes you think you'll live forever, doesn't it? She cannot fade and she be fair.<sup>1</sup> Those days were good days. Never thought them beautiful days, but they were, and it was Truth enough for all of us, wasn't it?*

*And only months later. Stage Four. I'm sure you didn't feel young, but you still had your grace before your fear. Soft, white arms punctured and bruised by IVs, like needles in ripe fruit. Fresh, vivid flowers in a sterile grey-blue hospital room. That bed looks far too firm, I thought. You told us, 'I just want to go home.' But then you laughed about how your brown hair was all gone, though its flowing length was one of your signature features, and you never knew you had such a beautifully shaped head.*

*You told our friends to pinch me—I wasn't wearing green. We stand, we turn, we go across the lone and level sands stretching far away.<sup>2</sup> 'Terminal,' they said. Joe told us to feel comfort in knowing that*

*you would soon feel no more of this. But we still looked back at you, realizing you never deserved pain.*

*I was here, in this seat last year, when Joe finally called about you. Twenty-one. Twenty-one. I hang up. I sit, misunderstanding, until my eyes burst open like breaking dams. I wondered later if you saw it. Did you?*

*'You should be in a wedding dress.' That's what we thought, the six of us. But instead they gave you a wooden box for us to carry down the aisle. A jewel box, surely, a precious jewel encased.*

He blinks finally, finishes the last bitter drops of some dark German liquor from a glass tumbler and sets it down with a heavy, indifferent clank. The throat burns and tingles. The stomach warms. It isn't a pleasant warmth. Sour, rather. Doesn't care so much about that right now. He looks with raw, darkly circled eyes out of the marred plate-glass sliding door, past a distasteful figure someone had finger-drawn in the dusty glass the past night. It was a warm, new green morning in the beginning of May, just like last year when he received that call from Joe.

*You should really get your depressing ass out of that chair already.*

He hears her and laughs. He'll stand and become useful again by mopping, perhaps, only to have the entourage of revelers he did not welcome into his home mark it up again. Or maybe he could research that meaningless thesis, though he knows it will simply wind up a forgotten scrap of paper not long after. How hard it is to simply exist. He'll stand and be useful, but he won't feel young anymore, as if there ever was such a thing as youth to begin with.

---

<sup>1</sup> John Keats: "Ode on a Grecian Urn"

<sup>2</sup>Percy Bysshe Shelley: "Ozymandias"

*Just a Matter of Time*



JOSHUA WHITTINGHILL

*Space Time*

If I could bend space and time  
 Would life unravel before my eyes?  
 Into fragmented pieces

memory,

energy,

And all that is sensory

What is Time but a ticking clock  
 Would I break its song of

tick

tock

tick

tock

If I could bend space and time  
 Would I be able to make it rhyme?  
 The present, the past,  
 They would all last,  
 But a shoRt while, alas...

Fleeting freely over ripples of matter  
 Hearing space dust's pitter patter  
 If I could beNd space and time  
 Where the shortest path is not a straight line  
 Where the beginning is the end and the end the begInning  
 Where the only sound is that of the stars

Bent space in Time to ride the future waves

bye

bYe

Sense is lost and echoes...  
 If I could bend space and time



## *Heart Shot Parade (Parts I & II)*

### I

These days...

I'm searching for God in all the wrong places:

I'm trying to see if he's hiding in the parts of me I don't understand,

Hoping that my inability to speak his language is a correctable  
defect,

But there are only question marks under my skin,

So I look for him in the pieces of me I leave behind,

Rummaging through the dust I kick up while running from time,

But all I find are blind corners and yellow-spined books,

I'm quickly discovering that I have to slow down in order to see  
God...

These days...

I'm walking on whatever happens to be beneath my feet,

At the moment, it's a field covered in the four-leaf clovers I've spent  
my life picking

From between the sidewalk cracks I decided not to back away from,

But recently I traded in my lucky penny for the truth,

It's a street-side story and it's everything I need,

So now I am melting down my dreams for the sake of renovation,

And grinding up the leftovers so I can scatter the powder and watch

As guilt-free flowers sprout like crippled kites cut loose from the  
confinement in their cords...

Today...

I've refused to hold myself back anymore,

But sometimes I still wish I could hide on the roof of my mouth  
when my poems fall short of complete,

I never learned how to climb up there...

There's no ladder leading to the safekeeping of my insecurities,

I can't see the space where my soft spots end and the rough around  
my edges begins,

And I'm trying to figure out if there's a single neutral bone in my  
body,

MATTHEW ZELLMER

As I find myself caught in between bottle rocket blasts and  
 stuttering Dictaphone diatribes  
 From both sides of my mind,  
 Like two lovers struggling to find what they believe is each other's  
 collective lifeline,  
 They have not yet met in the middle...

And tonight I will still not have slept soundly...

Someday I want someone to point at my head and say:  
 "There's something important going on in there!"  
 The closest I've ever come to that was on the day I met  
 A group of gutter-dwelling angels at 7th and Seraphim,  
 They were at the center of a rained-out parade,  
 Praying poems about barroom brawls between shadows and the  
 people who cast them...

The darkness was a trench they chose to do battle in,  
 And although they looked too weary to bother with a revolution  
 spent on wounded knees,  
 They made no attempt to hide the black feathers tattooed on the  
 outsides of their plucked wings,  
 You should have felt how warm the breeze was when they carried it  
 on their singing voices,  
 It sent soul-shudders down my softened spine,  
 Because I knew that these ground-bound angels hadn't forgotten  
 how to fly...

They kept pocket watches in between their nervous ticks,  
 Twitching while twisting the restiform chains around their callused  
 fingertips  
 To feel closer to the way that time on Earth sounds when it clicks  
 backwards...  
 They told me that you won't find Heaven in a pissing match,  
 They told me that you'll never see Hell in your worst recurring  
 nightmares,

They told me that my life is worth it even when it falls well short of perfect,

They called this shit vintage and said it can be found on vinyl...  
Now my chest is overflowing with record sleeves and typewriter keys,

So please forgive me for dancing the Deep Breath in slow motion,  
It's the only anesthetic complete with the active ingredient "release,"  
And it's taken me this far,  
So hit me with your best heartshot,  
Because I've got a bulletproof parade marching in circles around my clapcenter...

These right-shoulder angels will silence your left-shoulder devils,  
So back up slowly, Teeth Grinders!  
Get out of my way, Sunday Drivers!  
Your unconscious desire to crush everything in me won't stop this poem from breathing,  
You cannot stop this poem from breathing!

You see...  
I'm weaving threads of ADD into this moment of clarity,  
And it really feels just like a pinprick of picture perfect,  
But you're still determined to smuggle razor blades into my brain on the forked tips of your tongue...

So go ahead...  
Slice up my nervous endings with your affinity for taking it easy,  
Because I don't have it in me to be anything but crazy,  
And I wish I could pound my chest and say "Today I am anything!"  
But sometimes I fill myself up with living inside-out,  
Until it carries me on the wings I wish I had,  
And says:  
"You'd be flying if you weren't so afraid of falling..."

Now I know that when my feet hit the ground,  
I won't be ashamed to walk crooked...

## II

The only time I've ever understood what it means to choke on your  
 own dreams was the day I met  
 A young street performer at 5th and Forgotten Child,  
 He just stood there with a chipped halo hung loosely around his  
 neck,  
 And a blank stare pasted to his facial expression,  
 Watching as trench-tested angels trudged by in a rainy day parade...

He looked like an opened bottle of pain relievers in an empty  
 medicine cabinet,  
 Hoping that someday someone would find a prescription for  
 returning the glow to his cheeks...

He speaks in secrets,  
 As if the only story he knows how to tell is the one in which he  
 learned everything about  
 Pulling pain out from his body,  
 Creating the plotline from the pieces he kept of the poems he  
 couldn't write,  
 He says, "Someday I might..."

He carries a guitar case covered in peeling stickers of patchwork  
 praise,  
 Bent smiles,  
 And recycled rain drops,  
 Inside is a set of replacement heartbeats for those times when  
 laughter turns  
 The metronome rhythms of the human body into an impossibility,  
 But he doesn't remember laughing,  
 So he tries to forget that he can by chasing after the rain...

He sings "Blind Boy Blues,"  
 And while there's absolutely nothing wrong with his sight,  
 There's everything wrong with his vision:  
 Clouded by memories of starved promises and defective dreams...  
 He proceeds to take a harmonica out of his pocket,

And sucks poetry through it to inject some sanity into that small  
 crawlspace he calls his head,  
 It was like watching Dylan walk right across inspiration's face to tell  
 me:  
 "The Answer, my friend, is no longer in the wind..."

As if to prove this point the boy plays percussion on my back,  
 "Around here," he says,  
 "Pain is just a part of the vernacular..."

He told me that there were days he wanted to fold in on himself,  
 Days when the phrase "fuck you" lost all its meaning,  
 Days when he took it on the chin and across the cheek and on the  
 chin again,  
 Armed with the attitude he used to scrape passing glances off the  
 bottom of the barrel,  
 Only to discover that rubbernecking as you pass life on by  
 Is much more dangerous than flying,  
 So he pretends that it's possible to rip the whiplash from his spine  
 without feeling it...

He doesn't remember the last time anyone called him an angel,  
 But he believes he can play the part in this Heart Shot Parade,  
 And with a frostbitten tongue stuck on the wrong side of happiness,  
 He says "For one day only, I will choose to believe in God..."

I bow my head at his request,  
 And when I pray my chest cracks open like a window  
 Into the lonely hotel room of "hoping for something better,"  
 Where humility rests heavy and helps me feel right at home...

I'm now learning how to speak tire tread,  
 Spitting ornamented venom all over the headway we never made in  
 each other's lives,  
 Because we forgot the language of acid burn,  
 The kind of words that can set fire to our better sensibilities,  
 And burn down the walls built up between you and me...

Maybe someday we'll get there,  
 But in the meantime,  
 Put your windmill worries on pause,  
 They've got no business running circles in our world of broken glass,  
 There're too many jagged edges,  
 And I'm sick of pulling shrapnel out of your ass...  
 So find a place in the parade,  
 Because today we've all come here from out of the rain to see what  
     internal graffiti looks like,  
 Spray painting our hearts off-white so that we might remember the  
     face of grace turned inside-out...  
 Raise it up,  
 Like a gospel choir on a bender,  
 Like a life story in a shoebox,  
 Like a poem in a pill case,  
 Like a boy now standing in the gutter...  
 Hands in the air...  
 A bright color in his cheeks...  
 Because he has measured the greatest distance between one corner  
     of his mouth and the other,  
 He has discovered his smile...

I like the Holy Ghost because he's very social            always entering   never leaving  
entering your soul   spirit   mind           and he's got a flair for the dramatic   as in  
Shakespeare's stage directions   flourish trumpets   I mean you always know  
when the Holy Ghost is on the scene

blaze of light

clap of thunder

hush of the crowd

I like the way he can make you speak in tongues   I mean who wouldn't want to  
be able to speak seven languages           I suspect that the Holy Ghost hides  
sometimes though   in peyote   mushrooms   absinthe   in wild purples   in the blaze  
of sunrise   in absence of self   hides in all of us   and shines   when no one's looking

*Ice Puddle*



BETH WATTENBERG



*Glacial Lake Experience in Four Parts*

I

Where the air is light  
But breathing is heavy  
Scolding Altitude shakes his finger at you  
To remind you of your place.  
The barbarian breath stealer and lung immolator  
Makes you feel your heartbeat in your teeth.

The sky oozes to the water like syrup  
Broken bone slivers of  
Skeletal snow fingers claw the rugged landscape  
And hold a mirror to the sky

II

Sun glinting  
Only a jump into cotton clouds

Electric wrapped retreating  
Shadows licking the bank

In this funhouse mirror  
Wrinkles are dismissed as ripples

The time you only touch air  
Turns infinity on its ear

Shattered surface  
The white spark explosion  
Of a kicked dandelion

JEREMY RICH

Sparkle of broken glass  
 Pulverized by ground and gravity  
 Then enveloped by the spilling shade of retreating sun

### III

It shrinks your head  
 Like a snowball to the face  
 Beneath the surface  
 You plunge  
 To kiss the air goodbye  
 And the fluttering of sound  
 Is in and out of recognition  
 Flailing like a grasshopper in an oil-rainbowed mud puddle  
 Seizing and stiffening muscles turn to steel  
 Smack and tingle

Sting and frost  
 Deep and dull  
 Pain of velvet knives  
 Heat of wind welts  
 Bite like an over-eager advance slap  
 The broken heart stomach  
 Feeling of sharp rocks on hands means safety.

### IV

Towel embrace  
 The wet sock sliding over freeze broken toes  
 Like a snake slithering back into previously shed skin.

Altitude?  
invisible again  
We're invincible again  
For the rest of this day

Souls splash and sputter  
Boiling over  
Sunlight paints its warmth on our skin  
Drenches us to the core with static and fire.  
Lungs draw in the citrus sting of pine needled air  
And our feet vibrate.

JEREMY RICH

## True Colors

I stood on a ladder painting my single-story stucco house on a warm day in May. My Indian neighbors were hosting a celebration in honor of their newest grandchild. Ceremonial chanting drifted out their front window with the scent of cardamom. Guests came and went. Occasionally I'd stop to refill my paint bucket and move the ladder forward a foot or two toward the front of the house. The closer I got, the uneasier I became.

Though small and cheaply built in 1949 for World War II newlyweds, my house is worth almost three-quarters of a million dollars because of its location at the south end of San Francisco Bay in Silicon Valley. You wouldn't guess this area is the home of world-changing intellectual *chutzpah* where Apple, Intel, Google, Yahoo and eBay are down the street. Not judging by the acres of suburban ranch houses painted various shades of pastel, that is. White with blue trim. Gray with white trim. Beige with green trim.

When I moved from Illinois fourteen years ago, my house was a pale yellow with gray trim. Though a nice combination for a shirt, I never found the colors suitable for a place where I eat, write, entertain and am entertained. A place where I beach comb for words and images and in the summer lay on the couch and sleep, the breeze an island lovely. So when the need to repaint arose, what caught my eye were the colors I'd seen in Mexico. Ripe watermelon. Green iguana. An azure ocean. Colors that even when faded, drew tourists to lift their cameras and snap photos, presuming, maybe, that such vibrancy couldn't survive the trip home. But I thought, why not souvenir the colors that inspire me? So I chose Coral Poppy and Noble Blue.

Coral Poppy is Crayola bright and the color of the California poppies that blaze the freeway slopes every spring, a wildfire of color. The blue — a crushed lapis lazuli — deepens to purple at dusk. Both the orange and blue complement the palm tree I planted in my front yard the year I moved in, while all three together express how I think of my abode, not as a suburban box, but as a *casita* on the Sea of Cortez.

I painted the back and moved to the side. As I neared the front, the vagueness of my anxiety dropped away, leaving only one thought. What would people think of my colors?

Until that moment, the question had never occurred to me because mine is a neighborhood of strangers who live in fifty copies of the same house planted ten feet apart on a long block off an expressway. While I know the homeowners who live on either side of me and across the street, others I know only by sight and most I've never seen. Why did I care what they thought of Coral Poppy and Noble Blue, especially in an outside-the-box place like Silicon Valley that encourages you to do what makes you happy. Be a witch, an NRA member, a cocktail of races, a pursuer of odd medicinal treatments, a soul brother to the poor or a billionaire. Or better yet, be all at once. Yet that freedom didn't match the conformity of color expressed in my neighborhood, my city, my county, and why hadn't I noticed before?

Whereas when I chose my colors, I didn't think *this will tweak my neighbors*. Didn't consider *now no one will doubt my individuality*. Didn't contemplate *I can do what I please, so shut up*. I just wanted to live within the colors that fed my soul, a bleeding orange and an abyss-full blue to purple, depending on the light. So I kept painting.

I came to the front of my house. I turned the corner. Then finally, I understood, that a color could reveal more about you than you wanted the world to know. What would my colors reveal? Exactly how naked would they make me?

My first urge was to hide behind a joke. That when people asked why orange and blue, I could say *so nobody shoots at my house during deer hunting season*. Or I could tell them *the glow will help my neighbors get home safely in a snowstorm*. And for sports fans, *I'm an ardent Denver Broncos fan*. But when someone finally asked, what emerged was a ramble that while failing utterly at humor and eloquence, produced the truth, that I love how my colors make me feel. Bright, outrageous, happy.

I painted the front. I finished the house.

My neighbor across the street yelled, "You're kidding," and closed her window.

A woman down the block said, "Do you like it? Well that's all that matters."

A stranger driving by pulled up to the curb, smiled at the house and said, "What great colors! Do you know how to get to the dog park?"

A workman said, "Are you a Denver Broncos fan?"

Little kids who visit say they love the colors, which makes me wonder. At what age do most lose the desire to wrap themselves in hues that host their passions? And how come some never do?

I painted my house.

I painted my house Coral Poppy and Noble Blue.

## *Redevelopment*

The old graveyard torn down.  
Here and there  
stones  
like prehistoric ruins.

Bones uplifted,  
untangled from sod.  
Decay flutters  
from holy ground  
on black wings.

Bones wrenched from the land,  
from their depths.  
We stumble over our own roots.

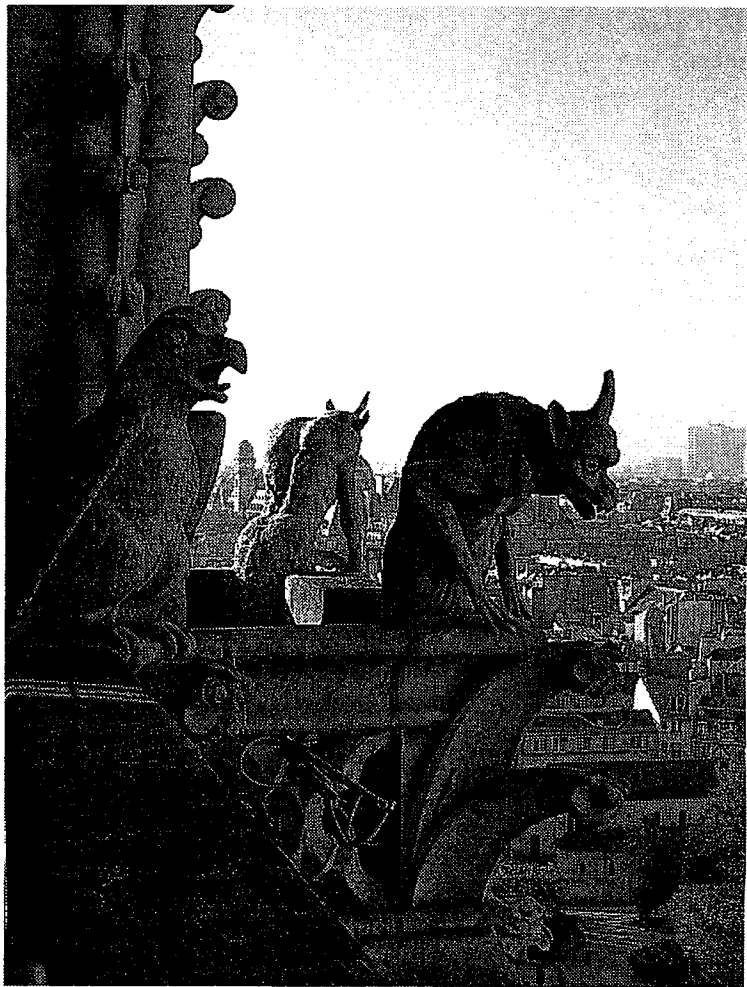
Remains labeled,  
stacked,  
shipped away.  
Bulldozers move in,  
condos are under construction.

Marble, granite  
saved  
for countertops.  
Stone lions,  
cherubs  
guard the gated community.

Relentless street lamps  
light the way.  
Our eyes close  
to the presence of absence,  
of scattered bones.

*Guardians of God & City*

Beneath the spire of Notre Dame de Paris perch the gargoyles, grotesque-looking statues—functionally, drainpipes—that some think guard the cathedral edifice from evil spirits. Perhaps, metaphorically, they do, sitting poised to defend the sacred above from the profane below.





## *Some Assembly Required*

From Bottom-to-Top, ramps stretch upward  
scaffolds begin to stack one on another.  
The blueprints were left unfinished,  
the craftsman has not yet become the architect.

An enigmatic cloud looms overhead casting shadow, while  
Dark obscure figures work on the foundation.  
The mortar of their corrupting influence sets,  
in the chilling night, the foreman waits to give his approval.

The influence attempts to change the design,  
to morph sphere into square.  
Forever changing that smooth, symmetrical shape,  
Patiently waiting to be fixed atop an unfinished spire.

Some masons abandon their work,  
leaving columns unfinished.  
Forgetting their job to custom build character.  
One misplaced column jeopardizes that unique elegance.

The phone is left unattended,  
As instructions are purposely forgotten.  
To avoid the Misdirection of others,  
decisions become a second nature.

Day after day we strive for perfection, sometimes disappointed.  
Until you realize the deadline peaking over the horizon.  
That dream was erected with your voice,  
this tower, from Top-to-Bottom, was built by you.

*Squisby Machine*

Everything you are being told about your brain  
Is wrong.

As it turns out—  
The secret to all that lies between left ear and right  
Is in existence because of your legs.

Surprisingly undetected by radar,  
X-ray,  
(Or even *The Reader's Digest*!)  
reside two fantastic plastic rods.

Since birth, these unbreakable poles,  
which grow like curious fingers from your hips,  
(Well, your backside, if you frequently wear heels)  
have inched their way up  
through the inter-workings of your flesh,  
all in the name of thought provoking thought production,  
and science. (sigh)

Eventually,  
if nourished properly with a healthy diet of Dr. Pepper  
and actual pepper,  
these rods will connect to spoons in your skull  
and soon  
your legs will move, the rods will dance, the spoons will stir,  
and thought will be produced—  
churned like butter, but without the cholesterol.

This whole process may take years (millennia) to perfect,  
but finishes for most of us  
around our early twenties.  
(Give or take a few bad decisions)

\* \* \*

For best “thought” results:

Walk at a steady pace to nowhere in particular  
(avoid Starbucks)  
and whistle.

This allows air to enter through your ears—  
helping the thoughts develop as they stretch and heat like taffy,  
which can eventually be molded into such things as:

–Letters to long lost friends

–Song lyrics from the '80s

–Dissertations

–The smell of Old Spice

–Nude thoughts of your high school crush (who, by the  
way, because she turned down your prom invite ended up moving to  
Nowhereinparticular, Texas and losing her sense of smell)

–Remembered appointments

–Conversations with some sort of higher being

And finally

(but not really finally because who am I to judge the limitations of  
your brain)

–Something artsy you can use to impress your obnoxious  
friend, Michelle.

*Taradiddle. noun. 1: FIB 2: pretentious nonsense*

Words often have no meaning to a reader unless the time is taken to look up the meaning in a dictionary. But what reader wants to spend the time looking up words? The reader wants to experience the story, not be taken out of the experience while looking up definitions.

It is the meaning of words that counts, not the words themselves, which are only abstractions requiring selected detail. The two examples below contrast the difference between utilizing words in the abstraction versus using their definitions, where only then do the words make any sense to the reader. (The undefined words in the first example were randomly selected from John Gardner's book about literary criticism, *On Moral Fiction*.)

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His laments were often vociferous, full of dirge, but he was immutable. He was turbid and dross. Because of this he was often vacuous.

He was also inchoate. When he spoke he was discursive and divagate. He was filled with entropy. He was nihilistic. Then again, maybe this was all taradiddle.

---

He called out in grief, wailed to the sky. His grief was slow, sullen and mournful like you might find in a piece of music. It was as if the purpose of his loudness was to draw attention; but he could not accept, nor was he capable of change. He was deficient in clarity or purity—foul and muddy. He wasn't just scum, he was scum from molten metal: impure waste—base, trivial, and inferior. Because of this his actions could sometimes be highly injurious, even deadly.

His mind was imperfectly formed, and the why of his actions always seemed incoherent or formless. When he spoke, he continually moved from topic to topic, sometimes without even completing a sentence. You might say he rambled, wandered, sometimes completely strayed from the subject. His life also consisted of chaos, disorganization, and randomness. Like the universe, his body was just slowly decaying matter and energy. He was running down, trending more and more towards disorder.

It occurred to him that all traditional values and beliefs were unfounded since they were all just inventions of mankind. In essence, our existence is senseless and useless. The way we are socially organized is so bad that we might as well destroy society for its own sake, independent of any constructive program or possibility.

Then again, maybe this was all pretentious nonsense.

*David Avalos* is a 23-year-old who has lived most of his life in the north state and enjoys it very much. He loves writing music lyrics and poetry and enjoys studying literature.

*Cody Caudill* is a current Chico State student working on a degree in English education with a minor in creative writing. Cody began writing poetry early on in college and enjoys writing about the many inspirations found across the town of Chico or whatever pops into his head.

*Brett Danielsen* is originally from San Jose, California. He is a senior studying design, photography, and marketing. He works as one of the lead designers at the AS Bookstore, but will put life in Chico on hold while he studies photography in Melbourne, Australia, this upcoming fall semester. He looks forward to interning in a design or photography studio.

*Sharon DeMeyer* graduated from CSU, Chico in 1996 with a BA in English, and is currently in the master's program. She works in the English department office here at CSU, Chico. She was born and raised in Chico and has lived here all of her life. She loves taking pictures, especially of her beautiful daughter, Zoe.

*Martha Engber* is a journalist by profession and the author of *Growing Great Characters From the Ground Up: A Thorough Primer for Writers of Fiction and Nonfiction*. She's had a short story nominated for a Pushcart Prize, a full-length play produced in Hollywood, and fiction published in *Watchword*, *Iconoclast*, *Anthology*, *Bookpress*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, and other literary magazines.

*Kenneth Fries* has been living in Chico with his wife, Janet, for the past three years, since retiring as a federal attorney with the U.S. Agency for International Development in Washington, DC. He still does some consulting work for the International Law Institute in Washington. He has been writing poetry for the last fifteen years, inspired by travel, time for reflection, and the encouragement of other writers here in Chico.

*Lara Gularte* is a poetry editor for *Narrative Magazine*. She received her MFA degree from San Jose State University, where she was poetry and art editor for *Reed Magazine*. A previous contributor to *Watershed*, her poetry is forthcoming in *Bitter Oleander* and has appeared in such journals as *The Fourth River*, *Santa Clara Review*, and *Kaleidoscope*. <http://www.laragualarte.com-a.googlepages.com/>

*Jenny Johnson* is living in Chico and working toward a speech pathology degree. After recovering from a head-on collision with a very drunk driver, she was inspired to enter a field where she could help people heal. She has spent the better part of a decade in the desert near the Grand Canyon becoming intimate with the earth and some time traveling in Thailand, Taiwan, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Canada searching for global beauty.

*Anita L. Joulé* believes in the old adage that one should "write what they know." She mines her own memories and experiences, many of which come from a life of raising children and ministering to the needs of her family, for raw materials in the form of human experiences—some encouraging, some tragic—which resonate throughout her poems.

*Caitlin Linscheid* is an English major at Chico State who spends an inordinate amount of her free time up a tree.

*Shelby Martin* is a sophomore at Pleasant Valley High School. In his spare time he likes to play video games, badminton, and swim with his friends. He is currently a second-year student in Japanese and plans to continue studying it through college as well.

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

*Robert Mirabel-Ramos* was born and raised in California's Bay Area and is currently an English major at Chico State. He will be graduating in May 2008 and is scared out of his mind about finally entering Grown-Up World.

*Kathleen Moran* is a graduate student studying cultural anthropology at CSU, Chico. She incorporates visual medium into her research frequently, particularly digital still photography.

*Robert Nazarene* is founding editor of *Margie/The American Journal of Poetry* and IntuiT House *Poetry Series*, publisher of Troy Jollimore's *Tom Thomson in Purgatory*, winner of the 2006 National Book Critics Circle award in poetry. Mr. Nazarene's volume of poems is *CHURCH*.

*Philip Reilly* is a 19-year-old sophomore at CSU, Chico, currently pursuing a bachelor's in psychology. He is a fairly outgoing person and looks forward to the rest of his time here. Thanks for reading, enjoy!



*Jeremy Rich* grew up in the Chico area and graduated with a BA in English education from CSU, Chico. He then taught abroad for three years in South Korea, Czech Republic, and Mexico before returning to CSU, Chico, to complete his teaching credential. He has published a number of poems in various collections such as *Watershed*, *Take Back The Night*, *Chantarelle's Notebook*, *Speedpoets*, *Thick with Conviction*, *Poetic Hours*, *Ceremony*, and others. He is currently an 8th-grade language arts teacher in Colorado, but was a long-time chef in California.

*Linda Seratto* a Chico State alumna, lives in Chico with her son Paul and her two dogs. Her daughter, Adele, is attending the university. She is currently a third-grade teacher at Rosedale Elementary School.

*Carolyn Starr Stephen* uses photography as a medium for artistic expression that allows for interpretation of cultural icons, play with juxtapositions of cultural meaning, and the pure aesthetic pleasure of nature. Historical and natural settings provide the majority of her subjects. She is trained as a historian and has loved the outdoors her entire life. These interests are reflected in her photographic themes.

*Garth Andrew Talbott* is a student and a veteran of OIF I.

*Hilary B. Tellesen* is currently pursuing her MA in English at CSU, Chico. She is a mother of two, a poet, and currently teaches academic writing at CSU, Chico. She received her undergrad in theater and performs when she can in the local community theater.

*Beth Wattenberg* is a graduate student in education. She loves photography because it helps her be mindful and enjoy the beauty and wonder of life.

*Patricia Wellingham-Jones* is a three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, who has had work published in numerous anthologies, journals, and internet magazines, including *HazMat Review*, *Poetry Depth Quarterly*, *Phoebe*, *A Room of Her Own*, *Pudding*, *Red River Review*, *Rattlesnake Review*, *Ibbetson Street Press*. Chapbooks include *End-Cycle*, *poems about caregiving*, *Don't Turn Away: Poems About Breast Cancer*, and *Voices on the Land*. Her website is [www.wellinghamjones.com](http://www.wellinghamjones.com)

*Jennifer White* is a mother of three, a wife of one, and a student of many. Nearing the end of her graduate studies, she's excited to get started on her creative project, even though she feels that the more she learns, the less she knows, and the less she knows, the more she wants to learn. So, the truth is, she might never leave the academy.

*Joshuah Whittinghill* believes that by looking "beneath the surface" we are given the opportunity to acknowledge and recognize parts of the unfamiliar, the forbidden, the taboo, or the feared elements of who we are. The world of photography provides a nurturing and revitalizing nest for this introspection.

*Matthew Zellmer* is a stay-at-home bullshitter, a licensed word-slinger, a certified soul lifter, and a recently registered gutwrencher. He speaks tire tread. He enjoys getting lost in his head. He doesn't mind not being able to find his way back.

LIFE