Emerging Voices

Editors
Sherry Brunkhardt
Deanna Wilson

Poetry Jury
Patricia Broderick
Rebecca Guerrero
Starla Rutan

Art & Photography Jury
Sherry Brunkhardt
Yelena Khanevskaya
Mark Rein

Prose Jury
Scott Hartman
Emily Hoehn
Tania M. Torres

Advisor
Janet S. Craven

Front Cover
Photography
Flow by Leodegario Sierra
Wallesan Grain by Dennis W. Miller, Jr.
Untitled by Christy Servido

Back Cover
Writing
Windmills - Silent Sentinels by Jerald H. Lucas

Photography
Untitled by Breanna Meyer
Art
Untitled by Jerald H. Lucas

For submission guidelines and more information please visit us on the web:
http://www.wncc.edu
Emerging Voices is a publication of Western Nebraska Community College
with financial support from student fees, the
Language and Arts Division, and the WNCC Foundation.
Contact us at emergingvoices@wncc.edu
Subscriptions are $5 per year by sending a check payable to WNCC Emerging
Voices, 1601 East 27th St., Scottsbluff, NE 69361.
Copyright ©2011 Emerging Voices
After publication all rights revert to authors and artists.
Printed by Print Express.
# Table of Contents

## Prose
- Silver Birds and World War II by Doreen Jensen .......... 3
- Deadly Storm by Shirley Sullivan .................................. 14
- The Akita by Mary Strong Jackson .................................. 28
- Dutch and the Hired Man by John D. Nesbitt .................. 37
- Unexpected Hazards of Hobby Farming by Art Clack 41
- Ice Cream Sunday by Laurie Alkire .............................. 42
- The Christmas Fiasco by CJ Clark ................................. 48
- I Dreamt Peace Came to the Mid-East by Art Clack 53
- Hiding in the Shadows by Katie Cagle .......................... 55

## Poetry
- Washes of Sound by Mary Strong Jackson ..................... 1
- Nosce Te Ipsum by Gary Henderson .............................. 5
- Haiku VL and XVLI by Gary Henderson ......................... 5
- The Edges of Humanity by Art Elser ............................ 6
- Old ‘Boes and Mushfakirs by CJ Clark .......................... 7
- Static by Stephanie Martinez ...................................... 8
- Two Monuments by Jerald H. Lucas ............................... 9
- Corners by Stephanie Martinez ................................... 10
- Homestead by Rhitta Ann Smith-Bounds ....................... 11
- Prairie Storms by Jerald H. Lucas ............................... 12
- You Wreck Me by Kethera Aiyana ............................... 17
- Miller’s Maxim by Aaron E. Holst ............................... 17
- Greed’s Victim by Andrea Cook ................................ 18
- Blindsided by Linell Wohlers .................................... 18
- Patriotism by Joni Whitcomb Bunzel ......................... 19
- Young Girl, Never Leaving Home by Gary Henderson ........ 20
- Hands by Yvonne Randall ....................................... 21
- The Wind in the Trees by Doreen Jensen ..................... 23
- Tiki Torches by Diane Dinndorf Fribe ......................... 23
- I Am by Zane Ricketts ......................................... 23
- After the Martin Luther King Parade by Art Elser .... 24
- Last Picture Show by Doreen Jensen ......................... 25
- Produce Picasso by CJ Clark .................................... 25
- Blue Creek Gardener by Norma Rhiley ....................... 26
- Daddy’s Little Girl by Brooke Michael ....................... 27
- Cathedral of the Plains by Martha Boyer Armstrong 32
- Sandstones by Andrea Cook .................................... 34
- His Kiss by Paige Vogel ........................................ 35
- If I Had a Day by Janet S. Craven .............................. 36
- Writer’s Block by Rhitta Ann Smith-Bounds .................. 43
- Dry Spell by Kethera Aiyana .................................... 44
- Aegis by Dennis Miller Jr. ....................................... 45
- Starless by Robbie Jaramillo .................................... 45
- Something from Long Ago by Linell Wohlers ............... 46
- Snow Blower by Christine Valentine .......................... 47
- Edgamation and Christmas Lament by Shirley Ann Smith . 48
- Broken momento mori by C.J. Wilson ......................... 56
- Requiem for a Young Gay Man by Art Elser ............... 56
- Searching by Cynthia S. Miller ................................. 57
- The New Thing by Diane Dinndorf Fribe ................... 58
- Depressing by Diane Dinndorf Fribe ......................... 59
- Shootin’ the Bull by Cheryl Wilkinson ....................... 59
- Painted Ladies by A. Rose Hill ............................... 60
- Dreamer by Adrianna Kay Packard ........................... 61
- I, Lost by Robbie Jaramillo .................................... 62
- Coming Out by Brooke Foreman .............................. 63

## Artwork and Photography
- Wallesan Grain by Dennis W. Miller Jr. ....................... 2
- Untitled by Darek & CJ Wilson ................................. 5
- Sam by Audrey Bosch Erickson ................................ 6
- Untitled by Emily Schmidt ...................................... 7
- Fowl Flight by Holly Jahns ..................................... 8
- Untitled by Jerald H. Lucas .................................... 9
- Above by Alec Kaus ........................................... 10
- Long Journey by Ashley Burns ............................... 11
- Three Bars by Alec Kaus ....................................... 13
- Matthew by Kathryn Stock .................................... 16
- White Wings by Tessa Kaufman ............................... 19
- Untitled by Darek & CJ Wilson ................................ 20
- Untitled by Breanna Meyer .................................... 20
- Hands by Kathy Reece .......................................... 22
- Winter Wonder by Sheryl Wallerich ......................... 24
- Speckled Bug by Tiffany Schank ............................ 25
- Sunflower Pickin’ at Night by Kathryn Stock ............ 26
- Bliss Is Closer Than It Appears by Kethera Aiyana .... 30
- Reflections of a NE Colorado Sunset by Margaret Evans . 30
- Untitled by Tiffany Snethen .................................... 31
- Aphrodite by Alec Kaus ........................................ 33
- Cornerstone by Audrey Bosch Erickson .................... 34
- Little Red by Alec Kaus ....................................... 35
- Living in Unison and Chorus Line by Margaret Evans 40
- Untitled by Chelsie Weidaman ................................ 47
- Bowser’s Nightmare by Brittany Keller .................. 52
- Love Hurts by Paige Vogel .................................... 57
- Vital by Kathryn Stock ....................................... 58
- Harvest Time by Tessa Kaufman ............................ 59
- Flow by Leodegario Sierra .................................... 59
- Fall Flower by Holly Jahns .................................... 60
- Marry Me by Ashley Burns ................................. 61
- Wings Over the Platte by Cheryl Wilkinson ............... 63
Washes of Sound

By Mary Strong Jackson

in the yawn of a silent roar
the cat’s teeth show sharp
his silent stretches reach
across a butter-colored rug

he hears the lap lap lap
of her body sliding into the tub
she asks him how he is
he meows his answer

the room
quiet as butter across bread
quiet as the sugar
that melts in the tea at tub’s edge

she thinks of pretend tea parties
sitting at the bottom of the pool
quiet in the noise of childhood
passing cups pouring tea
until breath runs out and small bodies emerge
and discuss who pours next and if sandwiches
or cake will be shared below water

after a swim
her mother spread butter on bread
brushing sounds in color washes
her voice
like the sound of water lapping
safe as the yawn of a cat
in the yawn of a silent roar
the cat's teeth show sharp
his silent stretches reach
across a butter-colored rug
he hears the lap lap lap
of her body sliding into the tub
she asks him how he is
he meows his answer
the room
quiet as butter across bread
quiet as the sugar
that melts in the tea at tub’s edge
she thinks of pretend tea parties
sitting at the bottom of the pool
quiet in the noise of childhood
passing cups pouring tea
until breath runs out and small bodies emerge
and discuss who pours next and if sandwiches
or cake will be shared below water
after a swim
her mother spread butter on bread
brushing sounds in color washes
her voice
like the sound of water lapping
safe as the yawn of a cat

Wallesan Grain by Dennis W. Miller, Jr.
Years of Christmas have come and gone between those snowy December days during the Depression and a certain Christmas during World War II.

A Christmas on the farm was often pretty lean. Our small tree (not too symmetrical) stood in a lard bucket of sand in our front room. We decorated it with paper chains and popcorn swags, and then Mom clipped six candleholders on the branches. The candles were inserted, but not lit. That was for Christmas morning.

My sister and I were not allowed in the front room on Christmas morning until certain chores were done. Dad stoked the coal stove in the front room and then went out to milk. We (my sister and I) had been awake since before it was light, so we sat restlessly at the kitchen table while Mother spooned hot oatmeal into huge bowls. I wonder if Mother ever realized that on Christmas morning, those were the longest bowls of oatmeal I ever ate.

When I heard the slam of the back door I knew Dad had finished milking. He set the pail of milk on the porch to cool, took off his overshoes, coat and that blue cap with earflaps.

Then we could go into the Christmas room.

I can’t remember all of the gifts we got through the years, but I do know Irma Lou and I received a doll every year. Most of the dolls were quite small, but Mother believed all girls should have dolls to play with. Many years later, when she had great-granddaughters, she was still pushing dolls.

After the gifts were opened, Dad lit the candles. My sister and I sat very still and said, “Ah!” Then the candles were snuffed out. The danger of fire was great, and there was no rural fire truck.

Mother always planned this next ritual with great care. She lifted a shoebox from the wicker library table, opened it, and began unwrapping five silver birds. They were light as a feather, made of paper-thin material, with shiny beaks and bristly tails. She herself hung the birds on the tree. They rocked gently and seemed to blink on and off as the flame from the stove licked at the isinglass window.
Mother had collected these birds one at a time over several years. The birds remained on the tree during Christmas day, and were then placed in the box and set back on the closet shelf.

* * * * *

In 1942 Howard joined the Navy, and we were married two months later. He was stationed at a naval base in Maryland. He wasn’t sure I should be going back with him because the town near the base was very small and was probably full of Navy wives. But I went anyway.

We did find a room—10 feet by 10 feet, with a bed, a chest of drawers, and one chair. You could open the door into the room only partway because of the bed. And the room was over a liquor store.

In a letter to Mother and Dad, I guess my description of the room prompted Mother to do what she did.

As Christmas neared, I received a box from home. Inside were the five silver birds! The note said, “I wanted you to feel at home.”

We managed to find a two-foot tree, placed it on the chest of drawers, and adorned it with the five silver birds. After Christmas I carefully wrapped the birds and mailed them home.

During the years that followed, the war ended, Howard came safely home, and we were getting settled on the farm. We also had baby Rick to keep us busy.

We lived close to my parents, so one December I offered to help Mother decorate her tree. She and Dad now had a home with electricity and the tree was tall. We worked about an hour. There were lights to circle the tree, red balls, garlands, and icicles to add. When we were finished, we stepped back from the tree, and it was beautiful.

Suddenly I remembered the silver birds.

“Where are they, Mother? I’ll get them for you.”

She hesitated, and then said, “Well, Doreen, I never told you, but I didn’t get them back. They must have gotten lost in the mail, you know, because of the War and all.”
Nosce Te Ipsum  
By Gary Henderson

The art of resurrecting a dead brother  
Is a hard-won errand in the night,  
Exchanging metal names with each other,  
Fumbling for the craft of spelling and sight.

Those brave bones embrace, embalm, and bury  
In the womb of some sentimental hill.  
His things— the name and knife you carry—  
Are now your life, the death his death will kill.

He lives! You see there where his shadow lies,  
Where from Styx's mud lilies now do bloom,  
And in the sun, as the Lethe dries  
On his tomb? The scent of lilac perfume.

For you were the soldier all along.  
As you now be he, be you now as strong.

Haiku XVL
By Gary Henderson

Did she cry last night?  
There's something in her strong eyes  
Looking defeated.

Haiku VL
By Gary Henderson

Doting Asian girl  
Who sits daily by her guy  
Sat three seats away.

Untitled by Darek & C.J. Wilson
The Edges of Humanity
By Art Elser

Five derelicts, cast-offs of humanity, huddle near a fire in a barrel in the corner of an alley, tumbleweeds blown there with the plastic bags and rags of their lives. They are snagged on the barbed wire of fate, fear, alcohol, psychosis, by choices made years before with little thought of where they might lead.

They laugh as they share a meal and stories and a brown paper sack that each drinks from before passing it on. A stray dog cowers from man to man. They talk to it, hug its neck, scratch its ears, and share a bit of their meager meal.

Sam by Audrey Bosch Erickson
OLD ’BOES AND MUSHFAKIRS
By CJ Clark

The rails they are a rattlin’, that lonesome whistle blows
Calling men of stout hearts, the ones they call hoboes.
Men like you and men like me, out of work and out of luck
Taking on a job, most any job, just to make a buck.
Putting lives on the line, putting family out of sight
Livin’ on hand-outs, biscuits and beans, hoppin’ trains both day and night.
Escaping “bulls”, enduring blizzards, succumbing to the sod
Risking life and limb for family back home, the men who rode the rods.
One odd ‘bo went door to door to ply his trade
A few cents here, a few cents there, his only accolade.
Broken ribs and ferrules and springs the mushfakir would repair
The fixer of bumpershoots, parasols and umbrella’s hardware.
With holes in their pockets and cardboard in their shoes
They’d find time to whistle happy tunes to shirk away the blues.
Jobs done, ‘round the rail yard they’d be thronging
Waitin’ for the whistle, with just a sackful of belongings.
To those old ’boes, mushfakirs and those who gave their lives
Your sacrifice, your wanderings, have taught me how to deal with strife.

Untitled by Emily Schmidt
Static
By Stephanie Martinez

i know i never asked you
to be a part of this,
and
i know that sometimes
i fall out of step.
but it isn’t your drum I’m marching
to.
sometimes you forget.
i step to my own,
and at times
our rhythms are the same.
but for awhile,
we have been apart.
i gotta come clean.
during those times,
i lied when i said
it wasn’t you.
but all i know is.
that I’m hearing static
and i’d like if you would come be

my harmony.
say what you have to,
and go back to your own.
or stay for a bit.
we could get lost in the beats.
in the off beats
are my strong points,
so when you want to jump in.
it will have to be more than a
1,2 step.
i’m not that difficult
once you break down the
instrumentals.
i just take time
to figure out.
i know we fell off beat,
and your stride is quicker.
but when you want to slow down,
i’m going half tempo.

Fowl Flight
by Holly Jahns
Two Monuments
By Jerald H. Lucas

On a forgotten trail
Headed into the unknown
Following the setting sun
Two monuments stand
Each by its self, alone.
One timelessly created
By an unseen hand
The other made by man.
Two monuments stand
Side by side alone
On a trail into the unknown.
Corners

By Stephanie Martinez

I’ll meet you at another.  
I need time to think.  
please, please say you’ll be there.

See you across the street?

I’m just a wanderer,  
skipping through.  
Looping through love.  
You were a stranger,  
a stranger who stuck.

I’m just a wanderer.  
You changed me.  
I’ve always believed,

But not like this.

I’m not sure what to think  
Or what to do.  
I’ll always be me.  
You’ll always be you.

We could be together.  
Together, yes, me and you.

So, I start to meander  
making my way across the street.  
I see you walking away.  
You smile, and it sparkles.  
You’ll always be you and  
I’ll always be me.  
Two different corners.

But together, indeed.
Homestead
By Rhitta Ann Smith-Bounds

Dark asphalt roads stretch endlessly;
   A weary traveler reaches skyward to ease miles of sedentary journey.
Dusty, rain speckled windows allow voyeurs to study her skeletal vestiges.
   Long forgotten walls lament, “Time is my enemy!”
Memories of laughter, dreamed prosperity, secret crushes, stolen first kisses,
   Seductively peek out from between wooden beams.
“Don’t you realize these things give me color, they give me substance!”
Once stately, revered, and loved by all who pass through her grand entre.
   Today, she’s forgotten just as her long faded shingles decay.
The car passes; a sad tear traverses a lonely path down a warped beam.
Sighing quietly, the old bones fall once more into a deep sleep until another traveler
passes, carrying with them another romantic dream of what once was.
Falling rain echoes off of canyon walls
Where once echoed the clop of ox, mule, and horse’s hoofs
Lightning flashes make silent ghostly shadows
Of mountain man, Indian, and west bound emigrant
The wind howls and whistles
Through the sparse foliage of trees and shrubs
Recalling the lonely cry of coyote and wolf.
And the rains come.

And the rains come
Kicking up the dust like racing prairie dogs
Escaping the hunting hawk and eagle
The rain falls, little drops, big drops
Plop, plop, plop on the parched sandy earth
Drunk up as quickly as it falls
Leaving hardly a trace,
Not enough to whet the thirst of the grasses.
And the rains come.

The clouds roll, tumble, twist and spin
Thermals rise from the canyons, ravines, and prairie
Swirling the storm upward into itself
Lightning flashes, thunder roars
Within and through the agitated darkening clouds
The sky is blackened by storm and night
Bringing ghostly images and echoes of the past
Lightning flash, thunder roar,
Rain drops falling more and more
And the rains come.

The blackened sky rolls and twists
The winds whistle and howl across the prairie
The images and echoes of the past
Get lost in the flashing, roaring violence
Of lightning, wind, and thunder
The air turns shockingly cold
As hail joins the cacophony
Bombarding the prairie and the senses
And the rains come.
Slowly the clouds part
The stars glitter and shine above
As the droplets of water glitter and shine
On the blades of grass
And the foliage of the trees and shrubs
The earth returns refreshed, renewed
The shadow images are returned to the past
To be recalled at a later time
And the rains came.

Three Bars by Alec Kaus
DEADLY STORM
by Shirley Sullivan

Richard Hooley lived alone on an isolated ranch 8 miles northwest of Oshkosh, Nebraska. His home was a small basement house two miles from the main road, flanked by a cement barn and a low chicken coop. From the front door, a dirt path sloped down to the corral, square cement horse tank and Eclipse windmill tower. The calf pasture lay beyond and was bordered to the south by a dry sand-draw. In the summer, tall yellow sunflowers, wild purple sweet-peas, soap-weed, and native grasses colored the landscape, but much of the year the countryside was drab, in shades of brown and tan. However, the sky was almost always a clear blue, and sunrises and sunsets were beautiful beyond belief.

April 26th, 1938 dawned bright and clear, the air softer and warmer than was normal for spring in Western Nebraska. Rich had been up since dawn with plans to fix a loose section of fence, but he was in no hurry to get started. Seated comfortably in an old yard chair, he savored each sip of fresh coffee from his favorite blue enamel cup.

The wild yellow cat sat just out of reach, fastidiously grooming her glossy coat, green eyes watchful. The cat had shown up at the barn after the last snowstorm, and Richard began filling a pan of fresh milk after evening chores. It was licked clean each morning. He also prepared a straw bed in the corner of the barn for the birth of her kittens, but she was too wary to go near it as yet. Richard felt she would warm up to him in time. He liked having her around.

The early rays of sun warmed the old man’s arthritic joints, and he flexed and massaged knobby fingers for a time before picking up the fencing pliers. Toiling steadily, he barely noticed the rise in temperature, but sticky heat had overcome the earlier pleasant air. The yellow cat was nowhere to be seen.

At noon, he quit and went inside. The basement house was noticeably cooler. He washed up, opened a can of pork ‘n beans to go with cheese and crackers, and sat down to eat. But heat had taken his appetite, and the food was left on the table. He stretched out on the rumpled feather bed to rest, turning from back to side and back again searching for a comfortable spot, but it was not to be. Grimacing, he swung his legs over the edge of the bed, jammed the stained straw hat on his head, and set to work outdoors on the sagging fence.

The wire tautened as Richard applied pressure with fence pliers and hammered staples into the grey splintery posts. He straightened to wipe his brow, groaning as pain stabbed into muscle like the point of a jackknife. Gingerly massaging his back, he paused to cup his ear and listen intently. A faint, indistinct droning rumble came from a distance, and his gaze swept the rocky boundary of the ranch until he spotted the source. To the southwest, blue sky retreated as black clouds pushed their way across the horizon, and Richard’s eyes bugged at the sight.
The storm was still miles away, but it was advancing, and it was huge.

'Hail or tornado', he muttered. The old hens scratching for grain around the yard continued on with the task at hand, for it was none of their concern. Richard grabbed a pail of feed, coaxed them into the chicken house, and fastened the door. The cat sat on the roof of the house, watching the chickens in quiet condescension.

Rich guessed the storm was on a northeast path traveling at a pretty good clip toward the ranch. Painful back forgotten, he hurried down the steps to the house as fast as his tender knees allowed. Filling the chipped enamel basin with fresh water, he stripped to his underwear. There was no time to waste; a quick wash would do. He towelled off, lathered his beard with soap, and took up the straight-edge. Tiny nicks of red bloomed on his pale face and neck, and he dabbed the spots with a towel and tossed it aside. Richard fumbled down the row of buttons on his white dress shirt, but found he’d started wrong and had one buttonhole too many; no time to start over. He pulled on his suit pants, thrust ropy, muscular arms through the brown leather suspenders, and slipped on the well-fitting black coat. This coat usually made him feel fine, well-dressed, but at this moment looks were the furthest thing from his mind. The tall, spare man in black resembled priest more than rancher. He bent to peer in the cloudy mirror, smoothing sparse white hair with trembling hands.

A decisive nod affirmed it: he was ready to meet his maker.

Straightening, he resolutely marched back up to check the progress of the tornado. Whirlwinds danced through the yard scattering leaves and tumbleweeds, and died to utter stillness. Richard eased into the rickety chair, heart bumping in his chest. Entwining worn black rosary beads into his calloused fingers, his lips moved in prayer. 'Hail Mary full of grace the Lord is with thee....' Calm descended, his heartbeat slowed. From the corner of his eye he glimpsed the yellow cat streaking for the barn.

The dark mass grew as he watched, it’s sides bulging and receding. The spiraling tail dipped from cloud to ground sucking trees, plants and fences into its vortex, and lightning arced to reveal the storm’s enormous size. Rich shivered, resigned to his fate. 'Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus....' The ominous roar grew, and his muscles tensed to rise.

Suddenly dirt and debris filled the air, and the old man quaked at the storm’s filth and furious voice.

'Our Father who art in heaven....'

The wind spun under the chair, tilting and lifting it, and Richard was dumped to the ground. He struggled to his feet, clapped a hand over his mouth and nose, rosary beads swinging wildly, and lurched down the cement steps. Breathing hard, he slammed the door against the howling wind and hurried to the small mud-peppered window. The voracious black spiral had arrived.

'Jesus Mary and Joseph! Here she comes!' Richard spun, stiffly dropped to his hands and
knees and dove under the heavy oak table. Clinging to the thick pedestal, he braced for the worst. Minutes passed; he opened his eyes, waited another interminable minute before crawling out and scrambling to his feet. The funnel had abruptly veered east down the sand draw, its terrifying din slowly receding to an uneasy silence. Richard weakly dropped to a chair in the dim, chilly room, the beads clutched in icy fingers, and whispered a prayer of thanksgiving. His right shoe was missing—probably in the stairwell—and his sock was solid mud. He dizzily considered the direction of the tornado. Tiny Lost Creek School was just down the road, and his neighbors’ farms dotted the land all around it. ‘Dear God please protect them from harm.’

Back throbbing, he paced the room, stopped at the window to squint up at heavy, low-lying clouds. Sprinkles, and then hard rain dashed against the glass, and hailstones bounced like icy rubber balls on the hard-packed dirt. A deep rumble announced that the storm was not yet finished. A burst of lightning illuminated the room, and Richard recoiled from the blinding flash. Rain fell harder, and the draw ran full of rushing, muddy water. Richard’s Jersey milk cow and yearling calf ran by the window, heels flying and tails straight as flagpoles. Rich could barely see the pair through the hammering rain, but he heard the mother and daughter bellow in panic. The fences must be gone.

The rain slacked off and the sky lightened, and the old man undressed and carefully hung up his good clothes. He pulled on overalls, slipped his beads in the breast pocket, put on work shirt and boots and his beat-up hat. He worried about the cat, but guessed she was smart enough to save herself. The cow and calf were not; they would have to be found and brought home.

The storm was over for Richard, but the tornado turned again just a few miles down the road. It traveled north to destroy the Lone Star Schoolhouse and took the lives of three children, sisters Jean and Mary Zorn, and a classmate whose last name was Brown.

Matthew
by Kathryn Stock
You Wreck Me
By Kethera Aiyana

You wreck me
like the ocean,
in ebbs and flows,
in gentle waves
and crushing blows
of memory.

I love you like
the sandy shore,
missing your embrace,
grown hard and stale
in your absence.

You wreck me
like the ocean,
keeping me floating
aimlessly, hopelessly
searching for an anchor.

I love you like
the craggy cliff,
holding steadfast,
absorbing your wake,
hiding the eroding
that inevitably takes place.

You wreck me
like the ocean,
comforting and soothing,
immeasurable in beauty,
undeniable in power.

I love you like
a brick,
unassuming and stubborn,
bound to sink.

You wreck me
like the ocean,
unmoved,
perfect as a pane of
glass.

I love you like
a skipping stone,
briefly joyful
before disappearing
in a ripple
and your surface
returns to glass.

Miller's Maxim
By Aaron E. Holst

Ya slip on a body suit tight as skin, raise no rash,
when you crash hard and spin.

Slide on pads for elbows and knees, strap on a
helmet,
save your brain, if you please.

Spend days at the rink, stretch muscles and limbs,
till you fly on eight wheels just like the wind.

Despite your hard work, practice and drills
and all of your risings from cartwheels and spills,
you find it's still true what ya just haven't
learned--
Ya can't roll yer skates in a buffalo herd!
Greed’s Victim
by Andrea Cook

The moon had slung its head down
Looking out with a frozen glare
I yell like a hungry coyote stealing
the quiet dark blue hills with small
animals running quickly into hiding
and the night stays like a plucked eye
from a dead carcass—only a skeleton left
like my insides—I need food...one morsel
would be fine—the dark void swings its cloak
around drooped shoulders—my cries are shushed.

I shuffle my feet near a slow meandering creek
my reflection distorted—I am only a fox
looking for a hole—maybe a kindness
no one has the time to notice—oh, this
broken shape of a once beautiful human—now
maybe a last door to knock on—they may keep
me and give me a warm bed in from the elements—
of deep suffering...hideous beyond my own words...
the fault is here with me—I never peered out beyond
my own wealth...beyond my own self.

Blindsided
By Linell Wohlers

Strange that the dog knows where to go.
He’s never been here before but
unquestioning
senses the way,
padding ahead of us
down the dark hallway
on the second story of this
almost condemned house.
Now there is only our footfall
to creak the dusty planks but
once in this very spot
you tried to make me cry.
After all these years
with no seeing eye to divine the floor plans
finally
we are in a bedroom together.
We or the silhouette of we,
in symbiosis
against the drawn shade,
one-sixteenth of an inch from touching,
the gap deliciously wavering in murky light,
close but not
solved like the last puzzle piece
that fits
but is just for the moment
held out in tantalizing
anticipation.
**Patriotism**
By Joni Whitcomb Bunzel

I sit here reading this letter again for how many times?
It says you died a hero, your life was given for mine.
It says you went down fighting not thinking of yourself
You gave your life for freedom, for your country and all else.
Says here I should be happy, rejoice in your sacrifice.
Have peace in knowing you're in a better place,
Be proud, let that suffice!
How can that be when I am here, without your laughing face?
No longer have your arms at night to hold me in your embrace?
No longer have two parents, just one to take that place;
Oh God, this price of freedom, do others understand?
Do they have a shattered empty heart?
Will they feel the way I am?
Again I read this letter and as I reach the end,
I know that you are with me Lord and that You understand...
Young Girl, Never Leaving Home
By Gary Henderson

You have conquered the Kings of Carthage;
You have sacked the line of Troy.
Your hair is smooth like Waterloo,
And did never a flag employ.

Your hips have swayed like Gettysburg,
No battle can bat like your eye,
No trait is like your honor:
Untouched like Thermopolae.

You are a War of Roses,
Without ever an end in sight.
Or better yet like Vietnam:
The fight to define all fights.

Have you yet decided
Whose side you’re fighting for?
For someone will have to lose
These kisses of civil war.

Untitled by Darek & C.J. Wilson

Untitled by Breanna Meyer
Hands
by Yvonne Randall

These hands are old and crippled now, but once worked long and hard.
They’ve done many jobs in all the years, now they are wrinkled, quiet, and scarred.

Hands show everything a loving touch, age, beauty, and even fears.
Hands may express anger or hatred but be gentle enough to brush away one’s tears.

Mother’s hands are gentle and loving are able to comfort a crying child.
Father’s hands are hard and calloused, but are often very mild.

A baby’s hands are soft and reaching for things far and beyond him.
A young child’s hands are busy exploring, wanting at times to commit a sin.

Hands of an older person are more experienced, are aged by the hands of time.
Hands of a young child are eager, smooth and in their prime.

As the years go by, hands will change to the old and gnarled look.
Then they too will be folded, stilled, and search for treasured memories in small hidden nooks.
Hands by Kathy Reece
The Wind in the Trees
by Doreen Jensen

The wind rides out of the west
with courting on his mind.

The locust tree, shy with lowered eyes,
sighs “no” through delicate fronds,
weaves soothing shadows
on the green tapestry below.

The robust cottonwood,
Willa Cather’s hired girl,
tall, sturdy in cotton dress
and brown shoes.
A no-nonsense girl,
hard to control.

The flippant poplar, a New York girl,
tall, dressed by Lauren,
lets the wind slip through her mind,
tells him she wants
no man.

The aspen, quivering virgin,
dances barefoot in the white dress
through shafts of sunlight
and mountain vapors.
Tantalizing
but much too young.

The pine, cool, detached,
a dryad, speaking full-throated
of wide valleys and giddy peaks.
The whoosh of her reply reverberates
long after the wind passes,
bearing only the scent of pine.

Tiki Torches
By Diane Dinndorf Friebe

Sunburnt bodies
Trudge the path
You light

From beach dancers
Dock stargazers
Night swimmers

Back past our trailer
Long, long table decked with cards
Kids grabbing spoons

Past Bach’s porch
Full of bridge players
Laughter lifting in the night

Past the sparkling campfire
Ringed by singers
Peanut shells at their feet

To Big John
Enter with your flashlight lit
Don’t drop it down the hole

You corral all this life
And keep us moving
From circle to circle

Campers loving their life
Hair still dripping with lake water
Sand under their nails

Smelling of kerosene
Your lights waver
In their metal pots

Posts holding torches high
Lighting the sand path for feet
Of new toddlers to 70 year olds

Guiding us from fire to fire
I am
By Zane Rickets

I am compassionate yet determined to fight.
I wonder why there are people with no food at night.
I hear the sirens, they’re ringing so loud.
I see no help coming but we still stand proud.
I want to know if respect for human life is just a right.
I am compassionate yet determined to fight.

I pretend like it’s all ok but it really isn’t.
I feel like we started to win it but we couldn’t finish.
I touch my soul knowing that it’s not diminished.
I cry sometimes hoping that it’s alright.
I am compassionate yet determined to fight.

I understand how we must be in this society.
I say we believe in peace and true harmony.
I dream of the day when we lay poverty at bay.
I try to get away but if we find love then I may stay.
I hope the light at the end is still in sight.
I am compassionate yet determined to fight.

After the Martin Luther King Parade

By Art Elser

The old man scuttles across the grass, below the gold-leafed capitol dome, half running, half hopping, like a magpie. A battered black coat shields him from the January cold, and wind feathers his white hair as he claws through trash left by those who watched the parade, shoving bits of half-eaten lunches into his maw.

A woman in a cashmere coat, glances sidelong at him, as she circles warily past. And a man in a dark business suit passes and shakes his head.

The old man continues to fly from pile to pile of garbage, eating and stuffing soda cans into a sack, ignoring those passing by.

Did he ever have a dream?
LAST PICTURE SHOW
by Doreen Jensen
For my sons

Last spring we sold the old stone movie house
to a man who gutted it  leveled the floor.
Now huge machines mold white plastic
into vaults for caskets.

I watched from the foyer
the morning the truck roared
up to the exit door.
Workmen in the glare of trouble-lights
ripped up chains of wooden seats
(strings of paper dolls)
pitching them into the truck bed
bound for the city dump.

To the beat of the crowbars,
sawdust and cigarette smoke
danced the tunnel of light
where once faces, words, music
cascaded from celluloid to screen.
Frightened ghosts of Garbo, Chaplin, Bogart
fled to folds of red velvet
or huddled in balcony shadows.

It’s winter now.
I’ve not been back to see
if they survived
the garish light
the acrid plastic stench.
My nights are free
to sit beside the fire
where Rosebud burns uncharred
and a faint piano plays “As Time Goes By.”

PRODUCE PICASSO
by CJ Clark

Orange pyramids artistically stacked
await. Taunting a shopper to a game
of produce Jenga. One misplaced pull
and like London Bridge, they all fall down.
I appreciate the art, but I want the fruit.
How many players are game, I wonder
As I pass by longingly.
Blue Creek Gardener
By Norma Rhiley

The massacre of Blue Waters was fought north of where his garden grows blue waters dapple in the sun clothe the shores with grass as the creek wends its way to the Platte

As he readies his garden bounty sweet corn is knifed off the ear golden kernels full of sun within the husk, the battle won with wily raccoons for another year, the corn safe in its winter home, the freezer.

Tomato vines bending under the weight of the juicy citric fruit, blazing like neon lights on a Christmas tree. Will it be a hearty soup? Or tomato sauce or homemade salsa on a cold wintry day

“How about a sack of potatoes? I just dug them this morning. How about some zucchini and how about cucumbers and a bag of tomatoes? And a dozen ears of corn?”

I gratefully accept this overflow of “veggies” from this friend who loves to garden and produces such extravagant results

Sometimes, I wonder, when Blue Creek is low on summer days, is it the water whispering or the wind singing in the trees - - Brules, Sioux, Oglalas, Lakotas, Listen, listen - - can you hear?
Eleven years have gone by.
I’ll never forget that day.
I couldn’t figure out what Mommy meant
when she said “Daddy is now in a better place.”
Day after day
I missed you more and more.
Then that day finally came
when I realized you’re not going to be here anymore.
Mommy was acting different
and I could tell there was something wrong,
but I was just too little
to understand what was going on.
I sat there in silence
throughout many days
thinking of nothing but you
and all the things I didn’t get the chance to say.
Now to this day,
there are many things about you that I miss,
your voice, your laughter, your smile,
and your goodnight kiss.
But I’ll always know
that I’m Daddy’s little girl,
and nothing can stop that,
not even you being away from this world.
I love you a lot
as I did back then.
I just wish that someday
I can see you again.
In 1945, after the Japanese surrendered to the Americans, there were only 16 Akita dogs known to exist. These animals were used during World War II as food, and their thick amazing fur was used to line the winter coats of soldiers. It was illegal for the Japanese to keep pets during the war because food was needed for people, and it was felt that it should not be used to feed pets. But there was one man who could not allow this incredible 4000-year-old breed to die out. The man's name is Morie Sawataishi, and he single-handedly and against his own government’s law saved the Akita breed.

An interesting book, *Dog Man*, describes Morie Sawataishi’s journey to save the dog beginning with the puppy he kept hidden, and who seemed to understand that he must not bark and risk being discovered. Even today the Akita breed is not a needless Barker. Geneticists who study canines believe that Akitas were brought to the main island of Japan with the first tribes of migratory hunters two thousand years ago. According to author Martha Sherrill who wrote *Dog Man*, recent genetic studies show the Akita to be one of the most primitive breeds and linked closely to the wolf. They were used to hunt bears in the time of the Shogun Era. Their webbed feet, large claws and powerful chest, neck and shoulders make them great sled pulling dogs. Akitas also schooled fish into nets for Japanese fisherman and the dog’s webbed feet make them powerful swimmers.

Unfortunately some American soldiers brought Akitas home from Japan and bred them with larger more aggressive dogs. These are the American Akita and weigh 100 to 125 pounds. The Japanese Akita is smaller and not aggressive if his owners provide affection and training as is true of any breed. Still at 85-100 pounds, they are no lightweights. Japanese Akitas babysat small children while the parents worked in the fields. Today they nestle beside elementary children as they read because Akitas make good, patient listeners without a critical hair on their big bodies.

The most well known Akita in Japan was named Hachi-ko and the following story portrays the Akita trait of loyalty. Hachi-ko’s owner, a professor who took the train every day to work, died one day and Hachi-ko continued to meet the train for the next nine years at 4:00 pm, waiting and looking for his owner to disembark from the train.

Helen Keller traveled to Japan in 1937 and was given an Akita puppy believed to be the first in the United States. Keller described her two Akitas this way: “gentle, companionable, and trusty...an unfailing source of happiness.” She said of her second Akita, “He had a strong soulful presence and quiet confidence. He was serene, attentive and careful. He figured out quickly that I was blind and never got underfoot. He walked gracefully throughout my house without disturbing the antiques. His every move suggests, ‘I know who I am.’

Learning of other Akitas reinforces my own experience. My Akita seems more wild animal than the dogs I have owned in the past. His attributes are difficult to explain to anyone who has not lived with or been friends with a dog like this. He is not aggressive or ferocious, but gentle with a sense about him that makes me feel I am looking into the eyes of a very old soul. Yet, he is so civilized that every morning he reaches for a washcloth, pulls it down to rub his face on it as if face washing is his expected morning ritual. I have owned Labradors and mixed breed dogs and have today a sweet collie lab mix that befriended me the day we met, unlike the Akita who walked into my house at two months old, gave the cat a sideways glance as if to say he would deal with it later, and checked the place out. I had read that Akitas gain your trust as you prove yourself to them. They discover and learn but take nothing upfront without thought and consideration. This trust relationship visibly developed over his first year. Breeders warn that Akitas are not for everyone. They are smart and as willful as they are striking. The most incredible animal that I have had the pleasure of knowing who first decided to trust me, then befriend, and now is one of my most loyal companions inspired the following poem.
Domestication

his feral gaze
draws me into a wildness
unknown except in my imaginings

he watches the street
from this house
his cavernous cave
and sniffs a breeze through the screen door
seems to taste readiness
smells the exhaled breath of ancient mammals
the dung buried beneath storied layers of earth

ancestors reside unreleased in his ice-clutching claws
and imposing chest
strength decorates all parts of him
his neck thick with fur waits for winter’s dare
that will never come

head rests across my hip
velvet covered ears await strokes that comfort
both woman and dog

I whisper his name
one ear swivels towards my voice

Was it the wind carving through ice that named you?
his eyes move sideways
discern me

what were we once to each other
those shapes of us unleashed
in another time

what are we now
dear pet?
Bliss Is Closer Than It Appears
by Kethera Aiyana

Reflections of a NE Colorado Sunset
by Margaret Evans
Cathedral of the Plains
By Martha Boyer Armstrong

You began eons ago, covered by water,
Hewn from the ocean floor, rising toward the surface of the earth,
Toward air formed by the glaciers,
Joining the ridge of rock and hill of which you became a part.

You stand – rising toward the sky,
Reaching toward the clouds where you have stood for many eons.
Now you greet the sun, the moon, the stars.
You stand firmly taking your place regally on the prairie.

You guided the pioneers on their journeys west.
You watched the tedious treks, covered wagons, horses and cattle,
People were weary and worn but steadfast in their beliefs.
They learned and taught determination.

The years have been many since your birth,
Your formation a miracle left over from the Ice Age,
Your purpose simple, but essential to guide the settler from east to west.
An everlasting compass for all who passed under your shadow.

Those brave pioneer families camped on the river’s edge in the shade
and protection of the pointed peak.
When the river valley was running full, the plains grass was green and
lush at full growth for the birds and animals that roamed here.

They were ever wise to the pursuits and perils of the Nebraska plains.
What grandeur we envision as the buffalo and the pointed rock shared
their homeland.

Many are the lessons to be learned from this Cathedral of the Plains.
Longevity, survival, sustenance, strength, faith, pride.
Who are we to even dream of such eternity?
Only God knows what is, what was, and what will be!
SANDSTONES
by Andrea Cook

Once again I engrave my name
on prairie stone of sand and clay-
tall rocks eroded down with
each year’s decline and their edges
frayed by the sun…the rain…the wind-
siblings of time out in the climate’s
thrust…there I have searched
for a childhood nick-name
forged into slab by smaller hands…but may be forever lost in stone dust.

How clever the cactus flower
blooms out on the butte
teetering near the ledge and sweet
lupine flowers wild on the slopes--
nature holds the bouquet against
her breast…and her face is the color
of white parchment before the story
is written for generations to gather again
like their ancestors had…names and dates left
on shelves of sandstone out on the prairie land.
His Kiss...
By Paige Vogel

is like no other kiss.
It wants, but doesn’t demand.
It asks, but doesn’t take.
It gives and pleads for more.
It is filled with desire, but also curiosity.
And it teaches me that a kiss should come gift wrapped...
Not stripped naked.
Most of all, it makes me want another kiss exactly like this one.
It will not be tonight.
If I Had a Day
By Janet S. Craven

“God permits industrious angels afternoons to play.”—Emily Dickinson

If I had a day—
Or even an afternoon—
To play industriously
I’d chase a bee or he’d chase me
We’d fly up to the sun
And then be scorched
and sore suppose
We’d fly back to the creaky porch.

If I had a day—
Or even an afternoon—to play
I’d chase a butterfly or she’d chase me
We’d fly up to a cumulus cloud
And then we’d tumble
Head over wings
Back down to the ground.

If I had a day—
Or even an afternoon—
To play industriously
I’d run through alfalfa fields
With tiny purple flowers
Then fall down among
That headiest of grasses
Infused with soil, sun, and passion.

Then, after a nap
In the cool green hay
I’d run off again...

If I had a day—
Or even an afternoon—to play.
I pulled on the crowbar to stretch the wire, wishin’ Jack would hurry up and pound in a staple to hold it. Instead, he hooked the claw of his hammer around the first free barb and gave the strand a pull.

He said, “Back up a barb, and put a little more ass into it, Dutch. We need to get this wire as tight as Dick’s hatband.”

Well, I thought I was already puttin’ as much ass into it as I could. But I gave it another try, and damned if I didn’t hold it, good and tight, until he got the two staples driven in.

Jack called ‘em steeple, but I was no one to correct him. Same with him callin’ me Dutch. It was my mother’s name, not mine, and I don’t know if he ever even knew her.

Here’s what I know: we had to get this fence put up to keep out the damn sheepherders and their sheep, and there was just me an’ Jack to do it.

We strung a lot of fence that first winter, and I had a hell of a time holdin’ up my end of the crowbar, sogglin’ along in a pair of Jack’s rubber boots and tryin’ to keep the spool of barbed wire from slidin’ down onto my hands. Leather gloves or not, it would draw blood.

That’s what Jack said, too. He said, “Anytime I get near this stuff, I get cut.”

And sure enough, there wasn’t a day go by that he didn’t have blood wellin’ out of his fingers. Between that, and the rust off the balin’ wire, I thought of him as Red-Fingered Jack. The other punchers that come by called him Three-Fingered Jack, but when I’d fall asleep in my chair next to the woodstove in the bunkhouse, things run together in my mind, and that’s how his name come up in that cloudy kind of way. ‘Course, all I called him was Jack.

After the two of us had eaten our beans and maybe a hunk of fried jackrabbit, and then mopped up our tin plates with biscuit, he’d say, “How was that grub, Dutch?”

And I’d say, “Pretty damn good, Jack.” Then we’d roll a cigarette, and he’d pour us each a glass of whiskey, and we’d scoot our chairs next to the stove.

Next day we’d be back at it again—rollin’ out the wire, stretchin’ it, poundin’ in the staples. All the time, Jack kept a lookout for the sheepherders, as if he knew they were goin’ to try to come and get him.

“Can’t waste no time, Dutch. I got two things to do—teach you to build fence, and make a man out of you. And I ain’t got forever to do it.”

‘Course, he wasn’t goin’ to get it all done in a week. After all, I was only four years old and had to stand on a bucket to pull the top strand of wire.

They called him Three-Fingered Jack for the obvious reasons. He lost the pointer finger on his right hand, like a lot of dally ropers do, and I understood it happened a long time before I was born. But you’d never notice he had a finger missin’ from the way he rolled a cigarette, handled a gun, or shuffled a deck of cards. He was smooth at saddlin’ a horse, too. He could have one ready to go in no time, but he made sure I learned to do it myself.

He’d say, “You gotta saddle yer own horses in this world, Dutch.” Then he’d roll a smoke and watch me as I put my pine stump in place, stepped up onto it, swung the blanket way high over my head and slapped it on, then tipped the saddle upside down, balancin’ the seat on my hat, and pushed it up and over until it settled onto the blanket. “Make sure everything’s even,” he’d say. “Don’t do nothin’ half-ass.”
So I’d pull on the blanket and push on the saddle, goin’ from one side of the horse to the other. Everything else seemed like big work, too, as I heaved to pull cinches and stood on my tiptoes on the pine stump to get the bit into the horse’s mouth.

Jack would finish a second cigarette by the time I had my horse ready to go, and he’d just stand back and watch as I climbed up onto the saddle like a monkey. Then he’d swing onto his horse, light as a cat, and we were ready to ride.

“Don’t be chokin’ Lizzie,” he said.

That meant grabbin’ the saddle horn, of course, and if I had anything I had my pride. I just said, “Hee, wadda!” and slapped my hand on my chaps. Then we were off, ridin’ fence, with me tryin’ to salt away the two parts of Jack’s lesson: saddle yer own horses, and don’t do nothin’ half-ass.

I held up a jackrabbit by its hind legs as Jack did the skinnin’. Blood seeped down his fingers and made the loose fur stick to him, but he did it all neat and slick.

He said, “I’ll tell ya, Dutch. Some people think jackrabbit is low-class grub, but meat’s meat, provided that it ain’t a meat-eater itself. Besides, there’s no sense in killin’ one of yer own cattle, and even if we did, we wouldn’t get half of it ate before it spoiled. Time was, you could eat anyone’s beef but yer own, but what with everyone fencin’ in, there’s hardly such a thing as a stray any more. No, sir. Save yer own stock, and ketch as ketch can. This is better’n biscuits and beans all by themselves. And it’s another thing for you to learn, to live off the fat o’ the land.”

Not that the land has got all that much fat to live off of—not here, anyway. If you ever see an antelope, he’s movin’ fast to some place that hasn’t been sheeped off yet. As for deer, they don’t come into this kind of hardscrabble country to begin with. So we ate jackrabbit and learned to like it.

Time come for me to learn to shoot one myself. I laid the barrel of the rifle on the third strand of wire, lined up the sights, and pulled the trigger. I went ass-over-teakettle backwards, and ended up with my hat down on my nose. When the world come right-side-up again, I saw Jack kneeling next to me with the Winchester.

“Two things, Dutch,” he said. “One, you cushion the rifle with yer left hand and hold it snug, like against the fencepost, so the barrel don’t jump. Yer bullet whistled between the tips of his long ears, so you were damn near a foot high. Second, you pull the butt of the gun into yer shoulder, hold it tight with yer right hand. Takes the kick out of it.”

“So I missed him, huh?”

“Sure did. He gave his head a shake, and then he zig-zagged away from here goin’ like sixty.”

“Wonder when I’ll get to try again.”

“No tellin’. Nice thing about jackrabbits is, you knock one silly, and another one comes in and lets you do the same thing.”

Jack squatted by the fence post, catchin’ what shade he could as he rolled his cigarette. Me, I sat up on top of my saddle, not wantin’ to climb all the way down and back up again. And besides, I could see the problem just as well as he could.

“Sons a bitches cut our fence, Dutch.”

I licked the paper on my cigarette. “Sons-a-bitchin’ sheepherders.”
“Yep, and we’re gonna have to run ‘em out.”

Jack’s eyes got tight and narrow as he hunkered there, smokin’ his cigarette. Then he swung up into the saddle, and we went off huntin’ the sheepherders.

We found ‘em about an hour later, two riders, with some five hundred of their range maggots crowded around our windmill. The two men reined around facin’ us as Jack and I pulled our horses to a stop. They looked like brothers—dark eyes and beards, dark hats with flat brims, skinny fellas on skinny horses, each one with a rifle across the top of his saddle. The only way I could tell ‘em apart was that one of ‘em had a flat side on his nose.

Jack spoke first. “Kinda makin’ yerselves at home, aren’t ya?”

“Hell of a thing,” the man with the flat-sided nose said. “Fence was down, and they all went through in the night. We just caught up to ‘em, a little bit ago.”

“Fence didn’t go down by itself. You fellas need to get them sheep outa here.”

“Aren’t you the boss?” The fella spit some tobacco juice on the ground.

“Don’t have to be. You’re on someone else’s land, clear as day. You need to move them sheep, and not let us find any more cut fences.” That was Jack, breakin’ it into two parts for him.

“You sayin’ we cut the fence?”

“I’m sayin’ we found it cut.”

The fella wrinkled his nose and slid his dark eyes around at me. “You and the kid.”

“That’s right.”

“Surprise me that you’re workin’ for him.”

“Shouldn’t mean anything to you.”

“Hah.” The snake-eyed man looked at his partner and then at Jack. “I wonder what this kid’s old man would think, if he knew about that.”

“You need to watch yer mouth.”

“You need to try to make me.”

Now the other one spoke up. “Too bad they both died in the fire. Would have been better to have a grass widow run this place, and you work for her.”

A deep laugh came out of the first one. “Plow the garden patch.”

Three-Fingered Jack had his gun out before anyone could see his motion, but his shot went wild. Both of them sheepherders fired their rifles without raisin’ ‘em and takin’ aim. Jack doubled over, dropped his pistol, and grabbed his saddle horn.

The horses were jumpin’ around, and I tumbled off of mine, but I held onto the reins when I hit the ground. The sheep were raisin’ a hell of a ruckus as they stampeded, every one of ‘em cryin’ Baah! Baah!

The sheepherders took off after ‘em, and it was just me and Three-Fingered Jack. As I got to my feet I could see he was turnin’ kind of grey. I helped him slide out of the saddle and get propped up against the windmill tank.
“All my fault, Dutch. I let the sons a bitches get to me.”

I ran my tongue across my dry lips. “Are you hit bad?”

“I think they done for me. Damn poor way to go.”

I could see blood leakin’ through his fingers as he held his hand against his stomach. “What should I do?” I asked, meanin’, get him some water or help him find some shade.

“Two things, Dutch. One, don’t ever cut someone else’s fence. Two, when it gits down to the pig noots, don’t let anything rattle you.”

Well, that was all a long time ago. Things have settled into their tracks, and I’ve got a clear idea of how things are goin’ to be. I can stand here on the porch of the ranch house, wearin’ Jack’s gun and holster and rollin’ a cigarette just the way he taught me, look out over a land of fencelines, windmills, and jackrabbits, and think about how I’m gonna run this ranch. Brand ‘em in the spring, ship ‘em in the fall, ride fence all year long. Try to make do with the kind of hired men that come through, with all their talk about whorehouses and hangovers and piles. Someday I’ll have to think about women, but I’m only six right now, so my main business is to tend to my stock and keep a lookout for sheepherders. Even though I’ve got these other jokers in the bunkhouse, most of the time I feel like I’ve to do it all by myself. Jack used to say you can hope for one good horse and one good dog in this life, and maybe that’s the way it is with hired men. I doubt I’ll ever have another one like Three-Fingered Jack. All it took was for them sheepherders to cut that fence.
Unexpected Hazards of Hobby Farming

By Art Clack

New Years Eve Morning: A family emergency took my wife out of town on short notice. After she received the call, she briefed me about chores and left, racing ahead of a winter storm.

So – wanting to be a good husband in all senses of the word – at first-light I jumped up to commence the briefed routine.

The first item was to put the house-goat outside to piddle.

The house-goat is a bottle-baby, still in the house because 1) he is too small to endure the cold and 2) until his mama's test results are back, we don't know which group of kids to put him with.

Bob -- the bottle-baby's name is Bob. My youngest says so -- Bob has a certain dog-like trait that endears; when I put my hand down to comfort him, he first assures himself there is no milk in the fingers, then he lays his head in my hand, as if to be comforted. Bob doesn't talk much, either; which is a true joy in a goat.

Because Bob stands just over a foot tall, he can live in a large bucket, a tub... with boards on top, held in place by a toolbox.

Because Bob stands just over a foot tall, when Bob goes out to piddle, Ranger (our dog) goes out with him; for protection. (Ranger is very protective of goats, while they are small.)

So at oh-dark-thirty this morning, I jump out of bed, grab the bottle-baby, call the dog, and head for the front door.

Now you have to picture this next part; I'm just out of my warm bed, I'm wearing nothing but skivvies, I have an over-enthusiastic dog under my feet, I have a squirmy baby goat in my arms, and I plan to heroically open the front door into a -2 degree wind-chill, walk down three snow-covered steps, and deposit that baby goat in the snow so he can piddle outside his bucket.

All I can say about the experience is that stepping barefoot into three-inches of snow was not nearly as attention getting as when that bottle-goat looked around, saw something vaguely familiar, and latched onto my nipple.

Baby goats are born with teeth, in case you didn't know.
Ice Cream Sunday

By Laurie Alkire

Sunday was going to be hot. This was my dad’s prediction. Dad had a sixth sense about the weather. When people were planning a big outdoor get-together, they would either simply request to put through to 476-RJ or stop him on the street to ask, “What’s the weather going to be like on Wednesday, Leonard?” My dad would stop, think, smell the air, and then tell them. He was normally right on the money, much more accurate than the indistinct little weatherman tinged with a green aura who bobbed about on the on the black and white oval TV screen.

So when Dad made that prediction about that particular Sunday, my mother decided it would be a good day to make homemade ice cream. She filled six half-gallon milk cartons with water and put them in the banged-up deep freeze tucked away in the cellar. She had first asked me to take them down, but I declined because of the twelve-inch Black Widows I was convinced lurked in the dank, rock-walled cellar. I’d only encountered a few Granddaddy Longlegs in the unwelcome recesses of the cellar, but the forced trips helping Mom lug the laundry into its inkiness to the wringer washer were seasons of terror, nonetheless. She would carelessly sweep away cloying webs, sighing with irritation at the ceaseless, futile toil of the spinners. I hovered just long enough to dump the pile of wadded clothing before escaping back up the creaking plank steps into the light.

Later that afternoon, we kids all piled into the back of the sky-blue GMC pickup, and Dad followed the thin blacktop strip north six miles, the luxurious wind delivering the odor of sagebrush and alfalfa to our eager noses. When he turned east to creep down the washboard lane to the old Raben place, the Meadowlarks perched regally on the flat tops of the split-cedar posts cried advance warning of our progress. Mom always said the Rabens sold the best cream because they raised contented cows. The cream came in quart Mason jars, the mouths covered with wax paper secured around the threads with a rubber band. The cream was yellow and thick, and it was my job to watch that it didn’t slosh out on the bumpy ride back to town.

By Sunday, the temperature reached 104 degrees, the penetrating sun shimmering from the heart-shaped leaves of the rampant lilac bush that shaded the weathered back porch; anticipation of the smooth tang of hand-crafted ice cream overwhelmed me. My mom used to say that commercial ice cream kills your taste buds. Dad and my younger brother carried a gunny sack and the heavy, long-handled axe down into the murky cellar to chop up the ice. I, naturally, stayed outside on account of the dreaded spiders. The tapestry of the day lodged in my nine-year-old mind, and I sensed the rarity of the particular treat: ice cream and the trip out for supplies, and my brothers and I dashing around the yard. Occasionally, we’d stop long enough for one of us to twist the stubborn crank on the wooden tub, grinding the pale yellow mass into the thick whip of ice cream. The salted ice melted slowly, the water oozing through the staves of the tub and puddling around the base. It didn’t take long for the novelty to wear off as the ice cream began to solidify, and Dad always ended up completing the final churning when the batter became sluggish. He’d brace the tub between his splayed cowboy boots and grind away, hunched forward in the ancient wooden dining chair while he visited quietly with Mom about the annual August fishing trip to the Bighorns. She arched her back and braced herself with her arms twisted behind her, diligently tracking our movements as we charged back and forth, looping tirelessly around the gnarled apple tree which had long since given up producing apples and settled for glorious early blooms and barren, relentless summer days.

Yes, I knew. I recognized that the sounds and smells and the rush of the frozen bulk sliding down my throat were to be savored, stored away. I recognized the memory being constructed, perhaps for the first moment of my adolescent awareness, and I, for the first time, consciously filed the details of Dad’s work-worn hands resolutely twisting the crank. My mother’s quiet pose, leaning back into the Lilac’s shadow, imprinted on my mind, so unusual to see her idle, torn from her familiar realm of the white porcelain range and cracked linoleum countertops, the clanck of heavy platters and scrubbed plates.
Even my brothers, normally an insufferable pair of ragamuffins who tagged after their older, more sophisticated sister incessantly and foolishly, who mooned over my blonde friend Debbie with elaborate and embarrassing earnestness, sipped tea on that bright-lit day from miniature china cups gracefully and munched imaginary chocolate cake with appreciative sincerity. It was a good day, and I knew, even then, that it was a treasured day—that it was grand and extraordinary to be young, and yet still to be at least a year older than my squirt brother, and that it was glorious to catch snippets of song from yellow-breasted Meadowlarks whom my mother always insisted were lilting the words “John Greenleaf Whittier.”

I bank still that day, not shadowed by unhappy times inevitable in all lives, and never replaced with better days which trump initial joy of discovery. I had awakened to possibility, to a perspective of privilege accorded by my adolescent place within the rambunctious center of a hermetic circle of family. The world beyond the four-block main street was fable, and even the immeasurable reaches of the far-flung Milky Way described by reverent, nearly breathless narration on the 8mm reels at school could tend to itself. A war had begun somewhere, I knew, and bandaged young men were being carried through muddy rice paddies on canvas stretchers. But life, not death, framed my existence. The external was irrelevant because the cocoon of birds and leaves and dust motes sealed the ugly quandaries of humanity from me. My immediate world throbbed with the energy of full bloom. We kids hunched cross-legged on the cool porch floor and gulped frosty ice cream. My dog Bingo, a black Poodle mix with kinky fur and sharp nails, stretched beside me, his head warming my lap. On a blistering July Sunday in 1964, I came alive.

**Writer’s Block**

By Rhitta Ann Smith-Bounds

Impenetrable as a fortress of rock,
    is this hateful writer’s block.
A blank sheet is my mind,
    laughing at me because I can’t unwind.
Nervous, anxious, my head pounding,
    surely this assignment won’t leave me rebounding.
I’m praying for some divine intervention,
    hoping this wasn’t my teacher’s intention.
I’m breaking out in hives of emotion.
    leaving me itchy and in need of Calamine Lotion.
Just as my night comes to an end,
    my poems come together, so too class—I’ll attend.
No words, no words, no words.
It’s been more than months since I’ve been able
to find my words.
They seem to have left me without a note
hinting at why or even a possible return.
They just hightailed it for greener fields,
more fertile mind to sink into.
The feelings and thoughts are still here,
rolling around inside my head,
but,
without the words,
they cannot take shape and leave me.
Maybe my hand and my head
had it out ~ a lover’s spat
that left words feeling jilted,
so they bolted ~
and I am the one left to suffer the pains
of having no word, no words,
no words to say.
Perhaps the words were starving,
shrinking away to nothing
because my creative nectar has ceased its flowing
through my veins.
Even the crap I threw on paper in the midst of muddled minding
showed some glimmer of ingenuity, vocabulary,
sparks of something great.
What beast has been bleeding me of creativity?
What parasite has been feasting on my inspiration?
What kind of maggot is this that dwells in my mind,
munching mercilessly on my poetical prowess?
I need medical treatment.
Mainline me some superfood for the soul.
Irradiate and irrigate the creative channels.
Stitch me up with profundity
and make this poet whole.
Aegis
By Dennis Miller Jr.

A shield, protector and safeguard,
To meet all needs within the yard.
They shelter and provide, oh yes,
Each child requires food and dress.

To many this may seem the want;  
The physical seems paramount,  
But oft it’s most delusional.  
For parents, things are far from all.

Down deep within each child is kept  
An ego that is not adept  
At fending off the world’s woes,  
Growing despite emotional foes.

To spark the spirit of each one  
To run the race until it’s done  
To run with vigor and to lean  
On others, but with love, not mean.

A race to win integrity  
And come to know the Deity  
To learn to be invincible  
Yet open and available

To learn to work, to give their all  
And not to tire or to fall  
But, helping others to success  
To win the race to happiness.

And in the search for fun and joy  
To see beyond tomorrow’s toy  
To see that in relations rest  
The part of life that is the best.

Yet not to give until they fall  
But keep a balance and stand tall;  
To see each side of every man  
So’s not to buy deception’s plan.

What can protect the little one  
Along the trail that must be run?  
What shield, direct and guide the way,  
Of path that marks this life’s short stay?

Oh parent, and grandparent too,  
How great the task that lies with you.  
To see beyond youth’s every plea  
And form the shield, the family.

Starless
By Robbie Jaramillo

give me a starless night  
a night that is only black  
don’t let these little blooms of light  
protrude from their wandering track

not just cloud covering up  
these little suns of hope  
pour the sky with a loving cup  
of blackness in heavy ropes

squeeze every inch of little dots  
speckled above me now  
take them, these gazillion watts,  
and heave-ho them over the bow

blot them out, please, black them gone  
for just an evening so  
the star sailor drops his astrolabe  
and has no idea where to go

for once let me lie down looking there  
at a night sky that doesn’t move me  
nary a speck of memory or prayer  
to inspire me or to soothe me

just one night, I beg, just one  
where I don’t look up to see  
the memory of this ancient Love  
and the wish I made on thee

give me one starless night  
a night that is only black  
don’t let these little blooms, tonight,  
remind me that I can’t turn back
Something from Long Ago
By Linell Wohlers

a tiny fairy of a hurt, catches
in my throat,
delicately settles on the sternum
and makes a playful glide over the left clavicle before deciding wisely
to bypass the heart,
only to ride for weeks in the pit of my stomach.
No amount of serenading from left
or right hemisphere can make her budge,
arms folded in a classic funk.
Don’t you want some air?
You could leave any time, you know,
I say on the really bad days,
so many exits to offer.
A navel approach could be clever
of if you’re willing to get some backbone there are
any number of convenient holes in my head.
That is if you don’t want to resort to the darker escape routes.
She points chestward with a
baleful stare that tells me
she won’t settle for anything less than pulsating cardium.
Off limits, forget it, I say, standing firm.
Been there done that and now look.
It’ll never blub like it did before.
Can’t she see there’s a
Keep Out
sign nailed from ventricle to ventricle
protecting what’s left of the damaged wellsprings?
What if it’s imagined,
not even real, she fires at me
in broken English
since the Fairy tongue has not worked so far.
There’s always that to consider with your kind,
I answer coolly.
Emitting the tiniest of moans
she hurls herself at the barricade.
You’re breaking my heart here, I say, undaunted.
It’s the only way out, she counters valiantly,
bracing herself for another gossamer lunge.
Meanwhile I am hammering like mad,
determined to put a stop to this once and for all,
choosing my words accordingly:
I’d rather die.
Snow Blower
By Christine Valentine

The TV said more snow in Denver
The poet once more
Shovels nature’s free manure

Too much shoveling
Is bad for the heart they say
The poet needs a snow blower.

Hurry
Hurry
Indoors
Warm hands around the hot mug
Gather pencil paper
Write all the images
The words that explode
Across each line
The verbs that dance off the page

Mail
Out
Poem
After poem
Poem
Upon poem
Until they are published

Then you’ll be rewarded
Go to town
Buy a snow blower

Untitled by Chelsie Weidaman
Edgamation
By Shirley Ann Smith

I graduated high school,
enjoyed college days, never learned a thing
But how to waste my days.
now I owe a lot of money, that tuition and fees,
My van’s parked down by the river
and I’m eating government cheese.

Christmas Lament
By Shirley Ann Smith

Christmas came
Christmas went,
Presents opened
Thank you sent,
Money’s gone
Over spent,
Down by the river,
Living in a tent

THE CHRISTMAS FIASCO
By CJ Clark

Billy Bloomer stood on the altar fidgeting. He couldn’t understand why the third grade Sunday School class had to sing songs for the Christmas program. Singing was for sissies. Last year they performed the Christmas story and he was a Roman soldier. That was so cool.

Standing on the riser, he was bored. He looked up at the ceiling. He looked down at the floor. He counted the windows. Finally, he dug in his pockets and pulled out a piece of stale gum, unwrapped it, stuck it in his mouth and chewed vigorously.

Mrs. Merriweather wrapped her stick on the music stand. She called it a baton, but Billy knew better than that. Batons were things girls swung around in parades.

“Billy Bloomer, spit that gum out,” she hissed quietly.

Billy took a big breath and blew. The wad of gum flew from his mouth landing in Christy Moore’s long blond hair. He started laughing.

“Ooh, yucky,” Christy cried as she tried to get the sticky mess out of her hair.

“Christy, dear, stop playing with your hair. When you get home, have your mother put peanut butter in your hair and that gum will come right out.”

“Ooh, yucky,” she said again, thinking of her head covered in peanut butter.

“Billy, say you’re sorry.”

Billy said he was sorry, even though he really wasn’t. He didn’t like Christy. In fact, all girls were gross.

“Mrs. Merriweather?” asked Lisa Davis. “You said this was a dress rehearsal, but me and Angie are the only ones wearing dresses.”

Mrs. Merriweather smiled. “Yes, dear, and aren’t the two of you pretty girls. But dress rehearsal means final practice, with or without costumes.”

Lisa’s blue eyes teared, “B-But, I don’t have a costume.”

48
“That’s all right dear. I didn’t mean you need a costume. You’re beautiful just the way you are.”

Billy leaned over the riser where Lisa could see him. He put his finger down his throat and gagged.
Lisa stuck her tongue out at him.

“Enough! Let’s try this one more time.” Mrs. Merriweather looked at the twenty girls and boys before sweeping her index fingers in a wide arc indicating they should all smile. Billy felt stupid grinning where his two front teeth were supposed to be.

Mrs. Merriweather took out a small round pitch pipe, blew into the key of G, then holding the note began flapping her hands like a symphony conductor. Various strains of *Gentle Jesus Meek and Mild* filled the empty church.

Lonnie Everson whispered something to Billy that no one else could hear. Billy nodded. Lonnie reached into his pocket and removed his pet garter snake. He nudged Billy with his elbow. Sly, the snake wiggled out of his hand dropping at Christy Moore’s feet. Lonnie stooped down in an effort to regain Sly. When he did so, it pushed Christy and a couple of other girls forward, out of line, and the girls ahead of them fell off the riser to the floor.

“What is going on here? Girls, get back in line. Lonnie Everson, stand up straight, please.” Her smile faded. “Lonnie, what are you doing?”

Lonnie squirmed this way and that trying to reach Sly, but he just didn’t have the right leverage.

“AGH!” Christy cried. She scratched her ankle with her opposite foot.

“Everyone quit singing.”

“Christy!” Mrs. Merriweather said sharply.

“Mrs. Merriweather, Lonnie’s playing with my legs. That’s gross.”

“Lonnie Everson, perhaps you should come sit in the front pew until you can behave yourself.” She gave him a stern look.

Lonnie looked down, not because of the scolding, but because Sly was slithering over Christy’s shoe. Sly was about to go up her pant leg. “No, no, no,” he whispered.

“Are you talking back to me, young man?”

He looked up for just a second and shook his head.

“Then let us continue,” Mrs. Merriweather said impatiently. “We all want to sing this song correctly, don’t we? We must practice until it is just right.”

The children groaned with slumped shoulders.

Christy began wiggling, and then let out a bloodcurdling scream. The riser bounced up and down as she hopped from one leg to another screaming the whole time. About that time, Sly decided Christy’s pant leg was not the shelter he was seeking and slid down to the floor and began slithering toward Mrs. Merriweather.

“Snake! Snake!” She grabbed as many hymnals as she could and began flinging them at Sly.

But Sly slithered and dodged his way around the maze of books on the floor.

Lonnie jumped out of place and grabbed him up. Dangling the snake in front of Mrs. Merriweather, he said, “Geez, it’s just a little old garter snake.” He began stuffing Sly back in
his pocket.

“Get that thing out of here!” she yelled, holding her hands in front of her and shooing him to the door.

“But he’s my pet,” Lonnie wailed.

“Fine, then you are excused from practice. But your parents are going to hear about this, young man.”

When Mrs. Merriweather composed herself and looked back at the group, no one was in line anymore. The boys were laughing, snickering and talking. And the girls, afraid there might be more snakes crawling around, all huddled in a corner. After assuring the girls there were no more snakes, Mrs. Merriweather clapped her hands. “Let’s start again. Take your positions.” This time the children sang loud and strong, and Mrs. Merriweather was so pleased she excused them early.

The night of the Christmas program, Mrs. Merriweather looked out from the door of the pastor’s study. The church looked beautiful lit in the soft glow of candles. Pine garlands draped the pews on one end, which were quickly filling up with mothers, fathers, grandparents and children. A large Christmas tree stood in a corner of the altar decorated with ornaments the children had made in Sunday School.

When Mrs. Kanoodle, the organist, began playing *O Come All Ye Faithful*, Mrs. Merriweather whispered loudly: “That’s our cue. Form two lines and walk quietly to the risers.” Twenty children quietly came out of the pastor’s study walking towards the altar. Once on the risers, Larry Thompson nudged Rafe. Rafe nudged Larry pushing him into Billy. Billy nudged Larry back. Larry nudged Billy, then pushed Rafe. Rafe pushed Larry harder. Loud whispers of “No, stupid, I’m supposed to be there. Uh-uh. Are too. Am not,” rose over Mrs. Kanoodle’s music.

Mrs. Merriweather cringed. A look of displeasure came over her face and she shook her head vigorously for the boys to stop. Pulling Larry out of line, she placed him directly in front of her in the front row of girls. When the children were all standing in position, dressed in their finery, she looked at them proudly. She turned around and took a few steps away from the altar to announce that the children would sing *Gentle Jesus Meek and Mild*.

In the hushed room, sweet voices sang the opening line. In the second line, Lindsay Graham was off key throwing the entire class off key. In the third line, *Pity my simplicity* the boys sang *Pity my ’lectricity* which set off a bunch of snickering.

Mrs. Merriweather frowned. Embarrassed, she chose to overlook it.

Suddenly, she noticed Larry cupping his crotch. She gave him a stern look of disapproval and he removed his hand for all of five seconds before holding himself again swaying from side to side.

Mrs. Merriweather widened her eyes and pressed her lips together as if to say, “what did I just tell you?” But her eyes widened even further when a dark stain developed on Larry’s khaki’s. She hitched a thumb to excuse him and he ran off holding himself.

As they sang, *Suffer me to come to Thee*, Billy broke out with a howl of great pain.
while Trace Hutchison clutched his sides and began falling in a death throe. The booming noise of his body falling over the riser caused everyone to stop singing. Amongst snickering, Mrs. Merriweather raced over to Trace, clutching his arm a little tighter than necessary helping him up.

“Don’t you do that again!” she hissed.

“Please excuse us. May we start over?” Mrs. Merriweather said to the audience. She nodded for Mrs. Kanoodle to start the song again. This time the first verse came out nicely although there were some leftover snickers. In the second verse, Rafe sang out at the top of his lungs, Thou shall my sample be, rather than the correct words Thou Shalt my Example Be.

The audience began chuckling.

Mrs. Merriweather flushed just as Billy pushed Rafe.

“Quit it!” Rafe said loudly as he bunched his fist and socked Billy in the cheek.

“OWWWWWWWW!” Billy grabbed his cheek, then turned and grabbed Billy’s shirt.

Mrs. Merriweather stepped in parting the boys. She placed Rafe in the front row where Larry had been.

Crimson, as the song concluded, she swallowed her embarrassment to face the congregation. Trying to make light of the situation, she casually remarked, “And they were all so good during rehearsal.”

The congregation smiled and whispered. Some chuckled.

“And now, let us conclude with the benediction: May the peace of the Lord. . .”

SPLAT!
An odorous smell drifted upward.

SPL-SPL-SPLAT!
The children laughed.

Swinging around to face them, she saw Rafe was crimson. Looking directly at him, he said in a wee, small voice,” Sorry, we had beans for dinner.”

She closed her eyes and hung her head. It was just too much. How would she ever live down the humiliation?

Unfortunately, the overhead microphone had picked up Rafe’s confession and the entire congregation was in gales of laughter.

What should she do? She wanted to flee the scene, but as she turned around, she spied Pastor Nickerson walking up the aisle to the altar, his hands in prayer repose over his smiling lips. His eyes gleamed in amusement. He touched her shoulder showing her to a seat in the front pew.

With a chuckle still in his voice, he announced, “This has given me an idea for next Sunday’s sermon. I think I’ll call it, Even Jesus Farted, and we’ll concentrate on the humanness of our Lord and Savior.”

But not a soul heard him above the glee.
Bowser's Nightmare by Brittany Keller
I Dreamt Peace Came to the Mid-East

By Art Clack

I was camping with my family when I had a terrifying nightmare.

I dreamed I was present when peace commenced in the Mid East.

It was a terrifying experience, but certainly worth a dream.

In my dream I was a playground monitor. The kids were four, five, and six year olds of both genders.

I watched the kids as they came to the conclusion they should detonate the bombs in their mouths and blow their heads off.

A little boy and a little girl were the leaders. The rest of the kids went along, comfortable as long as their leaders led from the front.

As the moment of truth approached, somehow the leaders had second thoughts. I would love to be able to report the details of that discussion but I can’t – I dream in pictures, not words.

Anyway, the leaders were cornered by their own words, so they set off to blow their heads off.

At the last minute they... delegated. They pointed at another couple and said, “They can go first.”

All the other little children looked at those two and thought about it and... nodded. That would be acceptable with them, if someone else went first.

The designated couple wanted to belong to the group, and the group they wanted to belong to looked at them and nodded. What were they supposed to do? Without a word they walked behind an outbuilding to blow their own heads off.

I followed them. I didn’t tell them “No”. I couldn’t tell them “No”, but I made the two martyrs understand how serious it would be if the bombs in their heads went off too soon.

They agreed to wait until I told them it was OK.

When I walked back around the outbuilding I found that the school yard inexplicably had more adults, and more adults were filing in.

One of the newcomers asked if the bombs in their mouths would really blow their heads off. I opined not, that they were only powerful enough to blow their jaws off and maim them for life.

Somehow in the dream this seemed consoling.

The children were so serious. And the adults treated the children seriously. It was beautiful, and terrifying to see those homicidal infants being reasoned with by patient, loving adults.
With much persuasion the school yard decided it was wrong to blow off your own head and the two children should be recalled.

I was delegated to make the recall.

I stepped to the backside of the outbuilding, knelt, and explained the situation. I went on to say it wasn't right that they should even have bombs in their mouths, would they please spit them into my hand.

I extended my hand, palm up, and the little blond girl promptly spit her mouth guard into my hand. It was clear plastic, wet, and warm.

The cute little four year old boy was a balding, shaved pate brunette with a five o'clock shadow. (Argh! I am guilty of racial profiling even in my dreams!) He tongued whatever was in his mouth, but did not immediately spit anything into my hand.

As I patiently waited, a small arm extended from round the corner of the building and placed a bridge into my hand. It was partly gray, partly green, and partly shiny silver wire. The owner's little round face peeked around the corner at me. He smiled self-consciously and withdrew.

I cocked my head to the left to look around the building's corner.

There were no adults left on the playground, but all the children had lined up to turn in their oral appliances.

I filled right up with emotion. Those beautiful children looked so sweet and innocent. I choked up, I was going to have the most cathartic cry, I was, I was, but it wouldn't come.

Then my wife rolled over and woke me up.

It was just a dream.

And my bladder hurt.

And the ground was hard and my back hurt. It was morning outside the tent. And it was just a dream.

Oh, how I wish I'd been able to cry.
Hiding in the Shadows

Dedicated to my sister with love

By Katie Cagle

Hiding in the shadows of sadness stands a beautiful woman brought down by the disappointments of life. Walking around half the woman everyone remembers her being. Being beaten and broken down emotionally and mentally by the one she has loved the most.

She is skin and bones walking around with a happy mask upon her face. Trying to make those around her believe everything is okay even though deep inside her the little girl cries several tears not knowing if life will ever be more than a disappointment to her. Will her children ever see her smile or hear her kind words again or will they grow up cold from her fake façade?

Those close to her are enemies in every way, helping her destroy what little of a beautiful woman that she can no longer see when she looks in the mirror. Pushing away those she once loved for fear of feeling happiness again. Those who love her carry her pain and feel the hurt she has endured.

Harsh words are spoken daily, to her and her children. She is sucked deeper into disaster by those who care little and use a lot.

She dreams of a better life, but feels punished by God for letting it all slip out of control. Feeling the coldness from the shadows she hides in, she can no longer hear those telling her she is beautiful, kind, strong, and capable of conquering the demons following her in the shadows that she now knows as home. Will the warmth of the sun ever touch the beautifully, amazing self that she really is? Those who love her reach into the shadows wanting to pull her out of her hell, but will she reach out and embrace their love, or will she simply fade away deeper into the shadows where no one can follow?
**Broken**
momento mori
By C.J. Wilson

I live in a haze under a sky of grey
memories of the dead lead to this decay
though I pleaded to god to let them stay
this is my life just what I can’t say

can’t understand all those around me
caged by emotions with no desire to be free
will I ever understand life, eternity
is it pointless to fight against my destiny

I want to be alone as my heart sinks low
would old friends forgive me if I let them go
if I forgot what happened so long ago
could I find happiness I’d never know

as life becomes death, love is born of sin
so I’ll hold close to my demons within
and I will keep searching for a dream to believe in
I’ll find this dream to honor all that have been

---

**Requiem for a young gay man**
By Art Elser

The young man, in black pants and coat,
white shirt, stands slumped at the window.
His pinched mouth works silently.
Absentminedly, he strokes his short black beard and stares
into the darkness at his feet.

After a long while, he moves to a small desk
and writes a note about the painful death
of his friend, of the virus they share—
the doctors doubt he’ll live two more years —
of his father’s angry, homophobic curse ...

Taking off his coat, he folds it, places it on the desk,
and sits cross-legged on the floor.
He rolls up a sleeve and leans lightly
against the wall. In the darkness he cannot see
the vein, but he’s done this before and does it by feel.

The drugs course warmly through his blood.

He smiles beatifically. Then darkness
dims his eyes.
Young people seem so rebellious!
Perhaps it is well that they rebel
Against this upside-down world.

Well-educated, they forget their studies.
Well-groomed, they grow their hair.
Having all they want, they squander it.
Having heard the advice, they ignore it.

Leaving teachers and parents, shoulds and shouldn’ts,
They abandon the life we intend for them
To search for the life for which they are intended.

If they can get far enough away from our voices
They will discover the still small voice within
That will teach them who they are
And a reason to live.
The New Thing
By Diane Dinndorf Friebe

It was called television
Mom and Dad first saw one at Witschen’s house
A box on legs with dials
Large black sheet of glass in the center
Window on the world outside

Uncle Louie and Aunt Joyce got one
So Dad checked them out at the appliance store
Priced, figured, considered
And ordered one

Brenda and I were outside when it came
Skating on our homemade ice rink
Practicing loops and swinging around the birch tree
When Mom called us in
Never have laces come unlaced so quickly

And there it was
Black and white
About five, count ‘em, five channels
Bonanza, Lawrence Welk, and Sid Caesar
Right there in our living room

And cartoons!
Woody Woodpecker, Bugs Bunny, The Roadrunner
A personal movie theatre
Enticing, wondrous, addictive

Outside time was cut in half
Except when Mom threw us outside to play
Tired of our open mouthed fixation
And ability to quote Mickey Mouse
Better than the Ten Commandments

Antique, almost ancient now
Source of hoots from the grandkids
With their 250 channels
Movies on demand
And little black box
That lets you record two shows at a time
To view later
Backing up and fast forwarding as you please

All with the touch of a button
On a little black handset
That saves you getting
Off the couch
For a couple steps of exercise
To change channels or the volume
Overwhelming developing brains with images
Choices so plentiful as to promote ADHD
And general impatience
With channel surfing at its best
Commercials increasingly close together
With as little content time as the government allows
Pressing the box for nudity and profanity ever larger
Teaching the language of sailors to two year olds

Progress

I’d like my five channels please
Depressing
By Diane Dinndorf Friebe

It’s not true
Just not true
That wooden sticks
Depress tongues

What really depresses tongues
Is no food for a week
Liquid diets
10 meals in a row of unsalted crackers
No ice cream cones for a month
A mouthful of soapy water for swearing
No lollipops
A diet with no chocolate
No visits from friend Toothbrush
Meeting ice cold metal poles
No teeth to run against
No sweet kisses

Now those things
Those are what really depress tongues

SHOOTIN’ THE BULL
by Cheryl Wilkinson

Good ole ranchers
At the coffee shop
Shootin’ the bull
Talking cattle and crops.

They’re fixin’ fence
And puttin’ up hay
Drinkin’ lots of coffee
Having lots to say.

Complainin’ ‘bout the help
High wages they have to pay
Hoping for some rain
To brighten up the day.

How can these ranchers
Drinkin’ ‘til they’re full
Even raise a cattle herd
When they’re shootin’ the bull?

Flow by Leodegario Sierra
Painted Ladies
by A. Rose Hill

Like children in the noonday sun,
shouting, “Me first, me first,”
the last butterflies of autumn,
drawn by the insistent odor of marigolds,
vie for space, rise, settle
on the bright yellow flowers,
ignore more numerous white or pink petunias.

Painted ladies or maybe fritillaries,
warm tan undersides with many white eyes,
tan upper wings, a hint of orange
and varied patterns of brown and black,
they alight, two or even three at a time,
on the tallest blossom,
jostle for a spot, insert long tongues,
pump wings slowly,
sip nectar from the aromatic blooms.
Dreamer
By Adrianna Kay Packard

I am a dreamer.
I dream of things
I doubted to see.
Over time hopelessness
Became my view of reality.
I am a dreamer.
I thought that was all
That my life would be.
Bitter and angry because
I saw not love nor hope nor honesty.
I am a dreamer.
I seek to find,
A change that comes with time.
Words and feelings
Marching step for step
In perfect time.
I am a dreamer.
Finding my way
Another step for another day.
Natural progression is
My new obsession.
Transitioning from what I am
To who I really am.
I am a dreamer.
Gone are the guises
No more pretending
Because I cannot hide it.
Faith has been rediscovered
And with these words
My world has been re-colored.
A few innocent remarks
And that is where the story will start.
For I am a dreamer.
And something I thought never could be
Has finally found me
And now my dream will be my reality.

Marry Me by Ashley Burns
I, Lost
By Robbie Jaramillo

U then came unto me while..

driving under pale livid iron moonlight
the moon it was arguing
with a big purple velour blanket
neatly unfolding herself over
the entire eastern sky.

i couldn't recall the song
le freaking all over my speakers
on the way to dearest mother's.
sick headed, still and upper cutting
those blankets of her own.

Just then my mind wandered with limp control:
Every day at an exact moment
Stolen being scrambles chicken egg for his self.
Some other body,

Is caught crimson-handed

Staring down the untruth of how it
Thinks it doesn't know why it can't love.
Indiscriminately calling out random forces of m-theory physics
Lamenting and oh my god, that's a lot of useless drama.
Lets me finally gain control. Then, unto me came..

Thicker neutron splosions.
How much time do I have with her?
I now see Her the mother of my very existence.
No care for trick and tickles of time at all.
Knowledge of it could spell enslavement of unknown will.

Oh, then a few more airy concrete wisps
Fantastic purple-rifted sky, fingers caressing the wheel

Yesterday will never be far enough away,
Only yielding to daily ritualistic
Undying thought that all I wanted could still be

parading around the main street of my mind like a tuba band every damn day.
though it never does or will replace
the absence of
the real thing or the truth
that it cannot ever be and never really was
Coming Out
By Brooke Foreman

Deep in a valley
in the depth of the night,
He stood by the lake,
watching the moonlight.

Along the shore
he looked up at the sky
His life had no meaning;
all hope had died.

His sparkling eyes
dripping with tears;
His hope was gone,
as it had been for years.

He knew nothing of life,
for he was not of age
He knew nothing of happiness;
for he was caged.

He took off his clothes,
they dropped to the sand.
He dove in the water,
leaving all past on land.

The frame of his body,
the paleness of his skin;
was shining in the moonlight-
his hair in the wind.

He joined with the water,
like a wave in the ocean;
Wiping out all strength,
stealing his emotions.

He used all of his energy,
as he gracefully swam.
He paddled to the edge
then stood on the sand.

Spinning in circles,
with his arms in the air;
watching the stars spin
his body still bare.

He fell to the ground
still watching the sky.
Then hope came before him
meeting him eye to eye.

A silver star shot out of the sky
shining as bright as the sun.
It's billion years of life had ended
on the night his had just begun.
Biographical Notes

Kethera Aiyana is currently coming to grips with the reality of the springtime of her life. She flows from baking cookies to banging nails seamlessly and can be found hidden under assorted and sundry rocks.

Laurie Alkire is a mathematics instructor at WNCC.

Martha Boyer Armstrong is a retired widow, 78 years old. She has been writing poetry since she was eight. She lives in Gering.

Joni Whitcomb Bunzel is an area artist, writer, and photographer who also rescues, loves, and cares for animals.

Ashley Burns is a WNCC student.

Katie Cagle is a Human Services major at the Sidney campus.

Arthur L. Clack recently moved to the Panhandle from eastern Kansas. He is retired, building a house, and planning a garden. "Forty-eight years of journalizing have not relieved my need."

CJ Clark lives in the Ozarks, where she is working on her second novel. She has been published in several magazine and journals, nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and has won several awards for her poetry and short stories.

Andrea Cook is a 1980 graduate of WNCC. She recently returned to the Scotts Bluff Valley and continues to write poetry, prose, and fiction.

Janet S. Craven celebrates her 15th year as Advisor for Emerging Voices. She is proud of all past student editors who have gone on to successful employment in journalism, art, and other careers. Her poetry has been published in many anthologies and journals.

Art Elser has a PhD in English and has taught writing for over 30 years. His poetry has been widely published. He lives in Denver, Colorado.

Audrey Bosch Erickson is a WNCC art student. She enjoys drawing, painting, and outdoor activities.

Margaret Evans is a WNCC employee in Sidney.

Brook Foreman is a WNCC student at the Scottsbluff campus who was born in Loveland, Colorado.

Diane Dinndorf Friebe has lived in Nebraska for 15 years. She is a former member of the Sidney Area Writers (SAW) and former employee of WNCC at Sidney.

Gary Henderson is a senior theatre major at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln. He is a former WNCC student.

A. Rose Hill of Sheridan, Wyoming, is a Missouri native. She is the mother of 3 adopted children, grandmother of 6, and keeps books for her son’s business. Her poems appear in many college, literary and contest publications.

Aaron E. Holst lives in Sheridan, Wyoming. He spent many years as a Fire Chief. After retirement he signed up for a nine-week poetry workshop through the Senior Center. His poem, “Air Travel,” garnered him the Amy Kitchener Foundation’s 2010 Wyoming Senior Poet Laureate Award.

Mary Strong Jackson lives in Scottsbluff. Her work has been published in small press and literary journals in the United States and England.

Holly Jahns is a WNCC student taking the Photography 2 class.
Biographical Notes

Robbie Jaramillo is a poet and musician from the Scottsbluff-Gering area.

Doreen Jensen, Oshkosh, Nebraska, taught high school English for 25 years. On retirement in 1987, she offered an adult writing class, which remains active today as a club.

Tessa Kaufman is a WNCC student.

Alec Kaus is taking online classes through WNCC. He recently moved back to Sidney from Boise, Idaho. He loves documenting with photography.

Brittany Keller is a WNCC student studying art to help improve her skills for her major, video game design.

Jerald H. Lucas lives in Scottsbluff where he is a founding member of the former Literary Arts Committee of the West Nebraska Arts Center.

Stephanie Martinez is a student at WNCC in Scottsbluff.

Breanna Meyer is an art major at WNCC. She moved here from Virginia Beach in 2009. “…hope to be a professional photographer, although I already do photo shoots on the side when I have time. I love photography…It’s the only thing that gives me butterflies!”

Brooke Michael is a student at the Gering Freshman Academy.

Cynthia Miller is co-owner with Dennis W. Miller, Jr. of “The Most Unlikely Place” art gallery, luncheon café, and coffee shop on Main Street in Lewellen. She is a former English teacher who is the roller-skating hostess at the “MUP.”

Dennis W. Miller, Jr. recently retired from the Board of Governors at WNCC. He retired from the Navy as Commander in 1991, and started farming in Lewellen, his hometown, with his father and brother. They just transitioned to organic farming.

John D. Nesbitt teaches English and Spanish at Eastern Wyoming College in Torrington. His poetry, fiction, and non-fiction have been published widely including past issues of Emerging Voices. His most recent book publication is Gather My Horses, a western.

Adrianna Kay Packard is a former WNCC student from Scottsbluff who enjoys art, photography, and writing.

Yvonne Randall has lived in the Scottsbluff-Gering area her whole life and married her high school sweetheart. She is the mother of three children and grandmother to four grandchildren.

Kathy Reece, Gering, taught at Lake Alice School.

Norma Rhiley lives in Oshkosh, Nebraska. She has been a member of the “Just Writers” club since it began in 1984. Her style is sensitive and unique.

Zane Rickets is a WNCC student.

Tiffany Schank is a 2010 WNCC graduate currently pursuing a degree in Fine Art from Chadron State College.

Emily Schmidt is a WNCC second year student.

Leo Sierra is a WNCC student and active with the WNCC Forensics (speech) Team.

Rhitta Ann Smith-Bounds is a Supplemental Instruction Specialist for TRIO at WNCC and also an advisor for Phi Theta Kappa honor society.

Shirley Smith writes from Mitchell.
Biographical Notes

Tiffany Snethen is a WNCC student.

Kathryn Stock is a WNCC student who enjoys art.

Shirley Sullivan, Oshkosh, has written and self-published three books: Miles Maryott; Keep the Rhythm and the Bridge Won’t Swing; and Wanted: Housekeeper. She is a member of the Just Writers Club.

Christine Valentine lives in Birney, Montana. She has been published in many anthologies including Tipton Poetry Journal, Voicings from the High Country, and the High Plains Register. She is the editor for the WyoPoets’ Newsletter.

Paige Vogel is a freshman at Gering.

Sheryl Wallerich works for catering at WNCC Food Services in Scottsbluff.

Chelsie Weidaman is a WNCC photography class student.

Cheryl Wilkinson was born in the Sandhills of Nebraska where she learned the love of nature. Her paintings, writings and photos depict this love. She lives in Gering.

C.J. Wilson is a sophomore at Gering High School.

Darek Wilson is a former WNCC student who enjoys art and photography. He currently lives in Tuscon, Arizona.

Linell Wohlers grew up in Colorado and later moved to a farm near Chadron where she freelanced, selling stories to children's magazines and anthologies. She is currently an occupational therapist living in Scottsbluff and is working on a novel.
Windmills
Silent Sentinels
by Jerald H. Lucas

The sentinel stands watch
Keeping secure his charge
Bold, stern, and steadfast
He stands first against
Those who would do harm.

The windmill fixed steadfast
On the barren prairie
Stands like a sentinel
Keeping watch over
Flickering fading memories
Of Indians, and wagon trains
Cattle drives and homesteaders.

The windmill stands silent
To remind us, today
That the past is alive
Future and progress
Abide within and beside
The secret mysteries
Hidden in the prairie.

Friends Don’t Let Friends Drive Drunk!
Thanks for being a designated driver.