



BROAD IDEAS

POETRY BOOK - 2018

A COLLECTION OF POETRY FROM...

LILLIAN "LEILA" ANWAR
HEATHER A. HOUZENG
RENEE DIESCHBOUR
CHAR KENNEDY
CAROL L. GLOOR
CATHIE ELSBREE
KAREN STOCKWELL
LEONE CASTELL ANDERSON

EMMA WALLS
MELISSA MCGUIRE
CARRIE HASS
MARTA MICINSKI DOLAN
BARB KELLAR
PEGGY STORTZ
BONNIE GEISERT
JUDY ROWETT

PHOENIX-RISING

Lillian "Leila" Anwar

A Song of Freedom for all Woman-kind

Shimmering pile of ashes, shocking residue
Of the self-immolation of innocence.
Eons of relentless cruelty, of struggle, of subservience,
Led to this conflagration. Tradition the cold wind
That slammed the door of her captor's cage.
Enslaved, wings clipped, her song a silent scream,
She struggled to see the sky,
For her voice to be heard in all its beauty
For her life to have meaning, and joy.
Until the day, unwittingly, her neglected cage fell open
And, joyously free, she flew into the sun.
In a burst of brilliant flame, she was consumed.
Her ashes fell to the Earth in a soft grey rain of sadness
Touching the faces and fingertips of shocked onlookers
With an indelible smudge of Lenten-like contrition.
But wait, the ashes pulsate and shift, with a metallic rainbow hue.
Stunned bystanders gape, as a mystical metamorphosis takes place
Before their disbelieving eyes.
First, a bronze talon appears, grasping, groping
Then another, pushing aside the funeral pyre.
A glistening beak, rising into a majestic, crested brow,
While sapphire eyes survey the scene with the wisdom of the ages.
Then, the matchless body of the fabled bird steps forth
Shaking from her gold and purple plumage
The last flakes and embers of death.
She lives- She is the Phoenix!
Proudly risen from her struggle.
Triumphant and beautiful, she knows no master!
Her dazzling wings spread, and she soars above the Earth
Protective and loving,
While her song, a canticle of truth
Tells of peace and tolerance.
She is the Phoenix, long awaited,
And her strength will heal the world.

I wrote this poem several years ago, as an homage to the struggle of women through the ages. Now, I dedicate it to Heather Heyer, of Charlottesville, VA, who gave her life for peace and tolerance, and to all others, who, unafraid, raise their voices in the cause of what is just and right.

Pull the Thread

By Heather A. Houzenga

Pull the thread
That holds it all together;
Tug at the loose ends
Until it's all tattered.
Unravel it all out,
Until there's nothing
left of you,
But to be able to submit
To the higher calling
Upon your heart.
Strands of energy,
Feeding through the construct
Of the world,
With connection anew,
Through the needle pull;
Eyes feeding upon
The nothingness
That is really the essence
Of the base,
The fabric,
Of all that is and was.

May 19, 2016

Ray Rose

By Heather A. Houzenga

When I die, don't you bury me,
Don't you lay me in the ground...
But, set me up on a pyre, burn
up my bones and spread them all around.

For, the love I gave daily was
The best gift of all...
Don't keep it for yourself, but go forward
To keep catching those who fall.

Wrap up the memories and hold
Tight to their beautiful hue...
Just know a stone marker will not
Replace the love I've shown you.

Nothing will seem pressing anymore,
But I do know this to be true...
It's all in divine time, where again,
I'll put on a smile and get to see you.

RIP dear friend, January 2017

Just the Same

by Heather A. Houzenga

I try not to worry,
No frown upon my face,
I try to breathe through it all,
With faith that someday
I'll see the grace...

No one to tell me which way to go,
No direction is evident.
I simply put one foot in front of the other
And keep going till this race is spent...

Some days I get frustrated
And simply wish to end this masquerade,
But something inside me whispers
That there's more on the road ahead...

No need to be selfish,
No need to wonder why,
For there's more mysteries left to unlock
Before the day we must die...

Without the stillness in our days,
Without the rage in our hearts,
There's no way of telling
Upon the next task we must start...

Go fill your cup, unending,
Let it spill onto the floor,
Let it splash and flow its way until
It carries you out the door...

The love it carries will be
too much to hold or to contain,
No house, nor body will be able
To help pull you out of its refrain...

So, sit back and wonder
On where this life leads.
Take time to be silent and romanticize
Because that's what this world needs...

There's already too much anger,
Hatred, and shame
So, be sure that you're sharing your life
With love, that others may do the same...

Be one with your spirit,
Be one with your fellow man,
Be one with all your surroundings,
For, on this you're left to stand...

Give up your selfishness,
Give up your mundane deeds,
Give up your conflicting points
And go down upon your knees...

Rejoice in your life's accomplishments,
In the rear view they are vast.
Forgive your past relinquishments
And strive forward to make this life last...

Nothing's ever perfect,
On this you've learned is true,
Simply pick up the pieces, shift them around
And place them together, brand new...

Someone will join you in your madness,
And never want your wildness tamed,
They'll love every piece of you,
Until life is over, just the same...

February 25, 2017

Feather

Renee Dieschbourg

It began so quickly,
Not that I recognized that then.

You were a bit shy, yet so certain, so confident
Your constant attention and interest swept me in

All my free time revolved around you
Really, there never was enough time
I'd rush through everything to be back with you
I was utterly wooed by your boyish charm
And you seemed to appreciate my free-spiritedness

The first time

Your accusations were jolting to our perfect
As I processed your stern, serious demeanor,
Confusion flooded me
My grounding stolen away
All I kept thinking was
"What?"
Followed by a deep, deep desire to assure you

How could I convince you he's only a friend?
I tried, but my words gave you no peace of mind
In empathizing with your insecurity,
I gave you a pinch of my freedom
It was worth it, right...
For you, for my respectability

Scatter, like a feather

Begin again-perfect
Nights on the town, meeting the family, spontaneous trips
Intertwined in our playful ways and endless silly humor
All was well-
wrapped in your arms

Then

Your insecurities resurfaced more often
And in the most ridiculous, unpredictable ways
Voicing this never brought any reason

However, altering and molding my behavior
Allowed for peace, again

Scatter, like a feather

Soon everything became a catch-22
Working too much,
not contributing enough
Dressing up was suspicious and vain,
Natural and laid back was "letting myself go"

Your insults coated as constructive critiques
Yanked me down
You used my most guarded insecurities and vulnerabilities against
me
I tried to not let it get to me
To rise above, but
The depth and hurt was a falling
Further than I knew was possible

Was I scatter, like a feather?

Defeated...yes, at times, but
I never submitted to complete conquering
You hated the way I would
Subversively and overtly defy you
In times of distance I nurtured my power and strength
Allowing for calm, unambiguous breathing space with
My dearest supports bringing clarity

Nonetheless, tethered to you
I'd be back again
Being with you felt essential, in an unexplainably compulsive way
Rekindling meant earning your trust back
Trust being the curtain for control
Surrendering my freedoms, desires, and ambitions
I convinced myself these sacrifices were worth if for the blissful
moments
Moments that felt like floating and even soaring...

Then
In an instant

Flip.

How the first drop of a rollercoaster
Surprises and consumes the experience
But without the secure catch of the tracks
Your words and cruel actions leaving me simultaneously
overwhelmed and empty.

You're above me
Often starting as playful wrestling,
Your control creeps in and its not a game for me anymore
Physically pinning me,
to ground me
After struggling, I wiggle free
Without saying what you want
For a moment the escape feels like a win
Especially, since this time,
I evaded being spit on
As soon as my adrenaline calms,
I realize my dignity and worth are far from victorious

Scatter, like a feather

Arguing would get us nowhere
Exhausted I'd surrender to bed
Only to be awoken by your continued badgering
Where you point to my ability to sleep
As direct evidence of my heartlessness and fault

If only I could articulate things better
So you could just see my point, reason, perspective
I never could seem to though...
Even the social worker in me couldn't lead us to mutual
understanding
I was never heard
And in times when I must have come close
You dodged and diverted the conversation
Making nonsensical blanket statements
Evading accountability and shifting blame

If I endure the arguing thus far,
Then attacking my identity, values, family, friends
Was your ultimate whirlwind,
certain to extinguish any remaining resistance

Scatter, like a feather

Finally

The wind changes direction

I shift.

I recognize the cycle

I let go of hope for you,

And for us

I pull back my power

And for the first time,

I ponder what my needs are,

solely mine

It feels unfamiliar

It feels peaceful

Hard to catch

Innately Free

A symbol of hope

A feather challenges gravity and endures all the winds

Drifting along and moving on

Indeed I did...Scatter, like a feather

Wondering

Char Kennedy

Wondering...Why do you like the likes of me,
I'm coke shaped you see,
From bosom to knee.
But over and under my balance's maintained
Could this be the reason your interest I've gained?

The Broad I Am.....

Believes in 'for goodness sake' and
Recycling roadside litter.
Orchestrates meritorious meals.
Achievements in tennis, textiles, teaching.
Desirous mate?ask George.

Char Kennedy

Deer in Town*

Carol L. Gloor

2016

Shotguns blast the gray air, shatter
the skeletal trees of the state park forest.
Some deer come to town knowing
it is safe, vanishing in our small,
scattered woods, seen only if they move.
Two does nuzzle down a hill, eating
whatever's still green, shining noses
and flippant tails sometimes
giving themselves away.
My stare locks on one doe's
huge eyes. She is not afraid,
gazes back, for an instant
two creatures together on Earth.

**To appear in my full length collection, Falling Back, published by WordTech LLC,
in late Spring, 2018*

Working

Carol L. Gloor

2012

I started illegally, selling toys at Woolworth's
while the manager told me not to hold the boxes too tight
or I'd squeeze the milk from my titties.
So what, I thought, I'll get a better job, and I did.

All I ever wanted was a paycheck every other Friday,
that brief abundant moment when you buy
the sweater you've been watching all week,
a lipstick you don't really need.
All I ever wanted was to get the jokes,
bring a casserole to the baby shower,
say hi to the receptionist using her first name.

All I ever wanted was

to watch the narrow light of morning widen to yellow noon through
my office window,
while I do something people are willing to pay for,
to return after a lunch bought with my own money,
then work all afternoon while the light turns rose,
then silver gray, and finally a million windows
twinkling in all the other towers,
each one a woman working.

No Kill Shelter

Carol L. Gloor

2017

I clean the Unadoptables Room,
the inside door like one in a nursing home:
cat pictures and names:
Marco, Sasha, Pepper and Zoe.
All too fat, too skinny, too sick,
too needy, shy, jumpy or wild,
I clean enough to maintain,
finish with fresh food and water,
then open the outside door
for grass and sunlight.
They gather at the threshold,
sniffing the world.
Not one bolts for freedom,

just like my father after five years
in the Methodist Home would never go outside.
He would open the window after maintenance cleaning
to rid the Pine Sol smell, after he finished lunch
on a kindergarten tray, took the pills in a paper cup.
He said I get confused.
I understand the food here.
We sat together by the window.
Grass and sunlight.

Choir Practice*

Carol L. Gloor
2017

September volunteers us
back into folding chairs
where we settle into hymnals
to come up with
something for Sunday.
We sand our rusty voices
into sweet harmony,
but someone must sing
a solo for the third verse.

A fat backrow boy
who works at Walmart
says I'll do it,
and silences us
with floating tenor,
God will take care of you,
and for one moment
we believe.

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2018*

Intermission

Cathie Elsbree

Intermission; late November..
Maple and Birch
Oak and Walnut
Strip themselves of their
Flamboyant attire...
Having twirled their gaudy flaming
Red and yellow costumes into
Puddles around their feet.
Resting now,
after their wild autumn chorus line,
they lounge between acts,,,
Standing still and silent
Gathering energy for their next act...
And just in time,
The Master Dresser arrives with
Drifts of glistening white
Draping furls of silver over
Sweep of neck and leg.
Clothed in the finest, they appear again...

Serene Divas...

Queens of the winter stage.

Generation Gap

Cathie Elsbree

I look through old photographs
Sepia prints, verging on colorless
And find the women of my family
In times past
Standing
In their 50th years
In drab housedresses
Vibrancy fading away
Into Tombstone gray.

I will greet 50,
Bursting into my
Half century
In a pair of

Hot red
Short shorts....
And I did!

43: Single, widowed and female at a bar

Cathie Elsbree

I am lick on a stick...
I am packaged,
Labelled,
wrapped for appeal..
I am
Baubled,
Bubbled,
Beautified.
I am groomed for display.
Lined up...shoulder to shoulder.
Lollipops
One after another.
Through the cellophane, can the customer tell?
Is the flavor right?
The width of the stripe?
The color?
The shape?
The ingredients?
I am waiting to be sampled...
Prodded...
Examined...
Picked over...
And pawed.
Ultimately to be chosen
Or discarded.
I live on the whim of the consumer.

A Doctor's Hand

Karen Stockwell

Though still young,
she had the right manner:
concerned;
professional;
comforting.
Being the epitome of Asian elegance
in white lab coat,
her stethoscope draped over her neck
like classic jewelry.

She asked questions,
checked my vitals,
wrote a prescription,
advised me on the benefits of steam
and the importance of sleep.
All the while I watched her hands
at every turn.
Long, thin, pale fingers,
as delicate as a dove's wings,
They flew around and above me
and touched me.
They were worthy of celebration
in painting or photography.
I thought of Botticelli's Venus
and Stieglitz's studies
of Georgia O'Keeffe's artist hands.

This doctor's hands were those of a muse.
They were inspiration package in human form.
They had a purity about them:
a rare and sacred quality.
And I am certain I stared
as they did their work on me.

Hands like hers
Would be recognized as a feminine ideal
In any age.
But in this age,
Her hands are also blessed
With the ability,
And the opportunity,
To heal.

Slow Ripening

Leone Castell Anderson

We call her adolescent,
She who feels the magic when the moon's a crescent.
Now child-like, utterly devoid of sense,
 now woman wise.
Entangled in emotions, full of sighs,
She bruises thoughtlessly
 And causes pain, and yet
She knows the needle-pricking of regret.
Temptation's tilt-a-whirling leaves her dizzy,
 weak of will,
Until
The gyroscope of innocence
Returns her, trusting, to ideals incandescent.
We call her adolescent.

fuck censored

Emma Walls

I'm 17 and I can't talk about sex?
That's what he said when I was 3
And I didn't know what sex was
It was said again at 15
At 16
It was said in the fall and then
In a different voice
In the spring
They said
You can't talk about it
It's inappropriate
It's uncomfortable
You're too young
I'm 17 and I can't paint myself naked?
I can't paint him naked?
I can't paint what he did to me?
It's my body
And you're saying that if I'm naked it's sexual?
You shouldn't dress like a slut
That skirt asks for it
No, no, no, you're wrong
You can do it
But on our conditions
On our rules
Only pretty sex only yes sex
No nipples only cleavage
It can't make them uncomfortable and if it is then it's not allowed
But it can keep making you uncomfortable
Only when you're 18 can you talk
Except women can't talk about sex
You're being too loud
You shouldn't look like that
You shouldn't talk like that
You're underage and when you're a kid you can't talk about the things
adults did to you
We heard things about you
She's easy
She's cheap
She gets them in trouble
We don't ask you
We just know they're right
Button up and get out
This isn't the right place for you
Don't worry fuckers - I'm leaving

Parents

Melissa McGuire

Those loving ghosts:
Presence felt so intensely now
Haunting the tenderest dreams,
remembered like an ache
paining softly of regret,
of love's poor chances
missed; neglected; spinning away
behind Eternity's door.

Untitled

Melissa McGuire

Sweet music,
return me to those honeyed evenings
when we haunted Love's crooked streets
enchanted beyond time
Unquestioning
young- eyed and whole inside
Holy unknowing
Believing
Love would last.

INTRODUCTION

Carrie Hass

I am a mom of three amazing boys.

I was taught from a very young age that I should leave the world a better place than when I found it. These three kiddos have helped me succeed at that.

That doesn't mean by any means that I am done. Every mom knows that we are never done.

Just as most moms, I am always thinking about what I have taught my kids.

Have I taught them the right things in the right ways?

I feel pretty confident when it comes to some subjects, but as my boys have gotten older I have one thing that I am struggling with. I keep asking myself the same question.

How do I raise my boys to be gentlemen- old fashioned gentlemen- while at the same time knowing and respecting that everyone has a great power within them.

They don't have to do things (open doors, pay for dinner, bring flowers, etc) because another person isn't capable.

They do it because it is:

Respectful

Kind

Makes the world a better place

My boys have a wide age range. My oldest is nearly 19 and my youngest just turned 8 with my middle kiddo at almost 11.

I have been doing this mom thing for a while.

Mom ing has changed some since I started as a teenager.

I never thought I would have to worry about my kids hearing from government leaders about grouping members of the opposite sex.

I never thought I would have to explain to my kids why people they have seen on television reporting the news are now on news accused of assault.

When my oldest was young, one of the topics we had to face as parents was if the purple Teletubbie was gay. REALLY? This was even something to talk about?

Fast forward to 2018 and there are so many new things to explain, to discuss, to help them learn about and learn from. All the time, trying to make sure that they remember that they have a responsibility to remain gentlemen in this crazy world we live in.

That's a lot of pressure on each of them. How do I teach each of them to be a gentleman while respecting each person's strength and their wishes?

How do I teach that? How do I show that? What will they learn from?

There certainly isn't a book-trust me, I've researched Amazon for it!

I have gotten some tips from other moms, but no one I have asked so far has one clear answer. If anyone here does, could you raise your hand now? Ill be happy to pay you for your expertise.

CONCLUSION

I know that one of the greatest things I can offer my boys is a great example.

My husband is a true gentleman. They see it every day.

We are also partners. From crying babies, flooding basements, dirty dishes, and cobwebs; we are in it all. We are also there for the giggles from the babies, amazing report cards, starry skies, and family game nights. My boys see that too.

I am strong and I am weak, and the same can be said for my husband.

When I need help, my husband is there for me and vice versa. We

don't do it because the other is weak-we do to be kind and loving.

I hope that having my boys see that and talking about that equality with them makes a difference in their lives.

~~~~~

This is a unique type of question.

The type that you don't know how to tell someone how to do it right- but you certainly know when it is wrong.

I am not a fan of this type of question.

But from that magical moment that my first son was put on my chest- and the two times after- I am in love with being a mom to these three boys.

The world should be a better place when I leave it than when I found it.

Working to teach my boys this will be one more step in the right direction.

## **Just Keep Swimming**

By Marta Micinski Dolan

A friend once told me that chlorine has the power to cure all that ails you. She is a swimmer and, on many occasions, had mentioned that swimming was instrumental in helping her survive her difficult divorce. I always took her proclamations with a grain of salt until I had to pull through a challenging time of my own: in a span of a year, I got divorced myself, becoming the main caretaker for my two young children, and then lost a very well-paying job. All of a sudden, I found myself longing to be in the water. The pool seemed to have become my place of safety. This was a new experience for me--I did not have frequent contact with water when I was growing up and, most definitely, never took any swimming lessons. Actually, I did not learn to swim properly until about four years ago, a few months before I was to participate in my first triathlon (yes, I did sign up for one BEFORE I knew how to swim...).

I am not quite certain what it was about the pool that comforted me so. Maybe it was the feeling of being enveloped by the warm water, the noises muffled, the perception distorted--all shimmery and fluid, the sun throwing rainbows on the floor underneath me. Maybe it was that time was no longer measured by the conventional passage of minutes and seconds but, rather, by the number of breaths I took. If I let it, the water would support my weight, allowing me to float on my back without having to fight for it. I had to fight so much everywhere else that the simple act of just floating, without any particular goal or me having to do anything about it, was liberating. But I had to learn to trust that the water would do that. And, in the process, trust MYSELF to let go of the constant need for control and just BE. And I had to learn to trust my own body that it would do what it was supposed to: that my legs were strong enough to kick to keep my body from sinking too low, that my arms could stretch far enough to gather the water needed to propel me forward, that my face would rotate just enough to fill my lungs with precious air.

At first, swimming was a struggle--at its deepest, my community pool is 12ft deep and I was so afraid of that expanse of space separating me from the bottom. I could not get my breathing right, could not coordinate all my limbs, could not remember to stretch my arms and rotate my hips and the angle at which my hand should enter the water. It was exhausting, not just physically but mentally as well: there were too many body parts to keep track of

simultaneously. Those first few times getting to the other side of the pool seemed like an insurmountable task. But I kept coming back, pushing myself--at first because I didn't want to drown during my first event and then because I wanted to be better and faster and to prove to myself I could overcome my fear. Now, after many many hours of practice, I can not only make it to the other side of the pool but I can do so for a few thousand yards. However, while I can pass for a half-decent swimmer, there is still so much more I can work on...

Particularly, I am trying to remember to stretch while I reach out my arms. With every stroke, I picture myself elongating and becoming more powerful, graceful, elegant in my movements (I'm quite sure I don't actually LOOK like that when I swim but a girl can dream...). I am learning to take up more space, to "unfold" and become an unstoppable force as I cut through the water. In a way, the constant reminder to stretch, stretch, streeeeetch is helping me learn to stand a little taller on the ground as well. Swimming has helped me become stronger--in body and spirit--and taught me the value of persistence and determination: when things get rough, you just keep on swimming and, eventually, you get to the other side of the pool. So, maybe, in a way, my friend was right: chlorine does have the magic power to cure all that ails you...

*"To read more, please go to [lifeadaringadventure.net](http://lifeadaringadventure.net)."*

## **Memories of Mom**

Barb Kellar- 1995

With eyes a decade away,  
I ponder yesterday.

Memories float on today's breeze  
Bring laughter and tears with equal ease.

So much remembered, so much forgot  
So many 'should have's' so many 'should not'.

A memory doesn't last forever  
The saddest word in the world...never.

Never again will I hear or see  
The wonderful person she was to me.

To never feel the softness of hands  
Arthritically pained by life's demands.

How can it be, she brighter grows  
As memory of her fades to a glow?

So much I never asked  
Of our youth in the past.

She grew up with me, together  
Now I'll grow to her, forever.

## **To All My Children**

Barb Kellar

A small form cuddled into a ball  
So tiny, almost nothing at all.

I put my hand upon your back  
Making sure no breath you lack.

Your mouth frowns and then you grin  
Not knowing that your Mom's come in.

Or does that grin acknowledge that  
You know I've come to feel your back?

And deep down do you know I'm there  
To show you that I really care?

Perhaps an angel's whispered word  
Has spoken something I've not heard.

For it's much easier to explain  
Since you've just come from God's domain.

You've joined us here to make us see  
How new this big old world can be.

So enjoy your peaceful sleep.  
And in my prayers your name I'll keep.

I love you more than words can tell.  
May God bless you and keep you well.

### **Remember?**

Barb Kellar-1996

When I can't sleep I lay and wonder  
What I was like when I was younger.  
I try to remember as young as I can  
What I did way back then.

I'd think back to when I was three or four,  
Then smile to myself and think some more.  
Back to the days when I was a baby,  
But I can't confirm thoughts, not even with maybe.

I think, "I'll have to ask Mom what I did  
When I was asleep in my own little crib."  
But Mom cannot tell me and neither can Dad.  
And that really makes me feel very sad.

There's no one around who cares quite enough  
To help me remember this cute little stuff.  
There's no one who cares or who knew



About what I did, when, and with who.

Then I think of my own children's youth  
And I come to one unchangeable truth.  
I cannot remember when they question me  
What they like we're like at six or at three.

Even if Mom were here with me today  
And I asked her questions, I might hear her say,  
"I just can't remember. It's so long ago.  
But you were always so cute, that much I know. "

So if I am questioned by my grown up son  
On where he had gone or what he had done,  
Or if my girl wonders how old she was when...  
I guess I'll just have to tell her then...

"I just can't remember. It's so long ago.  
But you were always so cute, that much I know."

## PROM

Peggy Stortz

My daughter Lindsay perched on the edge of the bed and pulled a lock of hair down over her forehead. She was nearly cross-eyed as she studied it for split ends. "Mom, did you hear the school announcements today?"

Having her mom teach at the same high school she attended was often embarrassing to Lindsay, but it had its perks too. She could always stop by my room for extra cash or the car keys. And I learned of her nomination the same moment she did.

I marked the place in my novel and sat up, propping my absent husband's pillow behind my back.

"Oh, baby. Yes, I did. Congratulations. I was so excited when they said your name. Prom court...maybe prom queen?"

She smiled just a little, still tugging at her hair. "Could I have a new dress?"

Her gown from last year—midnight blue, sequined, glamorous—hung in dry cleaner's plastic in the guest closet.

I tried to think what to say.

Since her dad was having treatments for cancer and I had to be at school by 7 a.m. for my first class, she often got up early to get to the hospital to share breakfast and the paper with him. When he was first diagnosed and too weak to even feed himself, she coaxed him to swallow as she spooned yogurt into his mouth. She made sure he took his pills before she hurried off to school.

Always a perfectionist, each class assignment was completed in her neat block printing. She studied for every test. And every night she read a Bible verse and whispered her prayers before shutting off her bedside lamp.

Once she'd awakened to loud voices and ran downstairs to find firemen transferring her dad onto a gurney while I implored them to be careful, to not cause him even more trauma, as the cancer had already fractured his ribs and vertebrae.

Tugging her corduroy robe tighter, she located his prescription medications and handed them to a technician. Then the ambulance with her parents inside went screaming into the night while she stood alone in our abruptly silent house.

A new dress? I couldn't tell her no. "Of course, baby," I said. "Let's go shopping tomorrow. It's Saturday."

By 9 a.m., we were on the road. The sun blazed in an azure sky. Another spectacular Colorado day. Tulips nodded in yards as we

cruised by. Lindsay chattered about her classes, her teachers, her boyfriend Tony, the plans for prom.

At the mall, she tried on dresses while the clerk and I found new possibilities and returned rejects to the rack.

I was taking a breather in the chair outside the dressing room when she emerged in a spectacular ball gown: ivory with gold flowers, spaghetti straps, a fitted bodice, a full skirt. It reminded me of Scarlet O'Hara's dress in the opening scene of *Gone with the Wind*.

"Mom, what do you think?"

"It's absolutely beautiful, Lindsay. You take my breath away."

She smiled and regarded her reflection in the three-way mirrors along the wall. Stepping back, she turned and looked over her shoulder at her slender tanned back and the tiny buttons of the dress. "Find the price, Mom."

I slid my fingers under the back and pulled out the tag. It was much more than I'd planned to pay, more than I'd ever paid for a single dress, more than any of the other dresses I'd checked.

She caught my expression in the mirror. "Is it too much?"

At home, piles of unpaid bills sat in stacks on our desk.

I didn't know if Les would ever be able to return to work. I didn't know if our insurance would cover the costs of his medical procedures.

Yet this seventeen-year-old in front of me. How many nights had she awoken to the sounds of her dad vomiting, her mom weeping. She'd been at home alone on the day her dad was diagnosed, the day she carefully copied inspirational Bible passages and taped them to all our mirrors.

I sighed. "You'll never need another prom dress."

While the clerk wrapped up the frock for the trip home, we scurried around the mall buying dainty heels, a necklace, earrings.

As we zipped back home on the interstate, Lindsay suggested we stop at the hospital to show the gown to her dad.

After I found a parking spot, we grabbed our packages and headed inside. "Linds," I said, "he doesn't know we're here. Why don't you put on your new dress, shoes and jewelry and walk into his room all ready for the prom?"

Lindsay loved the idea, so we slipped into a hall restroom. I helped her step into the gown and button the back. She took off her Nikes and slid on the new shoes. I clasped the necklace and adjusted the earrings. Then she stood back and looked in the mirror. We giggled at the incongruity; she was dressed in the most formal fashion, but her long hair was straggly, hanging down to her

shoulders. Her face was clean, without the mascara and lipstick one would expect to accompany such a costume.

I pushed the door open and she lifted her skirts so they wouldn't drag on the beige tile floor. We meant to rush down the corridor to his room unseen, but several staff members huddled around the nurses' station. A nurse spied us, then they all turned to look. Dr. Lavrinets, my husband's oncologist, was there. Suddenly I realized they were having a briefing about Les. For a moment everyone just gaped at Lindsay. The stark hallway made a sharp contrast with the flowing gown, the string of pearls, the heels. We stopped and I said, "We just wanted Les to get to see her new prom dress."

Then Dr. Lavrinets smiled. He put his hands together and clapped. One by one all of the other staff joined in, applauding this unexpected diversion, this fresh-faced teenager in a Cinderella dress, this daughter who visits her dad in a hospital room.

At the unexpected attention, Lindsay lowered her eyes and blushed. I pushed open Les' door and she rushed inside. The staff followed us, forming a little semi-circle around her and the hospital bed. The strong odor of cleaning astringents made my eyes water.

Les had been dozing but the commotion awoke him and he startled, taking a minute to get his bearings before he focused on her. Then he grinned and reached out. She rushed to his side and gave him a kiss while he wrapped one arm around her neck. "Linds," he said.

She pulled away and twirled. "We just bought this for prom." He studied the gown and smiled. "It's nice."

Les was back at home on prom night when Tony drove up in his mother's new shiny red Chrysler Le Baron convertible. He was tall and handsome in his tuxedo. He handed Lindsay's wrist corsage to me before he hurried to greet her dad. When Les was in the hospital, Tony came to see him bringing a plastic bag overflowing with Twinkies, Hostess cupcakes and Ding-Dongs. He had stopped by the outlet store en route and bought what he knew he would have wanted if he was in the hospital.

After a few minutes Lindsay descended the stairs. Her hair was up high on her head with glittering barrettes securing it and only a tress or two escaping to tickle the nape of her neck. The gentle scent of her floral cologne wafted around her. She wore rose-colored lip gloss, black mascara, her slender fingers manicured with frosty nail polish.

Tony sucked in his breath and rushed to greet her. "You

look so pretty," he said.

I took his boutonniere out of the refrigerator and suggested we go out on the back deck for photographs. Lindsay exclaimed over her wrist corsage while I pinned the single white rose on Tony's lapel. Then they posed while I snapped pictures.

As they headed out to the car, Lindsay turned back. "You'll be there for the parade, won't you?"

"We'll have to see how your dad's feeling," I said. "But I'll be there for sure."

Les wanted to go so I helped him with his back brace. I found his jacket, pulled a cap over his bald head and held the door while he struggled to get in the car.

At the Events Center he pushed his walker in front of him, leaning into it heavily as he took each laborious step. Two parents held the door open for us and looked curiously at Les. When I stared back at them, they averted their eyes and murmured how the weather had really cooperated this evening.

Les eased himself down on a folding chair and I stashed his walker in a corner.

The six couples who had been nominated for king and queen were introduced, one by one, as they paraded in a circle in the ballroom.

"Lindsay Stortz, daughter of Peggy and Les Stortz, is on the varsity cross country team and is the student editor of the Trojan News." When she saw her dad her forehead creased with anxiety, but she kept a smile on her lips.

All six couples formed a line in front of last year's queen and king, who held the tiara, sash and roses for the new royalty.

"And this year's prom queen is --" A drum roll. A hushed crowd-- "Sarah Sullivan."

Lindsay kept the smile frozen on her face as she applauded.

She didn't have the happy senior year I'd always wanted for her. Instead of a couch and a coffee table, our living room held an adjustable bed and IV tubes. At night her parents didn't make popcorn and watch a movie; her dad moaned with relentless pain and I researched new trial treatments and wrote to other caregivers I'd met online. Her dinners were home-cooked, but by neighbors and friends. Each evening when she'd finished her meal and tossed the disposable containers in the trash, she wrote gracious notes thanking the cook for the lasagna and the bag of salad greens. Why couldn't she have had this title? Prom Queen. One sweet

memory.

As I retrieved Les's walker and helped him to his feet, she broke away from Tony and came to hug us goodbye. She gave her dad a soft kiss on the cheek, knowing an embrace would cause him pain. Then she clung to me.

I whispered, "I'm sorry."

For just a moment her lower lip trembled.

"It's okay," she said. "It wasn't my biggest wish anyway."

## Paper Relativity

Bonnie Geisert

Her hand glides over the smooth white surface  
delicate blue lines paralleled down the page  
three thousandths of an inch thick  
barely three-dimensional.  
The clay coating aids her pen  
now a half-century later  
as it did then for the young scholar  
drawing her ovals and slanted lines  
of precursory cursive,  
no way to erase the blue-black blot  
splattered mid-page  
when the spring lever of her fountain pen  
escapes the grasp of her youthful grip.

Grateful for the switch  
to a No. 2 pencil  
a pink Eberhard eraser  
and the Arabic numerals  
of her arithmetic paper,  
she muses for the chance  
to fold the paper just so  
and recycle it  
airborne across the room.

She did not know  
that throughout the centuries  
even now  
mothers, daughters  
are forbidden  
to use symbols  
on paper.

## Quilt Tops

Bonnie Geisert

They're in my cedar chest  
both of them for safekeeping—  
nine-patch patterned quilt tops  
the same, except for the  
contrast color to sackcloth  
one navy, one maroon  
colors of a conservative time  
a life of frugality  
when surplus  
wasn't status quo.

Sometimes I take the tops out  
smooth my hands over them  
imagine their maker stitching  
in the glow of an evening lamp  
a mended wool sweater on her shoulders  
taking her circumstances in stride  
quiet, dignified, making do.  
I marvel at the patience, the patching  
the material which tells of recycling  
before the concept became a plea,  
tiny triangles cut from withdrawn wear  
pieced together to complete an inch  
or a missing corner supplied  
from another swatch of similar dye.  
I cannot name the fabric sources—  
a man's shirt, a woman's dress  
a child's waistcoat-  
I cannot relate the familial stories  
of when and where  
or tell why the tops  
were never bound to batting and backing.

At the bottom of a basket of linens  
tossed in with the auction purchase  
of an old Monarch stove in Milford, Nebraska  
these pieces of past lives  
lay unwanted.



## **Little House in the Pasture**

Bonnie Geisert

It speaks to my soul—  
the little house in the pasture—  
of years long ago  
when the prairie beckoned  
Come! Fulfill your dream!  
and Europeans answered.

What is a man without a piece of land?  
It speaks of ambition, courage,  
of faith in an untried place  
just below the rise  
out of the north wind's blast  
a hundred yards from the four-lane.

Though small, it's neither hut nor cabin  
on the vast bent-grass prairie  
colored by a century's climatic turns  
standing straight and true  
a testament to its builders.

It speaks of cheer, optimism, survival—  
the little house in the pasture—  
where sun's first rays  
warmed the kitchen wall  
and a stout-hearted woman  
stoked the stove, baked the biscuits  
fried the bacon, boiled the coffee  
and secured the land  
for her children to come.

What is a woman without a piece of land?

## **Riding the Rocks**

Bonnie Geisert

I ride the rocks  
searching for specifics  
vain in my ability to keep my balance.

Unknowns await each step  
over the precarious pile—  
chaos from a dynamite blast.

I ride the rocks  
gather the calcified  
every muscle, nerve and sinew alert.

Message of mass  
reaches the brain  
adjusts the thrust of my foot.

I ride the rocks  
with a sense of surety  
free my mind for its flights of fancy.

The rocks gather force  
I lean and press  
at last riding high on the crest.

## **Passage to Healing: Raw Expression**

Judy Rowett

Although I whole-heartedly agreed to a Robot Assisted hysterectomy six years ago, I panicked when I saw the six armed Robot by the OR table. The surgeon seated. Ten feet away with his back to me, was engrossed in the computer screen, as if avidly playing video games.

The next day, the memory of the “automaton” and the OR staff’s detached behavior, seemed to stir scenes from my girlhood and young womanhood when I felt in dreadful emotional pain after something hurtful, devastating and scary happened. I hadn’t thought of these kinds of memories for many years. I did not tell anyone until writing this poem six years ago. The most painful memory that arose, was when I was 18, training in the OR to be a surgical tech. A woman in her 30’s was anesthetized while her surgeon and anesthesiologist commented on her attractiveness while joking about sex. They removed her gown, put her in sexual positions as they detailed what position they each liked best.

No-one intervened. The code of silence was clearly and wordlessly commanded. The patient’s well-being was not a consideration. I was stunned and paralyzed.

Today we know how trauma and powerlessness when abuse or witnessing abuse can affect people over a lifetime having damaging effects. As a Therapist working with couples one thing I have witnessed is the damage from abuse or harassment, can cause problems in the development of couples’ bond. This bond is not only the foundation for their life together, but also for their family’s ability to thrive. Expressing confusing, mixed, painful and seemingly unrelated emotions is the foundation for returning to personal power with wholeness of body, mind and spirit.

I’d like to read the poem that arose after the unsettling emotions stirred by the above event many years ago. It rose to the surface of my mind triggered by the helplessness I felt when I saw the ominous looking robot looming over the operating room table.

## **Passage to Healing: Raw Expression**

Judith Rowett

2011

Does my womb make me woman?  
Does woman make me Me?  
Does the eye in I drive it?  
Is the "Intuit-flow" the key?

Is the robot just a man?  
Or is man a robot too?  
Did the robot save the woman,  
To do what she's to do?

Does the woman know the man?  
Can she understand his turns?  
Can she know what makes him manly?  
Or does she need to learn?

Does the man know woman?  
Is he able to see?  
Can he look straight at her  
And still be free?

Will she lie down beneath him?  
Will the robot arms above,  
Come down and destroy  
The source of her love?

Could the robot kill the spirit  
Of the girl down below?  
Or could reason be restoring  
The she-spirit glow?

With hope of transcendence  
With fear of keening,  
What words will be there  
To announce this full meaning?

Having a voice is essential to the lessening or prevention of damage. Being blamed as "Hysterical" when expressing emotional confusion or pain...is now passe'; no need to be overwhelmed with emotions that can't be expressed. No more physical or emotional problems or illness being compounded for the victim from keeping things deemed "unspeakable in". No more families well-

being damaged by emotional and/or physical hurt from the past.

A powerful voice raises us up from the powerlessness! Then we can move on and work to return to wholeness of mind, spirit and body!



# **BROAD IDEAS**

POETRY BOOK - 2018