

Village Voices

In Our Own Words

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PATINA

by Richmond Shreve

The old stainless pot rests
inverted on my counter,
gleaming, scrubbed, washed clean
again.

It's not the sparkle of something
new and wild—untried.
Rather, it is the satin glow
of pummeled metal
chafed and burnished
from long use,
yet renewed with stewardship
and caring attention.

Likewise, my common kitchen knives
bear the soft patina of scratches,
not so visible as the glowing pot,
sheathed as they are,
each blade deep in its assigned slot
of the weathered hardwood block.
Old knives. Plain. Simple.
Each one favored by the cook.
Each with its purpose,
Each shaped for its intended use.
Each is keen, first cleaned,
then whetted—
fifty deft strokes across a hardened
steel.

Now, as I dry my hands,
my utensils again stand ready.
Set for a new day.
Ready to slice bread,
to pare spuds, peel onions,
dice apples, bone chicken.

Joyful chores these—
my sacred labor freely given,
the delight of those I love.

Switching off the lights,
I pause in silence, the better to hear
a still small voice that speaks
through these humble tools of daily
living.

Each of us starts life new and shiny,
At first, we are but blunt instruments.
Over our three score years and ten,
life uses us.
We acquire nicks and dings,
the hallmarks of engagement,
scars of service,
badges of love and loss.

Failure tempers pride,
alloys it with humility and
hones the will.
Our ignorance accepted thus
sparks curiosity.
Purpose, forged in passion's fire,
cools to resolve with age.

We grow in grace and wisdom,
souls slowly shaped by living.
With trust and time and active use,
we fit the guiding hand.

We come to gain that kindly glow,
so gentle on the eye,
our life-well-lived patina
that warms Friends' hearts to see.
It is the pleasant luster that
cloaks a burnished soul,
not new, not brash,
but simple, plain,
deep-rooted, and yet free.

Let's mind the cleansing inward light,
and seek to be honed keen.
Be like the pot: first pummeled,
chafed,
then burnished, buffed, and cleaned.
And thus, with good and joyful use,
shall we, when work is done,
find grace
and bliss
and peaceful rest,
and with our God be one.



GOOGLE by Alice Warshaw

I may be old, but I can Google.
(That sounds hopeful, doesn't it?)

Google can answer impossible
questions.
Dredging the cesspool of history's
ooze

We're dying to know of the What,
When, and Where
And especially Who and who they
will choose.

From our modern collection of
probable facts
Give us signs. Give us wit. Give us
clues.

e.g. "*Wikipedia* must be a medical
term referring to children. Right?
Or maybe a baby basket?
Ya know? Let's Google it."

A PREMONITION by Alice Warshaw

Under eaves, shattered
leaves snagged by web threads shiver
and twist to freedom.



WONDERING
by **Glenna Follmer**

*The Thank you in my heart
obstructs the Thank you on my lips.*
Emily Dickinson

I wonder who was there
to time the waves of pain,
to hold your despairing hand,
to absorb your screams?

Who wrapped your tiny girl in a clean
towel,
cut the cord, then wiped
the blood-red tub?

Whom did you trust with your secret?
A sister? A work friend?
On the street, people glanced at
your belly, then your ringless finger.

He was not there, deceiver, he who
made inroads
to your heart and then your body.
He will not help.
He missed the pushing, preciousness,
the pain in your heart.

You cannot care for her.
With breasts bound but still leaking
you offer her to others across an
ocean.
An immeasurable giving. . . .

Did you also wonder about us?

Six thousand miles away and two
years later, my own baby
was in great distress.

I had my nervous husband,
a knowing doctor who sliced my belly
and lifted out a bloody boy,
big enough but barely breathing, and
he was taken away.
Machines and prayers cared for him.

And only then I glimpsed a sliver of
your pain.

. . . If we could talk, embrace, share,
I'd tell you
how strawberry juice squished from
her mouth in the garden,
how she loved her long black hair,
how she hugged our dog, defended
her struggling brother,
how she inhaled knowledge and
begged for more books.
how this persnickety teen became a
serious science major.

I must tell you, whenever I idly slosh
dishes in my sink,
I do wonder about your life.
Did you forgive yourself? Did your
parents ever know?
Were there lovers, a husband, other
children?

I pray life has been good to you—
who was so good to us.

*Poet's note: As a novice poet, I find this
hard work, emotional, cathartic. I only
write about something deeply moving.
"Wondering" incubated for years; I
made it work using my daughter's
"voice."*

OUTSIDE
THE GARDEN GATE
by John C. Wood

So often tried,
As often failed in finding
Pen to transcribe beauty
That surrounds encumbered lives;
Requires but a moment's time
With seeking glance
To change from virtual to real.

Treasures lie at water's edge
In unkempt space, an open field,
Concealed but to unseeing eye,
Blinded by apparent purposeful intent,
That discounts weeds and wild things
As useless wasteland's waste.

Seeking eyes enriched,
Delight in unexpected gems
Broadcast this happy carefree way.
Shapes, sizes, forms, and furbelows
In infinite array,
Surpassing all that Grecian
goldsmiths forge.

And when the treasure hunt seems
closed,
Yet another, then another
Opens for display
Beside a common space or path,
Showing for a first-time view,
Though you often passed this way.

Quill's quest faulted from the start.
Absent alphabet or word,
Silent language of mute diadems
Addresses truth and beauty

Much the same.
Speaks softly to awaken,
Then to whet,
A sensibility from slumber,
With perfect script and eloquence
Found solely in the Jeweler's mystic
pen.

STRAWBERRY LADY
by John C. Wood

Strawberry shortcake,
Peaches and cream,
Is this what you are,
Or only a dream.

Blueberry muffins,
Chocolate ice cream,
Is this what you are,
Or only a dream.

A bunch of blue violets,
A rose fresh with dew,
Is this what you are,
Or only a dream.

The sweet cream will sour,
The rose wilt with time,
Your loveliness lingers,
You know what I mean.

So, have your Swiss chocolate,
Your peaches and cream,
I'll cleave to my love
'til Hell's waters freeze.



LOCUST TREES
by Elaine Ferrara

Having been granted membership
In the worldwide forest of locusts,
I am at least a billion years old.

I have traversed many lifetimes,
In many life forms.
I have survived fires and floods
And ice ages.

I have witnessed the folly of
Atlantis's powerful people.
I am saddened by today's massive
waste
Of Mother Earth's resources.

I am alive forever.

Poet's note: I wrote this poem after attending a class in making herbal medications. The students were instructed to communicate with any plant on the property and to take its message back to share with the class. Searching, I notice snow, in May, in the form of tiny white flowers dropped by locust trees. I explain my mission to a particularly large locust who requests contact. Pulling my hands against her trunk, she conveys a twenty-minute panoramic 3-D video of her species' history on this Earth, and grants me Membership as a Locust. Then she lets my hands go. . . .



A MUSING
by Beth Barnes

Where did this day go?
Where did this year go?
At least it's summer again,
Who could ask for anything more?

I could, if I was greedy
I could ask for it all back.
I'd do it all over again
If I could.

Of course I wouldn't make the same
mistakes again. Ha!



HEAVEN, THEY SAY
by Claudia Burbank

is like walking on clouds,
the blind-bright summer kind of clot
we pop out of when we level off.

Cotton-candy tundra.
Flint-struck radiance
like being
inside the dome of an egg.

And there's room here for everyone
who ever was or will be—
philosophers, bassoonists, snake
charmners, scribes,
Visigoths, ventriloquists, vacuum-
cleaner salesmen.

Yet to see the face of God
would drive one mad.

They say the first aviators
dazzled at the sight,
tried to walk atop the clouds.

Imagine wind
ripping at your goggles,
roar and vibration in your bones.
The first step believing
your body will be borne up,
your feet touch down.

GERMAN HELMET
by Claudia Burbank

One of the boys lugged it to the porch.
One poked it. Another cracked a joke.
Then someone gripped the rim, patted
it like a dog.

And nothing happened—no fire,
no burst of yellow sulfur. Yet to touch
what a Nazi once touched felt electric.

One by one we overturned
the neck-stunning weight on our
heads,
the dark closing over.

eyes ears nose deadened as the inside
of a bell.
Perhaps some dull glimmer
of a thousand-year rule, the truth of
killing.

But this was when we were immortal
and thought nothing
of falling down dead, getting up,
laughing.

*Poet's note: These date back almost 20 years and seemed appropriate for a general audience. They originally appeared in **New Letters** ("Heaven, They Say") and **Prairie Schooner** ("German Helmet") with "German Helmet" also garnering a Pushcart Prize nomination.*



WE'RE MOVING
by Henry Baird

On to our old folks home
Not—mind you—a nursing home
Tho' admittedly it has that in it
No: first, rich lives unassisted
Only later, maybe, after all
Hospice braced and patient.

Poet's note: My first & so far only poem.



JULY 1, 2020
by Deidre Crumbley

Knowing only this:
I understand so little
It hardly matters

DECEMBER 23, 2020
by Deidre Crumbley

Pondering last year,
April recalls crocuses
Then laughs at the snow



BEING TWELVE
by Phyllis Purscell

Girls leave other girls out; it's what
they do
until they become civilized. So
it was my great luck to be excluded
with JoAnn.
I would have been miserable being
abandoned with someone like
myself—
moody, shy, and bullied by decorum.

Jo, unmindful of my limitations,
fashioned a friend worthy of her
joyful hedonism.
We laughed at everything—my sister
as we spied on her from the kitchen
window
going about her prosaic affairs,
and especially at our own diminished
social status,
granting us advanced degrees in irony,
a useful antidote for adolescence.

**EVERYONE NEEDS
TO GO TO IOWA**
by Phyllis Purscell

now and then. I just got back. It had
been
dry for a long time, but it rained
while we were there, a lovely rain.

The waitress, the ladies at the bake
sale,
the mailman, our cabbie and the
stewardess

on our plane all said about the rain:

“It's too late for the corn,
but it might save the beans.”
And if those words don't move you,
it's time you, too, went to Iowa.

*Poet's note: See my book, **Remind
Me Next Spring**, in the Pennswood
Library.*



TUNDRA
by David Cuff

Treeless hills
Shattered rock
White lichens
Red mosses
And around the clock
Poppies dance
In low sun's rays
Celebrating
Those long summer days

POLLUTION
by David Cuff

Like a lass from the country
Fresh, unspoiled
A stream to the city dances
Then crawls away
Ravaged, soiled
Avoiding her Maker's glance



THE WINNER
by Anne Baber

Only one poem will win the prize,
so it will have to bear all the weight
of the judge's expectations, avoid

all his erudite antipathies, and nod
to the internationalism of the contest,
while opining on a topic of some
significance.

The winner will be discovered,
though,
three-fourths of the way down the
pile.
It will tug at the judge's heartstrings

reminding him of his mother as she
knelt, so many years ago,
to assuage his red-faced tantrum—

her blue skirt a puddle on the floor,
her golden flyaway hair a nimbus
in the sunlight flowing though the
window—

to show him, gently folding his
fingers,
how to pinch the end of his sleeve,
so it won't ride up inside his jacket,

then held him by the shoulders,
saying,
There now, before sending him out
into the world—a trick of mothercraft

he just a few minutes ago put to good
use

as he grabbed up a rough wool
sweater
and pulled it over his charcoal
turtleneck—

the edges of the cuffs secured without
thinking
of the small, enduring gift from his
mother—

before he left his house and walked
briskly—already miffed at the
inevitable
idiocies he'll see—through the cold
wind

to his office to read the entries.

THE HOLE
by Anne Baber

Cut
around the edges
of this poem. The hole will
be just about 3.19 inches wide—
the size of the borehole down which
the Chilean miners received sustenance
for 70 days. Look through the poemhole
in the paper. Imagine you're one of those
people on the surface figuring out what
to send below in 5-foot-long canisters,
they called doves. Let it do what
poems do, take you deep in
an idea, fill you with
awe.

*Poet's note: I like to write about some
tiny thing that has never before appeared
in a poem. That's what I like best about
poetry (both writing it and reading it):
noticing.*

PIXEL PICTURES
by Kathy Hoff

My Mother's Day gift,
Smartframe, so-called.
Everything's digital these days.
My old photos stayed still,
Sat there peacefully, framed, shelved.
Loved people, loved places stayed put.

Now memories slip and slide away
Electronically,
Ten-minute time slots
Randomly sorted
No fixed playlist
Scrambled.

Fragments of life relived
Ten minutes at a time:
White-haired son beside his own tall
son,
Next slide, infant in arms once more;
Husband here, then gone again.
My heart smarts with loss.

Like pixel pictures, life slides away
In segments,
No fixed playlist, scrambled,
Bright bits of color
Dancing in the ether of memory,
Fitting together fitfully.



*Credits: article-separator graphics
#1 & #12 are by Richmond Shreve.*

HAIKU
by Claire Durand

I.

Feathered-pen clouds skywrite
Great questions of the ages
Look! the answers too

II.

Two great sycamores
Reaching out to each other
Michelangelo



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**Past copies of *Village Voices* are
in Pennswood Library, shelf 21.**

MAKING POEMS

by Kathy Hoff

I. *Reaching for Big Poems*

Density of poetry
Yields diminutive,
Intaglio on pinhead.
Concentration shuts out
Side vision,
Slides perspective
Straight up track of ripples
To setting sun

Suppose eye denied the focal track,
Sailed beyond consistent
Metaphor,
Crewed for Flying Dutchman,
Refused to answer hails at sea
Asking for identity.
What end then?

Retreat from open sea—
Infinite canvas appalls—
We live by limitation.

II. *Focus*

Pare away
extraneous detail—
potato skin
spot
eye.
Leave behind
firm, white flesh
only

III. *Expansiveness*

I leap
Eliza-like
from sound to sound
cracking ice
floe to flow
branching out
to flower