

WORDS MATTER.

CAYUGA CONNECTORS Boomer's Edition ANTHOLOGY

Copyedited by: Luiza Flynn-Goodlett



ABOUT THE PROJECT:

Litquake sparks critical conversations, and inspires writers and readers to celebrate the written word with diverse year-round literary programming, interactive workshops, and a ten-day festival.

Litquake's Elder Project is a literary arts project focused on creative expression through writing and performance.

Litquake brings the teaching artists to the elders in a classroom accessible to them. The class allows students to discuss and record past and current life experiences, resulting in personal empowerment through creativity. The goal is for students to find a new self-confidence using the creative process, writing and performance as a means of generating a dialogue within and outside of their community.

Teacher's Bios:

Lisa Galloway is Litquake's Elder Project Director. She is a graduate of Pacific University's MFA program in Poetry. She was a 2014 Lambda Literary Fellow, and she currently serves as a poetry editor for Foglifter Press. She's a three-time Pushcart nominee and the author of *Liminal: A Life of Cleavage*. She came to the project having worked as a palliative care change manager at Kaiser Permanente for 5 years interviewing end of life patients and caregivers, as well as directing Ball State University's Senior Writing Project pairing Elder writers with current creative writing students to craft collaborative stories. She currently works at the Disability Communications Fund as a Grants Program Writer.

Julie Rogers has published and presented readings of her work for 40 years, is author of several chapbooks and a book length collection of poetry, "House of the Unexpected". Her work is included in various journals and anthologies, she has published articles, essays and newsletters, and 'Instructions for the Transitional State', a Buddhist end of life manual. She also recorded a poetry CD with her late husband, poet David Meltzer. She facilitated a writing workshop for four years and has worked as a "Creative Writing Coach" for kids and teens. She is also founder and director of TLC Transitional Life Care, a Buddhist non-profit end of life training and education program, and worked with seniors for many years prior to this. Her website is: www.julrogers.com.

Charlie Getter writes and performs poetry in San Francisco. His efforts been described in the San Francisco Chronicle as "the work of a poet as beguiling as **Dr. Seuss**." (8/25/2011) He holds an MFA from the New College of California in Poetics and his latest collection, titled How to Arrange Physics and Geography to Your Advantage (Seventh Tangent:2016), is now in its second printing. He's a founding member of the Collaborative Arts Insurgency (CAI), the group of artists, poets, emcees, and musicians responsible for the genesis of the ongoing 16th & Mission street arts workshop that takes place every Thursday on the streetcorner at 16th & Mission in San Francisco's Mission District. Charlie believes in a holistic approach to teaching poetry to let his students use their own experiences with found poetic forms to power their work.

Benita McCown-Harper

Benita is a fourth-generation San Franciscan, yet it was her 10 early formative years in Northern California's town of Eureka where she developed her love of reading, nature, and the outdoors. As a child, living five miles outside town on Humboldt Hill, Benita spent most of her time in one of the two forests on either side of her house, and her favorite day of the week was when the bookmobile would arrive at the top of the hill and she would find a quiet place to read. As an adult, Benita still loves books, journaling, nature, and the outdoors. In this new "senior chapter" of her life, she took her first writing class, a Litquake Elder Project nine-week Creative Writing Class, and was introduced to poetry. This class helped open a door to her creativity and her younger self, and she is very grateful for the profound experience and the gentle nudging of the inspiring teachers!! Benita's proudest accomplishment is motherhood, and her current most enjoyable experience is the joy of being a grandmother!!! Her future goal is to follow her childhood dream of writing and illustrating a children's book!!

Seen, Felt, & Heard

It can be *Seen* clearly
In the old, frayed photograph.
The way the younger new mother
Looks into the face of her newborn child.

It can be *Felt* in the spontaneous motion
As a husband reaches over after a shower
to softly dry—a few droplets of water left by.

It can be *Seen* in the flash
of a big wide smile reflected back to you
clear as day, in the silver water faucet cover
as you lift up and wash the hands of your toddler.

It can be *Heard* in the playful, noisy rough housing
Of the family of four
Tickling, squealing, and giggling
Plus 4 golden paws more.

It can be *Heard* in the neonatal unit
In the grandmother's song she softly sings
to her grandson who's come 2 months early
and cannot be touched or held in her arms.

It can be *Seen* from behind—
A couple walking to the rhythm
Of their 2-year-old son between them
All 3 lovely silhouettes holding hands.

It can be *Felt* when a friend's hand
is softly placed over yours, no words needed
As you drive off together after a family memorial.

It can be *Seen* from above
Looking into an itsy-bitsy hummingbird's nest
Where she sits day in and day out
And waits for her little ones to hatch.

It can be *Seen, Felt, & Heard*
In the form of *Thoughts, Memories, or a Present Moment*
Captured now forever, for me, in the written word.

Trains

Trains are my favorite mode of travel these days
While others drive fast, fly fast
I choose the slow track—no commute, no car back-ups, or jet lag.

Trains have a rhythm, Tick Tack, Click-ity Clack,
Whoosh Whoosh—and the multiple slow long pulls of the horn.
Train car swaying, side to side, rocking me like a lullaby
Making me feel I'm glad to be alive!!

Hop a train, grab a seat—there's no timeframes to meet
Settle in, open a book, or grab a pen
Wrap a blanket around you and
sit back and watch the many landscapes go by.

Trains and vacations are my favorite combination
The Coast Starlight, my first pick, as its tracks run close to the ocean.
If you get lonely or on edge, walk the cars and sit in the observation deck
Where there's conversation, new friends to meet and new sights to see—
you're all set!!

The train's dining car meals are such a sweet deal
While joining other travelers, sharing great food and stories of travel.
Next time try a sleeping car; it is the ultimate glory!!
Your own bunk, some privacy, and nodding off to train sounds is just heavenly.

Trains have a rhythm, Tick Tack, Click-ity Clack,
Whoosh Whoosh—and the multiple slow long pulls of the horn.
Train car swaying, side to side, rocking me like a lullaby
Making me feel I'm glad to be alive!!

I Hear It Before I See It

I hear it before I see it
The gurgling, bubbling, the rushing sounds.
Nature is ringing its harmony gong, its sweet song.
I answer without question—my steps quicken, driven to follow these pleasing sounds.
My mind's eye draws a picture while my body pulls forward, closer and closer,
To what is awaiting me at the end of this beautiful forest path.

The vision I see is striking and for a moment
the sound that called me is gone, forgotten, set aside.
The leaf patterns take front stage, moving slowly in the breeze,
and shadows of shade dance together
along the bank's lush green trees.
Colorful butterflies flutter and playfully dance
While grey dragonflies dash, here and there, darting at my glance.
My eyes take in all this beauty, and I feel grateful, more aware.
Nature's beauty stands before me so I stand still and continue to stare.

The lovely sounds I heard back aways on the path are now back
and merge with the startling vision I see before me.
The sound of the rushing creek water flowing over smooth boulders
Creating warm still pools and clear rushing waterfalls.
A humble peacefulness surrounds me, calms me, embraces me
I'm now an extension of this moment in time
A part of this glorious natural scene
Inviting me, prompting me, so
I happily and gingerly dip in my toe.

Debbie Padilla

Debra (Debbie) Ann Padilla retired from teaching preschool, kindergarten, and infant/toddlers for 32 years. She was born in Boston, Massachusetts as the eldest of seven children, has been a wife to Jose for 45 years, mother to three daughters, and grandmother to 13 grandchildren with one on the way. She enjoys painting, drawing, crafting, sewing, and baking, plus a few other pastimes. She loves animals, but is partial to cats. She's a "mom" to a senior Jack Russell (Zero) and a young, sweet, black cat named Keli Honey! She enjoys spending time with her grandchildren. They are such a blessing to her. And she has always had a desire to write and illustrate a children's book and is hoping attending this writing class will help her get started.

White Cheeks

This humorous story takes place in a poor, shanty barrio in Puerto Rico, where my mom, step-dad, and all of us seven kids were living. The other house we resided in had a fire and everything was lost, so that's why we were in this old shack that belonged to my stepdad's parents. It was home for the time being, until things got better. During this time, there was a lot of hardship, but we made the best of the circumstances.

Since everything was lost in the fire, that included clothes. The best clothes were reserved for special occasions. And to clarify, at the time of the fire, that happened before I arrived in P.R. as I was living with my grandmother in Massachusetts and when she passed away, I joined my family in the island. My siblings had only a few clothes to their names so the rule as I mentioned before was for special times. I was alright with clothing so it didn't affect me. So as Puerto Rico being tropical and oh so hot; my brothers had a choice to either sleep in the buff or wear a pair of old shorts.

So, one night, we were all in bed, (all 6 of us in one bedroom—tight)!!! Ricky was on the top bunk, I was on the bottom, Steven, Kelly, and Ralphie were in a double bed on the other side of room, and Carmen was in a roll-away single bed. Baby brother; Jay was in his crib in the other bedroom with mom and dad. It was crowded, but we all knew it was a temporary situation.

Everyone was pretty much asleep. I was just dozing off. The light in bedroom was off, but room had no door, so the light in hallway was glaring into the room slightly. My stepdad Julin walked by the room to go to the kitchen, paused, and glanced into the room as something got his attention. Then he went right up to where Ricky was sleeping and immediately started yelling at him and spanking him. Well, poor Ricky was sound asleep and woke up in a panic to this!!! I was watching this as Ricky started crying and saying, "What did I do? Why are you spanking me?" Julin said, "How many times have I told you kids to not wear your new underwear to bed and here you are wearing them?" Ricky said, "I'm not!" So all the commotion probably woke my mom up, and she came to see what's going on. So after Julin explains, my mom goes over to look at Ricky to see why he's wearing his new underwear. Well, what a surprise!! He wasn't wearing his new white underwear; it was just his very white butt cheeks!! Ricky was tanned so it made a difference in the skin shades. His bottom was very white! Mom started yelling at Julin, "You big

goof! Ricky has nothing on, it's his bottom!" What I didn't mention is that Julin had an eye injury and couldn't see too well out of one eye. He had surgery but his sight wasn't a 100 percent. Julin felt so bad that he apologized to Ricky for what he did.

Poor Ricky! I can't imagine how he felt being in a deep sleep and to be awoken by a spanking and being yelled at! It wasn't funny at the time, but now, looking back, it is kind of humorous; knowing that Ricky's butt was so white that it was mistaken for a pair of white underwear. Till this day, every so often, this story comes up in conversation and we have a good laugh about it. Ricky has a good sense of humor so I know he won't mind me sharing this story to others about his "White Cheeks"!

Mua

I was about 16 years old and I was living in Puerto Rico with mom, stepdad Julin, and all six of my siblings. and . . . lots of animal!!!!!! And I mean lots!!! My mom had such a love for animals that she picked up every stray that she found, and even the neighbors gave her pets that they couldn't keep. So the "pet" tribe increased. In our new three-bedroom home we moved into after living in the old shack for a few years, we had many dogs, cats, birds, turtles (snapping ones, yikes!), two squirrel monkeys, guinea pigs, named Niko and Gigo, and a Kookaburra bird—how we wound up with it, I will never know! Aren't those birds from Australia? Anyway, we had it and it made a laughing sound ALL DAY LONG! My ears! Mom also "inherited" an exotic, rare Red Oscar fish that as time went on it, it grew sooo big that we wound up giving it to a neighbor who owned a pet store. The thing grew and jumped out of the tank, so off it went to the pet store.

So, one early evening, my mom and I were watching TV and as usual, the dogs and cats were roaming around the house, we were one big, happy, crazy family! Behind my mother's back, the neighbors would make fun of us having so many pets and called our house "Teddy's Zoo"! Us kids found out and were not too happy about it. Hopefully, mom didn't find out. But knowing her like I did, she knew but didn't care! The lights in the living room were dimmed, as mom liked to watch TV that way, so it was kind of dark.

There was this cute kitten who came up to me while I was sitting on the couch, such a friendly little guy that it wanted me to give it attention. So, as I said before, it was dark and I was kind of distracted watching a movie that I picked the kitty up and gave it a great big kiss, and said aloud, "Oh, you're so cute!" Just then, my mom looked over at me, and said out loud, "What are you doing?" And I answered, "What?" She then got up to turn on the brighter lights so I could see what I did, and I looked, and to my surprise, I was holding the kitty upside down! Mom said that I had kissed the cat's butt! I thought I was kissing its face! It happened so fast! My mom and I laughed so hard. It was the funniest thing; I don't know how I could have mistaken the cat's behind for its face. I sure did love that kitty! Hahahaha!!! It seemed weird but soooo true!

Dolores Fierro

Dolores E. Fierro retired after forty years of working in FDA-regulated industries as QA/QC/Global Regulatory Manager. She was born in the Philippines, the oldest girl of the 10 children. She joined her family in the United States when she was 27. Outside of work, she pursued interests like ballroom dancing, painting, interior decoration, and cooking, to name a few. At 50, she studied DNA technology. Her latest endeavor is learning how not to write like a scientist. She's writing a legacy memoir dedicated to the two generations of her family who were born in the United States.

After My Father's Death

At sunset, my father closed his eyes.
No tears came out of my mother's eyes—
a desert dried out over the years.
Pains from daggers in her heart,
she looked forward to the new dawn.
But the sunrise is blurred with her dried tears
for exactly eleven years,
her heart, a tsunami of pains.
She can't help but talk and talk about them.

Women in the hamlet thought she hit the lottery
when the debonair in town married her,
but his dances with the lionesses didn't stop.
He was not a one-woman-man.
Could he have avoided those hyenas?
He loved being loved.
The dog at home barked and barked
all the anger bottled up inside.

My mom's burden should have gone away,
no more endless nights of waiting.
What she did not foresee is the sea of sadness
in the absence of my father.
She holds her broken heart two fists
repeated bursts of anger.

My Mother's Seniors Prom

On the twelfth of July, the doorbell rang.
I opened the door and saw a package.
I carefully opened the white bag.
It was the dress I ordered for my mother—
a blush pink guipure lace
designed by Adrianna Papell.
I bought it for her to wear
at the "San Mateo Seniors Prom"
on August 4, 2018.
I was happy to find something that fits a prom queen.
I would like to dress my mother in the way she dressed me
at fifteen when I attended my prom.
I want to re-create the beautiful memory we had together.
My mother was thirty-nine years old and pregnant with the ninth child
when I, her oldest daughter, attended my Junior Prom.
Now she's ninety-two and could barely walk.
I would take her to the prom in a wheelchair.

I had looked online for a dress for three days.
I wanted it to be similar to what she had me wear at my prom.
I found it on the fourth of July when she could not get out of bed
because her high blood pressure made her dizzy.
I almost choked when I thought,
"What if my mother dies?"
"What if instead of the prom,
it is at her funeral that she would wear the dress?"

On July twenty-first, she fell face flat on the floor.
I don't know if my mother will still be around
on the day of the prom. Only God can tell, if not,
I know my mom will be a prom queen
with Saint Peter as king.

If I Could Plant A Garden

If I could plant a garden,
I would surround it with green bamboo
to honor my mother who bends and sways
with the wind and anything thrown her way

If I could plant a garden,
I would plant a willow tree
to signify my father's
false love to his lovers

If I could plant a garden,
I would plant a redwood tree
to remind me of my grandfather
strong and mighty

If I could plant a garden,
I would plant a sour lime
as tart as my grandmother's tongue
but excellent for jam

And for my siblings,
my garden will have-
pink peonies for Paul,
bell-shaped hollyhocks for Romeo,
marigolds for Sonia,
light pink roses for Aida,
yellow dandelions for Imelda,
purple delphiniums for Lisa,
evergreen thyme for Amor,
white clovers for Roy,
and for me, pink cherry blossoms.

Each sibling stands out
with a certain quality-
fragility, innocence,
anger, grief, ambition,
good education, industry, thrift,

happiness, abundance,
but we all exhibit these,
since we came from the same tree.

Grace D'Anca

Grace D'Anca was born and raised in St. Paul, Minnesota, coming to San Francisco in 1967 via New York City and Baltimore. Study and pursuit of the arts was the lifeline in her formal higher education. She performed with theater and dance groups around the Bay Area, and in mental-health facilities and youth lock-ups. That's where she got really interested in the audiences, so she became a creative arts therapist working with people of all ages and abilities for 40 years. She is retired now and jubilant about having time to do what matters most.

Whirligig Arms

She had the wildest hair streaming
in rivulets glinting bits of gray
tall with big bones towering
in form and spirit force
among us lesser damaged
looking with outside eyes.
She was a dancer but I never
saw her dance or laugh.

She had old sad eyes
forehead deeply furrowed
but she was young
married to a rich guy.
Her own mother lived in a car.

She appeared like Dorothy's house
deposited
in Kansas when women sat on the floor
to raise consciousness. She was
as conspicuous as we were self-conscious.
She must have been able to tune it down
when she went weekly to the psych ward to bring
dance balm to the psychotics in the face of the narcotizing
psychiatrists there.

Frenetic as a cyclone she was there
and gone like a summer
pulling our spunk together then
spinning it out to crash and break in our compact cars.
We all danced at the museum on a Friday afternoon barefoot
with whirligig arms so faux free.

Done, we crammed in the back of her beetle, she crazy
angry, courageous screaming at something in the air we
could not see. Schussing across the bridge.
I wrenched my stomach down till I could pop out of the car onto
the carousel of the City street free of her current and burn
grateful to be my small self.

St. Paul Streetcar

St. Paul streetcar going downtown
going oing oing down the tracks
old white driver
bounce jiggles in his chair
going oing oing down the tracks.

I'm too little to go it solo
so mama holds my hand.
caned seats stiff in winter
through our heavy coats
sticky sweaty in vapid
zapid summer air.
Going oing oing
going downtown
through the revolving door.
Too hot inside
inside heavy coats
going to the notions floor.

St. Paul streetcar oing oings down
the tracks
past 7 Corners
humble, shabby, seedy then.
Chic with boutique antiques now
I hear.

Somewhere in a summer
they took the tracks, dug 'em up leaving mounds of yellow
brown dirt punctuated with rocks.
Old enough to solo now I
traipsed over the mounds
to the corner store, popsicle juice
tattoos my hand, tromping to my back door
chucking pokey rocks on the stair.

St. Paul streetcar gone
replaced by a noxious bus

still goes downtown
past 7 Corners, stops
at Wilder pool. Men who have no bathrooms
shower there and
girls like me learn to swim.
Mean Betsy, my 4th grade fiend learned
float and crawl. Me, I floundered
while chirpy whistle blower teacher squished
my hand when I reached for the rail.

Mean Betsy didn't have it all good.
Her mama died, her daddy married Peggy
nice enough, but Betsy's rich grandma said
Peggy has piano legs.

On St. Paul noxious bus
Mean Betsy and me
hats, white gloves, quarters in hand
going to high stooled shiny beige Woolworths's counter
for hot dogs, chips and cokes
then to look at bras.

Solo on that bus
coming home with my first
Elvis 45, later
open close open
close stiff bags to peek
at fashions found on sale
through the revolving door in vapid
zapid summer air.

The tracks are gone, the corner store's
a pizza parlor now
and we still use that back door.

JC Walker

Biograph Part II

So when did my life begin
It musta been way back when
My folks had sex at least once
Nuff said at least for the nonce

This is the story my mother told
Way back when I was 'bout six years' old
When it came time for me to emerge
I was slow in answering the urge

She was tiny and my head was big
So I was late for my first gig
Her labor lasted 'til the 36th hour
She was definitely no shrinking flower

My father saw me all bloody and new
And then gave to me my first review
He looked at me and said with a start
"My God! What an ugly little fart!"

For my first few years we lived in Fontana
A bastion of SoCal Americana
Scarface Al Capone had once lived thar
As had Red Rocker Sammy Hagar

There the Hells Angels began and went on the run
Emerging from the Pissed Off Bastards of Bloomington
Home to the big Kaiser Steel mill
It kept the air smelling like swill

Was later home to the Grand Wizard of the KKK
Who marched and burned crosses in their sick white way
Not so fondly it was known as Fontucky
If you got out alive you felt yourself lucky

Free Parking

It happens to everyone. Well to lots of people anyway, and to me a lot. You walk out the door in the morning, keys in hand, when you suddenly stop. Where the hell did I park the damn car? Or you trek several blocks uphill to where you remembered parking but after a brief panic thinking your car was stolen, you realize that you parked there a couple nights ago, not last night.

I don't think I'm particularly forgetful or unfocused, it's more that when you spend so long every night driving in ever widening circles to find a parking spot, it all just blurs together. Or perhaps that when you finally do find a spot you're so frustrated and thinking about what you want for dinner as you race to make it to the bathroom that you just don't stop and imprint the exact location. And, of course, if you were out late and imbibing, then it's even worse, both the parking and your memory.

But none of that was really the case this morning. I woke up late feeling very groggy. I was on the couch and fully clothed and, for some reason, I was soaking wet. Flashing back to my wayward youth, at first I thought maybe I had peed myself, but I was wet all over so that didn't fit. Maybe I had gotten really hot and sweated through my clothes, but I was actually shivering and as I walked to the bathroom, the sloshing in my shoes put the lie to that theory.

Could I for some reason have taken a shower fully clothed? No, the tub was bone dry. Looking at my fuzzy visage in the mirror, it started to come back to me, some of it anyway.

There was a party at Delilah's house. She was a caterer and always put out a great spread. The guac was delish as were the wings, but I ate several oatmeal cookies that were out of this world. Going back for more, I lifted up a small card to get to the cookies at the rear of the plate. On the other side it said in large red letters... POT COOKIES, EAT NO MORE THAN ONE!

OH CRAP!

Well at least now I knew the cause if not all the circumstances. Pot is a mild psychedelic. You can only get so high smoking even the best stuff without coughing up a lung but if you eat enough there is almost no limit as to how

high you get. I pushed those limits. It was all pretty vague after that. I do remember singing loudly, which must have been excruciating for all involved as I can be extremely loud and am certified tone deaf. I also remember hiding in the closet from Delila's cat who was trying to steal my soul. As to the rest, I just don't know.

I did have my keys and a very vague recollection of driving so I decided to call Delila to fill in the blanks and to ask why the hell she let me drive home, but duh! My phone was as soaked as I was.

So I dried off and changed while I drank a pot of coffee and set off on the quest for my car. As I said, I've lost my car before, though under less remarkable circumstances. I even had a grid I followed, zigzagging through the hood till I found it or found something to trigger my memory. Neither was the case today and after a frustrating hour, I was about to give up when I heard someone yelling about a car in their goddamned swimming pool.

Oh-my-God! That explained everything and the memories started flooding back. I remembered climbing out of a big kidney shaped pool as my blue Toyota sank to the bottom.

Sheepishly, I walked around to the back but it was all wrong. The car was red and in a small square pool. I guess I parked in a different swimming pool.

John Edmiston

John was born in Lewiston, Maine, but grew up in Hollywood Florida, on the edge of the everglades, and developed a love of the ocean and aquatic games and sports. He has had various jobs over the years, such as a lab assistant at the University of San Francisco, a haircutter on Maiden Lane, a waiter at a French restaurant, crew on private yachts, and college English teacher. He worked for Kaiser Permanente for 20 years, and led nearly 600 people on 14 week-long rebuilding trips to New Orleans, LA, and Biloxi, MS over seven years following Hurricane Katrina. He moved to San Francisco in 1972, and lives with his life partner and now husband of 28 years.

Tables

I grew up in sun-blasted southern Florida, where the broiling disk overhead reflected off the ochre surface of the opaque murk in the canal behind our house. Later in the afternoon, with the sun dropping into the everglades, the surface of the canal glinted lazily over the schools of black mullet, "trashfish" who made their way to our dead-end finger canal at high tide. Sometimes they roiled in some paroxysm of activity, flinging sprays of water refracting the sunlight back up into the air, madly whirling, whether if in fight or flight never clear, hunting or hunted, until the water would once again calm, and their equilibrium recovered, leisurely swam back in the direction they came from, the only possibility, and I would wonder where they were going next in the turbid world under the brack.

To me and my brother, Florida was filled with palmettos and cattle egrets, box turtles and black snakes, brown stick bugs that we thought able to propel blinding brown jets of burning stink into your eyes. Thorns and prickles covered flora and fauna alike, to protect them from larger, stronger predators. Sometimes there were alligators in the canals. One ate Billy Walkstetter's dog as it swam along beside the eight-foot rowing skiff one afternoon. It surged from where it had been floating motionless moments before and dragged the black terrier under and disappeared. Later that day, the Sheriff and two officers hunted the gator down and shot it, and found the dead pup swallowed whole in its belly. We didn't know quite how to feel about it—the gator was just being a gator, and although we were sad that the dog had been eaten, we were also sad that the gator had been killed. We were sad about it because our mother was sad about it.

Marilyn, my mother, was an Eileen Ford model in New York. The day she graduated from high school in 1949, she went directly from the ceremony in the auditorium of Edward Little High School in Auburn, Maine, to the train station, where she bought the ticket she had been saving for and departed for Manhattan with no tearful goodbyes, leaving her parents, her younger sister, and two even younger brothers and the town of Auburn and the State of Maine altogether behind for what she hoped would be her triumphant and permanent exit. She had often stated she felt destined for better things, smarter people, and styled herself after Rita Hayworth and Hedy Lamarr, dark, glamorous, possibly dangerous. She had started dying her hair a deep red chestnut in her junior year against her mother's helpless resistance, and I never saw more than half an inch of her natural brown color, like mine, in my entire life. She was

considered a strange beauty, with very green eyes and a strong nose, England mixed with eastern Europe, and carried herself with a haughty self-awareness of the effect she had on men, which was considerable.

And she was brilliant, discerning, and talented, a concert-level pianist, fluent in French, who loved emeralds and topaz jewelry, Chopin and Sarah Vaughan. But she was only 5'4", too short for runway work, so when she got an offer to join the water ballet in a traveling water show traveling throughout south America, she took it, having never previously traveled farther than Quebec. The Aqua Follies was where she met my father, a platform diver and comic performer with wavy black hair, ice blue Scottish eyes, a Marine who fought in Iwo Jima while she was still a school girl. He was charming, smart, attentive, sarcastic, a born performer with a big personality and movie star good looks and an athlete's physique. They saw a great deal of each other dressed only in bathing suits. And so I was begotten, perhaps in Rio de Janeiro. Her showgirl days having come to an abrupt end, she returned to Maine, from where she had escaped, pregnant and married at 21, the wedding having taken place without announcements, photographers, family, or even guests. Within a year, she and my father moved to Hollywood, Florida, a rather cruel irony, where my father worked at a hotel in Miami Beach and Marilyn threw herself into being an excellent and fully committed mother. After three years of having her undivided attention, my brother came along.

By the time Eric was three, boredom set in, and she restlessly turned to creative home projects to keep herself engaged in activities not related to child rearing in the traditional sense, although she did enlist us both in her artistic pursuits, like coconspirators undermining the status quo of mid-century domestic norms, at least for wives and mothers. She was not like my friends' mothers.

The first project I remember was painting the bathroom solid black. We lived on the edge of acres of saw palmetto, scrub oak and the occasional rattlesnake. Our small concrete-block-stucco house was part of a development of hundreds of identical two-bedroom homes built around finger canals connected to the inter-coastal waterway; one could glide into the everglades in a shallow-hulled skiff, or to the outlet in Port Everglades into the Atlantic on any number of pleasure and fishing boats. The bathroom barely fit a dark pink sink and commode, and had a small jalousie window over the bathtub onto the back yard, the only natural light. By the time I was ten, I could stretch out my arms to both sides and touch the opposing walls.

My brother and I spread newspapers on the floor and covered the pink enameled sink and matching tub. Mom put the gallon paint can on the papers and, with our largest screwdriver clutched in her vermilion manicured hands, started prying up the lid. We had just that morning watched in the paint section of Sears as the eagerly helpful salesman locked the can onto the machine and pressed the green button, vigorously agitating the mix of color components to make the paint black. We saw blue, red and yellow dropped in formulaic quantities added to a gray base—I didn't see how in the world it would be black, so we were thrilled when she popped the lid and slowly raised one edge to reveal the content was an impenetrable black, almost as black and shiny as tar and, like tar, smelled of creosote, with undercurrents of formaldehyde.

The bottom half of the walls were covered in four-inch square dark pink tiles, capped by a border of gray ones with beveled top edges. The color scheme seemed familiar with the addition of black, reminding me of the coral snakes we were constantly warned about. With Eric and I nearly holding our breaths watching, incredulous and thrilled at what was about to occur, mother dipped the new five-inch brush about an inch into the black lagoon. She carefully wiped the excess off the inside of the lid back into the can, and lifted the brush as she lifted her face to the blank wall. Her face revealed a ferocity which we would come to recognize, a narrowing of the emerald eyes, a lifting of the chin and, with just the slightest hesitation, starting at the bottom corner of the wall behind the door, spread a wide stripe of viscous black across the expanse of white. Another dip, another stripe, all the way across, one stripe rising above the last, until with the help of a three-step stool that barely fit in the room, Eric and I forced outside, peering around the door to watch the transformation, our mother reached the last remaining strip of white beneath the ceiling, where she steadily and surprisingly skillfully layered on the last touch along the edge. The first wall was complete. We were all thrilled.

As she continued the relentless laying on of the thick pigment, the bathroom became an almost unseeable place, and the fumes off-gassing as the sludge dried stung our eyes, yet our mother appeared only more determined to complete the cave-like transformation, on her knees to get to the spaces behind the commode, and sent us out of the room to give her space as she turned to face the final short wall opposite the back window, framed in the open doorway, the amber light from the window behind her indicating the light outside was also waning. She appeared to us a different mother from the one we had known up until that morning. She seemed defiant in a way we didn't understand, as she'd told us dad had given his permission, a humiliation to her autonomy.

Massage

I stepped into the dimly lit room
Essential oils barely wafting into my awareness
Ochre brick fireplace
Lovingly housing a serene seated Buddha
Gauzy tattered fabric softening the
image of the crowded world outside

I am here to be healed,
to soften the rigid muscles
in my neck and back
Cords of wood suddenly calcifying
Straining ridges knotted visibly under my skin
stealing my attention

The therapist reaches under my shoulder blades,
skillfully probes the attachment
radiating a bilious yellow throb,
pulls, stretches, coaxes
recalcitrant armored lumps out,
Softening the tightly held knots below my skin's surface

He works his way up to the cord of my neck
Where a rod of iron ends at the clavicle
Like a sprung bear trap clenched under my jaw
And I try to explain
with just words
how I came to be here
supine on his table

The radiation was not so bad for the first week
Caged from the top of my head to my pectorals
A web of plastic molded to my face neck chest
Snapped onto the table, trapped motionless
as the rays traveled through my soft vulnerable pink flesh
still healing from the surgeon's knife

The burns appear and grow and merge,

I wake each day on bloodied pillows,
Sheets crunch with dreams that fell away in the night.
Clots of skin and blood and crust slough off
catching in the drain
vermillion staining the water washing over me

I tried to tell him all this from a place of detachment
his fingertips already knowing so much.
I started to say
"It was really quite horrible..."
but then I could only cry.

Karen Pudoff

Karen Pudoff is a native Montanan, long time California Bay Area resident, with an urge to return to her roots. A registered nurse, she enjoyed supervising the care of World War II veterans in their home, and listening to their stories. She is still a novice poet, and continues to learn the craft with family encouragement and support. Family, friends, life, and nature remain important inspirations. She is an avid cross-stitcher, needle and thread to fabric evolves into colorful pictures.

Mr. Bison

I'm out for a stroll, in my vast backyard,
a beautiful late spring morning,
enjoying breakfast, grazing.

I hear signs have been posted in the area,
warning about danger,
but who reads them anyway.

Observing the neighborhood, I notice my nosy neighbors,
The Naives, taking for granted, that they can get a better view
of my shedding brown fur, exposing my butt.

Naive as they are, the news of my acquaintance,
I wouldn't call him a friend,
injuring a lady yesterday must have been ignored.

I'm beginning to feel a bit nervous as they encroach my territory,
thankful, and lucky for them,
there is a narrow river separating us.

Man's Best Friend

The sleek, muscular chocolate lab,
sloshing about in the cold rushing river,
huge drops of water spraying her face,
scooping up a drink with her curled pink tongue,
long feathery tail slapping the water.

Zigzagging and romping through tall green grass
billowing in the cool breeze,
chasing a small white rabbit.
Hop in the air, taking care not to lose sight of her target,
her faithful companion.

Circle back, jump over short brown fences,
fluffy flowering bushes, hollow logs,
into the waiting warm embrace of her human.
Recoil, quiver, and shake,
no towel, no problem.

Hike up the hill toward the silver gray
gravel covered parking lot, and the dark blue truck
supplying water and treats.
Race over, running and dancing in circles, barking
hurry up. I should have slowed down.

Home, a warm welcoming space. Curl up on the floor
next to the flowery overstuffed chair, the fire
crackling in the red brick fireplace, flame flickering in her eyes.
Reveling in the soft, calming rubs on her ears and belly,
drift off into a much-needed sleep.

Ring of Fire

Majestic mountains, lakes incognito,
true identity hidden in plain sight.
A serene setting, sounds of silence,
suspended animation,
scattered white clouds soar above
geothermal pools of steamy water
surrounding barren black and brown soil,
the stench of sulfur permeates the air.

A low rumble, followed by loud gurgling,
bubbling, boiling water, erratically
spurting into the stagnant air.
The ground begins to shudder,
birds scatter and chatter, announcing
the brink of disaster.

Gray clouds of hot ash, spewing into the darkening sky,
dispersed by a gusting wind,
oozing lava, bright orange to red,
flowing over boulders and rocks strewn about.

Unrest on the Ring of Fire,
uncertainty in the vast, active cauldron
in northwest Wyoming.
Volcanic eruptions in Hawaii, Guatemala.
Is Yellowstone next?

MG Thomas

Born and raised in Texas, but improved by many more years in the Bay Area, MG lives in San Francisco with her husband, Rick, and two cats. She has always enjoyed writing prose. That, plus many years as an executive secretary, spent editing and correcting other people's writing, made writing poetry particularly painful for her.

The Entrepreneurs, version 2.0

Driving home on a warm fall afternoon with the car windows down, I was enjoying the breeze ruffling my hair and the rousing rock 'n' roll on the radio. Cruising slowly up to a four-way stop in a residential area, I noticed several people just hanging out—and why not? They were enjoying the warmth and blue skies as much as I was. One young man smiled and waved as if he knew me, and as I looked, trying to place him, someone else reached inside my passenger side window, grabbed my small purse and ran.

Like someone had shot off a starter pistol, they all followed him, dashing down the street behind me. And me? I didn't think; I reacted. Turning a tight U-turn, I sped down the street after them and drove up onto the sidewalk where several of them were jumping over a worn wooden fence into a backyard.

It felt like an "out of brain" experience. No actual plan had entered my mind that I was aware of, but I found myself positioning my car so that the rear tires were on the sidewalk and the front of the car was in the street. I casually got out, lifted the hood, sidled back to lean against the driver's door, and (for more attention) laid on the horn.

Gradually, the guys reappeared, approaching me apprehensively, like curious animals in the wild. Sensing I wasn't dangerous, just unstable, one came closer and said, "Oh, wrecked your car, huh?" "Nope," I said, "The car's just fine."

Stumped as how to respond to that, another one said, "Well, what'cha doin' here then? Go on home." "I'm waiting to get my purse back," I explained. I heard a few snickers while I continued honking the horn.

By now, of course, I had realized that these were "budding" entrepreneurs, selling nickel and dime bags of weed. So when another car drove up and the driver signaled for a "five," I yelled to him, "Rip off! They're going to rip you off!"

And that's when The Muscle arrived. Slowly sauntering towards me with dark, serious eyes, he was clearly here to intimidate me—if he'd only had the chance. I stormed up to him first, meeting his serious gaze with my crazed one and brayed, "Yes, can I help you?" He glared at me and (I swear, you can't

make this shit up) said "Lady, if you don't leave now, we're gonna call the police."

(Pause for laughter.) Sometime later, I came to appreciate the humor in his misguided threat, but right then, I just didn't have that luxury.

"Well," I answered him, emphasizing certain words, "I would give you a DIME for the CALL," and then enunciating slowly, "but... SOMEONE... STOLE... my PURSE!!" I returned to taking my aggression out on my innocent car horn, but by now, rather entertaining myself by varying the patterns of short beeps and bursts with longer blasts.

The Muscle came closer, leaned in, and spoke softly, probably not wanting his cronies to hear the defeat in his voice. Nearly pleading now, he said, "C'mon, girl, you gotta go." I paused to consider how to phrase my answer so he'd finally get it. Keeping my eyes locked on his I replied, "Get me my purse back, and I WILL go," I continued, now pointing to the crowd, "Because I'm not standing in line for two hours to get a new license at DMV because of you jackasses!"

The rest of the group had been murmuring during the whole confrontation, but now I heard sliding shoes and shuffling along the sidewalk. The crowd was shifting, closing up, and with hushed whispers, it slowly inched closer to me. With a languid, wave-like motion, the gang's octopus arms moved forward until one hand appeared at the front—holding my purse. I grabbed it and the crowd vanished like the finale of a Vegas magic act.

Ever the lady, I yelled "Thank you!" and started my grand exit. I slammed my hood shut, jumped in the car, and peeled out and away.

At the end of the block, I U-turned and sped back, pushing all four cylinders to their limit in the puke green Datsun they'll never forget, making the ones who had strolled into the street again run and jump back over the fence one last time.

Gaining Through Loss

He was playing a Greek god the first time I saw him, slim and blond, up on the college theater stage, in a short toga that he wore really well. Eventually, I would learn he thought he was a god offstage, too.

Our relationship turned into a hideous train wreck of a marriage and everyone knew it but me. He was egotistical, chronically unemployed, and narcissistic, an amateur actor and a professional pothead. But I was born female in Texas in the 1950s and a woman was supposed to stand by her man. For a while, part of me really thought that if I was a good enough wife, he'd "snap out of it." He'd realize how wonderful I was, he'd get a job, and he'd start taking care of me, instead of me catering to his every selfish, whiny need.

What happened was, *I* snapped out of it. One evening, after we'd had another argument, I left to just walk around the block. Leaving the heat of our studio apartment, the cool fog was actually welcome. Feeling better after a while, I went back to our building, walked up the creaky stairs, along the faded carpet and unlocked our door. There he was with his attempt at an apology—posed naked and spread-eagled on the bed, giving me a come-hither look. Ahh, hell no!

I told him I wanted out, no therapy, no separation, no second chances, and no palimony for his lazy ass either. I was done. The only good thing that came out of our marriage was that no kids came out of our marriage. We divorced and at age 35, for the first time in my adult life, I was living alone—and loving my new normal, predictable, boring lifestyle. Go to work. Go home. Watch TV. Pay the rent on the first. Ho-hum for some—for me, hallelujah!

Maybe a month or two later, as I strolled along the brilliantly lit aisles of a grocery store, I reflexively picked up a jar of peanut butter. It could have been electrified for the impact it had. That's when the truth hit me. "I like creamy!" We had always bought crunchy peanut butter because that's what HE liked. I held that jar of peanut butter in my hand and stared at it for a long time. Anyone watching me would have thought I was having a really boring acid trip. (Have you ever really looked at your peanut butter?) The truth was, I was thunderstruck because I had finally realized—this is MY life now. Right now, and forever, it's all about me.

If I'd been expecting an epiphany, which I wasn't, I never would have looked for it in aisle 7 of Cala Market, but there it was. That was when I realized that I got to make all my decisions now based on what I thought and wanted and needed. My clothes, my hair, my job, where I lived, what music I listened to and, yes, my peanut butter. I wasn't scared or overwhelmed, though maybe I should have been. All I saw in that vision of my life spreading out before me was that it was going to be smooth and creamy.

Sunsets

Heat, waves and waves of heat
Flow over and through me.
I stand on the hill overlooking the city where
Cars move on the interstate, while
At my feet, ants scurry doing ant things.
But I see none of that, I'm sensing too much
Like that wavering heat. Would that it would stop
Just for a moment while I catch my breath
Because I need to focus.
I must see, I must devour this tie-dye sky
that my brain says can't be real.
Younger, I would look at a sunset like this and say
how pretty
and move on
Too distracted by my little life to appreciate that
Once I turned my head, the miracle would slip away.
I've let too many stunning sunsets go by without
Charting, cataloging, saving them somehow
And then sitting with the emotions they raise.
Too wrapped up in "what-ifs" and "what's next?"
To stop and just feel.
Now, I'll let the sunsets flow into my heart and
Calm my soul.
Stop. Look. Breathe
And accept the gift.

Roger Underhill

Roger Underhill, once creativity seemed only in books. Trying to copy cartoons and comics. Spent some time in art school. Swimming dreamscapes underwater. Navy officer school. Doing photography, then film school. An unproduced screenplay. Making singles clubs fun. Playing and creating an SF volleyball league. Writing down dreams, and stories of unusual experiences. Combining photos and stories for a history project. Next, a memoir and more?

Dreams

Thinking back into early early memories, it seems there were always objects of desire beyond food, play, sleep and my playmates and parents-meaning if I was away from them too long.

As I got older and could read, I loved mysteries and adventures. I could feel being part of the story. Slipping outside into an early morning summer seaside haze, a rocky, irregular seacoast would be barely visible between the trees beyond a rustic bait shop. A little rickety wood row boat was off in the distance that could, hopefully, take me to a mysterious island, which appeared whenever the drifting fog thinned a bit.

I remembered that feeling from a series of books I'd read. It probably set, in me, a desire for adventure.

Just before my teen years, when reading Jacques Cousteau's books about inventing underwater breathing apparatus and exploring under the sea, I got really intrigued. Being able to swim and breathe underwater, via a mouthpiece and tube to a back tank? Looking through a face mask to view a new world, now open to me, a dark, green, mysterious unknown? Getting to see what lives in the beautiful, pale blue sea. Blue like the sky, with dark, shadowy forms scattered over a white, sandy bottom. Were some of them moving? There were ones that moved. Cloud shadows drifted by. Cousteau's pages showed scenes of underwater canyons with fish of many exotic shapes and a rainbow of colors: indigo, bright yellow, crimson or flashes of white and or silver. I wanted to do this!

I'd have to learn to swim better and not fear getting my head under water. After my parents finally got me a mask, it took a while to properly adjust so it wasn't too tight yet still seal out water that wanted to seep in. There was not much to see in our farm pond's murky green water. Once I got a snorkel, it wasn't easy to learn to keep the water from sloshing into the top.

But now I could put my head under and swim below the surface. It was fun, but it wasn't exactly the adventure of weaving among colorful coral reefs while keeping an eye out for curious sharks, sea snakes and such. I did feel the surge of the sea when we went to the Jersey Shore, but there was not much to see, as the waves churned up the sandy bottom. That is when a wave

didn't knock off my mask. This adventure would have to wait till growing up, working and building a bit of cash. Body surfing was fun though!

As a, soon to be, Navy officer, nearing graduation I awaited my assignment there came a big surprise. A big ship? A small ship? No, my orders said Trinidad, West Indies!

But that was actually a mistake, it was close though. "T" stood for The, as in The West Indies, and was preceded by 'Grand Turk'. My assignment was Grand Turk Island in the outer Bahamas, hundreds of miles north of Trinidad. Luckily the error was caught before going to the wrong island!

While no one ever heard of Grand Turk before then, some kind of magic was sending me to an area that, two decades or more later, would become a world famous SCUBA diving destination. Back when I got there, on a big, lumbering old military transport plane-a C130, it was just a little scrubby island. Passing many smelly salt flats, what died, I wondered.

Riding from the Air Force missile tracking station strip, seven miles to a bluff at the island's other end, came a little surprise. Welcome to Country Club NavFac Grand Turk, but that's another story for another time.

This view was quite a contrast from my ride: a white sand beach, an azure blue sea, dotted with irregular dark spots of coral heads and patches of sea grass near the shore, small waves lapping over the outer coral reefs.

Wow, this was going to be great! A dream come true. Good I'd practiced my snorkeling!

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