



# Calliope

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# Calliope

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\*\*\*\*

This special issue on *place* is dedicated to  
Mary-Lou  
with gratitude and affection  
and to

Dan  
who has taken his place among us

\*\*\*\*

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# CONTENTS

Tom Absher	
<i>Selkirk's Island</i>	5
Joanne Allred	
<i>Going Home to Winter</i>	6
Robert Bensen	
<i>On Ogunquit Beach, Mid-Morning</i>	9
<i>The Sea This Morning's Green</i>	10
S.L. Berry	
<i>From Here</i>	11
B.J. Buckley	
<i>Prehistory: A Fairy Tale</i>	12
Shirley Buettner	
<i>The Sign</i>	15
Maryann Calendrille	
<i>Wrong Town, Vermont</i>	16
William Doeski	
<i>Hazardville: A Spring Elegy</i>	17
John Drury	
<i>A Visit to the Capital</i>	18
K.S. Ernst	
<i>Threads of Time</i>	20
Gary Fincke	
<i>The Hallway Shoe Shop</i>	21
Peggy Heinrich	
<i>Familias</i>	22
David B. Hopes	
<i>Running Route 700, Hiram, Ohio</i>	24
Maggie Jaffe	
<i>Mojave</i>	25
David Keller	
<i>The Dream in the Afternoon</i>	27
Suzanne M. Levine	
<i>Giving Way</i>	28
Stephen Lewandowski	
<i>Valentine on the Oregon Coast</i>	29
Deena Linett	
<i>The Longest Day</i>	30



Sheila E. Murphy	
<i>Escanaba</i>	31
Kathryn Nocerino	
<i>Carpenter Ant: Monte Alban, Oaxaca</i>	32
Hugh Ogden	
<i>Spring, Valfurva</i>	34
Ken Poyner	
<i>Ground Zero</i>	35
P.J. Rosenberg	
<i>Stopping Short in Arizona</i>	36
Deborah Route	
<i>Girl Scout Camp</i>	37
<i>Small Town Relief</i>	38
Yvonne Sapia	
<i>The Needleman</i>	39
Christopher Seid	
<i>Rest Stop: After Driving All Night</i>	
<i>Through Wyoming</i>	40
<i>Exploring An Abandoned Mine Near</i>	
<i>Dillon, Colorado</i>	41
Thomas Sheehan	
<i>Storm on the Saugus</i>	42
Rick Smith	
<i>distance</i>	43
Joseph Somoza	
<i>Canyon</i>	44
Catherine Stearns	
<i>Honeymooning at the Pamodzi</i>	47
Pamela Uschuk	
<i>Undertow</i>	50
Ingrid Wendt	
<i>California Interstate 5:</i>	
<i>Some Travelers' Warnings</i>	53
Jeffrey Wilson	
<i>Harvest</i>	55

Tom Absher

SELKIRK'S ISLAND

Alexander Selkirk was the Scottish  
castaway on the island of Juan  
Fernandez who inspired Defoe's  
*Robinson Crusoe*.

I am becoming a part of all of this.  
A piece of me is planted here and growing.  
The long trees that rim the beach  
are distant, high-minded priests.  
They do not care for speech.  
Like the colossal rocks that jetty  
out from the sand  
this crescent isle ignores everything.  
And all around it the sea, wearing a mask,  
works the shoreline in a deep sleep.

At night I hear words in my head--  
they give off light, but I cannot say them.  
when my friends finally forget me  
I will be here.  
I have come a long way  
to live in this bottle, this white  
spacious goodbye.

*Joanne Allred*

GOING HOME TO WINTER

1.

Seasons roll back driving east  
into the Sierras. Scattered quince  
regather blossoms, oak leaves suck back  
to gold buds. The foothills are green  
for the first time.

Towards Donner Pass snow begins  
piling on the ground. Pines grow silent.  
At the summit white banks tower twelve feet high,  
funneling traffic down a past I don't want  
to get stuck in.

I am going home  
to winter: Utah, where cold  
locks late into the mountains.  
Where my childhood huddles  
in a plaid wool coat.

2.

I am seven  
the summer I meet  
my father home from work to ride  
the runningboard of the old Dodge truck.

Black rims his nails  
and his coveralls are stained  
from crouching under cars.  
I love the grease smell.

Walking barefoot  
in new mowed grass,  
my hand gloved in his wrench-swollen grip,  
he tells me how time's dream deepens--

Joanne Allred

someday  
the sapling maple  
we are planting beside the roses  
will shade the whole backyard.

3.

There are moments when the world cracks  
and is never quite the same--a star bursts  
the face of a medieval clock, an autumn  
traveler over Emigrant Pass wakes  
to snow sealing fate in his eyes.

I was fifteen the night my father  
dragged me from Randy Thompson's daddy's  
Cadillac--home late from church, all my buttons  
fastened right. Blurred welt of  
his handprint still burns in my mirror.

Shame whines like ice across  
the wheelslide of years. I've almost  
forgotten how to follow my own tracks  
in a blizzard and keep on moving,  
how to steer into the skid.

I turned him out to wander  
the tundra of my eyes' silence.  
*Love my fire* the snow's grey lips  
whispered. Only the dark  
man could hear.

(continued)



Joanne Allred

4.

Snow dries to desert. Green dies.  
Stretches of Nevada have never conceived  
trees. At the stateline a neon cowboy waves  
me onto the Salt Flats--*this is the place.*

When I was a child, before freeway lights  
put out the sky, there were a million stars.  
Now the muffled Salt Lake Valley lies  
lost in its blank sleep of smog.

What did he mean trudging the flurry  
of my dream with an empty scrap of longing  
borne like a lamp in his hand? His  
searching face froze at my bedside

and I woke knowing my father'd been with me,  
lives always, dumbly, within me. It was his gift,  
this hunger for tools cast to fit  
the world's gears together.

This trip I'm traveling back  
to unearth the place where color left off,  
to rinse in some gone season's snowmelt  
keeping the mud to reshape god.

Robert Bensen

ON OGUNQUIT BEACH, MID-MORNING

On half-sunk boulders lashed and girdled  
with the sea's lace, we strike an antique  
tableau in pictures, all stars on holiday,  
prop an elbow here, raise a knee capped  
with its own smooth skipping stone, easy  
with near nakedness in the gentle sun.  
A child cries through its shivering jaw,  
wrapped in blankets in a mother's arms.  
Hair blown like a sail set to yaw,  
making headway, crossing rocks big as cottages,  
we content ourselves with the busy surface  
that rocks the bell-bouy's foolish alarms.  
I could be that red kite tethered to a hand  
that knows when to give and when to reel in.

*Robert Bensen*

THE SEA THIS MORNING'S GREEN

The sea this morning's green with a bad night.  
I have colored the whole ocean with my pride.  
Still, there is coolness in the way it forgives,  
and a slow beat that swallows the same stone  
over and over until it's right, which is always  
not yet, not yet. Thus the stone acquires  
a luster of its own. I couldn't name everything  
that lives out there, that's not my province.  
Nor do I belong only where I come from,  
a waste of fields turning out factories  
and their brittle machines. When my eyes water  
it is the same sea as here, caught in my lashes,  
drying in the same air. The sky is wrapping itself  
in a heavy coat of pearl, coming from nowhere.

S.L. Berry

FROM HERE

From here you can see the whole  
city spread out like a watercolor,  
a gypsy camp of contagious shades.  
From here I imagine you: the length  
of you like a parkway, the depth  
of someone's backyard pool, your hands  
like parrots in the palm fronds of  
my hair. I imagine living below with  
you in some pink stucco villa with  
bougainvillea and lavender bath salts  
and a balcony overlooking the sea.  
I imagine this and I have to smile at  
the way the imagination mires itself  
in clichés. This is not

Gauguin or Matisse: this is just  
an overlook of another city,  
any city on any coast  
where the light strikes rooftiles  
at certain moments and catapults  
dreams into the air. From here  
you can almost make them out:  
like shards of stained glass  
they're spinning through the blue  
haze. I imagine your laughter  
at that.

*B. J. Buckley*

PREHISTORY: A FAIRY TALE

Today, turning over a new section of ground for the  
garden,  
I struck one rock so sharply with the shovel that it  
split  
clean in two. I bent to toss it to the side, with  
the other  
rocks, to use later for edging the flower bed ---  
if I should ever manage to have flowers, if the  
grasshoppers  
or the cows don't eat them --- when I noticed odd  
shapes  
and colors on the broken stone: a solid conglomer-  
ation  
of shells and wonders, clams and rotifers and ferns  
and fishbones,  
the certain spiral of a snail --- cast off,  
crushed and mutable, how long ago? Every spring at  
home  
my father turned the garden beds, and we found  
fossils  
then, too; toted them to the library, matched them  
to the pictures in the book, yes, that was what we  
had,  
an ocean, once, in our back yard.

It disquiets me. From the top of Dead Man the land  
rolls out  
in an even swell until it dashes itself against  
unyielding sky  
in mountains that break jagged like waves. Most of  
the vegetation  
is burnt off now, or grazed off, it's nearly autumn;  
but in June,



B.J. Buckley

the wild grasses --- horsetail, foxtail, buffalo,  
cheatgrass ---  
are tall and supple. The half-light after sunset  
paints them  
blue, and when the nightwind races over the prairie  
and you're a little drunk from the third glass of  
beer  
after dinner, you'd swear it was water moving below  
you.

What was it like the day the tide went out  
forever? I imagine it didn't happen all at once.

The water  
just retreated every day a little farther, almost  
imperceptibly --- the way love leaves you. It drifts  
more and more away, if you notice you pretend not to;  
or you tell yourself it was only the heat which  
kindled  
sharp words this morning; or that he has phases, like  
the moon,  
and this is the dark of it --- in a few days the  
crescent door  
of his heart will open, a soft red light; in a few  
days more  
he will be full to bursting, he will break  
salt and wet over and inside you  
like high tide on the breast of land.

When did she know? When the beached kelp withered?  
Now the grasses, without rain, dry brittle as tinder.  
When every day she grew more naked, and her children  
perished?

The bald earth whispers dust, grows whirl winds; and  
the deer  
this winter will climb on the dead bodies of deer,  
to strip bark  
and then branches until they can't reach any higher,

*B.J. Buckley*

and then die anyway, with their eyes, soft doe eyes,  
open.

Her flat body buckled, her bones broke against  
heaven,

and in the image of what she has lost, the land made  
herself over.

When the snow comes, the drifts, in moonlight and  
wind,

will cover the bones, will move like water.

"The snakes are my fishes,  
the coyote runs swift as swimming  
through waves of grass,  
there were mammals even in the sea,  
my smell is still salt."

Shirley Buettner

THE SIGN

The sign on the front door of this river wood  
says No Trespassing. Enter this risk  
by crawling under a sprung fence  
to a sunken floor: linoleum of leaves,  
decaying.

Overturned trees, woodwork of wind,  
clutter the floor, their spliced roots  
like scrimshaw carved from ivoried cores.  
Here and there, black shadows gleam.

A startle of sky lights up a place  
of cloven hooves, the decor  
of white-tailed deer.

Past other ruined rooms, mossy and corniced  
with vine, the floor breaks away to a porch  
of sand where spiny cocklebur beads criss-  
cross the path, quill tight through cuff  
and skin.

And on the sand terrace overhanging  
the river, a script written in intricate  
bird glyph repeats and repeats itself  
like broken stars.

*Maryann Calendrille*

WRONGTOWN, VERMONT

I've walked out of worse sets than this  
Annoying pile of crumpled papers and sheets,  
Out of intriguing talk and cheap champagne,  
Or so I think. With time nothing changes:  
The Shaker chairs, sidewalk cracks, old friends.  
And the town's daily paper says Hey,  
You in the long face, do something different.

More rain thunders through the movie's second show  
There's the curfew, blue laws,  
A bar crowd with knotted wooden faces  
And I see what a short stick the tomatoes get,  
How the mountains grow older and cold.  
At the corner, I'm late-night anxious,  
Light a cigarette for the uphill hike  
Past foreign green license plates and match stick  
houses  
Boasting bigger and bigger piles of wood.

## HAZARDVILLE: A SPRING ELEGY

The Sunday paper sops and sulks  
on my father's leaky porch;  
no one reads it anymore.  
The whole town has retired, rolled  
over with its roots in the breeze.  
Lack of commerce means innocence  
regained: no Milton will conjure  
an epic just to please  
the snow bound, taxpoor, the Poles

who used to grow tobacco,  
potatoes, turnips, and corn.  
This Sunday at thirty-eight  
I'm the youngest man in town.  
Main Street's last few American elms  
have netted high in their crowns  
spirits of suicidal high-school pals.  
Like shooting stars these friendly dead  
glow above the fading village.

No one hears their voices crack  
as they dispense a gentle ash  
invisibly upon that trust  
in war and order and scandal  
that kept us virgin half our lives.  
No one except me will look up  
to see them flash against the night sky,  
their claws improvised from sticks,  
their energy aped from the stars.

I pity them in this weather.  
Their faces crack like Old Masters,  
three hundred years of settlement  
ooze in muck from their dead mouths--  
no pain except that of a child  
who loses his first brave balloon;  
and primitive as a god  
feels himself drift further than pain  
could sustain him, or faith in the breath  
of incense wafted in the rain.



*John Drury*

A VISIT TO THE CAPITAL

*Nothing, like something, happens anywhere.*

Philip Larkin

I'm waiting to get back prints  
of a trip we never took.  
Again we'll see  
the opening blossoms of the cherry trees,  
the paddleboat we rented  
on the Tidal Basin, and the likeness  
of the rotunda, distorted by water.  
How sensual the marble is, smooth as your cheeks,  
your own hair finer  
than the slight breeze that touched us.  
Here is the spot,  
carved shore, curved blocks of the memorial,  
where the bomb exploded in my dream:  
the streets were empty  
as I tried to leave, nothing but wrecked artillery  
on an abandoned golf course.  
When the pictures arrive, all of this  
will be clear:  
superimposed on a shot of you  
on a towpath, under a wall  
of gnarled vines, a flag spreads out  
like a fireman's net  
while a coffin enters its trench in Arlington.  
As you sip Irish coffee  
in a sidewalk cafe, after a musical,  
a blind woman with a slide guitar  
reaches into her shoe box to count what's there--  
remember that I dropped her nothing.  
As you look at Mohini, the white tiger,  
I stew at a banquet,  
stirring my drink and not stopping.  
I would show you a better time

*John Drury*

but it's no use lying.  
What never happened is real,  
deluding us like a memory:  
a billboard whose posters peel and mix,  
a broad smile  
glaring out of a torn house.  
Behind it, a squad car aims its radar.

*K.S. Ernst*

THREADS OF TIME

I love  
the panel that screen  
by the window if you look  
outside  
is bleached through it  
the peony you glimpse  
and the sliding  
waters an alien landscape  
can hardly be told apart  
flowers are clockhands  
a sign of the threads of  
time I suppose willows  
old things turn to black plumes  
to refuse change

Gary Fincke

THE HALLWAY SHOE SHOP

In 1952, swarthy enough to be slurred  
On Etna's white streets, Puntereri  
Heeled and soled and stitched up shoes  
In his skinny shop, the beveled end  
Of it cut like his daughter Patti,  
Each sharp angle of her designed  
To fit there. The tough burdock,  
Voyeur, was window high the summers  
We ran through the alley behind  
His expressionistic store, listening  
To his tools, pretending he would  
Kill us like any foreigner would,  
Stuffing our bodies under those unclaimed shoes  
With those fresh Cat's-Paw heels.

Once, I laughed at something stupid  
After her into the shop, ran up the steps  
To look for reaction, and in that time  
Of light adjustment, her father's lasts  
Walking toward me, I was struck  
By the black garage fear, the stuck groin  
Knowing that this unknown would move.

But this June, thirty years of myself  
Disappeared, only the burdocks grow,  
Puntereri become one of those people  
No one can confirm, his shop still trailer-thin,  
Full of costumes my son would charge inside  
To see. Crouched on the steps, four girls  
Smoke and I want to ask the dark-skinned one  
If Patti is her mother, if she can use an awl,  
If she is afraid of the aimless way  
I am walking this block while a row of Yoda faces  
Sits behind her and the sun falls into the traffic  
That whispers at the intersection.

*Peggy Heinrich*

FAMILIAS

At the airport  
a Mexicano smiles  
kisses my daughter's hand

\*

Saturday in Chapultepec Park,  
day of birthday parties;  
each family cordons off a square  
with ropes between the trees;  
a case of Coca-Cola,  
a row of folding chairs  
mark boundary lines;  
above their heads  
balloons,  
piñatas shaped like dogs and fish,  
rainbow lights

\*

On the path to the zoo,  
a mother bakes tortillas  
while her children play  
around her legs,  
a man peels avocados  
for his son to sell,  
other families hawk  
circles of piña and jicama;  
a woman and her son scrape needles  
from green-eared saguaro leaves;  
the lake is filled with rowboats  
filled with families

\*



Peggy Heinrich

"Qué tal?" In the market,  
the sound of a kiss in the ear.

"Come, we go dancing."

"Hey, lady, I want  
to marry your daughter."

Teeth white in skin the color of tea.

My daughter laughs;

her fingers press my arm,

she whispers, "Don't leave me."

*David B. Hopes*

RUNNING ROUTE 700, HIRAM, OHIO

Slowing home I met the light.  
Whatever before I thought the light was,  
he was greened and frilled then  
passing through the trees.  
He was body immense and intimate,  
leaning dusk, coaxing star in the farthest corner.  
Light a stillness in that flood:  
splendor of bluejay,  
red ravel of sweetpea,  
fir, stone, caught in clarity,  
a robed-in-calm-flame field,  
I gathered to him on the field's edge;  
so whole is the fire's consecration,  
so slow is the rose of the ditch to open.

Maggie Jaffe

MOJAVE

Sores in the desert, "set-  
tlements."

Inorganic matter pressed  
against the heart.

The mountain's face  
bleeds like madras,  
acid rain into  
the arroyo's mouth.

Once Yuma, Peublo, Papago  
danced the snake  
dance for rain.

In the vision pit  
the dreamer dreamed  
of a diamondback  
swallowing its tail;  
that summer squash  
flowers were numerous  
as stars.

Nothing here now  
but B-52's,  
also "vermin"  
to be trapped or shot:  
Coyote bobcat hawk.

It's dawn just outside  
Reno, Nevada.  
The last few visible  
stars wheel and sing,  
mountains stand  
watch over us.  
The red sun,

Maggie Jaffee

fierce old god,  
will burn off the pale  
beads of night-  
moisture.

A redtail hawk  
swoops down onto the freeway,  
talons poised:

David Keller

THE DREAM IN THE AFTERNOON

(for Dina)

Back of these fields, thin trees  
silhouetted against the fine light.  
It could be a foreign country the hill  
rises from. Snow covers the ground.  
The trees are not hands, lace  
or coral branches though they remind you  
of something, the way the colors  
spread up the pink sky late  
in the afternoon. There's a story  
you try to remember. Among the trees  
near the top are evergreens, darker shapes  
like thoughts among the bare places.  
Inside the forest you could be warm  
though it's winter, the light uncertain.

Your best dream came from this place,  
the one you never told anybody.  
You turn away and the hill  
is still there, for home,  
the high gray rock in the snow  
surrounded by azaleas, blooming the pink  
and red colors of a body. You enter  
by a crack, the dog and cat waiting,  
in time for the regretful sun  
setting through the kitchen window,  
and sit down for a hot dinner.  
This is how you love the landscape,  
as if it were a face you begin to know,  
even your own.

ROOSEVELT, NEW JERSEY



*Suzanne M. Levine*

GIVING WAY

A house is quiet only a part of the night.  
Allowances are made: a dog steals up the stairs,  
a clock chimes hourly, a husband swoons in dream-  
light.  
Familiar parts of the white moon's silence.

Muffled between hands, a door closes; a child  
slips into the house. A mother, hearing these  
things,  
falls more deeply into sleep. A night fog  
seeps like lava into the corners. Where light  
breaks

through loose shades and bodies turn  
to the other side of the dark, faces pressed  
to pillows. Water belches in the copper throats of  
pipes  
making way for steam as night throws up its hands to  
day.

Stephen Lewandowski

VALENTINE ON THE OREGON COAST

What am I doing here?  
he asked from the bedroom  
with its potted plants &  
broad view of ocean breakers.  
There's no red here:  
green sea, grey sky, tan beach.  
No real red at all- no fire  
engine, candy apple or blood.  
Sea spray won't allow it- bleaches  
& polishes color away, reduces all  
to variations on the salt theme.  
He could imagine himself in  
every breaker rolling  
down the curve of the bay,  
an infinite regression,  
not riding but *being* the waves.  
They say the sea surges like blood,  
but he made a walk in a storm  
blown fresh from the sea  
that could have cooled his blood  
for good. Think of a drowned man.  
Watch the ocean wash a wound's rim.  
Tell me what water has to do with blood.  
That's pulse in your ears, not tide.  
Ah heart, he remembers now  
what confused him, where he left you-  
it was beside a river in lake country.  
Bridges over the river. City around bridges.  
Lights in the sky. Sudden thunderstorm.  
He is bathing in the cloudburst,  
in the lake which gathers clear water,  
in the river carrying it all away.  
He's washing away this damned blood  
and bloody urge. Give him  
a cardboard heart but no lover.  
He's getting clean. If he must  
wear a heart on his sleeve,  
let it be a white one.

Deena Linett

THE LONGEST DAY

If you fly westward in spring  
you will not regret the two ounces of rubbery chicken,  
the sprinkling of feta cheese on grimy lettuce leaves  
like remnants of too many political dinners,  
the stewardesses heedless as bitter icons.  
For a little while you will forget  
the needless deaths  
of young Irishmen starving themselves  
in prisons, your impulsive kiss  
on a forbidden cheek.  
For those few hours when outside  
it's sixty below zero fahrenheit,  
seven miles above the Mississippi  
where she splits open like a woman  
laboring to give birth to the American dream,  
you will look out over the frozen landscape  
into shameless turquoise smears of sky  
and though your watch tells you it's almost midnight,  
at six hundred miles an hour  
you fly before the dark. Rejoice:  
coursing through purple skies, *the sun*.  
All the light you will ever need, in your eyes.

Sheila E. Murphy

ESCANABA

Beauty is contingent on our finding mirrors.

At twenty-three,  
I was too young to see myself  
in tall pine rows.  
A blindness covered land like snow,  
unleavened depth needing to rise  
from trapped surface.

I decided, "There is nothing here,"  
and walked alone across chilled land,  
pronouncing the word "South."  
It hung in breath before my face.

Lakebreeze opened nothing.  
I was the fabled man  
responding to wind,  
tightened my coat,  
inviting sun to loosen me.

There was no sun.

Sometimes I picture a cabin in the woods,  
where I could listen  
to deer listening to ice branches.

I want to see myself in fragile seasons  
full of cold trees  
I now seem to recognize.

*Kathryn Nocerino*

CARPENTER ANT: MONTE ALBAN, OAZACA

having climbed,  
    dizzy in the unobstructed light,  
to stand among the temples, platforms,  
    walls, enclosures, steps, observatory -  
everything half-cloaked, half-melted into  
    soil and vines;  
around me and below me,  
    brilliant as the rocks and fish seen through clear  
    water,  
is the valley - tilled fields, ring of mountains;  
    under my feet, or so I'm told,  
the miles of tunnel and the graves.  
    overhead, the storm-clouds of Oazacan spring  
approach us, heavy with green rain.

to enter a building it is necessary to bend double,  
crouch and leap.  
    the darkness of these corridors is barely lifted  
by our small beam;  
    away from sun, the walls sweat cold.  
some years ago, the diggers brought out,  
    among necklaces and earplugs, jade disks, yellow  
    gold,  
a goblet like the moon, carved out of milky quartz -  
    fragments of closed history.

    the paper of theory  
accumulates like white drifts over the stones,  
    upon the hoard of secrets.  
outside the buildings, mountains behind mountains,  
    going blue with distance.  
in the valley, you can just barely distinguish motion-  
    a farmer on his horse; fields which,  
from this height, look like the patterns  
    made in soil by a leaf-rake.  
as the big clouds move overhead, come towards us  
    from the mountains,

Kathryn Nocerino

their outlines reproduce as shadows travelling the  
ground -  
flat dark bodies swim like manta-rays.

this shelf of land grows huge with emptiness.  
the builders have long since descended into  
farmland,  
into memory; have trickled down the slopes,  
quick streams of rain.  
down in the grass, close by my feet,  
I see a subtle motion: an ant is crawling shakily,  
a burden of green leaf slung crosswise on his back,  
several times the length of him.  
I watch until he disappears into a crevice  
underneath a stone-  
the hill's last architect, the keeper of the  
silence.

*Hugh Ogden*

SPRING VALFURVA

At dawn a blue sky  
and as light rises peak by peak  
the goats come down shadow by shadow  
until the sun touches them.  
There they are  
by the stream coming off the glacier.  
One raises its head.  
The others continue drinking.  
Then the chickadees start  
as if quiet never existed.  
Boughs shake, branches.  
Clumps of snow fall off.  
The goats raise their heads to listen.  
and the day now all the way down in the valley  
you'd think winter never happened  
with crocus in every pasture,  
fields in warm sunlight white all over,  
goats jumping around scrub pine,  
chickadees sining  
and where the paved road ends by the grocery store  
men stepping off the bus  
and each one looking up at the mountains.



Ken Poyner

GROUND ZERO

I cannot think that after all of it  
The river will run any other way.  
The bones of Jan McClellan will still  
In the bottom mud be odd mineral.  
In places the fence will yet stand;  
Sections of porches, perhaps displaces, will sit  
Off balance in fresh underbrush. Over everything  
An anonymous Christ will still reign.  
Whatever you've left on the line will be gone.  
In the metal box half a dozen papers  
May persist: grandmother Rainer's picture,  
Grandfather's World War I dog tags, the life  
insurance policy.  
Facing east or north, if we sit on the stoop,  
We may see the best of it. Our wedding picture  
In aluminum foil I've put in the old cartridge case,  
That steel box spirited from the weapons range.  
We can make certain in advance what will be left,  
How the new races will know us.  
Buried in the yard is the family Bible,  
Our full ancestry outlined in red. I do not think  
Much of the topsoil will be moved,  
That the hills will change. The country marker,  
Our initials on the side, will brood forever.  
I can't believe that in any real way we will be gone.  
If it comes in the south  
We can watch out the kitchen window.

*P.J. Rosenberg*

## STOPPING SHORT IN ARIZONA

I told them I was going home  
to the middle of the desert,  
with its mountains of silence  
spreading like a fever toward the road,  
stopping short of reasons for being there.

In the middle of nowhere  
looking for something familiar,  
I recall being lost the first time  
in the hills outside Mexico City,  
waking to the wind barking in my ear,  
the stars, glowing knots in the sky,  
untangling as my impatience dawned.

The dawn continued without my help,  
brought only a local drunk, arms  
waving in a breeze of victory.  
Speaking through tequilla, he said  
he knew the prairie dogs knew his name.

His name, he told me, was not important.  
And we stood there all morning  
as I am standing here now,  
listening to the dying breaths of silence,  
and wanting to hang myself from a cactus,

telling myself I will tell them I found  
what I was looking for, the heroine returning  
home, telling them where she'd been  
was like nothing she'd ever seen before.

Deborah Route

GIRL SCOUT CAMP

The worst part was swimming.  
The lake, like shining mercury  
waited for our floundering bodies  
as the counselors became huge knives  
slitting us into three groups:  
the Sharks, the Minnows  
and the Skunks.

As a skunk  
I wore a red bathing cap  
with a black stripe down the middle.  
My best friend, a shark  
wore a pretty pastel blue.

I longed to be a shark.

Even a minnow seemed more appealing  
than a skunk: a despicable, offensive creature.  
A poor swimmer.

Groping for shore,  
desperately trying to master the crawl,  
fighting against death  
three times a day  
while the counselors lounged  
on the dock with their tops off,  
we hoped we would never have breasts.

*Deborah Route*

SMALL TOWN RELIEF

It feels odd  
to live so safely  
like returning to childhood  
before breasts  
before puberty.

It is like the old neighborhood  
where there was nothing but fields,  
where we made jewelry  
from grass growing up to our waists,  
where we collected bones of dead farm animals  
and imagined dinosaurs.

In dreams I go way back,  
playing in the streets at night  
waving to strangers  
talking without fear.

In this small village  
I can walk in any direction  
and see cows and horses and pigs  
and not one human being  
except a young man  
who thinks the mace on my key chain  
is breath freshener.

Yvonne Sapia

THE NEEDLEMAN

it's sorry what the times offer:

uptown botanicas,  
magic men in ragged clothes,  
fat Cuban women anchoring  
their boats of little children

Sun and Moon  
cripples beg the courthouse steps

on the rooftop  
in the grey air  
of his mother's city,  
of his father's city,  
a city with arms,  
for the melting spoon  
and delicate night

alone to do it well,  
Mercury barely seen,  
he waits for a messenger  
to deliver

if only the music downstairs  
were louder

against stars he strains  
projecting like fine  
shadow of a pin

Flager Street thin as a vein

*Christopher Seid*

REST STOP: AFTER DRIVING ALL NIGHT THROUGH WYOMING

In a blind canyon toward Teton  
we step from the car at midnight  
where sage crushed under our boots  
releases the odor of distance.

And out there in blindness  
a river recites its collected stones  
as starved deer stop-dead on the slope  
twisting their ears to hear.

Striking a match that is  
the only flare in miles  
we smoke--damp odor of sage  
a light rain to the senses.

*Christopher Seid*

EXPLORING AN ABANDONED MINE NEAR DILLON, COLORADO

Holding our my lamp  
against the lung-dark swell;  
  
cold tongue of dust rising  
from its lip of rock. Thick-  
  
throated tombs, pulse  
of ancient disturbances...

\*

Traces of early gold quickly spent.  
Overnight towns collapsed like playing cards.  
Now, only this short meadow of graves remains  
where the pick-axe could turn  
moss and a half-foot of mountain loam--  
the hacked gravestones blatant in their wisdoms:  
    Here lies old Caw - Survivor of death  
    Thus resteth Junkins - Man 'O Depth



*Thomas Sheehan*

STORM ON THE SAUGUS RIVER

Even under this storm,  
which is like a woman  
at rugs, the river chants;  
rollicking mariner,

sad word singer, reeler  
jigger of pantomime.  
It moves puzzles of airs  
beneath the wooden bridge,

the pursed lips and puffed cheeks  
of river throat humming  
stones from ten thousand years  
under the minstel tongue

and voice only water has  
at wearing down, cutting  
rock walls, roots, in August  
warm paths, December deep.

And now, with freak April  
northeasterly at odds,  
a drunken sailor's song  
vibrates all the metal

the river's ever known:  
ball, grapeshot, gunneries,  
torn decks, a bell clanging  
close to rocks, an oarlock

strident on the surface,  
statements old iron makes.

Rick Smith

distance\*

Tracks slice through Belgium  
without me.  
Nearing Paris:  
communication wire,  
imperfect parallels,  
the same sun,  
cows leaning against posts, etc.

I'm 80 miles east of Needles now,  
aimed at the mountains,  
thinking of thunder  
and the backs of your knees  
thinking of you  
unrolling your dark stockings  
while Hurricane Belle  
beats Long Island to death.

Mariachi music moves across the desert  
like locusts.  
Spanish newscasts swarm around my ears.  
The radio &  
the wind;  
it's the only way to stay awake.  
Tracks hum alongside me,  
tracks tracing the curvature,  
tracks gathering the first heat.

\*for m.t. with respect to Reverdy

*Joseph Somoza*

CANYON

I.

An old dog barks  
hard against his backyard fence  
at my passing by.  
Trained as a watchdog  
he can't be taught new tricks.

A light blue camper  
pulls out of its carport,  
the old faces of mother and father  
in the cab smiling at me.

And what can I be taught  
walking along a newly tilled  
cottonfield in March?  
That I'm growing old.

Cars swoop suddenly  
beside me and move away.  
The distant, repeated warning  
beeps of a truck  
backing at a new construction site.

So I drive to the mountains,  
park off the dirt road  
just before the impassable rock,  
and walk toward the twin-breasted hill  
with a century tree plunging down her neckline.

When the dilapidated shack  
of cinderblocks and tin appears  
over the hill, I turn left  
into the narrow valley, cow-smelling  
protected from the wind.

And further up, at the natural  
shale-rock dam, I choose

Joseph Somoza

the right-hand chamber of the canyon,  
narrower than the left,  
with dark caves near the entrance.

2.

A wind to blow children  
over the edge starts up  
whistling through holes  
in my yucca staff  
and into the canyon.

Succulent prickly pears,  
wide spread, block the path  
but I cut through their spikes  
and plant boots sideways  
in the loose shale to prevent slides.

If the snakes awaken  
from their deep sleep  
deep in their fissures  
inside the cave walls  
what will they come to signify  
blinking at me  
with their nictitating membranes,  
the patterns written on their backs  
almost wholly camouflaged  
among stones and snake weed.

Near the top, a sudden grass patch,  
tall, yellow, protected  
in the rocks to lie in.  
I eat my orange and sail peels  
out to the wind

then step out from cover,  
try to lean  
at the angle the plants do,

*Joseph Somoza*

and hug the smooth shale so the wind  
can slip me over the top

over a valley without sound  
without movement or questions  
where old lives less amorphous  
than mine stand scattered  
frozen as boulders.

Catherine Stearns

HONEYMOONING AT THE PAMODZI

(The Pamodzi is an elegant hotel in Lusaka, Zambia. The woman speaking is a member of the Tonga tribe in Kafue, Zambia. *Muka Joni* means John's wife.)

I keep one eye open  
to see what my husband does--  
under these silk sheets  
he looks like a white man.  
This bed's big enough  
for me and all my sisters  
who are not yet married;  
I am *Muka Joni*, *Muka Joni*.  
Last night I admit  
I was a little girl  
when he asked me to brush  
my body with powder,  
for the smell of dust  
provokes the ghosts in my head.  
Not that I won't adorn myself!  
On my wedding day I tied  
rattles and bells on my legs  
when we danced in the daylight  
where everyone could see  
the tattoos on my chest  
like palm fruits, the tattoos  
on my back like stars.

This morning I missed  
the roosters crowing,  
my sisters shaking their gourds.  
But I am *Muka Joni*,  
and when I turn on a game show  
women like me

*Catherine Stearns*

win pots and copper plates.  
I think: I can be on TV  
now I'm a rich man's wife.  
Because I know  
how to use the red ochre  
my bride-price was ten cattle.  
At the Pamodzi there is water,  
cold water and hot water,  
but the roof is flat and low.  
The roof of my mother's house  
was laced with elephant grass.  
I remember when death came  
to fetch my little brother,  
without even brushing the dust  
off his face, my mother  
tried to hold him higher  
than death could reach.  
But when he comes--  
in spite of the rhinoceros horn,  
crucifixes, dancing--  
you cannot resist.

My husband's lips are dry,  
but not as cracked as the earth  
in the dry season.  
He doesn't wake as I kiss him.  
Downstairs, breakfast is  
coffee and eggs and meat.  
I won't have the meat myself,  
but I think my husband will.  
In the elevators are mirrors  
to see how lucky I am--  
*Muka Joni, Muka Joni.*  
When I go to the swimming pool,  
surrounded by a high wall,  
I swim up and down, past



Catherine Stearns

the sirens in the street  
and the girls I know there  
begging, past their children  
who move like poisoned fish.  
Past the ghost of my brother.  
And when I have finished  
I call for the towel-giver,  
who looks like my cousin Chamuka,  
who forgets himself and hisses  
at me like a wounded snake.  
How I could laugh  
in his unlucky face  
when my new husband  
dresses upstairs in the military  
and wears darkglasses  
to shield his eyes  
from the flies.  
Why do I want to touch him?

*Pamela Uschuk*

UNDERTOW  
for my father

I

Beyond Holland where we never stopped  
to look at tulips  
glowing in waterlight like Seurat's points of color,  
you drove the family to Tunnel Park.

From the car, we raced  
through a stone mouth where wet sand  
chilled names in red chalk,  
Mark & Sandi tru luv 4 ever,  
and we heard Lake Michigan boom  
then grumble like wind through cellophane  
as it nibbled the shore.

This was our perfect get-away,  
you and Mom finally at peace,  
those dunes blonde as sleeping Palominos  
we ran down so fast  
lucky not to break our necks  
as we cartwheeled to your feet.

Rocked by that huge unyielding lake, we dove  
again and again pretending  
we were sharks no one could find. You taught us  
to bodysurf, to float  
like the dead,  
then told us how, when you were small,  
Johnny Weismuller came to your school  
and taught you to swim.  
We copied your ape call's perfect pitch.

Each summer weekend was like this.  
We built forts devoured by surf,  
played "Shoot the Moon" with aunts  
and cousins while bright sun  
and brighter waves washed the assembly line,

Pamela Uschuk

your bad temper,  
and the smell of oleum and grease from our lives.

You said,  
    *do well in school*  
    *work for yourselves*  
    *live beside an ocean you've never seen*

We never wanted to leave. While you  
drove us home, we slept,  
then woke complaining to flat farm land  
huge around us. Then,  
the sound of crickets made us cry.

Every night I worried  
you home from the factory. I counted  
the cigarettes you smoked--  
three packs of Chesterfields a day--and couldn't  
    sleep  
until I heard your snores fill the house.  
I hid when you tossed your supper  
on the floor, when you argued  
with Mom whose sobbing broke our dreams

II  
The last weekend we went to the beach,  
white light veered across  
the dew stroked farms we passed.  
Through the tunnel we saw red flags  
that warned of undertows, the waves muddied  
by a riot of cloud and wind, but we swam  
daring the gray anger of water

Back on shore we learned  
a body washed up South of us that day.  
I imagined its lungs  
like ripe plums bruised and bursting.  
With each new wave that claimed  
the sand, its face exploded

*Pamela Uschak*

above the locked throat,  
its endless scream for the key.

Wading into surf, I shrank from  
the soft thrust of drowned flesh,  
water's formless touch against my knees.  
Then, caught in the silence  
of a wave's violent trough, Father, I saw you  
knocked from your feet into dark water,  
and I knew even you,  
who seemed so firm on land, could be lost.  
I screamed as you sank,  
and the stone of that secret fell through me.

III

So many years since you struggled  
back to shore, Father,  
I've lived near water watching  
it swell and subside  
over the shifting catechism of my life.  
I live with a large man  
dark as you are light,  
who smokes too much,  
who's drowned several times.  
At night I love his snores. And every day  
I try to know why, sometimes catching myself,  
ape call warm in my throat.

But what's more, Father,  
when I imagine you now  
it is in the deadly silence of waves  
that separates us and drowns  
what you'd reveal.  
And sometimes, Father, I think  
what lives in dark water  
is what is between us, in those tunnels  
only dreams permit.

Ingrid Wendt

CALIFORNIA INTERSTATE 5: SOME TRAVELERS' WARNINGS

Silent as the false  
teeth we found in the rest  
stop restroom halfway between  
Ball's Ferry and Jelly's  
Ferry Roads

                  silent  
as Fourth of July all summer  
bursts of oleander lining  
the freeway prosusion of fuschia  
magenta crimson cushioning  
north from southbound  
traffic

the fact of their poison

my mother's friend's story  
of soldiers on leave from  
the war   who never  
returned   having chosen a twig  
to stir their coffee instead  
of a spoon

                  messages I  
wouldn't hear anyway   car  
Japanese-made and purring  
content as a lion at thirty-  
five miles per gallon past  
a plague of oil wells  
grasshopper heads single-  
mindedly drinking their fill

trusting as red-winged blackbirds  
perched on cattails deep  
in the ditch   or the chicken  
shiny as bootblack scratching

*Ingrid Wendt*

shoulder gravel miles  
from any  
farm

determined  
as giant crows      one  
every few miles      flapping  
off the attacks of sparrows

or  
the biplane dusting fields for Medfly  
shooting up over the highway  
after each row like a killer  
whale in a show      so low  
over the road its shadow  
could swallow us all.

Jeffrey Wilson

HARVEST

for N. Chatfield

A summer storm exploded overhead, wasting  
rain on the worn barn. As the sun elbowed  
its way between clouds the wood steamed  
in silence. While the relatives  
all went to church, grandfather  
sat in the shadow of an orange tree  
and taught me to howl like a coyote.  
The corn rows shuddered in unison,  
all tilting in response to an awkward breeze.  
They remained indifferent as I barked  
my way through the stalks. Night  
crept into the field, hoisting a blue ceiling.  
I was lost--and it would be some time  
before my name would be called from the end  
of the row. I made my way to the road  
that led to the stiff white house. I lied  
and said I was never lost but "out front, reading"  
and "No," I never heard them call. The next  
morning my grandfather helped milk  
the cows. The collie's yapping  
and the cow's bell woke me. The dark  
was full of dew as I snuck into the tired  
barn, surely the most holy place I had  
ever been in. This was the day we were to leave.  
I hid my clothes under the front seat  
of the Oldsmobile and took the empty suitcase  
into the field where I filled it with damp earth.



## CONTRIBUTORS

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