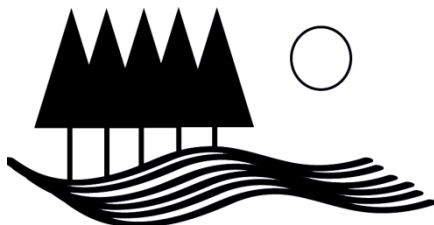


BLACK RIVER REVIEW

A Journal of Poetry, Prose, and Fine Arts



Jefferson Community College
State University of New York
Watertown, New York

Volume XXXIII
Spring 2023

EDITORS & JUDGES

Christine Pristash, *Editor in Chief*

Lucinda Barbour, *Art Editor*

Roy Romano, Aleksin Ortega, and Corey Pentoney, *Literary Judges*

Ashley Collins, Emma King, Descendre Sforza,

and Corey Starks, *Student Literary Editors*

Josh Dickinson and Jess Leigh, *Literary Editors/Proofreaders*

COVER ART

Jessiah Okai

Hidden Truth

(mixed media)

Opinions expressed by the authors and artists do not necessarily reflect those of the editors or of Jefferson Community College.

SUBMISSIONS

The editors seek original submissions for the *Black River Review* in the following categories:

Poetry: Up to 5 poems, not to exceed 50 lines each

Fiction: Up to 2 short stories, not to exceed 1500 words each

Non-Fiction: Up to 2 essays, not to exceed 1500 words each

Plays: Up to 2 one-act plays, not to exceed 1500 words each

Artwork: Up to 4 works in the original medium, such as black ink or charcoal drawing, computer graphics, b/w photographs, even if printed from color film

Music: Up to 2 compositions 16 or more measures in length

Only submissions from Jefferson Community College students (full or part time), faculty, staff, and alumni will be considered. Cash awards for outstanding work will be awarded.

Submitting and presenting work:

For *Black River Review* submissions, include name, address, phone number, and status (i.e., staff, faculty, student, alumni with grad class year) on each submitted work as well as a biographical note of thirty words or fewer when submitting. See <http://www.sunyjefferson.edu/brr> for more submission information. All submissions become the property of the *Black River Review*; submitted works will not be returned. However, after first publication, all rights revert back to authors.

Award recipients are encouraged to participate in the reading of works and presentation of awards during the *Black River Review* unveiling in Spring 2024.

Deadline for Volume XXXIV: February 16, 2024

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CREDITS

Typing and layout for this volume of the *Black River Review* is done using Microsoft Word. Typing by Christine Pristash and Jess Leigh; prize notification by Jess Leigh (Class of 2005). Digital imaging assistance by John Thomas. Original logo design by Dave Bowhall. Cover art digitizing by Keri Chubb (Class of 2010) and Gillian Maitland (Class of 1993). Website content production by Andrew Lackey and Jess Leigh. Printing by Speedway Press.

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Lucinda Barbour

Introduction: Creative Time and Space

Springtime brings a surge of creative energy and opportunity for growth, and it is the time to release a new edition of the *Black River Review*. The 2023 edition has themes with a great range of topics: the passage of time, forgotten items, inspiration found in nature, the importance of humor, and a surprising number of wonderful, winged things! Some of the subjects are as subtle as the rhythm of ripples on water; others are mysterious with twisting vines and cobwebs. Several delve into painful memories, and another playfully explores making new patterns with a bird's feathers. Art and literature can help us find our voice, strength, and resilience, as well as a positive way to shine a light and to move forward.

The *Black River Review* is always a result of collaboration. This edition exemplifies the teamwork of faculty, staff, contributors, and student literary editors who helped with the selection of written works. Since the magazine's inception, the cover has featured a current student artist. This year's cover-art called *Hidden Truth*, by Jessiah Okai, with its carefully observed lunar moth masking a young woman's face, implies that there are things yet to be discovered or known. Butterflies and moths can represent transformation or a flight of the imagination.

Jefferson Community College has a wealth of thoughtful people to be found in the students, faculty, staff, and alumni. The *Black River Review* is a creative outlet that allows us to celebrate and enjoy endeavors from this talented group. It is a true gift to have time to explore, practice, and create in a safe and supportive place. This is my 27th year as Art Editor for the magazine. In May, I will be stepping back from full-time teaching in order to have more time to make art, and I want to wish the college and this marvelous journal continued success.

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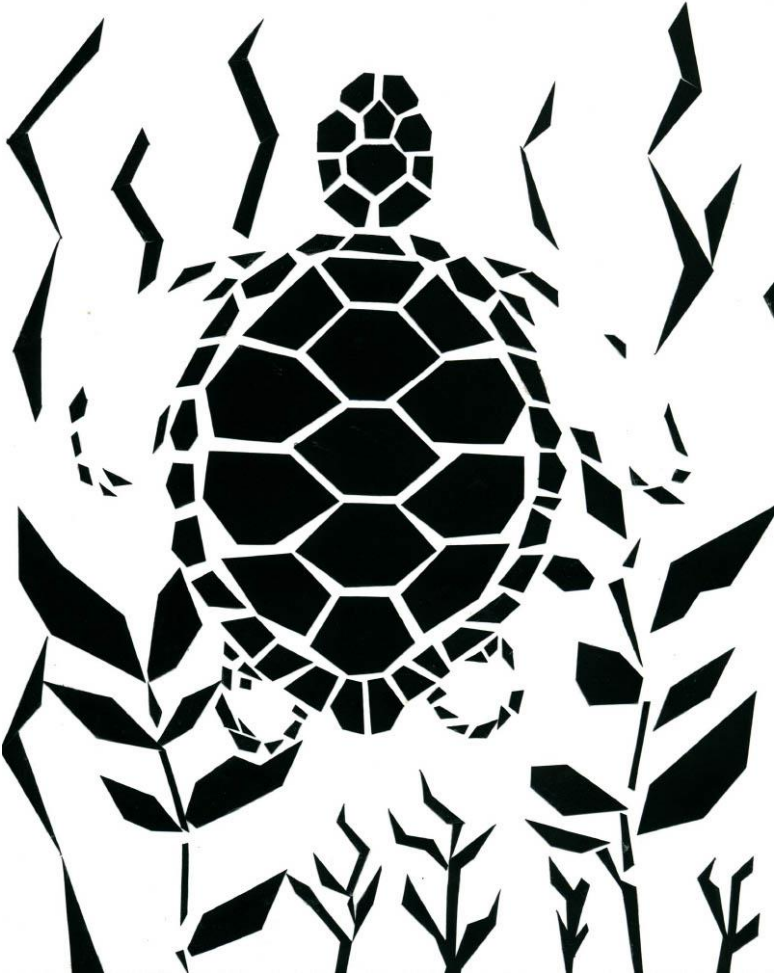
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Jessiah Okai
Outside My Shell



Zoe Turtura
These Days

for these days;
when waves crashing into my lungs make simple breaths,
unbearable.
where the alder tree loses its glow from summer –
to winter.
when my thighs begin to mold themselves into canvases,
and the urge to paint is immense.
i remember these words,
“find yourself within the stars.”

- what if I want to be with them?

Arsynio Robinson
Survival



Kerry Elliott
Red Maple Leaf

When I think of the leaves changing, the thought evokes a full array of emotions in me. For many years, I could not explain why. But recently, I've come to realize that Autumn is a season of change for all of us, especially me.

Year after year, autumn returns to remind me in its most beautiful way that my kids never listened to me when I pleaded for them to stop growing up so fast.

"Who told you that you could start 1st grade?" I would state with a false stern look.

"Momma!" my son would giggle, "Mr. Allgood said I was ready!" as he would try to match my stern look, mocking me by putting his hand on his hip, head slightly cocked, blue eyes squinted with delight.

"Well, I am your Momma and I say you can't go to first grade!" This time with a stomp of my foot added for flair. "I want you to stay my little baby boy forever." I would grab his little body, hugging and kissing him while he squealed that he just wanted to grow up. And I just wanted time to come to a full stop and let me live in those moments forever.

And so, this happened every year. As the years passed, he went from the adorable impish boy who allowed me to hug and kiss him into fits of giggles to a bright young man barreling through the seasons with no regard for me and my feelings. How was I to just

accept that years after year, from one autumn to the next autumn that my baby boy grew into a man?

Like the job of raking leaves, parenting can be tedious and seemingly never-ending. Just when you think you have all the leaves tidied up from your yard, a cold gust of northerly wind brings another bag or two of leaves to decorate your landscape. Being parents and partners during our children's school years, so much of life was simply a blur. We fought the daily battle getting them up, ready and to school on time. The drudgery of lunches, homework, and after school events seemed never ending. Today, I long for those autumn days filled with my children, chaos and blowing leaves.

"She will be a four-hour drive away from us," I quietly cried as we pulled out of the dorm parking lot at SUNY Plattsburgh.

"I know but we can talk to her every day, and you know, we can get to her if we need to," her father answered back with just as much emotion simmering below his false pretense of calm.

"Turn around and go get her," I croak out, deciding that is the only course of action that was going to stop the pain.

"You know we can't do that," he whispered while he grasped my hand.

The rest of the four-hour drive home was made in silence. Our van, once full of clothes, books, pillows, and school supplies, overflowing with her, now makes the trip home, empty. I glance at her vacant seat and wonder who told her she could grow up? Not me. I want the shy elementary girl to remain forever. At this point, I would gladly take the confident high schooler she had blossomed into. Our shy girl had become a young adult right before our eyes

without us realizing it. I was not ready to accept leaving her at college, four hours away. As we drove home, I noticed the flashes of colors in the trees. Again, autumn is back, mocking me with its beauty.

It is only the two of us in our house that once was filled with children's voices, piles of laundry and laughter. I am left wondering where all the years of my life have gone. I realize I am firmly in the autumn of my life. Some days, I feel like spring's budding leaves, full of young life and the promise of new beginnings. But those days are becoming less and less. Most days, I feel like a newly fallen red maple leaf; not yet dry and brittle but still vibrant and able to serve a purpose.

Recently I discovered that raking leaves in autumn is destructive to the ecosystem. Insects and small animals rely on the leaves for food and protection. Fallen leaves support our yards and forest by acting like a natural fertilizer, weed suppresser and a preserver of soil moisture that in turn helps keep our lands healthy.

Is that my purpose now? I am no longer part of the daily grind of my children's lives. I have done my job as their mother. They are now the young Spring buds stretching out to the sunshine and taking in all that their lives have to offer. Can I be that blanket of leaves that nourishes them quietly from below? I am ready to provide them with shelter and extra support when life gets to be too much. I can provide protection by slipping them extra money when needed and make their favorite meals when they are in town. I can act like a weed suppresser when family drama creeps into their lives. I am ready and able to take on the extended family that often

questions their life choices. I gently remind them that there is a good reason we have taken root thousands of miles away. And I will act like a preserver of all that is good in their lives. I am the keeper of memories, no matter how painful it is to have just memories left where my beautiful children once stood.

The leaves have begun their annual show of beauty. I am embracing being in the autumnal season of my life. I will take this season of change to find myself. To find the young woman that fell in love with the young man who has walked through life with her. To find the young person who left her desires and dreams on the shelf so everyone else could succeed with their dreams. I will find her and show her the beauty of Autumn. I will hold her hand and bring her back to life. But not back to long ago, but to the present day. Present day with the fallen leaves swirling all around. To help her find those shelved dreams. To finally understand that life will happen at the pace it chooses and to fully appreciate it when fortune visits. To enjoy books, coffee, and dear friends made through the years. To travel to the four corners of the earth to watch the seasons change.

Corey Pentoney
Stickworks, Tupper Lake Wild Center



Ashley DeMar
fruit

I am every summer
which has ever fed me.

Storing strawberries in my cheeks,
barefoot running across full moon grass.
Tossing open doors, tossing elbows to the sky,
all knees and thighs and shortcake surprise.

Tumbling down hillsides
lips swollen and hips wide
cradling each and every unknown
as close as though it were already mine.

That hot sweat stick
that can only be stood
in the thick of it.

Skin swallowed by cool, dark water
rubbed raw by rope swing and slick stone scratched –
never feeling more alive than this moment.

Except for the last.
And the past.
And the one to come.

So come.
Take my hand and follow me down.
Let me sweet slip that honey'd crown
atop your golden head.

And make sure that you are fed.
By all that I have carried here,
each and every strawberry,
year after year.

Kylie Thomas
Connected As One



Ashley Seybolt

Pheromones

It wasn't supposed to start like this
We laid out a plan
To untangle roots so deeply planted
To plant seeds and start new again

It wasn't supposed to start like this
We promised each other to wait
To hold off demonstrating affection
To not cross that line until our first date

It wasn't supposed to start like this
But weeding our gardens grew too messy
Stealing moments became our normal
And taking steps back became too stressful

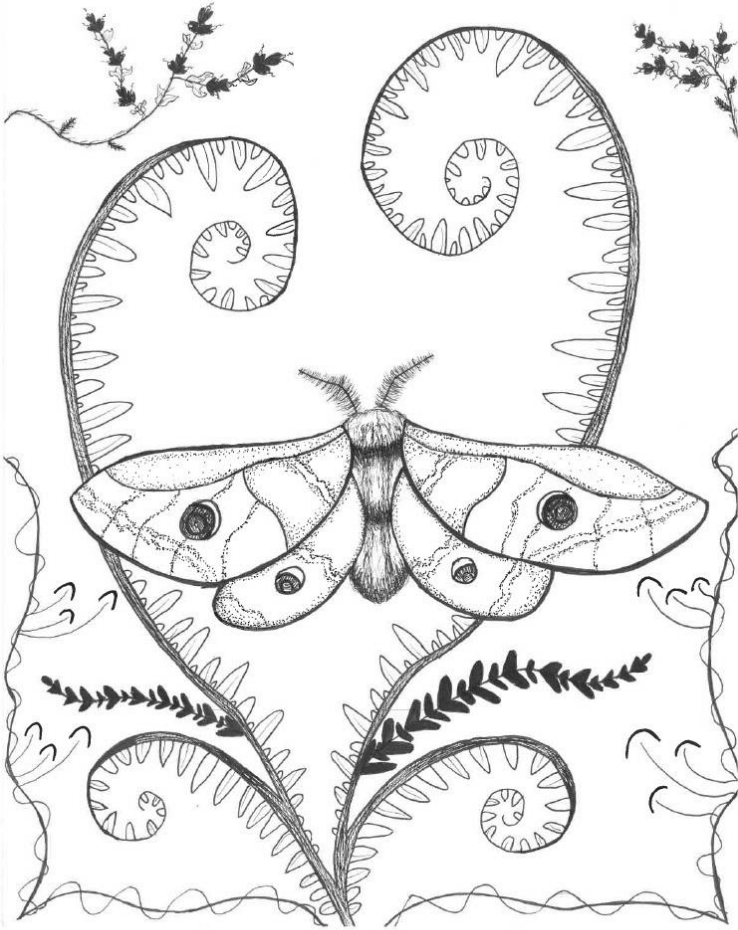
It wasn't supposed to start like this
That day in your kitchen, it just happened
You stole a kiss off my sultry lips
Me dumbfounded, craving for seconds and

It wasn't supposed to start like this
But that poisonous kiss drew me in
Begging for another taste as I smelled
Sweet pheromones across your supple skin

It wasn't supposed to start like this
Your scent became so alluring
You swore we didn't mess this up
That it would be okay, sounding so assuring

It wasn't supposed to start like this
But your spell has made my world so lively
You watered this, allowed our love to bloom
Luring me in like Poison Ivy

Rae Knapp
Emperor Moth (*Saturnia pavonia*)



Margot Jacoby
Mouse in the House

“Something smells dead, like a mouse,” I informed Doug, my husband. I opened the closet door in our master bedroom and smelled the odor more intensely. “Phew, it’s coming from in here,” I detected, pointing to my side of the closet.

“I can’t smell anything,” was his response.

“You will.”

And he did.

“We need to pull everything from the floor of the closet,” was his suggestion.

So we did: loose shoes, boxed shoes, totes, and at the end of my side of the closet were things of Martha’s I was saving to go through. There was a box of some of her treasures, labeled “SAVE” and her big stand-up jewelry box. I was hoping my youngest daughter or sister could go through them with me, but now was the time to do it, after we figured out the source of the stench.

“Okay, Margot,” I told myself, “try to make this fun!” Martha is my eldest child and daughter who passed away twelve years ago after a four-month horrendous ordeal with Stage 4 renal cancer. Life since then hasn’t been the same.

Doug went through his things and discovered that a mouse, or mice, left seeds in his fleece slippers. The mouse also helped itself to some of the fleece. Doug tossed the slippers into the trash and put the rest of his things back into his side of the closet.

While he did that I pulled a sheet out of the linen closet and placed it over the bedspread of our guest bed, where our girls used to sleep in the same room. I placed Martha's saved box that further read "MPP~ save for 2012" on the bed and put her jewelry box on the dresser next to the bed. That was all I could do for one day. It is now January 3, 2022.

The next day I dared to open the jewelry box: the top opens like a grand piano. Out flew grey, yellow, and white feathers from Martha's beloved cockatiel, Sunshine. Sunshine was a present from me on her thirteenth birthday. She was ready for a serious pet and she was a bird lover. She picked out this particular bird, and the bird picked her. She took very good care of it throughout the years. The bird loved Martha and she liked to roost on her head when Martha let her out of her cage. I laughed out loud as I became engulfed in its feathers. That was enough for the second day.

For the following days I allowed myself to go through more jewelry without it becoming a tedious chore, or too sad. Most of the pieces either made me smile or chuckle. I recalled giving her several pieces, and knew which ones came from my mother and other family members. Some date back to when she first started wearing jewelry, at the age of seven. Martha loved being a Brownie and later, a Girl Scout, and she considered earned badges and star pins, treasures. When she was eleven, she was allowed to get her ears pierced and she collected little creature posts, like ladybugs, frogs, and the like. Very elemental. Some of the jewelry was costume jewelry from Gran, my Mom, which she loved to wear while playing "dress-up." It took

a while to find matches to earrings, and after careful inspection I found most of the mates.

Then I sorted the jewelry accordingly: pins, charms, bracelets, rings, earrings, and a watch. Lastly, the miscellaneous things, like Girl Scout badges and pins. She held onto everything since she was quite young. Each and every piece has its own special story. Very sweet Martha. Thank you for the memories. Again.

This continued for about a week. After things were sorted out, I methodically place things back, thinking of sharing most of the jewelry with Maggie and my four granddaughters. They would enjoy the earrings when they are old enough to have pierced ears and learn to take good care of jewelry and such. I knew Matt and Perla would appreciate a few pieces that I would give them when I see them again. I know better than to mail anything since it could get lost. I saved some things for myself, to help me smile like so many of her belongings that I have kept do.

By the time I completed going through the contents of the box of treasures and jewelry box, the smell of the dead mouse dissipated. I did not put them back in my closet, but left them out to share with others. Within six months I had given a few things to my son and his family, and soon after that to my youngest daughter when she and her family visited us. Maggie was really happy to see some things she had given her sister, and a couple of pieces Martha apparently borrowed from Maggie. We had a good laugh over that. Thank you, Martha, and mouse.

Pamela Dixon
A Rare Breed



Laurinda Lind

For the Birds in Ogdensburg, NY

A young great-uncle amazed into marriage
Lost his laugh before I was born but
Fed birds with crumbs every day at five,
Recovering from the shock of his capture on
Evenings when he stared out from his kitchen,
Deaf to all that disappointing noise.

Let's be Alfred at twenty,
Educated while the family could
Spend their money on him, though the
Priest had said four grades were good
Enough for girls to get their parents a ten-year
Return before they married them off to
Anyone who wanted a wife.
Not that the boys fared better. Of eleven
Children, only two stayed with their spouses.
Evenings with the pigeons seemed so much safer.

Paige Soules
Escape



Hannah Cooley
Loon on Lake



Dalton Hall
Bitter and Laughing

Each day I see a man broken down, limping away,
toiling at this unforgiving work.
Still soldering, climbing, crawling, shouldering copper lines made for
young men like myself to break ourselves on.
But he's not young anymore - forty-four going on seventy -
one good leg left, looking a long life of abuse in the face.
Each day we laugh, with our calloused hands and our
unkempt faces soot-stained and weary.
It's all there is to do when you are broken: laugh at this bitter world.

Each day I arrive home to a chorus of young voices yelling.
They yearn for an absent father to see all they've accomplished
in a day that's an impossibly large fraction of their lives until now.
It's all the small scraps of paper bent and torn and shredded,
colored and glued and strewn about; abused.
It's what they call art. Beauty.
It's everything they can think of in the small world they live in.

They fall from the dining room chairs,
bruises well up in the painful seconds
that their shrieks pierce the house.

Those echoing needles make a man shudder and
whimper, sending his well-kept marbles flying.
Though he is broken and bruised himself.
Really, it's nothing - what befalls these kids. They do it to themselves.
But it kills in the moment, it puts crocodile tears in curious eyes.
What's a man like me to do with it?
Skin scarred and burnt over, sliced open,
peeled back, squeezed dry day by day.
Confronted with the fragility of a child;

juxtaposed by the cruelly twisted, still-struggling body of my
colleague
pressing on as if misfortune had never known his name?
How does a father manage to bridge the gulf
between home and career?
With drink? With walls built up?
With trust torn down, abuse reciprocated?
How do we stop ourselves from becoming those men?
By laughing at this cold and bitter world?

Margot Jacoby
Let Me Breathe for You

“Your breathing has become raspy,”
were words I did not want to think, hear, say,
ever, my daughter.
You were worried, I was beyond worried.

My breathing became your breathing
for nine months and four days.
You breathed on your own
for thirty-one years, three weeks, and four days.

During your last month I tried to breathe
for you, next to you, we were in sync.
At first we had a natural rhythm until your
breaths become shorter, shallower.

As we lie in your bed, your back to me so you
can look out the window, I watch your back
heave up and down, as you breathe.
I listen to your hoarse rasp.

Please don't stop. Let me take this from
you. The pain. The immense effort. The shadows
lengthening, darkening. Let me breathe for you, again.
Let me breathe for you.

Madison Truesdell
Rainwater Revival



Ed DeMattia

Listening

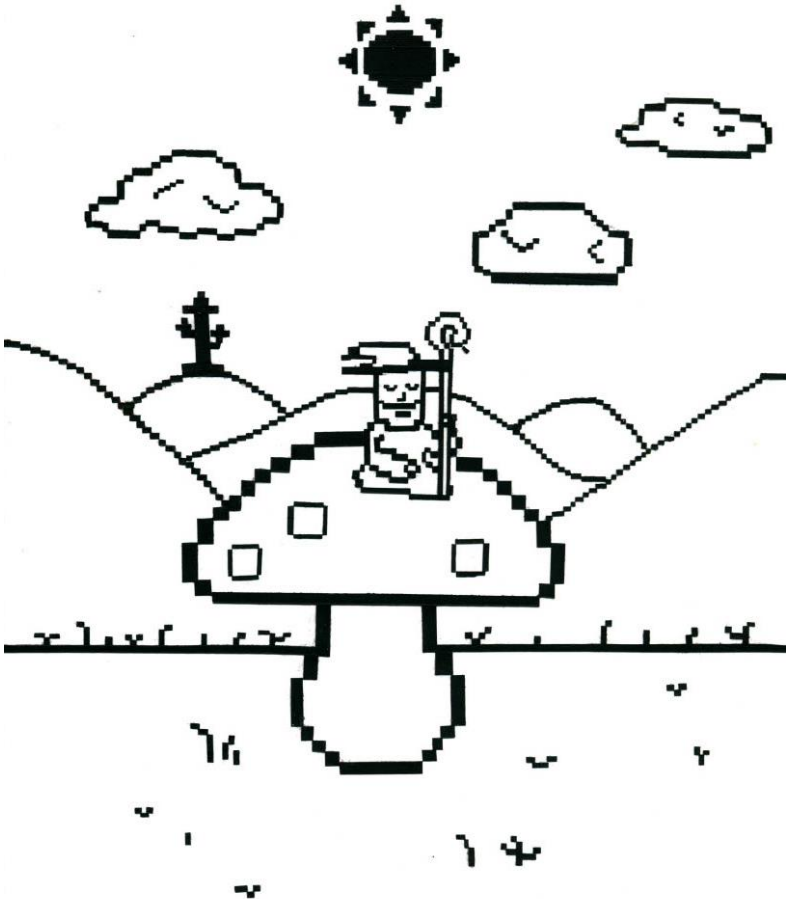
'Neath the ancient pine he sits
waiting, watching, ears open
to a rustle in the leaves
the snap of a twig.
He once knew all the words in
the landscape lexicon, enough
at any rate to understand what
he saw and to describe it at another time.
Lately his feebling mind balks at the naming
the classifying: he desires only to observe
without language, lest the label
become the object of his perception.

The woodland denizens know him
he needn't address them any longer
no *Odocoileus virginianus*, or *Quercus rubrum*
need prevent him from seeing the thing itself.
He apprehends the label as obfuscating
the real entity before him,
like peering at nametags at old reunions.
Familiarity suits him now.
He protects himself from forgetfulness
avoids the annoyance of having to recover
what he had failed to recall,
the minor frustration of trying to rebuild
the memory bank.
He desires pure enjoyment now
of seeing without separating specimens
by their artifices.

How do trees or birds address each other?
Do they have the labels we have?
Trees talk through chemicals, via fungi, roots,
filaments he knows.
The birds are beautiful mysteries to him.

He hopes now he will be found
here on his folding stool
his back to this or another woody stem,
walnut perhaps, or in the alvar grasslands of
the North Country, admiring the limestone
clints and grykes that fascinate him,
where prairie smoke dwells,
where the upland plover nests in the grassiness,
that ethereally elegant avian with doe eyes.
Or maybe where he finds
the rare ram's-head lady slipper
or the cluster of yellow orchids he lusts after.

Joshua Rowe
Right Where I Need to Be



Elena Dickinson

Wordplay

Two escaped Boston's bustle exchanging
raincoat swishes.

Silence rung for the closing door.

Of comings & goings only the
wind was concerned.

permitted to skim just a phrase
or two

with each unannounced entrance.

In our own gust, we too missed
the poetry section.

We two.

All others were searching for
nothing in particular
with the unspoken plea for solidarity
in common

A commonwealth.

i chose a book of this blue.

Stafford.

"Yeah, he's good," dad said.

\$8 is cheap for paternal validation

& no tax on Someday Maybe

for the two of us: my dad and me

Arsynio Robinson
Be Not Afraid



Joshua Dickinson
Leaves of Grass Redux

A real look under your boot soles moment
First grass cutting of the campus semester
Smell of life in death, summer's fall.

Walking the campus past still symbol clock you stopped me again,
grandfather,
Another grass lane you turned, backed, returned
Consummate mower
Scything blades from underneath the soil
These two days since we planted the reminders of you
Trees at the courthouse, hope in shade.

An onioning of tears suggested to me
And I slow slow stop
Stumble forward so as not to appear mental.
But that's what I am.
Not crazy like that time biking past some bearded old
Man mowing, thinking it was you I crashed in a ditch
Arrested by an image of something worth the reincarnating,
some doppelgänger you,
But warped enough to consider stricken.

Practical as your generation was, I'm left thinking of you in terms of
Cut price per acre and
Memory accounting per month
Till claws in the blood
Release
Unpinioned, breath returns,
Tears prised.
And, one-fourth you, this dim offshoot self walks onward.

Kenyon Wells

Thoughts and Prayers and Guns

After the muzzle flashes
like rapid mini red lightning bolts
stop burning the innocent air;
after the shell casings stop bouncing
like brass tacks tossed across the floor,
innocent bodies lie bloody and still and dead;
innocent bodies lie bloody and writhing and screaming.
After yet again the monster is neutralized
by SWAT or by its own hand,
other innocent bodies come out from hiding,
timidly at first and staggering,
like the toddlers they once were,
hands clasped to faces white as sheets,
mouths open, voices mute,
others shouting, sobbing and keening.
After this, some stop suddenly to kneel
not in prayer but to touch or hug
or look briefly into the tortured eyes
of a friend or stranger or a brother or a sister.
And after this they rush here and there to escape
the horror of death that they will never unsee,
fleeing to the out of doors
where the idea of safety awaits
until another day when it doesn't.
After all this, across this land of freedom,
the right to bear arms,
will remain sacrosanct.
Sense and responsibility,
will remain without enumeration.
After all this and yet again,
we will be left with...
thoughts and prayers and guns.

Madison Truesdell
Life of the Great Sphinx



Zoe Turtura
Salt & Sugar

and somewhere in the mix
between the lines
of lies and honesty
i became numb;
numbed to the broken promises and forced feelings,
numbed to waiting.
you have changed me.
i am unrecognizable,
saddened by the world,
i've become silent
when all i ever asked for,
was love.

Joshua Dickinson
Poem for Mackenzie

How can we ask for a thirteen-year-old girl not to have felt
something
Knowing they are alive to so much more than
The old, the unseeing?

Just a glance at her photo on the funeral home's site, amongst those
aged, expectant faces, tells this. She had those kind eyes that, as the
obituary notes, go with the fact that "She loved little ones, especially
babies."

Yet that is what I ask—that pain was cut short,
The appalling lurch you found yourself taken by
Would end—not end you.

There was no bargain, as if life was intent on reminding us
"No guarantees."
How we should have remembered to warn everyone
Of every action, consequence,
Negative possibility.

Nobody could function that way
Much less on a farm. There is work.
It is done. Wordlessly.
Slips and half-chances at disaster are common.
Usually avoided and forgotten.

Yet I know you did suffer, and this wrenches me,
Pains me in ways I'm still discovering,
Me with my twins your age,
My son your older brother's age
Classmates all.

If it is worth noting, I can say that I will take nothing for granted
And do it—not just meant to. . .

That you have made us more, a reminder to live one's days, not a
lessening.

Though we are diminished without a spark such as yours around,
Lesser because someone like you could be harmed.

We must be intentional, catch glimpses of light thrown out even by
shadowcasting.

So I hope you did not suffer long, and that your days were as
beautiful as

Our imagination needs them to be. Life can last in other ways.

Not bargaining for the first body, we can keep you here in our
attempts,

Keeping that second self going out into the world, coming back in
what is noticed.

Insignificant enough compared to what you were,

But still signifying, trying out your wings upon the world.

<https://usobit.com/obituaries-2019/05/mackenzie-lynn-abbott-november-9-2005-may-19-2019-age-13/>

Erin McCarthy Greene
Otter Creek Snowfall



Michael L. Keck

The Mountains of Thompson Park

Author's Note: Thompson Park is located in the city of Watertown, New York. It sits at an elevation of 755 feet, with two summits. The park was developed in or around 1916, from a design by Frederick Law Olmsted, the same firm that designed Central Park in New York City.

It got so that Loretta used him as her guide for going to school. She would be dressed, have her breakfast, and watch out of the living room window as he parked his car on one of the Park Circle streets and began walking uphill. He was there on most days. On most mornings. He was like the sun to her. When he was there, it meant that the day was going to be alright, already, and that she could go about hers. Her mother watched her.

“Loretta, it is time to be going.”

“I know mom. I just wanted to know if he would be here today. There is something about him. It is like a mystery.”

“Would you like to talk to him?”

“Do you think I could? You wouldn't be mad would you?”

“Let me see what I can do.”

When she saw him, she smiled and sang and began to fasten the straps to the long brace that held her shriveled up leg. Standing, it creaked to life. She believed that it had a life of its own. That one day, it would decide to walk off by itself. She would watch it leave. Wave goodbye and then skip off to school on her own. She had never learned how to skip. It looked like fun. It was simple. The other girls did it at recess. Her mother told her that she had done it when she was young but since then, did not feel like it anymore.

Loretta had wondered about that. How can a person leave alone a thing that they enjoy, as if never looking back on it ever again?

Her mom looked out the window at an old man. He was not even halfway up the first hill and stopping to take off a hoodie. He wrapped it around his waist, took a sip from the water bottle that he carried and moved on. The footing appeared good this morning. Instead of leaning into the cane, he carried it in his other hand, checked the sky and moved on.

She looked at her daughter, at the dishes, at the notes on the refrigerator door, at the cars moving past her house on their way to work, thinking, 'he had nothing to do today but walk in the park' He has a good car. Almost new. He wears good clothes but he is always alone.

She found him sitting on a bench almost to the top of the hill, on a curve in the road. There was an entrance to the zoo nearby but it was gated and locked from traffic, cars or people. He was watching out over the horizon towards the east. The morning wind blew straight into his face. It was red. He had almost no hair but a beard. A white beard. As she walked up the hill, it came to her that she might startle him. She paused. It became long enough for him to notice her there on a sidewalk, that even in winter, the city crews had cleared of snow. He had turned towards her, holding her with blue eyes.

"My daughter wants to talk to you. I want to know that it will be okay. That you're not some weirdo."

He laughed. "I can be weird but I am harmless. How old is your daughter?"

“Ten. She watches you each day. It has become like a ritual for her as she gets ready to walk to school. You almost always make her sing.”

“I know ten. I used to be a teacher. That is a good age. For a teacher, the kids are just learning what a smirk means. They have all of the necessary imagination to make a story come to life. They can still be kidded with but will not become upset or see it as being picked on. They are still kind. My name is Michael. Tell your daughter that I am ‘Mr. Mike.’ If you like, I can write down my address, phone number, and give you the name of my nephew who watches out for me. He is a cop here in Watertown.”

“No, that won’t be necessary. I have all that I need. Have a nice day now.”

“What is your daughter’s name?”

“Loretta.”

“Get back.”

“I know, right? She doesn’t get it.”

“You tell Miss Loretta that I will be here Saturday morning, starting my climb at ten.”

The sunlight still had a few leaves of fall to peer down through as he climbed. Near the first top, he would sit on the bench, near where the park people had planted new trees, fenced in to keep the deer from eating off the tiny branches. He took a sip, wiped his forehead and watched his breath moving out into the cold. Just a tiny cloud, he thought. But one more breath. One more was good enough. Before moving on, he put his hoody back on. The wind would be next to greet him. He turned, it was away from the

morning sun, towards the next rise. From the west, the wind struck him full into the face but he smiled. He always smiled. He bent into it and walked west across the flats, feeling how it etched his face, how it made his eyes tear up, how it pushed back at him. Where was he today? Mt. Guyot in Maine where the first blizzard found him? Or on Mt. Rogers in southwest Virginia, where he was lost in another for four days? As he walked, he decided which one, living there again.

He had been younger. Stronger. It seemed like such a simple task. He left in September, moving south from Maine, along the Appalachian Trail, hiking solo. That is where his memories began now. These creep forward in our lives as we live trying to find them. They seem to drift along in places where we found the largest parts of our lives.

He told his mother that it was just a hike, like others that he had been on, but when it was over and she saw how much weight he had lost, as he hobbled into her house on two broke feet, she cried. “This was not what you told me about.”

He would put his hoody back on, dig his hands into the pockets, watching sky. He liked how the storms grew out of the horizon, where the great lake lived. He pretended that they were coming for him. He wanted to be ready. So he sat, even if it meant that he shivered. That was where the little girl found him. She sat on her end of the bench.

“Mr. Mike?”

If you have ever been a teacher, the sound of a child’s voice sings inside your head forever. It has an innocence to it. Perhaps it is

the wonder that is attached to it. There is a promise of hope. As he turned towards her, he was already smiling.

“Yes Loretta!”

“How do you know my name?”

“Your mom told me to expect you. Should you be talking to a stranger?”

“I know, right? It is one of the rules. I couldn’t go out the door alone until I knew these. Want to hear what they are?”

“Sure.” That is when she saw it. A smirk. He was holding back.

“No talking to strangers. Do not take anything from them. Never get in their car. Don’t leave with them. If they smell funny or smoke or grab, leave yelling. Use my whistle. My mother made me repeat these until I could say these on my own. She told me that I couldn’t go off on my own until I could say these out loud.”

“But don’t you think that I am a stranger?”

“No. My mom says that there is a difference between being strange and a stranger. We know you. You are Mr. Mike. But why do you come to the park as often as you do?”

“I am looking for someone. I am looking for what is left of me. I come here to hike up these hills to help me think back on my life, wondering what it has all been about. Wondering if I did the right sorts of things in it.”

“Well, did you?”

“No, not always. Do you hear that?”

“Yes, but I don’t know what it is.”

“Those are the wolves in the zoo calling out to others of their kind. It is an ancient sound. It is the sound of wilderness. When I

hear them and find the wind in my face, it takes me back to my times in other wilderness locations, when I was younger. This is what the old people do. We go back on ourselves to relive who we were, making as good a use of our memories as we can find.”

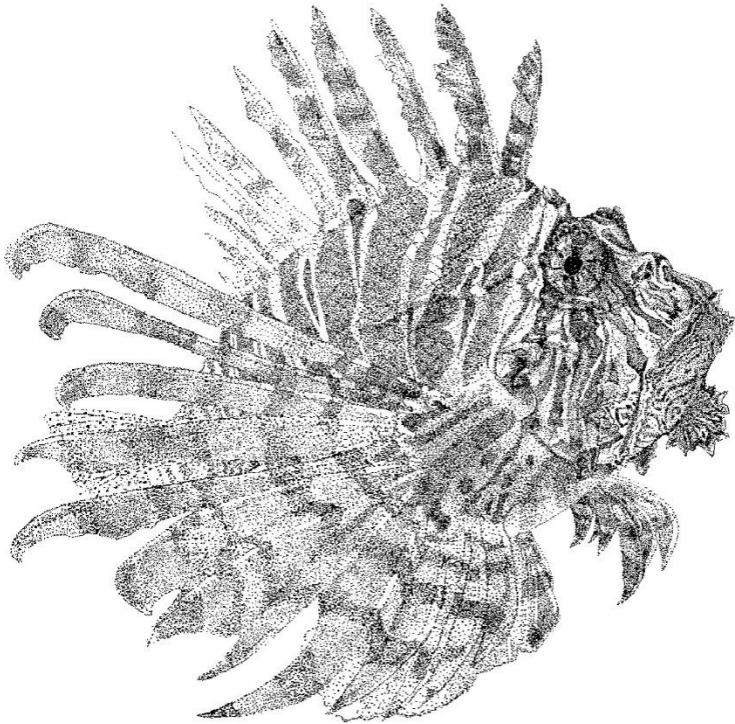
“Why?”

“We seem to believe that it is all that we can do. As we get older, we have to give up those things, like climbing mountains, because our bodies can no longer go on. We become tired. Like the wolves, we lose others of our kind and must go on without them. But then, one day, a child comes along and begins speaking to us, like you have. That takes me back also, when I used to be a teacher. Now I’m cold. I have to get moving. How about if I go first down the hill? You can walk a ways behind me to practice being alone. I will wait for you at the bottom to make certain that you cross the street and get back inside your home.”

“Alright but why do I have to practice being alone?”

“Because one day, you will be and there will be no other choice left for you.”

Hannah Cooley
Spotted Lion



Rachel Filkins
November Glory

As November fades,
the storm newly breaks,
a new calm for the North.
All white, all cold,
nature withers beneath
its blanket.

It's winter's show for the months ahead.
For us, it's time to shelter, to remember
with fondness, to pass time
while we all wait, silent,
for summer anew.

Skies open, the flakes
all fall, a silence that carries,
pushing animals to hide away,
to flee with final cries.
It's now come.

Alas, our November gold is gone.

Joshua Rowe
Snailsman the Salesman



Contributor's Notes

Hannah Cooley plans to go on for her Bachelor of Fine Arts before pursuing her master's degree in Medical Illustration. She has an amazing attention for detail and a great deal of patience – especially for refining her drawings.

Ashley DeMar is a writer, actor, recording artist and arts educator originally from Watertown, NY. Most recently, her poem “Love Letter” – ode to the North Country – was featured as a part of the Adirondack Center for Writing’s PoemVillage2022 installation in Saranac Lake, NY. She has also been published in several anthologies, including *Breath of Love*, and in the fall of 2021, her work was chosen to be part of the U.S. debut of the Of Earth and Sky outdoor exhibition and its corresponding poetry anthology.

Ed DeMattia (Class of 2014) is a JCC alumnus who has enjoyed writing in the North Country since his graduation.

Elena Dickinson is a junior at Beaver River Central and an EDGE student. She enjoys reading the work of L. M. Montgomery and hopes to pursue a career in medicine.

Josh Dickinson is an Associate Professor of English at Jefferson. He participates in the National Novel Writing Month contest each November.

Pamela Dixon holds an associate degree and a bachelor’s degree from Franklin University. A JCC employee, this fall, she will reach her 17-year milestone as a member of the Marketing and Communications Office. She enjoys gardening, photography, hiking, reading, and JCC fitness challenges.

Kerry Elliott is a Humanities and Social Science major at JCC, graduating spring 2023. After graduation, she will continue to travel

the world and attend concerts with spouse, spend time with their two kids, friends, family and simply enjoy the journey.

Rachel Filkins (Class of 2019) enjoys writing and photography.

Erin McCarthy Greene (Class of 1974) is an editor at the Thousand Islands Sun newspaper, Alexandria Bay, and she frequently submits her photos for publication.

Dalton Hall (Class of 2014) graduated from SUNY Potsdam in 2016 and did post-grad work at the University of Rochester. He now lives in his hometown of Brownville and is finishing up an apprenticeship in the pipe trades.

Margot C. Jacoby lives in Barnes Corners with her husband, Doug. She is currently writing a collection of stories and poems. She enjoys spending time with her children and grandchildren.

Michael L. Keck returned home in 1980, after teaching in Virginia, and has been writing about it ever since. By writing about the North Country, and those who call it home, he hopes to make others see the value of this place. He hopes to honor his neighbors, thanking them for making him who he is becoming.

Rae Knapp was born and raised in Clayton, NY. They have had a love for art since box televisions were popular and big boxes of crayons didn't cost more than \$10. They are currently enrolled in JCC as an Individual Studies major and strive to be an art teacher to inspire our youth.

Laurinda Lind is the birth-certificate name of Laurie Petersen, who taught English composition classes at JCC for eight years. About five hundred of her poems are out there somewhere.

Jessiah Okai plans to pursue a career in either illustration or graphic design. She intends to transfer to a four-year SUNY school to complete her BFA.

Corey Pentoney is a tutor, teacher, counselor, advisor, and all-around doer at Jefferson. His poems and stories appear at random in the world, but rarely are his photographs spotted. He lives here in Watertown with his wife Hannah and his two tortoiseshell cats, Quinn and Luna.

Arsynio Robinson is currently looking to be a tattoo artist and is currently an apprentice. He/they are curious about what will happen next in life and are going with the flow.

Joshua Rowe is majoring in creative writing and art. After JCC, he intends to pursue classes in game design. His goal is to one day open his own independent game studio. He enjoys nature, music, science fiction, and horror. He's kinda funny, but not like "HA-HA" funny.

Ashley Seybolt (Class of 2016) graduated from the Computer Information Technology, A.A.S. program and is a storyteller by trade. Whether it's news, a poem, film, or short story, Ashley's time at JCC has allowed her the ability to troubleshoot, brainstorm and develop her ideas over technological and creative media.

Paige Soules is in her second year at JCC. Afterwards, she wants to attend SUNY Polytechnic to get a degree in animation. She enjoys drawing, baking, and watching (or rewatching) anime and other animated movies.

Kylie Thomas is an aspiring tattoo artist and intends to continue her education at a four-year college with an exceptional art program in the near future. She is taking all the art classes she can to improve her skills.

Madison Truesdell is currently attending JCC with plans to transfer to SUNY Polytechnic Institute to specialize in art and Interactive Media Design. Prior to her first semester here, during which her entries were completed, she was entirely self-taught and had never received any formal art training, not even a secondary-level art class. Aside from art, she loves theater and acting, partaking in local theater productions and high school drama clubs. Madison also enjoys walks on the beach, funny films, and poking dead things with a stick (satirically of course).

Zoe Turtura is currently enrolled in Jefferson Community College with an aspiring degree in English Teaching. Writing has been her passion for over five years. She continues to search for any writing opportunities annually and always anticipates creating the best piece she can pull out of herself. She wants to personally thank her professors from Jefferson Community College and outsiders for taking the time to read; the rotten fruits, the change in the leaves, the sunshine, and the colors she is made of.

Kenyon Wells retired from the Melvil Dewey Library and the North Country to live in the Sunny Southland and seek his fortune.

Elena Dickinson
Luna Moth

