

CATCHING FIRE



**Southern Arizona Senior Pride
Poetry Anthology
March 2021**

SOUTHERN ARIZONA SENIOR PRIDE

Celebrating, Supporting, and Uniting LGBTQI+ Older Adults

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JEANNE BJORN

Pre-covid: Clothing/costume design, milliner, shoe maker and instructor. Nutritionist and author.

Post-covid: Remote animal communicator and animal wellness.

Jeanne's book *Attuned—Reclaiming Our Emotional Intelligence* is available at Amazon.com.

Afternoon Delight

She drives too fast.

I don't care

I hug her leather jacket tighter.

We soar over hills and curves
to meet the fog.

Eyes closed.

Air full of ocean and eucalyptus

Breathing in

Breathing out

Feminism

They say what you see is what you get

They say your insides need to match your outsides

but they don't know I grew up on a farm.

They don't know there was no vegetarian or vegan — only supper.

They don't know I defeathered chickens at age 4

or learned how to shoot a gun at 8.

They don't know my Hillbilly Shame.

And I know — we didn't Call it feminism

but, how else would a single mom and 3 young girls

survive that country life?

Imprints

I found a dress in my mother's closet.

I touch it
a piece of lace
tattered and torn
falls to the floor.

Iridescent pearls of mango, gold and hyacinth falling
sparkling as they fall
like the sun's reflection over the ocean
before it's swallowed up.

The fabric between my fingers is soft
like an old handkerchief that's been washed and ironed into submission.
Only a whisper of peach left.

The lace pattern is misshapen
drawing into itself
as a woman grows shorter with age.

The dress seems to fall on the hanger
let down
that the body it was accustomed to covering
has abandoned it
long ago

Responds to Love and Kindness

I am unrecognizable now
I was a paradise

fragile and numb
my receptivity — gone

beautifully exploited
nurture starved

my dreams — crushed
longing for life

war wounded and traumatized
Do you still believe in me?

I am deep brown brokenhearted earth.
I am your Mother

JOYCE BOLINGER

Joyce Bolinger still mourns the demise of Tucson's Wingspan, the LGBTQ Community Center, where she was a longtime volunteer and board member. But she is proud to volunteer with Senior Pride. In Chicago, she managed arts and media programs.

John

"You are so fat," he said to the Mexican woman who had been so kind to him. She laughed. I said, "You have a lot of patience." She laughed. I thought, "Why would he say that?"

The nursing home called to say he was lost—how could he escape in a wheelchair? He was found in a closet. "Just wanted to be quiet," he said.

You didn't see him when he mapped the contours of the earth miles below the surface. When I cleared out his desk, there were pens of many colors he used to trace underground faults and craters.

His father was a country doctor in the Ozark Mountains. He grew up riding in the horse and buggy with his Dad to call on patients, many of whom paid with squirrel meat or garden vegetables.

When he went to college, it was the Depression. Sure, he could have continued to study his love of mathematics, but his parents needed help.

My Dad found the most out-of-the way diners, like the shack on a remote beach where we ate stuffed flounder served on a metal beer platter. He drove for miles to find huckleberry pie.

But ask him what he most liked or hated or thought or was angry about and he gazed at you in silence. His loyalty to his wife, family, work, and friends was like steel. But he hid what he gave. He taught it was wrong to take credit.

There was always a rock in his pocket. He taught his daughters to love the earth and its stories.

He spent his life mapping what lay below the surface.
And who he was was quiet and hidden from view.

2020

Outside our patio wall
Cracks, Fissures and Invisible Disease Spores
Inside, the rhythmic splash of water in the fountain

Early Memory

My sister who is three years younger has not been born yet
I stand outside a cabin somewhere in an unknowable woods
Through a dimly lit window
I see my mother, my father and my aunt Maude talking
I am with three or four country children dressed in rags
I put chunks of wood in gum wrappers
I give them to the children and they obediently put them in their mouths and chew them like
gum
I think I fooled them
Now, through the tunnel of time, I realize this could not be real
But I can still see it so clearly in my mind's eye.

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HOLLY HARPER

Holly Harper is the owner of a yarn shop called Birdhouse Yarns. She developed her love of fiber from her mother and her love of poetry from her father.

Feast

firm tomato
ripe and ready
dreams of offering
heart-shaped slices
thick and thin
to the hungry one
who picks
this tomato
red with desire

Birth/Death

Born crying
Born loud
Born with a giggle box
Born confident
Born curious
Born intelligent
Born thoughtful
Born loving

Told to be quiet—
 What's so funny?
Told to be cautious—
 Do it because I say so.
Told to think—
 Get straight A's.
Told to think about others—
 Do your chores;
 Watch your brother;
 Be home in time for dinner;
 Make dinner;
 Clean your room.
Told you were too sensitive and cared too much—
 Why are you always crying?

Told you would ruin your life—
 if you didn't do what you were told.

Mary Ann

In a family full of girls
and drinking
She ran out of the house—
star-struck
To pirouette,
to tap her toes,
to rock to the beat

In a profession full of women
and drinking
too much
Her legs rocketed up to touch the stars
She floated and twirled
A smile plastered on her face

In a practice full of women
and healing
in abundance
She glided around the table—
moved to and with
the energy carried on heartbeats
Was a rock

Now she sways among the stars

Souvenir

The barn with its windmill
Reigns over the plowed field
Sentinel of a nostalgic past
Hints at a time where self-sufficient meant success

A metallic creak sings with the wind
A hand-pump will not yield—it is frozen and rusty.

It is really a shell of a barn
Listening to its low murmurings, it recalls a time of

Black and white cows
Yellow and red chickens

Exploring the past of a life not lived,
Dust carries the smell of hay and dung
The empty stalls with missing boards—
No animal could be safely sheltered now.

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DEBRA JACOBSON

When Deb Jacobson isn't harvesting, composting, growing, processing, baking or distributing food she is studying Torah, Spanish, the Tao, tai chi, flute, laughing with friends or reading a lot of books. She is looking forward to more time to write.

My Chris

I held my breath
Every time
I put Chris in the car,
her head falling back
like her neck would snap,
Always unnerved me.
Pull my left shoulder,
grab my pants,
push me back,
the seat belt

“How will you ever be famous
if you don't get up,” read the sign
on the ceiling above her bed

I paced outside, thinking about getting us
to school on time.
Everything took a lot of time.
Chris told me the numbers:
90 minutes to hoist her body out of bed,
into her chair,
30 minutes to brush her teeth...
I put the manual chair in the car
and paced.

Eventually her voice sang out the door—
Deeeehhhbbb almost ready.
So melodic despite
uncooperative
vocal cord muscles.
I had to smile.

Eventually Chris wheeled out
in her electric chair with a flourish,
colorful scarf dramatically draped
around bony shoulders,
and spun around to greet me.
I was dazzled,
every time.

And we'd head to the car,
load Chris in the front,
put the electric chair inside her house,
lock the door,
and we were off.

Chris taught calligraphy.
It was very beautiful.
All of it.
One kid asked if she was plastic.

Dime Tell Me

Dime la verdad
The truth
Always por favor
Please la verdad

Not the truth slant
or with lipstick
But naked with rolls of fat
and saggy skin
breasts sewn shut
Over open heart

And I will tell you mine
In the safety of your shoulder
My head resting there

Knowing you can hear me
Not the words
But me
Under the pain
The broken words

Si
Lentamente
Dime

Yes, Soon

There are dishes to wash, yes, always,
Books to read, the floor to lie on,
calls to return, papers to sort,
water to move,
lemon bread to bake, yes,
But I'm heading to the garden

Yes, I want to sit with you,
hear your story, look in your eyes,
But sorry, not now,
Now, I'm heading to the garden

I want to be among plants, stir the compost,
eat sugarsnappeas.
Yes, tai chi with you,
How about later?
Because now, I'm heading to the garden,
To the sun, through the chard leaves,
throwing color and possibility

Yes, the day is warm, we could sit together,
I want to know, really,
But the heat is causing the mizuna to bolt
and the aphids to multiply,
how about you tell me among the plants because
Really, I need to the garden

Yes, our sun soaked skin,
Yes touching, yes,
Wanting,
Yes, in the garden

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JUDY JENNINGS

Judy Jennings, a.k.a. Prairie, is a freelance writer and dog enthusiast. Her current projects include a book about how the pandemic is changing individuals and society, and an interview portrait of singer-songwriter Amber Norgaard. Her appreciation for SASP knows no bounds!

Knowing

I miss intimacy,
Not most the steamy sex of it
Although that, too.
More, I miss
Knowing looks
Across a cluttered table,
The light brush of a finger
Over my upturned cheek, and yes
I do miss the love
Making, and the
Knowing that in the space
Just next to my heart
Is one who loves me well.

Gratitude, Pandemic

I woke this morning feeling
Inordinately grateful
For no particular reason,
There was nothing different
About the start of this day
Than there was yesterday
And the day before yesterday
And the day before that.

Still, I woke this morning feeling
Unexpectedly grateful
For no good reason
Except this morning is mine and not Covid's

And last night I dreamed about horses.

Words

Reasons to rage stalk me day and night,

Lurking in corners wherever I go and leering at me in my sleep.

But today, let me discover words that wait in stillness and rest in compassion,

Words that live on light and feed on love.

Let me find kind words, let me offer them up to the world and to myself,

To my animals and my neighbors,

Let me shout them out to no one in particular so that I, too, may come to believe in them.

Today may the kind word crowd out the angry retort, let the kind word be the measure of me.

Today, let the kind words I utter be the ones I am remembered for.

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FRANCI MCMAHON

Franci McMahon began writing at age fifty, her first novel, *Staying the Distance*, published by Firebrand. Three novels followed with works in anthologies and magazines. Poetry is her grounding, head-in-the-clouds constant. She is an alumna of Hedgebrook.

Four Months and a Year

Imagined taste of her,
tang of sun-warmed lime
round and ripe on the slender branch.
She invaded my mind.

I did not intend to love.
Not this time.
I knew thorns hidden by leaves
would draw blood.

Breasts, soft and pendulous,
that once held milk,
She, desirous, seductive,
enticed me, her first woman

an Amazon Virgin
who believed she was in control.
Who believed she was the butch,
who believed her heart would survive.

My lover's warm potent smell,
voice vibrating against my chest,
her fingertips sliding through my folds,
the light citrus of her juice

How many ways can a woman
slip out of your life?
She recedes, you push away.
All that once aroused, now tastes bitter.

She dies and is beyond reach,
past understanding, touch, hearing.
The air is unmoving
when once it carried the energy of wind.

Gentle Equine

Warmth from horse breath lifts the down of my cheek
fluffs my hair, fills my lungs with the scent
of oats, alfalfa, bright green grass.

Warmth of your massive body radiates to
melt the snow along your back.

I bring my nose to you deep in your winter coat to
drink in your musky clean smell and be warmed.

Warmth of the living horse.
Snorting blasts of air from round nostrils,
you gallop off to join your herd with a lift of tail and a little fart.

You, gentle equine, cannot imagine the longing I have for you,
and how difficult it is
to find the warmth.

My Grandmother, Dora Mullen

walked beside the covered wagon, wind snapping the canvas
grit grinding the turning wheels,
those long miles to Oregon.

“What drove you from your home in Nebraska
to travel with strangers? Were you going toward something,
or leaving? Was there, as they say,
unwelcome attentions?”

Wispy, thin woman, Dora bent into the wind.
She discovered new stamina,
freedom moving forward.

Among her petticoats she tucked iris rhizomes
of her favorite colors,
a paint box,
a book of poetry, tools of survival.

Her only dowry and currency, her teaching degree
earned at the age of eighteen.

She hummed, and sang to chase away her fear,
wind tearing sound
tumbling over sage and rabbit brush.

Coyotes caught the feral sounds in their large ears,
recognized her and called back.

At night she left the campfire, the wagon, the people.
to pee in the dark and trilled a conversation
in their wild language.

My grandfather recognized the tough fiber of this woman
who walked to Portland.
His wedding gift was to share his remote sheep ranch.

You who I disdained when young, have become
my admired ancestor.

My Saddles Fight

They gather dust
horseless on
hand-made racks

Leather squeaks
when they think I am busy
gardening or reading on my porch

The western roping saddle says,
“You, prissy pancake saddle, can only
go on flat land.
Furthermore you have no strings for holding a slicker,”

The English saddle replies in a huff,
“People who really know how to ride
don’t need a horn to grab.”

“That horn can hold a cow, or with a rope,
drag a calf out of a mire.”

“You weigh too much,” says the sleek English saddle.

“She likes riding me better. We go all day moving cows.”

“I don’t have cowboy fantasies.”

“You have Olympic delusions.”

Longing Poem Number 3

You bring me coffee in the morning,
rich
dark
with cream to lighten,
like the sunrise flooding through the window,
like your adored voice.

In the soft bed
with heavy dog bodies lying on our feet,
I curse their right to be there,
struggle to find my place among them.

Fur babies you are not!
Albatross dogs.
Favored comatose canines

Out! Out damned spot.

I want this bed without you.

But now.

I would have you tenfold.
Might not even mind a bite or two.
If only to have your beloved human
curled beside me.

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LENA ROTHMAN

Lena Rothman grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and has been living in Tucson for 25 years. She's from a working-poor, Jewish background. She came out in 1972 and has been an activist ever since. She currently works with Tucson SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice). Professionally, she has been an acupuncturist for three decades. She loves dancing and writing.

They Said “Do This”

They said get the vaccines.
They said “You need to do this.”
Then they said “Wait! We have
another vaccine—
Do that.”
They said “Wear a mask.”
Then they said “Distance six feet.”
They said to “Do this”

Then they said
“The numbers are increasing”
in January.
Then they said
“The numbers are decreasing”
in February.
It is getting harder
to find testing.

Then they said
“By next winter we can gather
in the HUNDREDS
with NO MASKS.”

And now they said
there are variants
mutations

Then they said
“By next winter we can gather
in the HUNDREDS
with NO MASKS.”

They said
“They don’t know if the vaccines
will work on the variants.”

Then they said
“Get the vaccines.”
Then they said
“By next winter we can gather
in the HUNDREDS
with NO MASKS.”

Then I said
“Next winter I will
still be wearing my mask”

regardless
of what they said.

Ms. Persimmon

*In Gratitude to the Ones That Feed Me, or
for the Fruits I Suck Over the Sink When I Am Alone*

Ohhhhh Ms. Persimmon
with your flaming
red orange hair
succulent
juicy
messy, soft
red orange fire
flesh
like the sun arising in the east
sweet and mellow
starting a new day
everything is possible
and setting in the west
bright hot sexy
red orange golden orb
into the ocean
as night time falls.

Mango was my first tropical lover
with her yellow sugar tang
using my lips to devour her.
Juices running down my chin
Sucking her through her skin
or letting it all hang out

wet fingertips holding onto her so I could
grasp the last of her juices as I slowly tongue and
suck and drink in her tart sweetness
I have to let you go
for now
for Ms. Persimmon only comes
once a year
in the Autumn as the leaves drop to the ground
As I prepare to hibernate for the winter,
snow all around, with my sweet potatoes and
squash. No insult or slight intended, but you are not
my luscious lascivious Ms. Persimmon
nor my Passionate Mango.

I go into my kitchen and pick up the miracle
of you my sweet Ms. Persimmon
Sometimes you are round and squat
not as tantalizing as your bigger cousin Hachiya
but more mellow and not as hot.

Hachiya, you fit comfortably in the palm of my hand
as I cup my fingers around your spherical
womyn's shape
I cut you
into quarters
so I could savor
ALL of your flavor
the red orange delight of you
your flesh is other than my mango supreme love
Your flesh more subtle more tender more giving
more gentle to my tongue

You slowly open to the pressure
of my lips
You slip this way or that
but remain still
so I could nibble you til
your jelly-like golden rush
bursts into my mouth just a little
before I swallow you whole.
Oh, I don't say goodbye to
my passionate Mango
But in the Fall, I want to visit
with Ms. Persimmon is all.

Oh my goodness
this has turned into a fruit ménage à trois.

Friday Night

Friday night
stop at Grandma's
before going to dance at
Bay A Go-Go
in Sheepshead Bay,
Brooklyn, NY 1965

My grandma Lena's
hallway smells of apple, cinnamon
and raisins.

She opens the door for me

And then she walks in front of me
both arms raised
to feel the walls
on either side of her
in the dark.
We come into her kitchen/living room.
All the lights are off
except for the soft candle light
from her two Shabbat candles.

An empty glass sits on her table.
It always amazed me that
she would drink hot tea in a glass
and not in a cup.
A healthy snake plant
sits erect in its pot on the floor
covering a missing linoleum square.
Glass curtains
obscure her fire escape

She speaks to me in Yiddish.
I smile, not knowing.
She puts down a cup and saucer
and puts a Lipton teabag into
my cup, pouring hot water over it for me.
I watch the steam rise.
She sighs as she sits down.

This one Friday evening she
tries to tell me a story
in her broken English
about carrying my father
as a baby
through waist-high snow
in Russia
to get him to a doctor.
She was afraid
he would die
but because of her bravery
and determination
he lived.
That was the only story
she ever told me.
It has stayed with me 50 + years.

I renamed myself in her honor
that I should be so brave,
so loving. I also wanted her
to live through me.
To have adventures and be free
of the nagging children and husband that bound her.

Today, I laugh at my upper arms
which are just like hers, flabby,
giving me wingspan so that one
day when I leave this earth
my arms
spread-eagled flying
the Universe will greet her again.

Yemaya

I sing to you,
my Yemaya

Your warmth
your breath
my secret
clandestine desire

To be tumbled
wildly
recklessly

losing breath

shall I stay
or shall I go
wasn't up to me

Yemaya determined my
next breath

she spit me out
onto the sand
and gave me
life once more.

Each time
I was without
control
over whether I
would live or die

It felt good
I learned about
fear
and
gratitude.

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EVYN RUBIN

Evyn Rubin is a versatile writer who has written plays, stories, poems, memoir, and nonfiction. Before the pandemic she was employed part-time as a substitute teacher. She is from Massachusetts, and she likes writing groups.

My Relationship with Susie Gluck

There was an ongoing exchange of a love poem
back and forth like a game of badminton
with a recurrent metaphor of a feast
jointly developed.

A splendid table
inviting our hearts'
best feet forward
our troubles banished

Platters of nourishment
how we enticed each other
the blessings of our verbs
we are sustained
and intertwined
our arms and legs
made sacred letters
of their own accord
our flesh against flesh
as rich as a delta

Food abounds on the plates of our poem
sweet beverage splashes from goblets and cups
no demarcations between entrees and desserts
edible delights

Our poem went back and forth
not like a tennis game in which
the ball is hard to hit (for me)
but a luxurious volley with an eager birdie
cooperating in its flight back and forth
between us

My relationship with Susie Gluck
included a jointly written poem

My relationship with Susie Gluck
in retrospect drew upon a psalm

My relationship with Susie Gluck
was like badminton and not tennis

Anger Management

May your anger be transitory
not embedded to make you wrongheaded

Don't build your hangar
with bricks of anger
because it will limit the ways
in which your plane can fly

Anger is an intoxicant
that is, embedded habituated anger
is an intoxicant

Like a drunk on the dance floor
who thinks he is graceful and smooth
like a drunk on a bar stool
who thinks his conversation is clever or charming

The angry ideologue
thinks his anger confers
proof of veracity
when in fact it signifies
parametered capacity

The angry ideologue
thinks his or her anger
is passion and strength
when really his thinking
is stuck in one gear

The writer who can only
bang out an angry rant
is surrounded by pitfalls
potential mistakes of reason

Don't build your house
with bricks of anger

Anger is to manage

Anger emerges in response to a wrong
but don't let anger become your only song

Anger is to manage

Anger needs chances to dissipate
so as not endlessly to accumulate
to dominate your palate of emotions
and surround you with pitfalls

Don't build your house
with bricks of anger

Anger requires management

Anger management is self-management

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KAY F. SMITH

Kay Smith has lived in Tucson since East 22nd Street was a gravel road. Her little adobe house across from the desert is full of coyotes, javelina, deer, roadrunners, quail, and an occasional rattlesnake. She lives with her family of Barkley, an Australian Shepard, and two cats. She would like to thank Southern Arizona Senior Pride and Joan Larkin for a wonderful adventure into the world of poetry!

Fire Catching Walkway

Bricks the color of our adobe house
lead in a curve to the road
and cover the desert dirt path
that once held the tracks
made by the gurney's wheels
that carried your shroud-wrapped body:
your strong embracing arms,
your lips perfectly formed for lipstick,
your hips of womanly proportion,
your long enough legs
and size 12 feet.

The wheels' tracks led to the hearse
that went down the road
into the blinding mid morning sun,
out of sight
to the mortuary
to the huge round oven
where the iron door clanged shut
and the thunderous fire ignited
the bone-breaking-ash-making-fire
until all that was left...ashes.

Each desert rain
diminished those deep rutted tracks
until there was only a curved
anonymous dirt path of the before-death-time.
Adobe bricks now lay there in silent
overlay of those memory tracks.

But grief bearing love burns things
into heart's soul-memory.
Our life our love
before bone-breaking-fire-to-ash
there was heart-on-fire
soul-catching-fire
life
memories
forever.

Messenger Dragonfly

Memory of camping alone in the wilderness of North Rim Grand Canyon

What you say, iridescent blue damsel
What you say, hovering over the creek
four wings woven of finest lines
your slender royal blue body
and head of full black bulging orbs.
What you say, Yahweh's jeweled insect
messenger from another world.
You who left too soon—
fluttering, hesitating just above the water
before you gave your message:
You
are
not
alone.
When have I ever abandoned you.

Waiting for Dawn with my Dog Barkley

I write this about you
Your head resting asleep
warm on my thighs.
Waiting for dawn like the hawk
atop the huge Aleppo pine, hungry to fly
Caw, Caw, Cawing

I write this about you
fur body soft, hot against my hip
my hand your chest become one.
Coffee cup empty
space between thoughts
move like clouds in the sky.

You're still sleeping
feet twitching running dream
chasing the Jazz notes
of Wynton Marsalis
a note slammed high
perfect pitch caught mid air.

You the jazz musician
asleep on the bed
behind curtain of day
my hand on your belly
breath perfect metronome
my little boy blue.

Come blow your horn!
Slow to rise
lips licking, little sneeze
a shake a stretch—You awake!
I yawn, you yawn...
Dawn its first song!

La Poetisa

She walks lightly on desert paths
making compost to grow a poem,
friend of spider and bird.
Inside like planet earth
a cauldron of fire
volcano against abundance
jeroboam of desire
at war with more-is-better.

Leaves

I remember how it felt, said the tree to the wind.
Your whirling-dervish-dance along my branches,
with limbs moving right and left against your breath
how leaves flew off in gleeful abandon.

I remember too, said the wind,
how my many gusty fingers
tickled your gold leaves
their joy flying from the branches.
Our dance was devilish-delight!

Damn You! said the tree
You left me naked bare, exposed to winter—
my leaves brown, dead, trampled into dirt.

You were gone, God knows where.

I cursed you too, beloved tree! said the wind
You with roots deep down under earth, gripping
extending, drenched in rain, dung, and worm.
Always secure with the earth holding you in firm embrace.

Here we are once more said the tree,
I hear you, wind, calling from the pines.
Now I'm older, stronger, taller, free.
Lush gold leaves and long lines
of enticing branches are mine.

Here we are again whispered the wind,
your branches swaying
gold leaves like children—not yours to keep.
I remember our dance, I miss loving you.
Hush.....I'm coming
don't tell the leaves.

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PENELOPE STARR

Penelope Starr, founder of Odyssey Storytelling and author of *The Radical Act of Community Storytelling*, writes fiction, personal essays, and an occasional poem. Her novel in stories, *Desert Haven*, is looking for a publisher. She lives in the foothills of the Tucson Mountains with her partner, Silvia. See more at www.penelopestarr.com.

A Bee in her Bonnet or A Band of Bees Surrounds my Honey

Love's lively fingers knit her a cap,
green and blue with orange rings,
colors so bright the bees thought
she was a flower, applauding her bliss
with beating wings.

An aggregation of stingless solitary
bees, tiny *perdita minima*, confined
to a mason jar. No hive, no honey,
no need to defend, the peaceful band
flee their prison, blissfully
buzzing their freedom.

What if What We Know Isn't What We Know?

What if my feather duster perched
on the piano bench waiting
for a song?

What if the African mud cloth decided
to return to its homeland, leaving
a trail of dust?

What if your crusty boat shoes, liberated
from feet, walked inside
tracking mud?

What if our inflatable kayaks, deflated
from lack of use, escaped
to join the blackbirds?

What if pillows unstuffed, milk froze
midstream, books lost their words?
Would you still love me?

Three Days of Writing Workshops

Write what you know
Write from a single POV
Write in a particular genre
Write with a discernible arc
Write from your heart
Edit from your head
Use metaphors
Use surprise
Be concise
Be clear
Be

Amazon in a Western Bar

Flipping raven curls over a shoulder
your flickering eyes on mine you purr
What'll it be darlin'?

You call me darlin'
but then you call everyone darlin'
You rush off to serve your boys

Bud, Bud Lite, Michelob, Michelob Lite, Tecate
Reaching into the cooler, icy air misting like a halo
Angel of the tavern

Teasing and retreating, you gift me
a glimpse of cleavage
and a double shot of Cuervo Gold

It's Especial you say and wink
gliding off to nurse the yearning ones
You winked at me

Goddess of innuendo and irony
dream lover of cowboys & workmen
I'm the lucky one in your bed tonight

Hands Refrain

Right hand

I expect you to remain
nimble and able
concise, precise
when stabs of pain
make it plain
arthritis is your nemesis

Left hand

I expect you to remain
helpful and stable
assisting, persisting
you don't complain
yet I maintain
your status is tenuous

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JEAN STUMPF

Jean Stumpf has participated in life story legacy writing groups since 2012. After completing a course in 2016 offered by the Birren Center for Autobiographical Studies, she has led writing groups using methods learned based on themes and prompts at senior centers, libraries, nursing homes, privately, and at a bookstore. After attending the Senior Pride poetry workshop as a beginner, she looks forward to turning her special life stories into poems.

Anne's Table

Four rough wood boards
stained dark brown
scratched and pitted
braced together
with recycled pallet planks.

The boards form an uneven surface and
its sturdy legs have a tiny squeak.
This table was built to fit 'just right'
in her Santa Rosa home's dining space.

It's farmhouse style, she had told me.

At this table, so many
potlucks and poker parties
our annual Holiday Ugly Sweater contest and
tender corned beef served to all on St. Patrick's Day.
This table so large our group would dine in comfort,
no need for coasters under our crystal wine glasses or sweaty beer mugs.

It's shabby chic, she said.

After she died
we gathered to help put her physical affairs in order.
This table became a display buffet for her
loose photographs
political buttons
travel trinkets and
bootlegged music copied onto CDs.

I touched her pink pussy hat and 49er ball cap,
and found strands of her hair stuck amongst the fibers
At the table's center
her jewelry collection featuring
carved silver beads

semi-precious stones and turquoise
pooka shells
pearl chokers
and cocktail rings.

We walked around the table.
We poked through her treasures.
We took what we wanted.

The family is not interested in anything left, the conservator said.

Such fun times together
the camping trip in 2016
when I smelled cigarette smoke on her breath.
Standing silently on the firm Mendocino ice plant
facing the salty Pacific, feeling the cold
wind whipping our hair back.
We bowled on the same league.
She convinced me to perform in an
amateur production of the Vagina Monologues.

(My one and only acting gig.)

And then, we fell out. And
I regret she died before we could forgive each other

As I examined her precious possessions,
I ran my hand along the table's edge.
A tiny splinter of wood pierced my fingertip.

This table, I asked. This table. Does anyone want this table?

A Gathering of Friends

When the salted water comes to rolling boil,
you turn down the heat. Splash!
The crab cries out—
you hear its blood-chilling moan
—really, it's more of a quiet whimper and

It's over in an instant.

You send up silent blessings and gratitude as
the hungry group of 15 friends gather
at our favorite picnic table
between the parking lot and sandy shore.

Each person brings a special dish to share, and
meal-time talk is the same every year.
You find this comforting.
Someone asks:

*Is this a Dungeness crab or rock crab?
What kind of bait did you use?
Who made this scrumptious salad?
Are any of these dishes vegetarian?*

You look across the table watching
hot drips of melted butter
paint Iveta's lips with a delicate sheen.
You hear her slurping noisily as
she sucks each crab leg clean.

You study Shirley, sitting next to you,
methodically cracking shells,
skillfully extracting chunks of meat and
building her pile high. She doesn't sneak a taste,
delaying gratification, and you wonder why.

You scrape the iron butter pan with
heels of crusty bread, mopping up the
delicious dregs while saying
farewell to your friends.

*Hope to see you all soon. You shout.
Our time went by too fast.*

You're the last person on the beach and
you scatter picked-over crab shells on the sand
with bits of tasty crab hanging on to each.

The seagulls circle overhead.
Round and round they go,
screeching and squawking loudly.
It's their turn to gather now
for a meal with their friends.

LAVINA E. TOMER

Lavina Tomer has lived in Tucson since 1972. She has been longtime activist for the LGBTQ community since 1973. She volunteers for Southern Arizona Senior Pride.

Writing has always been an enjoyable, creative, and empowering medium for her.

This Is A Poem

This is a poem about Hohokam dwellings in the cliff of rocks and dirt

This is a poem about snow falling as I traverse up the steep trail

This is a poem about looking out on a vast canyon of trees that used to be fields of crops

This is a poem about hearing the unique trill of a canyon wren's call

This is a poem about wanting to sense the ancestral community of this ancient ruin, their lives, their survival

This is a poem about feeling grief about what must go away as I am wanting to hold dear to my life experiences and relationships

This is a poem about rooting deeper into this life, this plane, even though my life will erode away against my will.

5/10/95 and 2/13/21

My Sister

I want to tell you about my sister, we come from the same womb, the same blood and bone, the same fierce, nurturing Lebanese Mother

I want to tell you about my sister, we come from the same Lebanese Father, hard-working, loyal, loving, mean, and a source of family chaos with his unchanging drinking, gambling, and hateful arguing with our Mother

My sister, who shared a cozy room and sometimes a cozy bed with me until I was 12 years old

My sister, who is an artist, she could draw and paint landscapes, still life, and once a beautiful, yellow flowered teapot that I requested

I want to tell you about my sister, who applied to a private art school, and when our Dad found out he yelled, "we can't afford that" and slapped her in the face

My sister, who quit school at 16 and went to work at the Five and Ten on Main Street

My sister, who would bring home a small, fun gift for me, her little sister, each payday

I want to tell you about my sister, who cried in the night because our parents disapproved of the man she was dating and wanted to marry.

My sister, who married at 19 in the small chapel of a Catholic Church, she left me to begin a life with her old-world Italian husband. They were at each other's side for 53 years

My sister, who gave birth to her first daughter Rose, a sweet little redhead, at 20

I want to tell you about my sister, who lost the capacity to mother as she slowly and quietly lost her mind

My sister, who could only take care of her child by keeping her in a playpen all day long and counting on her husband to give Rose a bottle and Ritz crackers

I want to tell you about my sister, who came to live with us in our small apartment with her child. She was so emaciated that her breasts were unrecognizable. She was so scary as she contorted her face and constantly raised her eyebrows in response to the voices in her head. I was 14 years old

My sister, who was admitted to a mental institution for the first time at 21. She would spend months at a time living in Newtown at the state mental hospital

My sister who was given drugs, traumatizing electric shock treatments and a safe, if harsh, place to be out of her mind

I want tell you about my sister, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia and who would never, ever be the same older sister I knew. Her life was shattered into bits of jagged-edged misery

My sister, who had to leave her one-year-old, vulnerable child in the care of her family and her husband's family periodically for over 5 years

I want to tell you about my sister, who would have several more painful mental health crises: the birth of another daughter, the death of our mother, menopause. Who lived in that sprawling, over populated mental institution on and off most of her young adult life

My sister, who now lives with the burden of mental illness with grace, strength, acceptance, and hypervigilant attention to her schedule of medications and psychiatry visits

I want to tell you about my sister, who will always be most dear, most cared about, most loved by me, her broken-hearted little sister

JOY VALERIUS

Joy Valerius has been a member of Senior Pride for several years, often participating in their Words of Wisdom poetry reading. She has been writing poetry for over 30 years. She published "Dogs on the Verge of Poetry," a collection of dog poems, which is available at Amazon.com. She is often inspired by her Poetry Pups, who eat up her poems as if they were tasty bones.

The Skin of Experience

In the skin of your experience
you felt you would be less of a woman.

In the skin of my experience
I felt more of a natural woman.

In the skin of our experience
we defined what it means to be a woman.

You opted for a lumpectomy so you would
feel less with less,

while I saw my chest as an American
road map; I was moving from the hills of
Shenandoah to the plains of a Nebraska prairie.

We were on the same road trip
but chose different routes.

I came to believe beauty is in the eye of me
the beholder,

while you never got the chance

to believe.

Grip

I grip this reality
of glass and shards,

the hidden memories
amid the rubble.

I grip her hand
feeling her brittle bones.

Nobody told me
you could feel all
ninety years of someone

with just a touch
of a hand.

Those years buried
deep within me

grip like the jaws
of a pit bull

at my bruised heart.

Deception by a Therapist

You looked like a typical
worm,

a disguise that hooked
us in,

but you turned out to be
a rectangular worm

with edges that
sliced us thin.

You entered our apple orchard,
and like Adam & Eve
you perpetrated your sin.

The branch my wife and I hung
from was low to the ground,
making us easy pickings.

We clung to the branch
and each other, despite

the way you wormed
your way in.

My wife and I looked to the sun
saw our reflections in
each other's skin,

came to believe in the health
of our orchard in spite
of the way you wormed your way in.

You ate away at our core,
until we finally let go

of your pull. Our orchard
now restored, we rest

in the hands
of each other.

A Conversation with Emily Dickinson

Hey Emily, how are you
this winter day?

Does it matter to you that
it's not summer?

Are you feeling trapped
inside this corseted winter?

Are there answers
to these questions

in those writing bones
of yours,

or do your bones know
only of loftier ideas?

What have you to say
to this modern audience

that you have not
said before?

What's that you say?
You want me to listen

to you now that the sun
has gone down?

Well have at it, girl!

*You make me feel like
I have a funeral in my brain*

*with all those inconsequential
questions of yours.*

*My Pen is a loaded gun
that will shoot you where you sit*

*it is not a thing of Feathers
that gives you hope!*

*You're Nobody from my future
that will lessen*

*the Somebody that I am
today.*

*Shush shush
Hear my poems.*

*They are Not Dainty
as buttercups,*

they Rise and Roar!

Pen to Hand

Your grip is more like
a sensuous grasp

between the lips
of lovers.

You hold me just so,
and my ink flows

leaving kiss marks
like lipsticked lips

across the whiteness
of the page.

Our relationship grows
as you twirl me

in your nimble
fingers,

as we continue this writing
dance of ours.

My Sister Patty

You lay in the hospital bed
staring out the window,

raspberries beckoning
to be picked.

Your blue polyester
bed jacket

the perfect compliment
to the blue jay outside
your window.

The season is coming
to an end,

your eyes glassy
with knowing.

Nightlight

The moon begins the evening
with a cup of tea.
It stirs in a star or two
swallowing their magic.

Moonlight blends with starlight
creating a child's first
nightlight. I park myself on the edge

of his bed,
reading bedtime stories.

He beams just as bright
cuddling up in the
night light.

Rest

Rest
rest

Out with
the rest of it.

I rest my case
rest easy in your jail cell.

Rest and regain
your composure.

Rest your life
away

Sway with the
breezes

Rest isn't always
easy

but it will spare
you some pocket change.

Rest is the sleeping lion
that holds your head

in its jaws.

Cicadas

I hear the buzz
of cicadas,

and wonder if
they are reciting poetry,

or if they are just complaining
about the lack of rain.

They often have a lot to say
about nothing,

chitter chattering
in total disarray.

Nature's teenagers
texting away.

Bees Buzzing

Bees buzzing,
nature's spoken
word poetry.

Yellow pollen,
fairy dust
blessing each poem.

Each
flowering into
a Bob Dylan song

a rapturous
melody

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JUDITH WEISER

I am a Midwest gal who crossed the Mississippi in 1975 & never looked back.
I worked in the medical field for 40 years, retired five years ago, and became a radical recycler.

Covid

(For Ellen)

When I heard she died I mourned for 2 miles

I never even got to meet her

Broken

Is it my leg...

(or my heart?)

She said she could fix it

I look into my leg and see a rod of bamboo

Curving from my hip

To the tip

of my foot

When she said "I can fix it"

I didn't say yes

But I didn't say no

Her face so close to mine that she became as familiar

As someone I am supposed to know

I never said yes

But I didn't say no

Labyrinth

Crunching of my footsteps

Breath beneath my mask

On my path I can see

The path to my right

And the path to my left

Crunching of my footsteps

Breath beneath my mask

A hairpin curve

Now I am *on* the path to my right

There is a new path to my left which was the path I was on before

Crunching of my footsteps
Breath beneath my mask
I reach the rock in the middle
I always go around it to the right

Crunching of my footsteps
Breath beneath my mask
Horses can't do it
Dogs don't like it
But I do

Labyrinth II

I could figure it out, but I don't want to
I purposefully try *not* to learn it
I purposefully try to *not* learn it

A father and son watch me
I reach the exit
"are you going to try it? It's fun!"

I don't understand it, but I can teach you:
Enter here
You can't get lost

Manya

Came over in steerage
Came over in utero
Inside her mother, Yetta, for whom I am named.

The only one of five girls born in this country.
Yetta, pregnant with Manya, with her four other daughters
came here alone,
the men of the family having been conscripted.

In the summer, at the same time every day
She stood at the living room window with a tall glass of ice water;
Not a paper cup or a jelly jar, but a real glass with etched initials.
"It's for the shvartze."
She stood by the window until the mail carrier arrived,
As he was putting letters into the boxes in the wall of the foyer, she unlocked the door and
greeted him as an old friend.

A blue and white pushke hung on the wall in her kitchen.
It looked like a Band-Aid box to me,
And I happily put coins into it.

Her nose was bigger than Jimmy Durante's.

Playing in the bushes under the apartment windows
I saw a big pile of worms and ran crying into the house.
Manya had flung the leftover spaghetti out the window for the birds.

She walked everywhere.
When I visited every summer I walked everywhere with her.
I couldn't understand why we walked for 2 miles just to pick up a pint of cottage cheese.

She is 25% of my 100% Ashkenazi blood.
She is the reason I have "ashtray" money in my car for the homeless.
She may even be the reason I hate to waste food or the reason I feed the birds.
She is certainly the reason why I walk.

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KERMIE WOHLLENHAUS

Kermie Wohlenhaus is an award-winning author, producer, angelologist, zinester, artist, and clairvoyant. Her books, including *Shopping with the Virgin Mary*, can be found on Amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, and elsewhere. For more, see www.kermiewohlenhaus.com

50th Anniversary

Today is February 11.

50 years ago
we each had our first lesbian touch
blasting into a lifelong journey.
The Kiss,
sensual love making,
relationship.

We have remained friends
for 50 years.
are we really that old?
We ask each other.

On this date we connect,
physical miles between us
makes no difference.

Annually we remember
finding each other through time
to tell each other—
Thank You.

Love revealing who we truly were,
gently
softly
patiently
opened hearts to love's adventure.

My soul will always retain
the remembrance
as we mingled that day.

Who knew what was to follow on that night so long ago.
I kissed a Girl.
And I loved it.

Dragon Sculptor of Steel and Glass

She covered in heavy protective clothing
in the sweltering desert sun.
Cloth rapidly burned off
from splattering hot lava slag
revealing sleeves of tattooed
Madre muerta skeletons and dead religious figures.

Dragon artist dons
reinforced boots
guards as tons of steel lower and rise
on waves of chains craned
up and up
to meet her weld.

Razor steel and glass
slice calloused hands,
blood spots concrete floors daily
splash like full spring raindrops.
She slaps Duck Tape to stop the crimson flow
annoyed at any diversion to slow the work
then continues until faded light of setting sun.

Inadequate hearing protectors allowed
deafness to sneak in like a thief
stealing the voice of birds on the morning dew.
What to blame?
Blasting head banger music
high whine of machines
hiss of compressors
bomb blasts as metal chunks fall onto cement floor
heavy chains clanging,
screeching under the weight—
all driving her intense focus.

Dragon artist of fire and smoke,
driver of forklift, skid steer and
stealth black work truck
bashed by raw steel and
Towering sculptures transported
to final resting grounds
filtering brilliance of color and strength
to public acclaim.

On the Doorstep

Awww, release into another
warm surrender
breath
full body pressure
crimson lips moving ever closer
Crackle, Pop Heat

Her hand brushing stray curl
curious Red Flag waving through the dreamy fog
Dawn Brighter
CLARITY
A wedding ring?
The bright sun of truth abruptly wakens
bridging gap between slumber and morning.

Scanning, no shame
no one hurt from sleep-filled desires.

Curious sensations, though, linger a few hours in
labored breath, touch, incomplete kiss held in the air.

I will wear a new shade of lipstick this day
to silently seal this dream within.

Blonde Privilege

Blonde privilege —
She parks her black corvette
wherever she wants.

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