



*"The nature of poetry is to illuminate the darkness." Alicia Ostriker*

## The Towson Osher Poetry Group

The Towson Osher Poetry Group began meeting on February 14, 2020. Now via Zoom, we meet weekly to read and discuss poems we've written and those of accomplished poets. To date we've read more than a dozen poets from many different traditions, some translated from Hebrew, Korean and Polish. We've read U.S. Poet Laureates Joy Harjo, Billy Collins, and Tracy K. Smith. As we explore more and more poems, we are becoming aware of both what's old and what's new in this inexhaustible human treasure. Also, we've watched each other try fresh ways of putting words on a page, and with gentle, often humorous critiques, we've encouraged each other to be mindful of our readers.

# Esta Baker



“Poetry was not in my book bag, writing poems definitely not until Valentine's Day. Reading the poems to make the selection for this anthology was quite illuminating as I couldn't believe some I'd actually written. Creating poems has inspired me to push the limits of self-examination and our everyday world.”

## **I Find Beauty**

I find beauty in the rosy velvet of daybreak

And its sinking orange into the lake.

I find beauty in the blazing sun on a sandy beach

And its wintry warmth melting snowflakes.

I find beauty in lightning bolts,

Our flashlights from the stars above.

I find beauty in the droplets misting a new leaf

And the icy cloak on rustic boughs.

I find beauty in a sprout rising up

From its humus bed of sleep.

I find beauty in a full moon's face

As it dangles from outer space.

I find beauty in a tropical breeze

And in an old man winter's sneeze.

I find beauty in what mother nature's hand has touched

And what man's has not.

Earth Day 2020

### **Untitled**

Not tonight, I have a headache

Met with soft gentle strokes

Nudging for a yes.

I say 'No' to everything

Just to arouse his desires and determination.

His arms and legs entwine mine

In billows of crisp white linen rumped by our passion.

Our rolly polly game of lovemaking

Collapses like a souffle

Hastily pulled from a hot oven.

Red, hot puffs smolder in the morn's darkness.

Into the steamy showers of dawn, I step

Washing away his sweet sweat of desire.

Only to drown our throes of lust

In milky warm Arabica

Buttered steel oats

Sugar coated with 'some nights I fake it'.

## **Poetry**

You were read in high school  
Not in college,  
Til I wrote you . . . today.  
Searching for words  
With meaning  
To me and to you.  
Now I read you  
To others . . .  
Outloud.

## **The Old Miss**

Rolling, rolling  
Rolling down the river.  
An Old Miss parts  
The rising from the setting,  
Ne'er the twain shall meet.  
From her headwaters  
Snaking our heartland  
Southward to the bayous,  
Her crescent parts  
Wards and districts into quarters.  
Her waters rise above  
The army of levees  
Washing away their protection.  
Flood gates her power defies.

Her mouth sips from the gulf

A salty bed for sleep.

Oh, that mighty Old Miss.

Solstice 2020

# Carlton Greene



“My experience with the Osher Poetry group has been most rewarding. Initially I thought that the discontinuation of the in person sessions at Towson was going to make active participation difficult but I have been pleasantly surprised with our Zoom sessions.

I have always loved the feel and musical flow of poetry since my high school and college literature classes. I think I have always been a closeted poet and actually wrote thirty to 40 free verse poems starting in the late 60s. Some I have found on my now obsolete floppy discs. Incidentally, it costs an arm and a leg to get these redone with the current Word format.

Since I started these sessions with Brenda Baer and the others of our group I have improved my approach to poetry and my appreciation of poetry has increased. The critiques of Brenda and my fellow poets are greatly appreciated.”

## **ON THE DEATH OF MY JEWISH NEIGHBOR**

As I turned onto my street

On my arrival home today,

About 7:30 P. M.

A long black limousine pulled in front of me,

And parked.

Two men in black suits and starched shirts got out.

Yarmulkes crowned their heads.

I initially thought they were lost,

And was seriously prepared to give them directions....

But they never asked....

They pulled out the gurney  
From the rear of the big limo  
And went directly to my neighbor's house.  
In an automatic, practiced fashion,  
They snapped the expandable legs erect,  
Clicking them into place outside the door.  
One knocked formally.  
I wanted to hear him ask, "Is anybody home?"  
But it never came.  
They knew. They knew!  
One was let in,  
Then the other, with the Gurney.

Having been drawn there by this event,  
And hoping not to be too inquisitive,  
Or intrusive.  
I went upstairs and watched from behind the blinds,  
Yes, I stood, and watched from behind the blinds,  
Not to be seen.

Such efficiency....  
Such formality....  
Such finality of this act,  
I thought.  
On the floor,  
Inside the door  
Mr. Cohen lay.

The door partially blocked by his body.  
Heart attack, I suppose.  
I didn't even know that he was sick, I mused.  
Perhaps he wasn't, I thought.  
Maybe I should have asked.  
When he could have answered.

I wondered if he had completed the things,  
That he had wanted.  
Did he fix the lamp?  
Did he tell all he loved them?  
Did he finish the report?  
Did he write the book?  
Or promise to do it tomorrow.

The two men in yarmulkes, and starched shirts,  
And black suits moved fast.  
Moving him out of the way of the door,  
Covering him with the sheet,  
Putting him in the bag, and onto the gurney.  
And out the side door to the long black limousine,  
they went.  
All within 15 minutes, 20 max.  
I watched the long black car slowly make its way.  
Carrying my neighbor to eternity.

The last thing I remember,

Long after the big black car was gone,  
Long after the evening had set,  
Well after I had settled in for the night,  
The last thing I remember,  
Were the tracks of the gurney on the newly mowed lawn?  
Two parallel lines, weaving across the grass.

A sudden rush came upon me  
Just before falling asleep that night....  
Before I dreamt.  
The last thing I remember,  
That after the overnight dew,  
And the suns inexorable rays,  
The next morning,  
The tracks too will be gone.  
Just like the dew.  
Just like my neighbor.  
Like so many wisps of smoke.  
The tracks too will be gone in the morning.  
I guess I'll call my dad tonight.

### **BORN TOO SOON**

I saw her for the first time  
And knew she was different.  
She, like a burnished, dark, bronze statue,  
Came alive.  
So real, so voluptuous, so sensuous.

She, not even trying.  
Smooth and soft inside, I imagined.  
Her voice was accented, but clear.  
Her lips were curled and plump and juicy and sometimes  
Quivering.  
They seemed to be always yearning for a kiss.  
Maybe, from me, I wished.  
I would gladly volunteer, if only she would ask.  
And oh, that figure, in the starched, white, plain uniform.  
That figure, she found so difficult to hide in, in spite of the  
planned modesty of the outfit.  
The urge to touch her was unbearable.  
I resisted, but just barely.  
I wanted so much to remain aloof,  
But couldn't.  
I wanted to say, "Come here woman!"  
"Let me touch you while I still can."  
Let me stroke the smooth skin along your inner thigh,  
And whisper in your ear,  
And say "let's run away."  
I wanted her to say, "Take me, you fool."  
But then I thought.  
I have a daughter your age.  
And with great effort,  
I resisted these desires.  
I succumbed finally to the inevitable, eternal dilemma.  
"I was born too soon, or she too late."

I know now what Andrew Marvell was thinking,  
When he said,  
“Had we but world enough, and time.”\*

*\* From Andrew Marvell's "TO HIS COY MISTRESS"*

# Michael Magrogan



"Poetry should combine an image with a thought. Some modern poets are so abstract that they turn off the average/or even above average reader. My poetry is, simple and to the point, something that appeals to everyone...something that the reader could say, "Oh, yeah, I could have thought of that...and look how he's combined it with an universal idea."

## A DEAD FLY

I found a  
    Dead Fly  
On my window sill  
    This morning.  
Obviously, it was trying  
    To get out,  
But died.  
And, I thought,  
    "How like us":  
The ecstasy of getting in,  
Eating until it was gorged,  
Irritating me,  
    Then, died.

## BEACH VISION

You placed

Sand

Gently

On your child.

I saw

Ocean waves

And

Love

In your eyes,

Knowing

You'd

Disappear,

Leaving

Vast stretches

of

Empty

Sand.

## FORGIVING FATHERS

His fingers-

Each making three of mine-  
Slice hurriedly

(the way he and I  
do all jobs),

Brutally,  
"You've read nothing of mine!"  
"I'm not a reader"

But, I know better--

Those fingers  
folded  
and  
creased

The disasters

Starting with the Depression-  
For nightly Perorations  
of impending cataclysms  
That never come.

And I, Your Son,

Pen  
these fingers

To cut away

The chest bone  
to the Heart.

"You've read nothing of mine!"

"I have no time."

But, I've seen

those fingers

Hold for hours

Cutting tools that

Ripped  
burlap-backed

Rugs

And my heart

To fit

An odd-shaped surface.

No matter,

The irritating,  
bare shafts

Of wood that triumphed

where fingers  
and knife

Were powered off course

By the Fates

He cursed.

Looking up  
    at Me  
A fearful scowl,  
    "I'm busy, don't you see."  
And, I know  
    My Fear  
He'd cut  
    uneven slices  
From My Heart  
    To leave  
    Naked edges  
Around  
    My Soul.

## Ann Marie Morin



“C.S. Lewis was surprised by joy – I am surprised by poetry. In it I have discovered a place to sing with my heart, share my soul, and bring delight to my spirit. Finally, I have a place to quietly place the thoughts which come unbidden, as I live. I am beyond grateful and full of hope as I continue to grow in knowledge and hopefully, skill.”

### **Ode to the American Pie**

American Pie, you  
delicious creation of  
filling and crust!  
You reign easily,  
savory or sweet-

Quietly, you serve up  
tantalizing treats,  
hospitality, and  
belonging-  
however temporary.

You can fold a stranger  
into a group,  
blend welcome with warmth,  
soften hardened walls.

And foster hope

All, as exquisite culinary gems  
travel grateful gullets

Whether a flaky crust or  
A dense union of  
crumbs and butter,  
we lucky imbibers  
gleefully discover  
Texture, taste,  
Sweet melded  
with tart, and more

What do I treasure most?  
Memories-  
Of laughter shared,  
people gathered,  
And techniques learned-  
Your fillings,  
From so many places,  
delight and  
Celebrate life!

Examples abound-  
Massachusetts offering choice apples with cinnamon sugar, wrapped  
in cheddar cheese crust,  
Texas sharing pies of crunchy pecans  
And molasses, while Illinois

beckons with  
sweet potatoes puréed with  
eggs, cream, and spices,  
Each rewards the eager eater.

What times you create,  
The adventuresome will  
discover others wherever they roam.  
For you, a multi-tiered gift,  
Bring all together,  
How fitting  
For a melting pot nation!

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### **The Green Refuge**

This familiar boulevard always  
scoops us into its emerald bosom.  
Massive maples join  
conifers to shield against  
harsh weather and sun.  
Interlocking boughs  
form cool tunnels.  
Penetrating peace pushes out  
memories  
Of hectic interstate driving.

Time eases,  
Begins to fade,  
like the Cheshire Cat of Alice's adventures.  
We pause.  
We witness  
sun textured leaves  
with deep green partners.  
Branches,  
in a romantic air waltz,  
gracefully glide, to and fro.  
Nature softly caresses  
puckered brows -  
with soothing sights  
And sounds.

Jangled travel nerves  
unwind.  
Tense muscles,  
relax  
And spirits,  
lift.

This stretch is leisurely traveled.  
We have no desire to race.  
This refuge,  
Solace for tired souls  
Helps one  
Slow down,  
Savor, and  
Linger,  
as we enter  
Beach days of renewal.

## **A Prophet of Hope**

Who knew the gift,  
Hidden deep in the grotto-  
Where soft, sporadic sounds  
Blended with gentle breezes and  
Clear blue skies contrasted with  
deep earthy red rocks-  
A haven for souls. .

En route we had braved  
the sun blasted day,  
Slipped past terracotta rock formations  
Sped down the lazy Colorado  
as it slowly meandered south.  
Chatting, our love of music  
Bonded us to one another.

Disembarking, we hiked a faint path.  
Temperatures cooled as we plunged  
further and deeper.  
A clearing abruptly appeared,  
A highly polished grand piano,  
Its immense presence, dominating  
the languid, terracotta scene.

Concert attendees, moved quickly-  
They pounced  
On fancy folding chairs or  
Scampered up,  
To lofty, rock perches  
Acoustically, all was well,  
No matter the seat.

An air of anticipation rose.  
Musicians tuned,  
attendees squirmed.  
Butterflies balanced the tensions  
As they flitted,  
danced,

and distracted.

With the introduction,  
A hush descended,  
Softly, the piano presented  
the main melody,  
Violin and cello slowly joined,  
The theme expanded,  
Our spirits lifted.

At an intended Pause-  
The Canyon Wren  
unexpectedly  
took over.  
From its petite throat  
the melody soared forth.  
It echoed the notes, exactly.

I gasped as  
Bird and humans blended their instruments,  
Creating one voice  
Of exquisite beauty and hope,  
We shared a moment  
Transcended

Carefully and reverently,  
My soul protectively  
folds over this moment,  
this sacred hallowed gift-  
of abiding hope  
and peace.  
Nature and music,  
comfort tools, from God.

### **The Twisted Knot**

It started small,

thread bunched,

a knot,

Unintended.

Pulling only hardened it.

Loosen one side, gently

Work the other strand,

Watch the whole untangle.

Would that understanding

another

Worked the same.

## Janice Moyd-Kane



“Over the past few years there have been many painful losses in my life. The death of loved ones especially my husband, retiring from work and lately the loss of freedom because of the Coronavirus. Writing poetry has allowed me to express my feelings about these losses, give tribute to loved ones and is helping me to heal.”

### **A Pantoum Poem: Mary Jo**

She sat beside me,

One hot summer night in  
a room filled of strangers.

Her Smile so warm and inviting

One Hot summer night

The words of wisdom she shared made,

Her smile so warm and inviting

It brought tears to my eyes.

The words of wisdom she shared

Were truths I did not want to hear

For it brought tears to my eyes

How did she know

Truths I did not want to hear  
Pierce my heart and created fear  
How did she know my pain,  
The anguish I felt inside

My piercing heart no longer created fear  
As she sat beside me  
The Anguish I felt was gone for I was no longer,  
In a room full of strangers.

### **After You Left**

After you left,  
The World ended.  
I tried to find you,  
in your words,  
in my thoughts  
but, you weren't there.

After you left,  
A massive rock started to grow  
in my heart.  
Which continued to grow,  
nothing seemed able to penetrate it.

After you left,  
I found it hard to stand  
on my feet.

Always falling  
to the ground.

After you left,  
The Joy of Life left too.  
The Sun Beaming,  
Water rushing,  
They all remind me of you.  
Now that I realize,  
you're not coming back,  
That your leaving was  
no one's fault.  
I will try to be again,  
to start over,  
and Live.

# Nancy Rothman



“Recently, my writing has been an exploration of my psyche in myriad ways as I cope with the Coronavirus Pandemic. Isolation, loss of lifestyle, and fear of illness or worse leave me searching for new aspects of being, of finding solace and even beauty among what remains.”

## Chapters

In 1968, all I could see  
of the White House  
during the Vietnam War protests  
were the Crayola Yellow  
and Marigold schoolbuses  
lined end to end,  
surrounding the building  
like a child’s dystopia.  
Nixon hid from us,  
but hiding could not save him.  
Now, Trump has built  
tall black chain link fences  
with cement stanchions  
guarded by the military,  
Posse Comitatus be damned,  
to keep us from the people’s house.  
These forbidding symbols reek  
of the authoritarian rule  
he so adores.

I wonder, if he loses  
the election in November,  
will January bring a siege?

Will Trump strut the ramparts  
like a cornered medieval monarch,  
blustering inanities? Or will he  
take the Nixon way out,  
whimpering, as he helicopters up  
from the people's lush lawns  
one last time.

### **Equanimity**

The nighttime view from my balcony  
is like Fantasyland at Disney World.  
Tall verdant trees snuggle up close,  
while wrought iron Victorian lampposts  
grace the path below.  
Peeking out from behind  
the facing apartments and shrubbery  
are the fanciful white and red lights  
of the mall across the boulevard,  
a sparkling diamond and ruby bracelet.  
The sky, a steel gray, soon  
turns an even deeper, violet hue.  
My old green lawn chair creaks  
under my weight, as my cat  
lies still, keeping me company  
from just inside the screen door.  
In this time of Coronavirus,  
I travel only in my imagination.  
And that is enough for now,  
as the night beckons and  
the stars flare – signs  
that nowhere is beyond the reach  
of mind and heart.

## **Permanence**

Three pine trees live  
behind my home.  
The two flanking are upright,  
tall and deep green.  
The center tree speaks  
to my heart,  
for she grew  
horizontal, a slight  
dowager's hump  
in her trunk, and  
has lost all the needles  
on her left side,  
leaving gnarled brown  
branches like arthritic fingers.  
Her remaining needles glint,  
a shade of miraculous  
silver gray, that shout  
to the world,  
"Here I am,  
standing proud,  
radiant in my imperfection."

## **Denouement**

Thunder has sounded  
all afternoon, roiling  
the atmosphere.  
Yet, the sun  
continues to shine,  
and there is no rain.  
Just the sound – heavy,  
laden – the atmosphere  
protesting, desiring change  
or fulfillment, something more

than the stagnation  
we feel six months  
into isolation.  
Sarah Teasdale wrote  
"There will come soft rains",  
but I look in vain  
for the arrival  
of this relief, the feel  
of gentle water sliding  
down my face, over my  
bare arms, reassuring  
that all is  
as it was meant to be.

# Henry Westray, Jr.



“As we hunker down in segmented underground silos due to the pandemic. Racist right wing missiles received Presidential launch codes to land hate bombs on American shores. In my isolation, I am comforted and empowered by the opportunity to give voice to my truths in Osher's Poetry group via Zoom. I've learned much from others as they also share their truths in our shared poetic tongues. Although, due to Corona we can't touch palms..... our poems can still touch hearts.”

## Finding Joy

Is Joy only for a moment or does it last a lifetime through  
If you don't have any can I give my half to you  
Is Joy found high on a mountain in a secret hiding place  
And if it's been there long enough does it ever leave a trace  
Will you find it resting deep in some old abandoned mine  
Or stagger in at midnight after that last Medicinal glass of wine  
Will Joy march in as your savior when you're feeling gray  
Or float down in divine order as you kneel to pray  
They say make a joyful noise unto the Lord  
And your joy will surely come through  
But what if Joy's GPS is broken  
And it can't even get to you  
Does it have a color or is it crystal clear

Can you really tell when your Joy is near  
Will **Joy** find that working mother  
Struggling to keep her children's hunger pains at bay  
Knowing that her pantry door  
Will close empty again today  
Is **Joy** what you feel  
When you dare "come out" as gay  
They say Joy can now be found at Costco's  
For a nickel or a dime  
And does it only come to those who are sanctified divine  
Or are we all bathed in fields of Joy the moment of our birth  
Will Joy come first  
Are the chances of our joy measured by our self-worth  
I have so many Joy filled questions  
At times the answers seem so few  
But there's one thing I know for certain  
To be so very joyfully true  
Today, I've found so much **Joy**  
In just being here with you  
**Have a Joy filled Day**

### **Dusty Roads**

*Road two*

I've known dusty roads  
Or is it that too many dusty roads have known me

Dust storms have often veiled my view  
Road blocks to climb over, slide under, go around and push through  
Although the blush of youth has nearly gone  
Left on ancient roads I've traveled on  
Unmourned memories of loving souls now gone dust  
Caught in dust storms where they lay to rust  
My soul must confess that I've had a dusty time or two  
And my restless heart beats less than it used to do  
Walking down roads that are almost nearly through  
My eyes were sometimes blinded by the dust  
Viewing the world through rainbows I so willingly trust  
But was God's love guided me safely through  
And has placed me on a dusty road or two  
To share this dusty moment with you

(This poem was inspired by the title of Zora Neale Hurston's Autobiography  
"Dust Tracks on a Road," and is *dedicated to her posthumously*)

### **When Sea Shells Speak**

Soulful sounds lie silent through seasons simmering in sea shells  
Just listen  
Observe oceans of mighty moments marooned in muses of mermaids  
Just listen  
Cascading cool currents catch clouds of rain running through rivers, brooks and bays  
Just listen  
Testy tides tease shores with wisdom  
As scorched sands shiver when waters approach their dunes

Just listen

Which way will this mighty current take us

Will we be shattered to secret shadows of the deep

Or be bath on sea shores by the sun

Only Sea shells know the secrets

Just Listen

### **The Parade**

When I learned I could live without you

I had a parade!

Marched up and down the whole block

I was the Band Leader

The Cheer Leader

The whole Damn Marching Band

When the street lights went out at 12 midnight

I put down my baton

My neighbors gave me a standing ovation and blew horns

I proudly marched back in the house

And bolted the door

# Brenda Stevens Baer



“When I agreed to lead this Osher poetry group at the beginning of this year, I had no idea how much doing so would affect my own writing. I have written poems for decades, but they came to me rarely because I hadn’t created a habit of reading and writing poems daily. Once this group got going, I found myself writing a poem, sometimes two, every week. And I read the poems of others almost every day. It has been a joyous, satisfying revelation to see my binder fill with my own poems and to discover connections with this group of observant, thoughtful people via their written work.”

## **They’ve Been Watching Us**

They’ve always been watching us.  
From behind a drape of trees,  
from a perch or a promontory  
out beyond where the train stops,  
they’ve been watching,  
waiting, strategizing.

And it came to pass  
that the White Horse  
won by a length,  
so the ones who’d been watching  
came into the cities,

braving the silence,  
stepping over the dead.

Treading quietly on  
pavement stones,  
pumas strolled  
the streets of Santiago  
with the same curiosity as  
a fox lopping along beside  
a garden fence in Kensington.

Mountain goats, five of them,  
took possession of  
a human-empty sidewalk  
in Wales where they  
ignored their reflections  
in shop windows.

At a bazaar of closed stalls in India,  
Macaques lingered, as if  
waiting for someone  
to present their citizenship papers.

A gaggle of geese  
waddled through a temple in Nagaon  
but did not seek Takamagahara,  
just a warm spot to rest.

A peacock alone in a Dubai courtyard  
was not there to pray. He wanted only  
room to spread his iridescent ego  
under new-blue skies  
without having his picture taken.

Stunned water birds in Venice  
had never put  
their webbed feet in clear  
water until this momentous day.  
Elated, they paddled the arcs  
of the Grand Canal,  
speculating about the masked ones  
Who scurried over bridges  
carrying brown paper bags  
heavy with warm pasta.  
Home they flew, six feet apart,  
never pausing to notice  
the ones who were watching,  
the ones who had always been watching.

### **Communique from Beyond**

We, the dead, do hereby declare  
we are model citizens  
no longer recklessly

pursuing life, liberty,  
happiness, or dollars.

Pay attention and  
you might sense us  
in diffuse early light,  
or at times when you can't tell  
the moon from the sun,  
both of them pale and translucent  
like the green light  
at the end of the pier  
always out of reach.

Where we are we cannot tell,  
but we have sunlight and  
bright-colored hammocks  
to rest in under stars  
that know our names.  
We walk beside cats and ferrets,  
foxes, bears, dogs, and small deer.  
Together, we sing celebrations  
in the same loving language.

We are never  
at war  
hungry  
cold

alone  
unforgiven  
or unloved.

You are the first to know for sure.  
Inhale. Exhale. Repeat.

“Personaje en un interior” by Rufino Tamayo (1989)



### **Hombre Con Flores**

A carnival of color and your cartoon grin beckon me,

a grin exclaimed by dimples on your flat, round head.  
But, one hand's a fist, the other tight about the table edge,  
Does your smile belie a fear – of being erased, deemed irrelevant?  
Hands connected to flaccid arms, you could not hug  
a child, or lift a fork to that black gash carved in your face.  
Tell me, do you believe in the god who drew you  
in this place? The one who threatens you with  
immobility in a mortal world of yielding suns.

Yes, there are compensations.  
He places a flower at your throat,  
a pumpkin-sized tomato to your left,  
that extravagant bowl of summer flowers  
at the edge of your table.  
He offers you a dusky landscape,  
a darkened dying sun.  
He gives you that wide grin to make believe  
breathing isn't what it is:  
imagination abetting desire.

### **Detour on the Road to Perdition**

The road to perdition  
may be rutted and muddy,  
sometimes bloody,  
but it passes by a window  
out of which

ripples the jubilant squealing  
of two small girls  
pulling chocolate chip waffles  
from a toaster  
as their hungover mother  
caresses them  
with bleary eyes.

*Fini*



*August 2020*

