



"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 wintery 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!

.

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

