Battle of the Bards Poetry Contest and Poetry Reading

To celebrate National Poetry Month 2015, the Poudre River Public Library District is holding this special program to engage both adult and teenage creative writers in our community for a multi-generational poetry contest and poetry reading event.

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

THE POUDRE RIVER FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY
WOLVERINE FARM PUBLISHING COMPANY & BOOKSTORE

MICHAEL LIGGETT  Poudre River Public Library District Board of Trustees member; Fort Collins attorney who served on the Poudre School District Board of Education; Fort Collins Baseball Club Board; and Foothills Rehabilitation Center Board; Battle of the Bards Host

KEN DRAVES  Deputy Director & Harmony Library Manager; Battle of the Bards Committee Member

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MOLLY THOMPSON  Jobs and Career Librarian; Battle of the Bards Committee Member

DIANE TUCCILLO  Teen Services Librarian; Battle of the Bards Committee Member; Teen Poetry Judge and Battle of the Bards Co-host

OTHER TEEN CATEGORY JUDGES:

ELIZABETH CHOQUETTE  A freshman at Fossil Ridge High School and a member of the library district’s Interesting Reader Society (Teen IRS) who enjoys writing and is a Co-host for this year’s Battle of the Bards event.

ELLIE DRAVES  A junior at Poudre High School who loves reading, volunteering, and drinking chai. She is a Co-host for this year’s Battle of the Bards event.

SHEALA DAWN HENKE  A writer and elementary school teacher who enjoys mentoring and working with young writers to develop their own voice in writing. She has published two books in her IDEA-33 young adult science fiction series and collaborated with “The Muses,” a group of local teen writers in the Poudre School District, to share in the creation process of her debut novel.

OTHER ADULT CATEGORY JUDGES:

WILLIAM HENRY FOSTER, III  English Faculty at Front Range Community College for over 8 years and has taught a variety of courses in literature and College Composition; served as the Writing Program Assistant for the Rhetoric, Languages, and Philosophy (RLP) department at the Larimer campus; is Advisor for Writers on the Storm, a creative writing club at Larimer campus; currently the RLP department’s Lead instructor for both Technical Writing and Concurrent Enrollment.

CHLOÉ LEISURE  Born and raised in Marquette, Michigan, Chloë holds an MA in Creative Writing from Northern Arizona University and an MFA in Poetry from Colorado State University. She currently teaches currently teaches elementary enrichment creative writing classes and a poetry class through Osher titled, “Inhabiting Poetry Inhabiting the World.” Her poetry has appeared in Matter, PANK, Paterson Literary Review, A Poetic Inventory of A Poetic Inventory of Rocky Mountain National Park, and Permafrost. She was the 2014 Fort Collins Poet Laureate, and is the author of the chapbook, The End of the World Again.
A day before a decade ago
Is when I should have realized
That I was wrong, and apologized
Now I could say that I was a child, and that then I did not understand
But, even a child knows that you cannot put hearts, like humpty-dumpty, back together again
I saw the cracks start
Tracing through the green lacquer of the puzzle box you carried from Budapest
A good place to be from, my father once said, looking always to the future
What future did you dream of as you filled that box with coins from every sleeping summer city?
What future did you dream of as you carried it all back home to me?
I will never know.
I pushed that box and your silent declaration back into your hands, and you placed them gently back in mine
A hundred coin cacophony, a symphony of misunderstanding
That lived in my chest, my hands as I worked the decade, Hail Mary – I am sorry, I am sorrowful.
Sorrows clanging up against my ribs until I saw you again at the start of summer, and you lifted me up into the loquat tree
I filled my skirt with fading fruit for a faded time, your hands on my waist and my hand on your shoulders.
Eat them before they rot, you said. A decade too late.
Too late to be sitting on sun-warmed rocks and talking of new separate futures until night and silence fell.
When we spoke again in winter, just the day before today, I heard your gentle concern – Are you alright?
Of course I am, of course I am.
I wanted to say so much more - I said go home to her.
Yearling Marriage
by Chelle Costello

We’re each straining to swim, and
Neither corseted by the other,
But pinned in place by this house
Which threatens to sink us
Into withered age and softened dreams
That were hard as apples, once, and just as bright.

I stopped feeling alive the day I no longer craved them.
Those trees don’t breathe on me anymore,
I’m fossilized at twenty-eight, grasping
At synthetic adventures.

And this is the core of my sleeplessness when
He, warm and dreaming of answers, lays
Ever to my left. But our match, if not our dreams,
May survive, shaped by the contours
Of these ceilings, these fences and floors,
This house- falling upon us
Like snow.
At the Veterinarian’s Office
by Michael Hill

He was a big fellow,
had to duck
just to make it in the door,
and long on swagger,
with broad shoulders
squared against the day
and thick fingers
that were busy subduing
a to-go cup of coffee.
But when the vet’s assistant appeared
and handed him the small metal cage,
empty save for an old, threadbare pillow,
I saw him cave in on himself
a little, his voice catching
in response to her questions
about cremation options
and his face pinched
by the weight
of unexpected grief, as if
the emptiness inside
the pet carrier
was growing heavier by the second,
and it was all he could do
to keep holding on.
October
by Elizabeth Kay Patterson

“You’re the best thing
that’s ever happened
to me,” I tell you
in the car after
a glass of hot
cider and rum.
“That’s very kind,”
you say and look
at me for a
moment, then back
to the road.
When we arrive home,
I go to the bathroom
to cry.
It is midnight.
In our room,
you are making the bed.
I took her out to lunch today.
She seemed better somehow:
More aware of the world around her
And calmer than before.

We ate at our usual place:
Where they understand our need
For a quiet, back booth
Away from judging eyes and noisy conversations.

I ordered her a sandwich and drink:
Easier than soup or something that needs cutting.
We talked about nothing, or rather, I talked.
She mostly sat quietly, ate and said nothing.

What does she really see
Behind those confused eyes?
Does she know what she has lost?
What she will still lose?

I paid the bill, gathered her things
And looked across the table
To sudden recognition in her eyes.
“You’re my daughter!” She cried.
“You love me. You take care of me.”
“I love you, Julie.”
Words I hadn’t heard in two years
Poured from her; once hidden behind illness.

I helped her to the car
Settled her in the seat
And looked for some sign that
Things had changed.
But behind those eyes
Everything was as before:
Silent and uncomprehending.
But for a moment, she was there.
I
They called the jam jar of red in the
refrigerator
my sister, told me that half-formed,
unripe fruits were a sibling of mine,
dead before death was even a fearsome thing.

As a child, I wanted to see arms, teeth, and feet,
the things that I knew meant living.
I wanted to see a dollhouse skeleton like the
Halloween puzzles I would get from the lady in the green house,
the kind of thing that makes small death seem simple like
a shadow show against the bedroom wall.
I wanted something to make miscarriage
a dark trip on the sidewalk, something real and easy.

If that was my sister, I wanted to see
the gruesome colors and textures that
all real walking people have,
ot this cup of red currents and dead fire ants.
I wanted to see eggshells, placenta,
molted skin, a shell of a chrysalis,
a sister.

II
My mother leans over the small cradle coffin.
It holds the child made of her blood, only.
Her empty breasts hang like small bags of
rock salt,
shaking as she cries
for the colony of fire ants inside her,
for the cruel anatomy of a mistake,
for the fig that she wanted to ripen,
for the twig that dropped it and the sun that
dried it up.

She wanted a child for each of her fingers but
now she leans over the child’s shoe box,
now set in the ground
now to be rocked by time,
now sung to sleep by the friction of whispers
now from highway route 71.

Her pearl necklace breaks, the beads fall,
bouncing against the cardboard lid, so many eggs.

III
Let Salome eat pears,
let her rattle the sugar maple leaves,
let her shake Saturn’s ring around her hips—

Herodias’s uterus
swings hollow when she walks
like a shriveled fig left on the
tree for the birds to peck at and the
beetles to fill up with their eggs.

We walk
a long time before speaking.
She asks what made
me dance that way,
as if, as if,
as if a demon
inside my womb.
You Left the Bonfire Early

by Tara Soulen

This is the last time we will be friends.
We don’t know it for certain but we both feel it
like a cold front in our knees. Sitting with the fire
between us. Turning away from the smoke.
You keep your hands folded in your pockets.
I stick my toes in the ash. Stir up sparks.

This is the last time we believe in invulnerability.
Believe the stars, the birds, the flames, the truth,
belong to us. Believe our hearts glow like coals.
Believe we can plunge our hands into the embers
and pull out gems. Believe the shadows
between trees hold no perils.

I want to tell you
to breathe deep. To feel the smoke curl deep in your lungs like a cat. To carry it
home with you, warm and soft. To tend it. To let it stay with you, a living thing
to keep you company in the night. To keep it alive. To never fully exhale.
I want to tell you.

This is the last time.
Staring through curtains of flame.
Sharing without saying a thing.
Sitting with the fire between us.
Turning away from the smoke.
“Message in a Bottle”
A Love Letter Written after Reading Moby Dick
by Morgan Taylor

Aboard the ‘Pequod’, 1838:
“I can’t explain, to thee, my loving wife,
the reasons why I toil the seas for life
that beats within the deepest breast. For hate
is not what I would share with thee. Berate
and strike when I come home. Or bear our strife
until thee weep, but know, harpoon and knife,
are simply means, not cause to separate.
I love thee more but cannot steer my bark
back to thy hearth before I boil the chops
that had my flesh. Until, from hell, I stab
the darkest part the whitest foe hides, hark
for me by dawn, by anchor, and by tops.
Love, he has come, and I must go, Ahab.”

“My Eighth Sea” A Sonnet for ‘Her’
by Morgan Taylor

There are waves that taste of you beneath the flush
of the salt Pacific sun. Winds across
their tips blow thoughts of you and high I toss
and burn within the roll of their foamed wash.
I need to drown as I do in your arms.
I need to sink and die a little bit
more each time the waves rise and steady; sit
and press the breath from me, as do your charms.
So I wait until the sea is high and
strong; fury in proof - much as your absence
is. When small-salt stones run fast at the brute
attention of the sea, as I, your sand,
do when you come to me, I abandon sense;
and find the sea’s embrace less strong than you.
Dad's Swing Sets
by Shelley Widhalm

Under an oak tree
is where Dad built the swing,
two ropes and a board.
Dad's hands on our backs,
feet touching the sky,
or seeming to,
matched with giggles
“More, more,”
Dorothy's red shoes
lighten my feet.

At our next house
when we’re too big for pushing,
he gave us two swings,
cross bars, a rope, a trapeze.
Hours we laugh,
sunshine to our growing.

Dad digs all of it out,
four yellow grassy spots a reminder
of his building, fixing
swings wherever we live
to take us up to the sky
and back again to his hands,
long fingers, calloused,
strong, beautiful
to me.
Okay. Here goes. Now don’t mess this thing up.
“A poem I’ve wrote for my dear little pup.
List all great qualities, she has that stuff.
She’s cute and small and white and very fluffy.” Oh no, there weren’t enough syllables. These ten beats are too quickly fillable.
I ran the word through two lines and they know.
But maybe I can save this. Start with “Oh!
Sweet canine, sleeping on my double bed,
Now dreaming of that squirrel that you chased.”
I’m sure no one noticed what you did there. Just mispronounce the word. Why should you care.
That you sound like a moron, adding ‘-ed’.
Too late to save this mess. Just get it read.
“Dear puppy, how you make me smile so big
When you run through the yard with yonder twig
Or snarfing down your dinner like a pig.”
Was that 3 lines that rhymed instead of two?
Did I miscount? How do you even do that, only counting up to two? That’s so embarrassing. We’ll quickly move on, though.
“When we walk down the street, my heart, it swells,
“On all faces, the joy I see, it dwells.”

I don’t think one word in that sentence was in the right place. I put them there because it made it rhyme. I’m really quite shameless.
“Oh, innocent mutt, who’s heart is blameless.
No sins commit, except for chewing shoes.
Those brand new, brand name hundred dollar shoes.”
Did I just rhyme ‘shoes’ with itself? And how Did we get on shoes and not the dog now?
But look. I go on, “I loved those shoes like,
Like autumn in the springtime. Strappy, spike Heel, with buckles on the side. No, wait. Were Those some other pair? My memories blur.
I only wore them once before that cur
Got her damn stupid teeth on them all o’er.”
And there’s two syllables I said as one. I should just sit down. This poem is so done.
But wait, down here, I get back to my dog.
“Silly sprinting hound.
So joyous in everything.
Don’t eat that dead bird.”
Was that haiku? I think I got confused On what poetic style I meant to use.
That’s it. No poetry writing at three In the night no matter how much coffee I may consume. “My puppy’s great. That’s all.
That is the message of this flailing poem.
And, yes, that did not rhyme.”
Faint Acceptance
by Chelle Costello

Last night, gazing at a yard staccatoed with snow, I watched the moon’s blue glow highlighted branches. Internal rhythms, hardened by millennia of pressure. Tree rings frictioned by the pulse of freeze and melt.

I know birth when I see it.

And what does this mean tonight, The chipped paint of the garage, the sage’s hardy leaves half-suffocated by ice? The full blast of moon answers in shining quiet, Hope, you fool.

Because I’d wanted visions- mad visions, bright as hell- I now know I couldn’t handle. And great love, like great visions, came calm and still and whispering, Hope, you fool.
Each day is a continual battle for you
The opponent yourself, the remedies but few
In the morning you’re him
By noon it’s someone new
At night when we sleep, I wonder who’s who
It must be difficult
To try and control
This that latches on to the seat of your soul
Moments of bliss
Are taken away
By anger and sadness, depression and rage
Doctors try their best to lend
Referrals to clinics
And prescriptions for meds
Those things don’t work
They leave you without drive
The better parts of you, locked up inside
Classified as a disease
With genetic origins
Your mom was whisked away in a straitjacket to Corrigan
Tears have streamed
down cheeks of faith
Refusing to rest until this monster is slain
You are stronger than
That of your label
The truth is set free when your actions are stable
As suicidal tendencies
Come to rear
I talk you down while not showing my fear
Secretly I wait
For you to fall asleep
Hoping that tomorrow we can take a big leap
Life doesn’t hand out four-leaf clovers
And things are much better when you remain sober
The booze is a crutch
This I’ve heard you say
When you start to drink, there’s no one to blame
It’s all apologies
The morning there after
But as the sun begins to sink, it toils disaster
Darkness blankets love in a shroud of unease
If we give up now
Who will it please?
Me against you
Oh, what has been done?
While we were off arguing, the demon has won
I may seem tough
But it’s not easy, you see
Your bipolar disorder also affects me
The Invention of the Smile
by Miranda Ray

We never knew them best by the way they dressed,
But rather by that universal grimace.
They packed themselves tightly into rows, orderly,
Like the pages of a history text
Ascending forward in time, upwards in height,
The tallest among them kneeling
In their best trousers, the gentlemen,
Their hats off, haircuts fresh,
Faces identical, the men and women.

How many times did their features stretch
Directionless
Wondering whether to wince or sneeze, to frown or yawn,
To kiss or sneer or remain unexpressed
And who was the first to discover the smile,
That laughing rictus?
To prove to their grandchildren that the people of the past
Had mouths full of teeth and twinkling eyes
And faces beautiful in historic context?
There are days while waiting
for the point of a turn arrow to glow
or standing amidst Martian gum skimming
what shades of divorce are in this season
when suddenly I remember:
I am supposed to be pretty.

I remember: It is not okay
- to use my fingers as my favorite comb.
- to dress myself from the men’s section.
- to trim a broken fingernail with scissors.
- to leave my teeth yellow and unbleached.
- to present my face without paint,
  my eyes circled in sleep instead of liner
  my lips cracked from winter
  my lashes clean of tar.

I remember
and I am terrified.

I change directions. Pace hollow
down aisle after drugstore aisle
filling my basket with polish, balm
in Pink Kiss, and delicate lace
bikinis I’ll stick a thumb through.
Lotion to smooth out all my cracks
and shampoo to add luster. Cheap
earrings clicking like high heels
against the plastic.

Hurry home and pull windows and doors
around me like veils. Disrobe and stand
before the bathroom mirror in penance
counting every flaw like a rosary bead.
Say my prayers.

Make me pretty.
Please make me pretty.
Aubade for the Stars  
by Krista Beucler

Carnival of wonders
Peddlers
Markers of dreams
Vendors of miracles
Bazaar magic and nonsense
Market of the Faeries
Casting through the chimes
And cries
Enticing smells
Strange faces
He found her
And she gave him a flower
And stole a kiss
Promised him everything
Gave him his Heart’s Desire
All he had to do was hoot
Like a little owl
And the meadow made a bed
And the stars were a room
And she gave him things he’d never had before
She held him spell bound
And the night was wrapped in gasping breaths

The heat of kisses
The salt of tears
And two people so close they took the space of one
The heavens glittered
And the starlight sang
Soft hands roamed along free expanses
And they lay together quietly
For a while
And the exotic girl, a slave
Whom his love could not free
Then the world woke around them
And the silk of her raiment once more covered her
Lavender eyes closed a final time
The last of the blackberry kisses
And she stole back to the caravan
While he was left to wonder
If she had ever really been there
While he was left to wonder
On faraway places
And magic never imagined
I am the cornerkeeper
though it may seem this is just a corner
a small part of the infinitesimal cosmos
meaningless to most mortals on this planet
to me it is a home
a home to read
inspire
laugh
cry
sit in solitude and peace

I am the cornerkeeper
dust adorns the walls it is positioned between
mousehole, dark and dim, burrows into its center
I find this location encouraging in all its dull glory
though this may not make sense to you
the corner is crystal clear to me

I am the cornerkeeper
the corner keeps me
no-one notices this small, boring area
so at least we have something in common
when a place is as lifeless as this poor corner is
there are plenty of things to imagine

I am the cornerkeeper
imagine that inside the tiny mousehole
fairies and elves are twirling
magic flowers swaying
the sweet smell of nature in the air
visualize that this corner was once home to a
bookshelf
full of stories
and history
fantasy
science
tales of war and sorrow

I am the cornerkeeper
this small place in the world
the intersection of two sides of a closet
squirreled away
veiled with filth
is filled to the brim with ideas
but none of them reveal themselves
at least not to ordinary people

I am the cornerkeeper
I’m fond of thinking about
what this corner could have been
should have been
can be
I like to think it does the same for me

I am the cornerkeeper
and when I am feeling lonely
like everyone has given up on me
including myself
it never loses faith in me
it bears my suffering in silence
I know I am stronger
smarter
prettier
and more colorful than this plain white corner
that alone gives me the strength
to fight demons
so that means that
when I only end up battling snotty eighth-grade
girls
I have a little bit of power leftover
to save for the real monsters

I am the cornerkeeper
the corner keeps me
and though it is weak
I think I’ll let it be
Bitter Mornings like Coffee Grounds

by Ellie Manning

Morning
Oh, my sweet, sweet darling,
The nights are long
And the coffee tastes bitter
When you stay away,
I could do things over
In my mind,
But it would never change
The way you left me.

Noon
All I can taste is the bitterness of coffee grounds
Yet I pour myself another mug
Was it your love that kept me addicted?
I can’t remember the taste of you,
It’s been too long,
The coffee is done brewing.

Evening
I found an old book of poetry
Dappled with coffee stains,
So I began erasing all of the love notes,
It was a kind of
Melancholy irony,
Did you ever write me a love song?

Midnight
I’m running on three hours of sleep
And my god, darling does it make me love you
There is something so precious
About those hours, kept awake,
Bitter
Sweetened by the anticipation of coffee in the morning.
Infidelity
by Ellie Manning

his into hers
It was the way body pulled
her away from his

vie, beats
that twisted an ardent desire to the way a heart
die, breaks

rise, strong she with
at sun so would never stand.
down, wrong he under
My Caged Birds Cannot Sing
by Rachel Poulsen

I seem to write in similes,
In metaphors, in imagery.
Poetry is another guise
For even here I try to hide.
I use my lovely little words,
Feelings trapped like caged birds,
Wings that beat against the wood
Just trying to be understood.
Yet still I fail to make them see,
For I’m afraid to reveal me.
I try to let another hear,
But the bird-words flee in fear.
They refuse to be expressed,
Though I try to make them rest.
I put my pencil to the page,
But graphite cannot break the cage.
The bars around are far too strong,
The birds within have no more song.
Feathers strewn across the floor,
Mournful chirping is no more,
Inside this cage there is no flight
No up or down, no left or right.
It might be rather sad to see,
For this is all they’ll ever be,
Crumpled forms with battered wing
This is why they cannot sing.
Roller Derby
by Greta Richardson

Lined up
Ready
Hands shaking
Stomach
Clenching
Adrenaline
Rushing
FIVE!
Five more
Seco-
FWEEP!
Here goes
Nothing
Body
Here
Enemy
There
It’s a
War zone
Opponent
Right
Behind
Another
Whistle
Signaling
Your
Lead
Can’t
Celebrate though
Busy

Click click shhhh
Just keep
Just keep
Breathing
S
K
A
T
I
N
G
Right into
The pack
A wall of
People
Just waiting
To
Knock
You
Down
A blur
Of
Skin
And skates
CrAcK
There it
Is

The familiar
Sound
Of body
Against body
Of human
Against
Ground
The familiar
Feeling
Of nothing
And yet
Every tiny
Bone
In your
Body
Dies a little
So much
Detail
On the
Floor
No time to
Pick up
Loose thoughts
Back on feet
Pushing forward
Seeing freedom
Between
Two more
Helmets

With figures
Underneath
Ram into
You
Goodbye
Air
Nice
Knowing
You
NO
No time
For gasping
Only forward
Tweet
Whistle
Blows
The fight
Is over
Two minutes
No, an eternity
Done
For 30
More
Seconds
The war
Is never done
Not until
You
Have won
Shoes & Pie
by Isabella Rogge

apples
I miss the cutting taste of a
granny smith from the tree in our
backyard,
a not-ripe granny smith from the tree
hanging over the picket fence

I picked some and made a pie
it wasn’t very tasty
(too much sugar)
but everyone had a big slice
and a scoop of French vanilla ice cream

overalls
with white paint stains
from painting that old picket fence
and we had a paint fight
wasted a whole bucket
just for a ten-minute memory

That was my barefoot backyard
and for all the thistles
I never learned to wear shoes.
The calluses grew and grew till
I couldn’t feel the thorns.
I didn’t need the shoes.

Ten years later
I wear shoes now
Wouldn’t be caught dead in the overalls
I’ve been missing
and I don’t have a backyard anymore
just a third-story window
with a back-alley view
(I keep the blinds shut)

I wear shoes now
because the calluses don’t help
all these people around me
wearing layers and layers
and through all our thistles
we were nothing but naked
we were nothing but alone

I bought some granny smiths
cut them up, made a pie
One of the most beautiful things
I’d ever made
Just cause I felt like it
No one to share it with
I made myself sick
All to myself and
no ice cream

since then, I can’t stand
the thought of
apples.
Lost?
by Kaili Schroeder

The earth has gone stale here.
We live like water-logged beasts,
Too afraid to let ourselves drown
Or pull ourselves ashore,
Half-way between
Living and dying
Cowering beneath mini-condos and skyscrapers
We’ve lost sight of our headwaters.
The internet doesn’t understand
Our origin.
This is not a problem with a simple answer,
Grab an easy fix through the search bar and comfort our minds No,
We need to fight the current.
We cannot be satisfied to let it drag us down the embankments
Scraped toes and waterlogged –
Headaches are not good enough anymore.
It is time to resist the pull,
Swim upstream and find our Headwaters.
Let’s carve a new path.
Through deep canyons and sandstone,
It has been done before.
We can carve a new path
Let’s carve a new path
Wash away remnants of skyscrapers and factories
Until we have remembered our beginning,
Until we have decided not to drown,
Until we have seen it is possible not to conform to the current,
That we can etch waterways through stone,
That we are powerful,
And that we can start over just as easily
As when we began.
One night I stayed awake for hours
Obsessively folding paper cranes. I couldn’t sleep.
My body had stopped functioning
approximately a minute after I had woken up
earlier that day
Yet my eyelids would not close
Except to take a rapidly blinking stop motion movie of my lifespan.
I had gotten up
With a notebook spine replacing my bones
and cartilage,
A mindful of paper cuts making my thoughts bleed red
A wingspan of doubts and insecurities turning my feathers to lead.
I sat there folding...folding...folding birds
My lips having trouble remembering the definition of ‘smile’
My wings shrunk into useless, floundering arms that could only pathetically imitate
The possibility of soaring.
I folded for hours,
Methodically folding and re-folding the same steps for every bird until
The repetition took over my being and
I was a paper crane myself and
I was beautiful,
But dumb. Worthless.
As forever stuck to the ground by my inanity
As the rest of the haphazard fleet of birdsong
I had creased into being.
I had finally drifted off,
An unfinished crane still grasped between my exhausted fingers,
Its wings not yet manipulated into a state of being,
Staying crumpled, purposeless

While I slept.
The cranes swarmed around my head all night,
The crinkling and sharp snap of paper,
Hundreds of wings sliding incessantly
Across each other with the whispering of secretive notebook sheets warning me
That obsessive flight patterns
Will bring me too close to the sun,
That I have too far to fall,
That I am worth more than sleepless nights and failed attempts to fly.
I got up
With a mindful of rustling papers reorganizing themselves along the lined surface of my skull,
With the soft memory of wing beats caressing the feathers downing my would-be wings,
With a finished crane resting between my fingers.
I got up with comrades.
I got up with beautiful birds whose wings are just as uncooperative and dysfunctional as mine.
I got up thinking
That maybe soaring isn’t just meant for the sky.
Unspoken
by Regan Thomas

We have a choice in this world
About who to be
We are shaped by the words we choose
To speak
The second worst thing in this life is when
We utter toxic words
Words that are meant to break a heart
Words that are meant to turn someone
Into nothing
Nothing

Worse than the toxic words
That spill out of our mouths like
Smoky black oil
Are the words that are left unsaid
Unread letters hidden in a box
Buried deep
Where they will never be found
Never

When all is said and done
We will look back on our lives
Filled with regret from the time
We never told someone
We love them
When we never told someone how much
They mean to us
We never let anyone know how much
We miss them
We should have spoken up
Now the moment is gone
Gone, and
We will not get another chance
To tell them what we never said

POUDRE RIVER PUBLIC LIBRARY DISTRICT
Snow Angel
by Brianna Alers

Each step brings the sound of crackling ice,
Soft and delicate.
Her snow white dress snaps in the wind,
Frigid and cold.
The snow swirls around her pale face, making a crown of ice in her hair.
Black locks, a blot of darkness in the white.
Ice blue eyes, as cold as the snow.
Pale skin, as soft as the clouds.
Flurry of snow, blocks the view.
Look around, she is nowhere to be found.
Like snow in the sun,
One minute there, the next
Gone
This Isn’t Love
by Cedar Bennett

Love isn’t real
I disagree with the fact that
It’s all we need
Believe it when they say
There’s no such thing as true love
They’re lying when they tell you
I love you

(Now read bottom to top)
My smile is wide trying to look like my sister
My backpack is pink with a gold survival whistle
The camera flashes and I am at school
introducing Lia to my peers
John’s voice is as slow as molasses as he speaks
to her
not knowing she knew English
The teacher claps
It echoes in the small gym as we were running
the pacer in third grade
fast
We were rivers after a flood
The flood of tears comes to my eyes
as I watch Lia struggle with a family death in
fourth grade
She wraps her small arms around my skinny tan
shoulders and looks down at my green crocs
Suddenly I’m hugging the principal goodbye and
graduating in my silver flats and rainbow ruffled
dress
I am given a present and open it to find a black
sparkly bag with Berlin printed in orange letters
I squeal and thank my German exchange student
then look around
I’m in an unfamiliar entrance to a school
Looking up I find CLPMS printed in green letters
Then there they are on my shirt in the reflection
of my gold French horn
The wind blows and I hear the river scream to me
Slow down—you’re in sixth grade
I walk to the river in floppy waders
laughing with a girl with brown hair and freckles
My teacher is yelling instructions over the loudly
flowing water
Who are you? Where has my pink backpack
gone? I question to myself
The teacher dressed in all purple blows her
whistle
I hit the worn grass covered in sweat
and mad
The yellow card swipes in front of my vision as my
cleats dig into the mud
Happy they were penalized
She is like a fireball my sister says after my game
Fireball the speaker blares and the crowd of
dancers leaps up screaming
I’m in a big gym with blocked out windows and a
bunch of kids my age
How did I get here I scream to a tall boy with a
tie and brown hair he points at his ear and walks
away
I look up at the colored lights
before I know it they turn into dim lights on a
screen
Just Dance is at the top of the screen
the white ceiling is my own comforting ceiling
Movement beside me catches my eye
a grown-up version of Lia is dancing to a
mannequin on the screen
Her glasses are gone
She is short and beautiful
The screen changes
I’m in eighth grade staring at the word beautiful
on my screen
Typing long sentences
If I had my gold whistle now I would blow hard
willing someone to find me
to slow me down
pull me from the confusing fast lane of life
‘Cause my childhood slipped away before I heard
the word smile.
Untitled

by Maggie Hubbeling

The waves crash over me, steal away sighs
Disguises washed away with water
Glimpses of shields once covering my eyes
Everything torn and taken like slaughter.
Masks hide my face from all looking to see
In flames my eyes covered, dark in plain sight
Stripping away the beauty, beastly now
I’m trapped within, reaching towards light.
The elastic peel comes off, free to move
Joyful tears burn across my cheeks in streaks
Leaving in their wake deep, beautiful grooves
Cages gone from skin, able to breath, I peak.
Joy from the shell that life once was to me
Bared I show my face, I am set free.
Jazz Band

by Quinn Ocheltree

Eighth notes swingin’
Half notes ringin’
and my Jazz Band's singin’.
Spit’s a ‘flyin’
brass is cryin’
and my Jazz Band’s flyin’.
The brass tings
the spit stings
and my Jazz Band plings.
Smooth metal is swaying
dented parts are making
the instruments start braying
the oil’s obeying
while my Jazz Band’s playing!