

2015



WINNING ENTRIES



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POUDRE RIVER  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
DISTRICT

# 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 POUDBRE 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*

**MEG SCHIEL** *Library Assistant; Battle of the Bards Committee Member; Adult Poetry Judge*

**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, Chloé holds an MA in Creative Writing from Northern Arizona University and an MFA in Poetry from Colorado State University. She 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 and Permafrost. She was the 2014 Fort Collins Poet Laureate, and is the author of the chapbook, The End of the World Again.*

## The Decade

by Allison Cleymaet

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.

# Recognition

by Jean Ruecker

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.

# The Three Sorrowful Mysteries

by Natalie Scarlett

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,  
not 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.

# Adult Honorable Mentions

## Poems Are Hard

by Veronica Brush

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 fluff-fy." 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 snarling 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 darn 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.

# A Fight for Your Mind

by Brittney Grace

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?

# Girl Tax

by Tara Soulen

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

# Cornerkeeper

by Livi Chatfield-Scott

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		The familiar	With figures
Ready	Click click shhhh	Sound	Underneath
Hands shaking	Just keep	Of body	Ram into
Stomach	Moving	Against body	You
Clenching	Just keep	Of human	Goodbye
Adrenaline	Breathing	Against	Air
Rushing	Just keep	Ground	Nice
FIVE!	S	The familiar	Knowing
Five more	K	Feeling	You
Seco-	A	Of nothing	NO
FWEEP!	T	And yet	No time
Here goes	I	Every tiny	For gasping
Nothing	N	Bone	Only forward
Body	G	In your	Tweet
Here	Right into	Body	Whistle
Enemy	The pack	Dies a little	Blows
There	A wall of		The fight
It's a	People	So much	Is over
War zone	Just waiting	Detail	Two minutes
Opponent	To	On the	No, an eternity
Right	Knock	Floor	Done
Behind	You	No time to	For 30
Another	Down	Pick up	More
Whistle	A blur	Loose thoughts	Seconds
Signaling	Of	Back on feet	
Your	Skin	Pushing forward	The war
Lead	And skates	Seeing freedom	Is never done
Can't	CrAck	Between	Not until
Celebrate though	There it	Two more	You
Busy	Is	Helmets	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.

# The Paper Cranes on My Floor

by Kaili Schroeder

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

We have a choice in this world  
About what to say  
We have been taught  
For decades  
To say the right things at the right times  
Otherwise  
The memories of the times we bit our tongues  
Instead of speaking up  
Will flood through our minds  
Leaving broken dreams in their wake  
Reminding us of everything we shouldn't  
have left unspoken  
Unspoken

# Teen Honorable Mentions

## 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)

# Grow Up

by Tannis Downing

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!



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