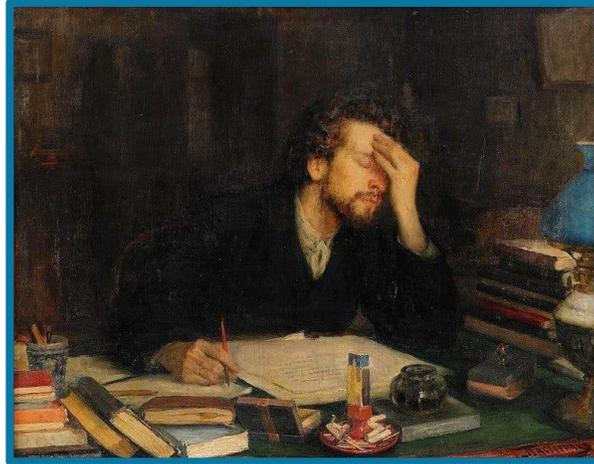


# Osher Poetry Group Anthology #5 Fall 2024



I have been facilitating the Osher Poetry Group for four and a half years. During that time, we've all had to face changes in our lives brought about by political, social, climatic, and medical disturbances in addition to the deaths of loved ones. It hasn't been easy. But our Friday Zoom meetings have been a quiet space, a sort of paradise, where we bring our work to the gentle critique of our fellows, and where we read & discuss the work of poets from our own & other cultures. This exploration has brought us a bit of wisdom & encouraged us to try new ways of making our "reckless encounters with whatever comes along" (Poet William Stafford) more compelling and more alive. We hope you find pleasure in what we've collected here.

Brenda Baer

## Fay Ashby

Brenda has created a safe and loving poetry environment. Each week I savor the sumptuousness of poetry and grow as a poet and as a person.

### **Life**

It's a death-defying ride  
full of extreme hills  
tight turns, steep slopes  
and sometimes inversions.

There are restraints  
but hold on tight  
prepare for laughter,  
tears and screams.

No mid-ride departures  
or do-overs are permitted  
And when the ride stops  
It's over.

## **Snake Oil**

I

was selling \*snake oil

but I did not know it

I ate it

breathed it

and

pushed it

to everyone

I worshiped a place

I thought was enchanted

and grounded in equality

and fair play

an ugly incident

forced me to step back

and take

a closer look

there was no magic

no altruism

just business

I was selling tap water

with sparkles

and clay

concocted by

the woman

behind the curtain

disenchanted

I backed away

no stumbled

and ran away

distrusting and disillusioned

feeling gullible

hurt and betrayed

should I be mad at her

or

Me?

\*Snake oil is a term used to describe deceptive marketing or a scam.

## **Our Quilts**

The fabric of our lives is lovingly stitched by hand  
not prefabricated as they would have you believe

Custom designed and unique  
altered as we grow

Sometimes the stitches are loose  
and we temporarily lose our way

We are seemingly unaware  
that the layers protect us from  
unbearable dangers

Frequently our patches are  
interwoven with the fabric of others  
temporarily or for a lifetime

Retrospective analysis allows us to see  
the piecing

patches

hidden stitches

and the appliques that

we are often too close to discern

while wrapping ourselves in our quilts.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP DANCE**

Come dance with me

we can slide across the floor

like you slide in and out of my life

hand dance

fast and slow

you can turn me

like you've turned my life around

Come dance with me

in a line

with choreographed steps

you are the player

you know how to step about

and play with my emotions

making me think we are in synch

but never committing before the dance is over

and we go back to our separate lives

Come before the dance is over

dances

unlike life

are defined by two

it takes two to tango

or we can two-step

twirl and laugh and move around the floor as one

but don't try to dip me

I'll resist

I don't trust you to support me

you've let me down before



Brenda Baer

The piles of books on my desk that spill onto the floor and a nearby table, the binders of poems, & my notebooks filled with ideas attest to the depth of my involvement with and love of poems. Pen & yellow pad, computer & printer: tools for Elysian aging.

### **We of Advanced Age**

We know this place, and,  
    open-palmed, offer up pieces of ourselves,  
sweetened, like berries in a pie.

Here, take us, we say –  
    we are finally ripe and of substance,  
lovable with flaws.

You will not regret coming close,  
    having a lighthearted lunch with death & us,  
here by the untamed river of uncertainty.

### **R.I.P. Bad Boy**

I watched you die yesterday,  
fierce Bad Boy – still hissing,  
growling, fighting off the vet  
who needed to sedate you.

“He’ll bite,” she warned  
her aide. She captured  
him in a blanket and jabbed

him with a needle. "It'll  
take ten minutes," she said,  
leaving me alone with him.

He jumped down from  
the table, already unsteady  
as he wobbled toward the door.  
I called to him, reached out  
to him; he came toward  
me woozy and splay-footed,  
collapsed between my feet,  
the tumor poking out  
from his belly;  
unexpected, convulsive sobs  
reminded me that such a loss,  
though deemed "the right thing  
to do," reaches into a person  
and wrenches some irreplaceable good.

We adopted this badass cat  
the same month we married,  
told each other frequently  
he had to go back to the shelter  
for unmitigated meanness.

But, in the end, we made a bargain:  
we would live in places  
where he could be outdoors  
on demand, be fed treats & catnip  
when he chose, and use  
our bodies to warm his bones  
on winter nights. Good deal,  
solid for fifteen years.

## Lift Off

I want to know what it feels like to  
get off the earth.

Not in a plane. More than that.

I want to rise out of the priceless  
everyday I live in:

deer resting in the yard,

their impossible legs tucked

beneath them,

my house built of cats & books,

sushi with my daughter.

I want to float away from

bone marrow and liver biopsies,

PET scans and CT scans and bloodwork,

get a cosmos away from more cancer treatment,

however hopeful and well-intentioned.

(I'll come back; I will.)

I want to float away

from good manners

when I see my waving neighbors,

from my husband's pressure

to plan a weekend trip,

from self-imposed nagging

to do back exercises,

walk, dance,

waterpick my teeth.

I want to be unleashed

from the crust of the world

for one afternoon,

lift my bare feet and find

there is no gravity,  
slingshot my bra,  
take a dip in the bracing clouds,  
and become a gust of wind  
or sunlight on the wing  
of a banking jet  
headed west or maybe east,  
maybe south, maybe north



Esta Baker

I make wine, I bottle wine, I drink wine.  
I like poetry, I read poetry, I write poetry.  
Sometimes, good poetry with keen observations, insights and  
turns.  
Sometimes, not so good after looking through the bottom of the  
bottle.  
Wine and poetry are good apart but not together.

**In Memory, Leonard**

I am climbing  
the foothills of old age,  
each step slower  
each breath deeper.  
The sun rises later  
and sets earlier,  
the days shorter  
and nights longer.  
A crescent moon  
lights my path  
in the shadows

of footsteps

taken to the mountain top.

Hallelujah!

### **Reflections on Georgia's Lake George 1921-22**

Late afternoon muted shadows  
cast along the drip lines of the hills  
hide in the shadows of my desire.

Mounds of sunburnt breasts  
lay on the lake's shores  
heaving with emotions of desire.

The lake beckons me  
to bathe in her cool refreshing basin  
washing away the hot sands of desire.

Through the shimmering shadows  
of each step until under her waters  
I am cleansed of my desires.

### **Moonshine**

Her luminescence hung  
among the redbuds  
begging the question  
if man  
ever walked upon her  
or imagined  
he touched her soul.

## Hey Shorty

They called him Shorty  
'cuz  
he was short.  
Shorter than his fellow fifth graders,  
shorter than the fourth graders  
and  
shorter than most of the third graders.  
Shorty was not fazed by  
this name,  
it made him known,  
He was seen  
but not heard 'to cry bullies'  
at the taller boys  
who bloodied his face  
with their feet and fists.  
The black and blue marks,  
swollen eyes were  
his badge of courage.

## GONE

A dew drop  
rolls  
down  
an elephant's ear  
pooling

below  
before  
vanishing  
in the morning sun.

## Rick Connor

“...Ah, poems amount to so little when you write them too early in your life. You ought to wait and gather sense and sweetness for a whole lifetime, and a long one if possible, and then, at the very end, you might perhaps be able to write ten good lines. “ — Rainer Maria Rilke

I was never so much interested in poetry nor did I ever write a poem before I joined the Osher Poetry Group about four years ago. What a gift reading and writing poetry has been at this stage of my life. I love beginning to think of myself as a poet and having the time and inclination to write poems—ten good lines or not, no matter.

## **Glint of Sun**

*Each morning calls us to praise this world that is fleeting.* —Jane Hirshfield

I drive east on Padonia, north on York to the walking path. In a glint of sun the Ford Fiesta becomes a nest of truth: I sense a will to live and wonder if it's a poem in me, always maybe a poem.

At the trail I settle into myself in walking shoes among walkers who're already among the blood-red birds and brave rabbits here. Bicyclists pass “on your left/on your left/on your left.”

Fleabane persists in the weeds and wet grass. There's a breeze, butterflies, a trail littered with gray blossoms. I spot a broken robin's egg stuck in its yolk. Maybe a poem here; I search for its first line. But no, it's a memory that does not bloom. Is that it? Am I more oblivion now than memory?

Thirty minutes in I turn around to follow the walk back to the cold Fiesta to search south on York and west on Padonia for a glint of sun to create a nest of truth become a poem become a will to live.

## **I Spend the Morning**

*Poetry is in love with the instant and seeks to relive it in the poem.* —Octavio Paz

I spend the morning, the day, the week looking for my poem. At the sink, in the bath, on the cot. Sometimes on the lumpy loveseat in front of the smart TV. At table, on a walk, in the shower, or even at the mirror if I'm not too distracted by many new things such as they are.

Until in my head there's a carpet of shade under a cedar tree in a forest of cedar trees full of wrens and sparrows spry and blithe in the branches above where poems from other worlds take shape to be said out loud at once or later. Here's hoping earth won't stop before then or ever.



Dan Cuddy

I write to both see and make sense of existence. Writing gives me the necessary concentration to make our complex moment on earth sight and sound----and perhaps taste, feel and scent too. Writing and its language are our silverware to eat the existential meal we are given. We want to know the recipes and the history and the nutritious value of what our lives eat usually subconsciously on the run through time.

### **Flying Off Into The Sunset**

I watch small planes

Sink into the sky

Like nickels

In a wishing well,

The metal on fire

With reflection.

Tonight

Today has bled

On the thin linens  
Hung in the darkening hours.  
A few pilots chase it,  
Race to discover  
The elemental fire  
In the blood.  
They must thrill  
At the smell of it,  
That moment free of time.  
It even washes against me  
Here below,  
The undertow pulling me up,  
But I am anchored  
By a lack of nerve.  
I envy  
Those silhouettes,  
Pebbles thrown at the sky,  
Bubbles on an ebb tide,  
Those planes riding the wind  
As if the present  
Could be caught, held,

Bound to the human heart

As physical as blood.

Those pilots!

What if their engines stall,

Their wombs of welded steel

Sputter, dip,

And they panic

Like swimmers far off shore,

Discover that the gift of buoyancy

Is for the dead?

What if those green fields

And man-shaped cuts of rock

Called cities

Rise up

To claim their offspring

From that alien thing the sky?

However,

The crimson fades to claret.

Perhaps the blood of the moment

Was only spilled wine,

And that is why we were all so intoxicated.

Perhaps that is why we can navigate,

Endure for a while,  
Then turn back, land, sleep,  
And the next day  
Pit ourselves against all the emptiness,  
Silence around us,  
And not tremble  
In the glitter of its eye.

### **Jumping Off**

Many times  
I've pulled the rip-chords of words  
sometimes with, sometimes without  
the h of them

often  
I've floated in a lyric breeze  
watching the puffs of trees  
and the scurry of birds below  
and the lowing herds  
of Thomas Gray

I descend always  
from the initial inspiring height  
each moment a descent  
into the vapor of words  
or the grit of images  
and the bump  
of grounded reality

I undo the tangled chute of the poem  
that wants to keep to the air  
a breeze of suggestive meaning always  
but I tamp the thing down

roll the lines up  
into an untidy mass until I fold it neatly

my poems are usually about nothing  
but the puff of wind  
the drape of thin fabric  
the gathering, clumping of words  
into a lump that will stay  
on the lay out of the page

Poetry is a sporting gamble with life and death  
It is a jest, a quest, a rest because like rhyme  
The sound and meaning leave the economy of the ground  
And spend an eternity in a few  
drifting, useless, exhilarating moments

### **X Marks the Spot**

x is a signature

a mark

one line over another

the pen must lift to cross itself

life's pulse must pause

even if just a fraction of a second

just an intake or exhale of breath

but pause nonetheless

continuity stopped before resumed

the mind, the muscles must lift

consciously mark a social document

though with an x

not a name in the small block

but most names

all but very, very few

are just an x

a mark made anonymously

and then

x becomes a prefix

ex

non-existent

the pulse that made two lines

a letter

a presence

whose only trace

is that pause

that consent of will

that contract with society

or that signature by the x

like all signatures

a life-force

whose universe

is forever

a mystery

### **Little Adventures in Being**

after falling

leaves curl into cups

and then after a rain

a whole lake of water sits within

sits?

a spectator to the sky

it takes it all in

you can see the reflection it holds

but that is just surface

ah, if you only had a microscope

take the lens held by the leaf

view the transparent little creatures within

amoebas, paramecia, or eukaryotes

do their swim, their divide

the eating and digesting

their vast unknown moments being

and we, big people with big eyes

so complex the structure of our simple thoughts

do not see that infinitesimal sea

that dries in an afternoon's breeze



## Diana Fusting

The Osher Poetry Group has inspired me to “let the words fall out.” I am most grateful.

### **In The Woods**

I am a nymph in pillars varied,  
among winged things  
that brush my hair the way  
my grandmother did,  
among squirrels that scurry  
with their little squirrel smirks  
and naughty toddler giggles.  
This is the place of engines,  
and ferris wheels, and  
afternoon tea.

I do not know if it is the soil  
or my feet that become glue  
in this place of stand-stillians  
and long-distance runners,  
but I know what it is to be planted,  
like an acorn dropped  
in this carnival of delight.

## **Squint**

What if you are safe now  
but no one told you.

What if you no longer fit  
into your favorite hiding place  
of stone and moss  
where you scratched lines on the wall  
to calculate time and lend order to  
the myth of calendars.

What if everything swirled  
in blues and greys because yellows  
need natural light  
and the yellow in your paint-by-number kit  
dried up before you could open it.

What if your bones grew without  
inviting your flesh so now everything  
feels so tight and burst-ready.

What if the door handle  
is on your side now.

Jan Hudson

It is with pleasure that I submit my first few poems. I am a Towson University graduate in English Lit but I mostly wrote for business. In my new retired life, I love the opportunity to explore the world through poetry. Thank you for the wonderful encouragement of my fellow students. It has been so rewarding to write and to study famous poets too. Thank you to Brenda Baer and all of you for all your encouragement and knowledge.

### **Witches**

*"I envy the tireless intimacy of women's friendship, its lastingness, and its unbendable strength." — Pat Conroy, A Lowcountry Heart: Reflections on a Writing Life*

My southern ancestors lived in the low country  
and when I am there I feel their souls flitting through  
the limbs of the hushed live oaks, whispering their stories

The oaks are the old ladies of the forest, ancient, craggy, furrowed,  
hundreds, even thousands of years old. They emanate tiny edible acorns  
nourishing the wild life. The hanging moss drops from the branches and is  
filmy, flowing in the breeze like bridal veils.

Maybe these damsels gossip through some medium we don't even know  
about.

Do they hold secrets we wish we knew?

Do they observe quietly and communicate with each other?

I wonder what they think about our souls - maybe through vibrations, soft breezes, and lightning streaking through the air.

This glorious world is dark and moody with wisps of sun or moonlight peeking through the forest, alligators stealthily walk through the jungle-like vegetation.

Owls hoot looking for prey.

The air is heavy with scents that are of decay and salt spray, and occasionally a waft of a strong perfumed flower.

Spiders, snakes, both lethal or good hide, and blend in with the trees and the forest floor.

This underworld is heavy, lush and dense, and surrounds us.

It is a soft, warm place with dangers lurking but the surrounding beauty is hauntingly wonderful.

It makes me think of the past and death in a beautiful way

When I die, this would be my heaven and I would be free of all the fears that lurk in the living.

I would join the coven, and rest and watch the world.

## **Tango**

We met at a fireworks concert.

In a field on July 4 - orchestra playing at sundown

Children dancing with their sparklers

People picnicking, laughing, sweating

You said, "Haven't we met before,"

Yes, I said, "many times."

I shocked myself!

He was shy and a big guy.

I think I frightened him.

The orchestra was playing a tango.

I was right, we had seen each other at a nightclub

"Do you tango?" "Yes," he said, "that's it."

Suddenly we were dancing like two magnets who

had done this together all our lives.

Then the fireworks began. We stopped!

And knew this was the beginning of

our magic attraction, fireflies silently flashing,

the sunset darker and moodier

To dance together is to sense a person

without talking. To feel two becoming one

with no words.

Fireworks brilliant colors, set to music

Booms that you can feel through your soul.

A little scary like living.

Being in touch with the unexplainable

"When can we meet again, he said."

I said "forever" in my mind.

### **Spinning**

i am confused, the world spins

i try to get up out of bed,

i collapse on the floor and hold on

not sure to what

My head is upside down,

i try to crawl on the floor

spinning spinning spinning

help husband

patience is called on to bear with this

turned around world

all i can think of is keeping together

holding all around me close

maybe this is like PTSD

you try and try to be normal

but there is no normal

i have had this before

and know it will go away

Please world come back right side up

Vertigo go away

## Ann Marie Morin

Poetry enables me to live fully. The humor, observations, and wisdom of it often expands how I understand life, myself, and others. My life is enriched beyond measure.

As a writer, the more I practice and write, the more aware I become. Creating a poem is an invitation to pause, to reflect, and to communicate effectively and consciously. To have the shelter and encouragement of our group, guided so well by Brenda, is one of my richest blessings.

## **The Journey**

Her holiday card shared his unexpected death, her broken and shattered heart, and her frenzied compulsion to purge.

In response, we came with open arms and ears, tons of memories, and a desire to be present. We celebrated his life, our friendship, and gently listened.

Flashes of tender moments, unbidden yet wanted, surged forward. Together, we stitched a comforting, thought-filled memory quilt. Even the mention of his human foibles brought a smile.

Tomorrow and tomorrow, we and others will be beside her until this fresh wound scabs over. We trust Life will beckon her to other dance steps - not better, but different.

We know at any moment, this journey could be ours, too. and we will need her- such is life and friendship.

## Word and a Picture

My “country” cousin often educates  
her “city kin” via  
critter posts.  
Today’s offering surprised me.

Her photo showed a creature,  
one of God's own,  
crouched innocently  
under a porch,

Head cocked to the side,  
it stared nonchalantly at the lens.  
Its kitten-like face and alert eyes  
held no emotions.

A broad chest  
bespoke confidence and strength,  
Two well defined paws anchored  
its small, powerful body to earth.

What is this creature?  
One comment offered, “Mink”  
“How nice, how cute!”  
came my inner response,

Then, a further scroll, revealed,  
“WEASEL!” -  
I felt surprised and  
Immediate negativity.

From disarming to alarming-  
One word and I see differently-  
those eyes have morphed to shifty.  
Recessed claws are now spotted,  
set subtly in furry paws.

Two words and  
one picture.



Nancy Rothman

The friendship of my fellow poets inspires my life and fills me with immense joy.

### **Hopper's Diner**

The girl in the green wool coat  
and orange cloche hat  
sits at the automat  
contemplating her coffee  
and lightly buttered roll.

She is alone in the painting,  
the empty chair  
so prominent across  
her small table  
quite emphasizing that fact.

I have measured  
my days in the chosen  
solitude of coffeehouses,  
as once ubiquitous  
automats are all gone now.

There is soothing luxury  
in choosing to be on your own,  
perhaps with a richly  
engrossing novel—  
characters who don't  
spend time on small talk  
and aimless chatter,  
but simply get on with the plot.

Behind the young woman,  
the plate glass window  
reveals rows of diffuse  
outdoor lights,  
or perhaps, a path  
pointing to the future  
where I exist in solidarity.

## **Clash**

The steel-cut night sky  
spits hail that chimes  
against my window.

Lights flicker for the slightest  
moment as the storm rages,  
the sound of tympani's  
crushing my brain.

My cat and I stare  
at each other, startled,  
awed, and frightened.

But I know, far better than she,  
that the cycle of unleashed  
and unrestrained angry storms

will increase in intensity  
year by year, wearing us down.

More ice flung against  
my windows acts like  
a fine gray screen  
between the world and me —  
preview of a dystopian novel.

Yet, inevitably dawn arrives.  
Outside, jewel tones shimmer  
under a sun that caresses  
and warms. I tuck  
my existential fear  
beneath my damp pillow,  
ritually make my bed,  
and find some comfort  
in the soft, serene hope  
mourning doves bring.

## **Honey**

A satiny white disabled duck  
with an awkward  
crick in her neck  
was rejected  
by all the other ducks  
on an otherwise idyllic farm.  
She wandered,  
quacking sadly,  
immersed in her sorrow.

Then, Honey was introduced  
by the caring farmer  
to a pack of squiggly,

bouncy baby brown pit bulls.

Overjoyed, her tail-feathers  
wagging, she gently nuzzled  
and soothed, a surrogate  
mom in the making.

We all seek that  
place of belonging—  
whether staunchly  
traditional or simply  
the flow of  
an unfettered heart.



## Kitty Yanson

I walk down the street and step into an image, pulling it upward around me like overalls, and I become a daisy with arms outstretched in invitation to a humid August or I become stubborn as a drain-hovering gnat. This is just today. Poetry makes sense of my senses, makes meaning out of the commonplace, creates beauty out of sound and script. I write poems because I am in conversation with life and can't seem to shut up. But I am blessed: life never shuts up either. We make a great pair.

### **Francis v the Old Woman**

An old woman lectures me about leaves

littering the sidewalk this late in fall.

Leave me alone, I tell her.

I will collect them when time

is left over after the day's creation

or the week's or month's

of what I've yet to know.

This chore is just too steep

for me today. And I just read  
some article or another  
that said leaving them is good  
for the soil. But not for the sidewalk,  
back she yells.

I know this old woman.

My head is her shoe;  
she has so many duties  
she doesn't know what to do:  
the concrete exigencies of time  
and obligation, washing the dishes,  
doing taxes; they scrape against my mind  
like rakes against concrete walkways.

So I lace up that old woman tight in her shoe  
and kick mine off, sit in a chair,  
and my cat Francis, who knows the leaves  
I've left too long; he watched each one fall  
saying in his kitty brain, wow,  
I wonder if it will happen again  
and it does, and wow,  
I wonder if it will happen again

and it does, and did  
becoming a great pile  
of dead surprises.

He knows I've left the leaves too long  
and just doesn't care  
as he explores paw by paw  
the round perfection of my lap.

### **Tin Foil Thanksgiving**

Pegeen brings me dinner,  
chicken salad wraps and chocolate brownies  
and conversation feathered deep with affection.

I sit in my recliner, my shoulder firmly trussed,  
my pain firmly entrusted to post-op oxy.

She tells me of the Thanksgiving dinner brought  
in aluminum trays by the caring staff  
where her father died.

(Her girls even now call it  
the Tin-Foil Thanksgiving.)

She speaks of telling

her mother that her husband had gone:

the family standing in the room, "Where's Ed?"

then silence, the others stepping back,  
and Peg, by standing still  
pushed forward to the podium of mourning,  
to speak the deep truth of death.

I think of how waiters sometime wrap uneaten  
dinners in tin foil, shaping them into swans.

But swans, in their reality, make lie our eyes' repast:  
we do not see the urgent churning below,  
the power of those thighs in continuous  
travail that feeds our dreams of unending ease.

We throw away the cellophane and cardboard.

My shoulder begins again to throb.

"You'll be ok?" she asks as she gets up to leave.

I nod, as does she, in unsaid thanksgiving,  
turning and returning to each other grace  
that endures beneath tenebrous waters  
as we paddle, serene on the surface,  
across the holy sea of loss.

*What astonishes is the singing.*

*Poet Jack Gilbert*