

[The Write Place At the Write Time](#)

[Home](#)[About Us](#)[Interviews](#)[Fiction](#)[Poetry](#)["Our Stories" non-fiction](#)[Writers' Craft Box](#)[Writers' Contest!](#)[Jungian Dream Corner](#)[Submission Guidelines](#)[Feedback & Questions](#)

Come in...and be captivated...

Crushed

By Lynn Russell

I am hurt, a wound slashed deep through my heart

the pain so unbearable at times, I want to give up

stopping all thought, taking my breath away

Creeping into my mind, caught unaware and off guard

an ache crushing the life out of my soul

the brightness of my days now grays and blacks

Breaking my spirit, knocked down bit by bit

sapping all energy, drained slowly as no words come through

sadness becoming the leader of it all

So do I ask why, as the tears trickle down my cheeks

looking for answers or reasons for it

I am hurt, broken and sad, anxious for words

Daily I wait, watch, and pray, while I laugh and chat with friends
but the anguish is there every hour of every day
I am crushed, not him

Path of Life

By Lynn Russell

You walk along the path, blindly following
Its every twist and curve
A hill ahead, making you dig in and
Climb without a thought
The master of your ways, the ruler of your road

The turns become tighter, not easy to navigate
No matter how many steps you take
The tops of the hills never get closer
Slowing you down, sapping your strength

Some forks you take become dead ends
Leading nowhere at all
Deep valleys come up fast, too wide to cross
Taking your energy, bit by bit, until it's almost gone

Simple streams soon become gushing rivers
The roads so narrow you can no longer go on
The steps in life are never easv. never clear and never smooth

Reaching Out

By Lynn Russell

Blood dripping from the wounds
Dark as the midnight skies
A hopeless look
Pouring from the eyes

Drops on an old blade
Job done, falling to the floor
A tired stare
Not able to take any more

Shirtsleeve rolled down
Covering up the truth
A haunted gaze
No longer a youth

The body growing weary
His eyes shut tight
A defeated aura
No will left to fight

A silent cry for help
Longing to be free
Needing strength to heal
Knowing he can count on me

North

By Philip Fleisher

Driving north between pines

I feel a presence.

Rocks and stones lie scattered

Like open books

Each one whispering a word as I pass by.

My car is a spider

Traveling the length of a black thread.

Houses sit back among trees

Table lamps burn throughout the night

Against the shadows

That approach without warning.

Satellite dishes rotate in back-yards;

Huge metallic flowers

Seeding the galaxies across time.

A meadow unfolds before me

Like a pair of wings

As I climb the curve of the earth

AS I CLIMB THE CURVE OF THE CATHEDRAL.

The moon peers down
Wearing the white mask of the bee-keeper.
He has come close once again.
This weathered old gardener
Who smiles at us like
We were his children.

Tuning

By Philip Fleisher

Nocturnal guitar
Evokes a chilled
Chord floating
In dropped silence

Those who remain vulnerable
nestle within frosted wings

When the body turns inside

The shadow resigns

But does not surrender

To the unknown witness

In the white

Of an observing star.

Birth

By Philip Fleisher

The aria of the sun comes to an end.

Summer's song fades into the cool

Blue threads of the September sky.

Only the husks of the singers remain;

Their shells line the trunks of trees,

They hang upon the branches, empty

As a closet full of clothes.

The field meditates in the silence

Of its own breath. while life

Continues beneath the dirt
The grubs of the seventeen year
Cicada, rehearse in the darkness,
Waiting for the wings they will use
As string and bow, when they rise
Above the curtain of the earth.



"Shell" N.M.B Copyright 2008

The Madman's Dare

By Chris Baratta

you'd be crazy not to breathe
the fresh, fresh air

*It's like a strange dream where you
wake up, convinced you're still asleep*

you'd be blind not to love
the lion in her hair

*the days go by and you feel as if you
just keep hitting the snooze button*

you'd be foolish not to know
the simple and the rare

*your experiences are just moments in
your mind; mental voyages of the
unconscious*

you'd be mad not to take
the madman's dare

*aboard a ship with no captain; rough
seas and eastern winds ahead*

The Key

By Denise Bouchard

An ordinary key...
it opened an ordinary door.
To an extraordinary sanctuary
that doesn't exist anymore.

We dined there on hope
and shopped for dreams...
Food filling empty spaces in our souls,
treasures stifling the lot of unvoiced screams

I had to go there the other day...
(your condition left no doubt)
to clean, to sort, to erase a life...to throw it out

What about the memories, the important things,
the laughter still echoing in the hall..?
How does a daughter sift through those things
while watching you fade
and properly
preserve it all?

Strange people, strange smells, a strange place...
I'm wondering if you'll remember my name...
It was bittersweet today as I packed things away knowing it'll never be the
same

The Green Slopes of Solace

By Adam Bright

Each breath creeps slowly on
as I put one foot in front of the other.
A stiff wind peels my eyes open
to see the staggering beauty before me.

As sweet sounds enter the space between
my ears

I know that I am trotting upon a Heavenly
landscape devoid of
confusions and worries of decadence and wistful
dreams.

The swift rush of running water
the cold of late spring's icy shores of the North
against my skin
I am truly a baptized Mountain Man, servant to
none, protector of the realm
and a pilgrim looking for photo opportunity
salvations.

And at last, above treeline I seek shelter;
sanctuary from the long upward road from Hades
surrounded by other pilgrims waiting for our last
supper before the summit

shrouded with quilts of clouds and painful majesty
like a gorgeous song composed for travelers of
these
the green slopes of solace.

Dreamscape Withdrawal

By Adam Bright

As the remnants of my dreams
shake themselves awake,

I am awake
deep conscious thought

still reacting to calm fantasy of
epic proportion

A walk in cool green gardens of
grandiose genderless payloads of
water leads to the surface of the moon where
I can look back at home with
a semi-nostalgic feeling of longing

Hope for redemption
fall in love
disengage from any challenges and pray for a
rendition of reality to reflect its rays on me.

All those things flee in the face of day and
I am left with a sweet taste in my mouth
like cotton candy ecstasy and the scent of
summer softly swathed scant upon a woman's
skin.

Night Vision

By Mark Barkawitz

he says: "i can see in my dreams."

i ask: "color or black and white?"

he says: "i don't know. both maybe.

then i wake up and remember i'm blind."

he uses an expletive

to describe such a morning.

i try to empathize:

"my little brother was in

double traction with two broken legs,

but always walked through his dreams."

he says: "weird, huh?"

i answer: "yeah. weird."

but really,

it's not.

Early Sunday Morning

By Mark Barkawitz

i have this dream:

bridget fonda—jane's daughter
and an actress in her own right—
stops by our house.

she looks a little stoned.

we're in the kitchen
and i'm doing dishes at the sink.

i tell her an investor has offered to put up
four million dollars to produce my screenplay.

she grabs me by the back of my thigh
and coos: "ooo, that's great."

searing sirloin in a frying pan,
my wife looks over from the stove.

but before this intrigue
has a chance to play itself out,

i'm rudely awakened by the barking

of my dogs in the backyard.
my wife sleeps peacefully
on the pillow beside me.
but bridget is gone
and my movie deal
is dead.

Impressions of Paris

By Danielle Ash

I find myself in a culture where it is actually taught, (I'm told) that it is much better to be discreet and go unnoticed.

See the thing of it is; you're allowed to be happy. You're just not encouraged to make public displays of it.

Before moving here to Paris, I knew Parisians weren't my forte. It's quite simple really, we think they hate us, and they think we hate them, and nobody bothers to ask.

So when I got here I pretty much said "**** that", and continued to live as though I were in good 'ol Canada. Where the people are friendly, individualism is encouraged, and if you want to give a stranger a warm smile or a bum a quarter then god bless ya.

This did not last long. I actually feel foolish for even having thought that France, a previous Super-Nation that has existed for centuries longer than my own, needed my help.

In the midst of my typical, "I'm North American, don't push, we can all

live this way" haze, I noticed that things around me were not correlating with the philosophy of do unto others...

My inner joy and passion for sharing it was tucked away safely. Like special china, only to be brought out on visits home, or vacation.

These days you'll find me wearing neutral colors, walking quickly to my destination, and of course, always avoiding eye contact. But don't try to talk to me because my earbuds will be in (though my ipod is rarely on).

So recently the city of Paris has been pissing me off. Not enough that I've yelled or smacked it, but enough to make me long for the motherland.

Thus in the interest of trying to be involved in the widely-rumored opinion that Paris is the best city on earth, I decided to create a personal moment in which the two of us could bond whilst on the way to work.

You see, I haven't given up on Paris yet. So many others rave about it, many can only dream about being in my position, and so naturally I have started questioning my entire belief system.

While sitting and silently congratulating myself for coming up with such a Robert Frost-esque way to both kill time and make a little love with the city that boasts being full of it, I ran through my mental magic moment checklist;

Fresh produce? Check

Scenic seat? Check

Open, euphoric state of mind? Ha-ha! Double check.

So before taking a bite of my genetically perfect apple, I had one last lingering look around. And that's when I saw HIM.

Him, of course, being the old French man puking all over a green patch probably coveted by little French kids.

Was it night-time? No.
Was I in a transient neighborhood? NO

Unfortunately, this is all taking place right before my very eyes.

So... Are the forces that be trying to communicate with me that, although Paris is an attentive lover who means well, and I want it so bad, the orgasm is just never going to come?

As the bench that shows movies from hell and I parted ways, I stepped in shit. You be the judge.

Recovered Memory: A Nocturne

for T.P.

By Vince Corvaia

1.

The ancient Romans had no word for “volcano.”

My father

Came into my room

At night.

The eruption happened

On the 24th and 25th of August, 79 A.D.

He said

It was my education.

Pompeii and Herculaneum

Were buried beneath ash and pyroclastic deposits.

He asked

If I wanted more.

I said yes.

Pliny the Younger compared the eruption

To a pine tree

Because “it shot up to a great height

In the form of a tall trunk”

He said if I told

I would die.

o

2.

Pliny the Elder was among the dead.

Agrippa and his wife were among the dead.

My schoolwork suffered.

I never got enough sleep.

I became contentious in class.

The population of Pompeii was 25,000.

The population of Herculaneum was 5,000.

I only wrote one paper

That ever got a decent grade.

3.

Pompeii yielded 1,150 bodies.

Herculaneum yielded 350 bodies.

When I was twenty-three

I remembered everything

As if leaving a trance.

Archaeologists called a skeleton they found

With two bracelets “Ring Lady.”

I told my therapist I had no feelings.

It was like unspooling a foreign film

With no subtitles.

“Garden of the Fugitives”

Is peopled by plaster cast figures

Running for their lives.

Then the anger came.

I told him I knew.

I asked him if I was still going to die.

I asked him if he wanted to.

Pliny the Younger was a survivor.

I am a survivor.

More than anything,
I am haunted
By a dog
Forever pulling on its chain
With its teeth.

What memories remain
Lay buried beneath.

Sunny Isles Twin Theater, 1971

By Vince Corvaia

I sat on the other
side of the screen,
eating popcorn from
a hot dog wrapper and
watching the audience
through tiny holes.

Two giant speakers

on either side of me
played Leonard Cohen
as people who were
looking right at me
watched the movie.

Oh what I could have done
with Linda, the usher
in the other auditorium,
if we didn't have to
stagger our breaks.

But I knew from habit that
as soon as Warren Beatty
left Julie Christie's bed,
it would be time for me
to put on my red blazer
and go back to work.

Darkness

By Vince Corvaia

Audrey Hepburn lighting matches in the dark.

Alan Arkin tapping the floor with a cane.

It was our first date movie, ever, with anyone.

I didn't know how to get my arm from here to there.

Neither of us knew, when we kissed during previews,
how to part our lips, who first, or why.

I found the soundtrack forty-one years later.

She might have been twice divorced or more by then,

perhaps with children older than we were
when Arkin leaped out of the darkness,

and she found her way into my lap (trembling
with fear) for the first time.

Cheri

By Vince Corvaia

*Ixora, Flame of the Woods,
Jungle Flame, Jungle Geranium . . .*

Cheri pointed out the hedge to me
on a walk in the suburbs
of Miami Beach.

She plucked one red flower
at the base of the stem
and pulled the inner stem
from the outer one
with two fingernails.

When the inner stem's tip
reached the edge of the outer rim,
a tear of sap appeared.

She lifted the stems to my tongue
so that I could taste the sap
that welled between them.

It was delicate and sweet. . . .

Indigenous to subtropical Florida.

Blooms year round.

My Mother's Hands

By Amanda Halkiotis

They play piano as if by reflex, a constant flutter
of knuckles. Shoulders erect, she emulsifies sound with
essence, like a chef searing wine and butter.

I saw them baking over that shoddy stove for hours
while her Eighties soaps played from the TV atop the freezer.
Custard squares, still warm, stacked on ceramic plates like towers.

On Saturdays they carried a boiling bucket of bleach water,
scouring crawlspaces, thresholds, and baseboards.
Maybe I don't use enough Pine Sol; each week I try harder.

They spun fine white thread into diamonds and roses.
Seventeen summers spent counting stitches,
a bedspread too graceful to invite afternoon dozes.

They've never had a manicure. As a Christian no one's read her palm.
Smaller than mine but somehow stronger, when she resigned the ring
after the divorce, I noticed for the first time, they looked calm.

Leaving

By Amanda Halkiotis

We should all be so lucky to die like leaves,
the colour drawn out of us slow so we acknowledge as it happens
each step closer to meeting our maker.

To savor final moments like the end of a month, the bittersweetness of
 past actions mixed up with the prospect of starting anew.
 To be missed before we're even gone.
 To enjoy an easy, painless decrescendo
 floating
 down
 down
 down
 as we're watched by the remaining standing below, awestruck and envious,
 we give ourselves back to the earth
 first as a blanket
 then as parchment
 then dust.

Something Like

By Amanda Halkiotis

I want something like what it used to feel like to be in love
 he tells me after a couple glasses of wine.
 I can tell by the way he says it I don't bring him to that place.
 So I match him drink for drink to ease the ringing in my ears.
 I don't want to start that conversation. Please, not tonight.
 Don't let it be the beginning of the end, the I'm sorrys, the I'll miss yous, the
 we'll talk soon,
 the empty compliments I didn't believe the first time around when
 he tried to get me into bed and don't even smile at now that he wants me out.
 I know what he'll say next. Maybe not tonight, but next in terms of us.
 He just realized he can't find any of his ex-girlfriends beneath my skin.
 Now the relationship feels too real and nothing can shake him
 free of his memories. He can't be around me right now.
 He just realized.
 Because he wants something like what he had back in college, the butterflies,
 the rubber knees. I know. Every guy has a story. Angela, Jessica, Amelia,
 Sabrina. My name has the same assonance, it always does.
 But I'd rather walk than have that conversation again

~~But I'd rather than than have that conversation again.~~

And I have.

For once I want to ask him to ask me what I want out of this before giving up.

Because I'd tell him. I've been waiting years to tell someone.

I've got all my collected answers ready.

The best damn anthology ever.

I want someone that gives me something like a constant brandy buzz,

a warm liquid hum that keeps me jazzed

all day long even when cold, merciless clouds hover above

like giant squares of sheet metal.

I want something like what I read about in a recipe for double-chocolate angel
food cake from my mother's Joy of Cooking once:

earrings for an elephant with no apologies.

And yes, the no apologies part would be f#\$%ing fabulous on its own.

But I can't help but wonder what the earrings themselves,

hanging off of that silent, royal creature,

would look something like.

Progress?

By Cheryl Somnese

Their nameless faces lined the city sidewalks,

searching desperately for opportunities offered.

Callused hands and a weathered brow

without a sound

spoke of struggles;

and eyes—devoid of tears,

wept in corners

where none could see.

The dingy rooms with steel machines
cold with indifference
consumed most of their waking hours.

Long days, little recompense,
appreciative nonetheless:
dressed in the fashion
of an idealist's dream,
happiness found them.

And now, from the sweat of their labor,
a dawn of prosperity has evolved.

Poised in a time
where many can pick and choose
their own destiny.

But how much do we see,
and what are we grateful for?

Fixating on bigger and better,
bewildered if it is not attained,
only too willing to profess

the pain

the pain.

Is it merely human nature
to lack gratitude when life is plentiful,
and value the meager
when there is little to go around?
In this land of abundance,
do we recognize the groundwork their toil provided;
or has wealth—
incarcerated our dignity?

Holiday Spirits

By Cheryl Sommese

A ghost visited for the holidays,
manifest in all his regalia.
Peeking at me through the doorway,
following me to the dressing table--
and then dining room
and parlor
and thoughts.

He didn't speak
he didn't have to,
it was not as if it was his manner to
criticize while chatting.

His countenance
said everything
I really did not want to know.

I wished to greet him kindly,
to have him sit and sip tea;
but his mouth was not fashioned
and the liquid would have splattered
everywhere--

Illuminating,
what was better left unseen.

So instead I glanced cautiously,
and then helplessly,
and then fearfully,

and then curtly
and then angrily,
and then sadly,
and then compassionately.

He stared at me through it all,
scrutinizing my expressions—
filled with anticipation:
then toward the end,
formed lips to smile.
And I knew as he vanished...
I knew it would all be okay.

Another Year

By Cheryl Sommese

Another year has come,
forging forward without a hearing or trial,
dulling the pain our missteps have created
destroying some guilt--so we may tread another mile.

And in this passing of our life's repentance,
we stop a while to count the heavy cost,
of all the dreams, however earnest, not fulfilled,
and the many promises, though sincere, somehow lost.

Too many stories we live but do not write—
our pens become barren, never giving birth.
Failing to inscribe the smile, or sacrifice, or kind word,
as if these simple acts possess no worth.

But if these gestures do not define us,
and the grandiose dreams, we rarely attain,
then where can we turn for our perception of "happiness,"
and who is to blame for our definition of pain.

My compatriots, be not fooled by the images around you;
the "grand" things seem small when an end may be near;
it is you who draw life in the pages you've lived,
and you who will judge the coming New Year.

What will be your criteria?

Spurned by Europe

By Cheryl Sommese

So much about you made me glow,
almost everything about you made me smile.

Feeling like a small child

immersed in the thrill of

simple pleasures

I became captivated by your romance,
mesmerized by your style.

I wanted you to welcome me with happiness:

to bestow air kisses at the doorstep

and utter cheerful hellos

because you believed I was worth it.

The awe of ruins I came to see,

the adventure of passages I grew to know;

your beauty fulfilled my every expectation.

So much so—
I still hurt as I reflect
that no matter what I did,
or how hard I tried,
you saw me as little more
than a nation gone astray.

Stillness

By Nicole M. Bouchard

Through a snowy wood under a tepid gray sky,
our minds ask the questions,
though Nature wonders why

There are truths present and ancient but mortal souls
go on seeking reason.
Nature answers in her wise way that we simply are;
we grow with the season

In frozen stillness we reflect on our purpose, feeling the cold
amidst glittering fortresses of white.
We become part of the trees for an instant- reaching toward the sky,
but realize we have no roots to the Earth, even if we attain their height.

Majestic season of winter, keep a dream for me.

Fulfill in great sanctity
what lies in my frozen reverie.

Taciturn

By Nicole M. Bouchard

Honey faith
no longer kosher
twisted
by puritan prerogative...
Crescent moon
hold it closer;
enraptured
by daring dreams...
The things we keep
the things we hide
defying the things
meant to lessen our lives

The King and the Poet

By Nicole M. Bouchard

They looked out upon the same star from the earth wishing for what the other possessed.

The King wished freedom, private passions of language, travels to depths of the sea
in imaginary finery and the importance of verse. The Poet wished himself
material
comforts, fine adornments, the love of a queen, removal even of the constant
flow
of words struggling free from his soul, bloody need like a curse,
and a kingdom to summon at his behest.

They thought themselves so highly different as night and day;

The star saw fit that they behold each other in a new way

And so each man was directed by the hand of moonlight to what they were told was an enchanted mirror in the realm.

Looking into it they saw not their reflections, but one another. "You have the life I want, thus I call you my brother. You are not as I am, but as what I could be, had I the purest character and courage to take my life by the vessel's helm."

The King told the Poet how only he stood just below him in importance throughout the land.

"You write the people's history, bearing the truth of the times as does glass enclosing the sand."

The clever Poet in turn, told the King how only he stood above him in importance throughout the land.

"You reach over earth and water to guide the people and create history divinely with your own hand."

Thinking on this, the King responded to the Poet, "If we each admire each other's work so, then we each, as men, must, in our current positions, do great things. Would we be as great if we chose to take each other's vocation?"

"Perhaps not, though our heart's still ache for more," was the Poet's answer.

"Can a King not write?" the King inquired. "Can a Poet not rule to some regard, hearts of men, queenly women, summon an audience, and find satiation with release of his pen? Yes, I should think, by God's illustration."

In answer, the Poet raised his hand to the glass to meet the King's. Upon their palms touching one another, they saw that the frame they stood on either side of, was not a magic mirror at all, but a mere open doorway under which they could cross the threshold at any time.

The rule of the King was poetic, the words of the Poet did reign, all was ever as it should be in their hearts in every vein, as men, women and children prospered in a place over which stars presided, rhythmic and guiding, blissfully unaware of their gold rhyme

unaware of their gold mine.

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