

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

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Come in...and be captivated...

  

### Writers' Craft Box

What this section is intended to do:  
Give writers suggested hints, resources, and advice.

How to use: Pick and choose what you feel is most helpful and derive inspiration from it- most importantly, **HAVE FUN!**

What a Writers' Craft Box is: Say you're doing an art project and you want to spice it up a bit. You reach into a seemingly bottomless box full of colorful art/craft supplies and choose only the things that speak to you. You take only what you need to feel that you've fully expressed yourself. Then, you go about doing your individual project adding just the right amount of everything you've chosen until you reach a product that suits you completely. So, this is on that concept. Reach in, find the things that inspire you, use the tools



"Arts and Crafts" N.M.B Copyright 2008

that get your writing going and see it as fulfilling your self-expression as opposed to following rules.

Writing is art and art is supposed to be fun, relaxing, healing and nurturing. It's all work and it's all play at the same time. A Writers' Craft Box is whatever your imagination needs it to be- a lifeboat, the spark of an idea, a strike of metaphorical lightning, a reminder, or simply the recommendation of a good book. Feel free to sit back and break out the crayons. Coloring outside the lines is heartily encouraged.

## ***Writers' Challenge Results!***



"Tree Roots" by Patti Dietrick; <https://www.flickr.com/photos/pattidietrick/>

About this image: *"I dreamt I was a tree...and my roots were aching because they were growing so much. I started photographing trees and roots for many, many weeks trying to illustrate my dream—this is one of those images."* —PD

This edition of Writers' Challenge drew one of the greatest responses of any Challenge to date with striking entries from different continents and age groups, all personally defining "roots." Using Patti Dietrick's photo above as a visual prompt and deriving further inspiration from the write-up (excerpt reproduced below) that dove into the term's Old Norse origins and provided well-known examples of art and music utilizing this theme, entrants were asked to respond in any written or artistic medium with what the term "roots" means to them.

We were honored by the caliber of the entries we received. Every single piece had a unique poignancy. Before the Challenge began, we'd invited oft-featured photographer, Dietrick, to serve as a guest judge who would determine the solitary winner. She graciously accepted—and thank goodness. We've never had such a difficult time of narrowing down finalists.

In an effort to share the great abundance that this Challenge yielded, in addition to featuring the powerful work of the three finalists and winner below, we have sprinkled some of our other favorite entries throughout the issue (amongst poetry and fiction) for you to enjoy. The strength and deep meaning of the entries (both universal and intimate) blew us away. Everyone deserves a round of applause. We were thrilled with this turnout. Congratulations to our finalists (April Salzano, Steve Pollack, Anna Kasradze) and our winner, Ms. Jada Yee—who, in the words of our fine guest judge, adeptly used "hauntingly expressive" words to articulate often unspoken thoughts and feelings "with such visceral descriptions of emotional and spiritual growth." A special thank-you to every entrant; you all did a beautiful job of giving immense meaning to the concept of "roots" and its powerful significance in our lives.

*(Excerpt from original prompt—see fall 2015-winter 2016 archive for full prompt with the contest directions)*

Reclamation of Roots

by Nicole M. Bouchard *(see About Us page for staff bio)*

Back due to popular demand, we have a Writers' Challenge prepared for you. The above image by Patti Dietrick, a photograph illustrating a dream she'd had of being a tree with growing, aching roots, serves as the visual inspiration. Ms. Dietrick, whose artistic photography has graced the Craft Box in our two preceding issues, will do us the honor of serving as a guest judge to determine the winner from amongst our selected finalists.

Reflecting the theme of growth outstretched from an original source, the concept of this challenge spread across a mental landscape seeking nourishment in knowledge. How do we really define "roots" and what are some creative ways that those definitions can be explored? Using the age-old oracle of Google, I typed the word in and came across two varying artistic interpretations that I'll share here for your further (optional) exploration.

The first is the painting, Roots by Frida Kahlo. We tend to think of the earth, of nature, as nurturing us during the course of our lifetimes, but the unique angle explored here is that Frida depicts herself as a nourisher of the land, with vines sprouting forth from her torso, life-force pouring back into the arid ground. In this reversal, one might interpret it as suggesting an equalized, reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. You'll find a link to the image below and an analysis; gaze upon it and derive your own personal meaning.

Link: <http://www.fridakahlo.org/roots.jsp>

The second is a song of the same title by the contemporary American rock band, Imagine Dragons. The song portrays a man's desired return to his roots following a descent to "rock bottom" and the subsequent loss of belief. Yet its message asks of us, is there is direction found in being lost— "Had to lose my way / To know which road to take"—and adversity necessary for growth—"I know it's gotta go like this, I know / Hell will always come before you grow"? One link below corresponds to the lyrics and the other to the audio video on YouTube. Go ahead and take a listen.

Links: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4RMh7NLHPY>  
<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/imaginedragons/roots.html>

I also searched the general definition of "root" and came across its literal botanical meaning, connotations of origin, heritage, being a source (for good or ill) as well as the meanings of the verb, including "[to] establish deeply or firmly" which I was particularly partial to. The word originates from the Old Norse term rót. I was compelled to dig deeper. I wanted to get closer to the original meaning. I took the English letters, and, after a bit of research, was able to return them to their runic equivalents.

The first, is a symbol for journey. The second speaks of native lands and heritage. The third, resembling a skyward facing arrow, is equated with the Norse god Teiwaz and depicts battle. Warriors would paint it on their shields for a favorable outcome. The journey of life we take, the character-shaping battles or obstacles we face and the heritage, the family ties we carry with us in our hearts, in our blood as we go, seems a fitting portrayal of what connects our roots to our lives and one another. We all journey, we all have maps of native lands and faces tattooed onto our souls and we all encounter obstacles as lessons learned along the path, raised shields with pointed arrows as we persevere. . .

Discover your "roots."

## *Winning Entry and Finalists*

**My Planted Soul** *(note that due to layout space limits in our software, a few of the longer lines add additional lines to the verses by 1-3 words or so)*

by Jada Yee

I've been bending these thoughts against their will.  
 I've been folding these shallow breaths,  
 and pushing them farther down.

I have held my muscles hostage.  
 I have branded my bones with bruises.

Still, I can't pretend that I am a tree.  
As much as it feels like it, my limbs don't live in quicksand.

But, inside there are decades of a beautiful species; beautiful  
until I realized that it's in their nature to make every warm space their  
home,  
leaving me standing still on an island, alone with fear, with doubt, with  
failure.

There has been a glimmer of a soul, and it has visited me in dreams,  
asking me to let it live again. There have been voices of mentors  
who say only a few words at a time; who try to talk to me through their eyes.  
And these fragmented signs are small views on a boarded window;  
like looking for shaded gaps through a tree that's against the sun.

I've become too comfortable with trembling, with cowering.

If I were to revive my retired strength  
it would mean turning my fists away from the bedroom wall.  
It would mean letting my fingers uncurl and relaxing my hand.  
It would mean removing the berating bully from my soul, from my  
thoughts.  
I'd have to forgive. I would need to be kind. I would need to fight,  
and keep fighting, round after round, day after day.

It would mean pulling my smallest self  
up to her feet; to see her in the mirror; to hear her voice;  
to feel the other heart that's been pacing this caged hallway.

I would have to believe that my life is brighter than this darkness I've  
settled for.  
I would have to believe that it's not too late for me to pull my roots out from  
the soil,  
and to convince myself that roots don't have to become rules.

*Poet's Commentary: For this themed contest, I chose to focus on my life, in  
the past and present. "My Planted Soul" briefly explores my present  
struggle with being courageous and leaving my comfort zone. Overall, I  
see roots as both positive and negative. They can keep you grounded, but  
can also hold you back. As always, my writing tools include coffee and  
music.*

Bio- Writing poetry is another means of inner translation. It provides an arena for the perfectionist, the fearful, the outraged and the hopeful. In every poem, Jada strives to remain honest, whether that be narrated joyfully or by reluctantly facing her own worth. Her work can be found in *Crack the Spine*, *Poydras Review*, *Penny Ante Feud*, *Tipsy Lit*, *Underground Books*, *Mad Swirl* and *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*.

### **The Window's Wind**

by Anna Kasradze

In my village there is a house with a window  
which permits more than famished mosquitoes,  
and coughing gusts that detest papers on desks.  
My window summons the memoir of the wind—  
the sands of screaming mothers silenced  
by deliberate flames.

Beyond the window lie the crumbling shacks,  
with aluminum panes for the sporadic roof,  
that bow to the muddy lanes paved by chickens  
searching for food among tired weeds and strewn bricks  
of houses that were never rebuilt after the tanks.  
Those who could, fled for the cities, leaving  
grandmothers with nothing but graves of husbands  
and sons who used to sit by the sulking river  
which once roared festive with wine,  
but now waters the shrubs with blood.

*Poet's Commentary: This poem is about the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, and its enduring effects on the lives and memories of the Georgian people.*

Bio- Anna is a Georgian-American high school student.

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### **Speaking to Father as Tree**

by April Salzano

You there with your roots  
twisted like malice, snaking  
like memory, bring me a horizon  
to shatter from the ground, a sky  
to lay waste to. Throw clouds  
like dishes against mantles.  
Break me from the earth.  
These limbs are tired  
of eating dirt like my life  
depends on sucking  
water from soil.

*Poet's Commentary: My thought process in writing this piece was a combination of conscious and unconscious thought. I am nearly finished with Sharon Doubiago's disturbing memoir regarding her sexual abuse by her father. Her images found their way into my dreams, re-surfacing feelings about my own father, who died in 2008. Like roots themselves, like the image in the photograph, these notions are interlocking, deep, and ever-reaching beneath the surface.*

Bio- April Salzano is the co-editor at Kind of a Hurricane Press and is currently working on a memoir about raising a child with autism, as well as several collections of poetry. Her work has been twice nominated for a Pushcart Award and has appeared in journals such as *The Camel Saloon*, *Centrifugal Eye*, *Deadsnakes*, *Visceral Uterus*, *Salome*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Writing Tomorrow* and *Rattle*. Her chapbook, *The Girl of My Dreams*, is available from Dancing Girl Press. Her poetry collection *Future Perfect* is forthcoming from Pink Girl Ink. More of her work can be read at [aprilsalzano.blogspot.com](http://aprilsalzano.blogspot.com)

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## **roots**

by Steve Pollack

look deep, deep beneath  
under the surface anchored

go below barren branches  
duvet of dried leaves

where we plant our honored dead  
there, at home with worms and bones



crawling through eternal night  
extracting sacred compost

even after frost hits hard  
living roots like fingers reach

moistened by organic ooze  
tempered from Earth's core

grounded in the past  
enriched by decay

sustenance drawn through a straw  
rising up the family trunk

each season banks its promise  
inherits nature's storehouse

turn the whole world upside-down  
see the image, an upright tree

in a mirror, faces tell  
elegant strands deeply dwell

*Poet's Commentary: The evocative picture prompt and thorough notes provided in the Craft Box provided a starting point for my consideration of this theme. The idea to merge natural and human images, to reflect both definitions of "roots," attracted me to this challenge.*

*The line, "turn the whole world upside-down," came to me first. Don't ask how, but those words got the poetic juices flowing, though ending near the poem's conclusion, only after many revisions. Some additional botanical research had assisted with word choices. The lower case letters and couplet form seemed a fitting way to present the simple, yet powerful ideas. The more I crafted the revisions, the stronger I felt the connection—we humans (despite our intellect and technological progress) are indeed, part of the interdependent natural world.*

Bio- Steve Pollack is retired from a career in facilities and project management. He has enjoyed writing since his days in elementary school, but found poetry (or poetry found him) in recent years. He and his wife of 46 years live in suburban Philadelphia and are blessed with two sons, two daughters-in-law and four grandchildren. His roots extend deep

into the rich heritage of his grandparents, who arrived to the golden shores of America between 1905-1920.



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