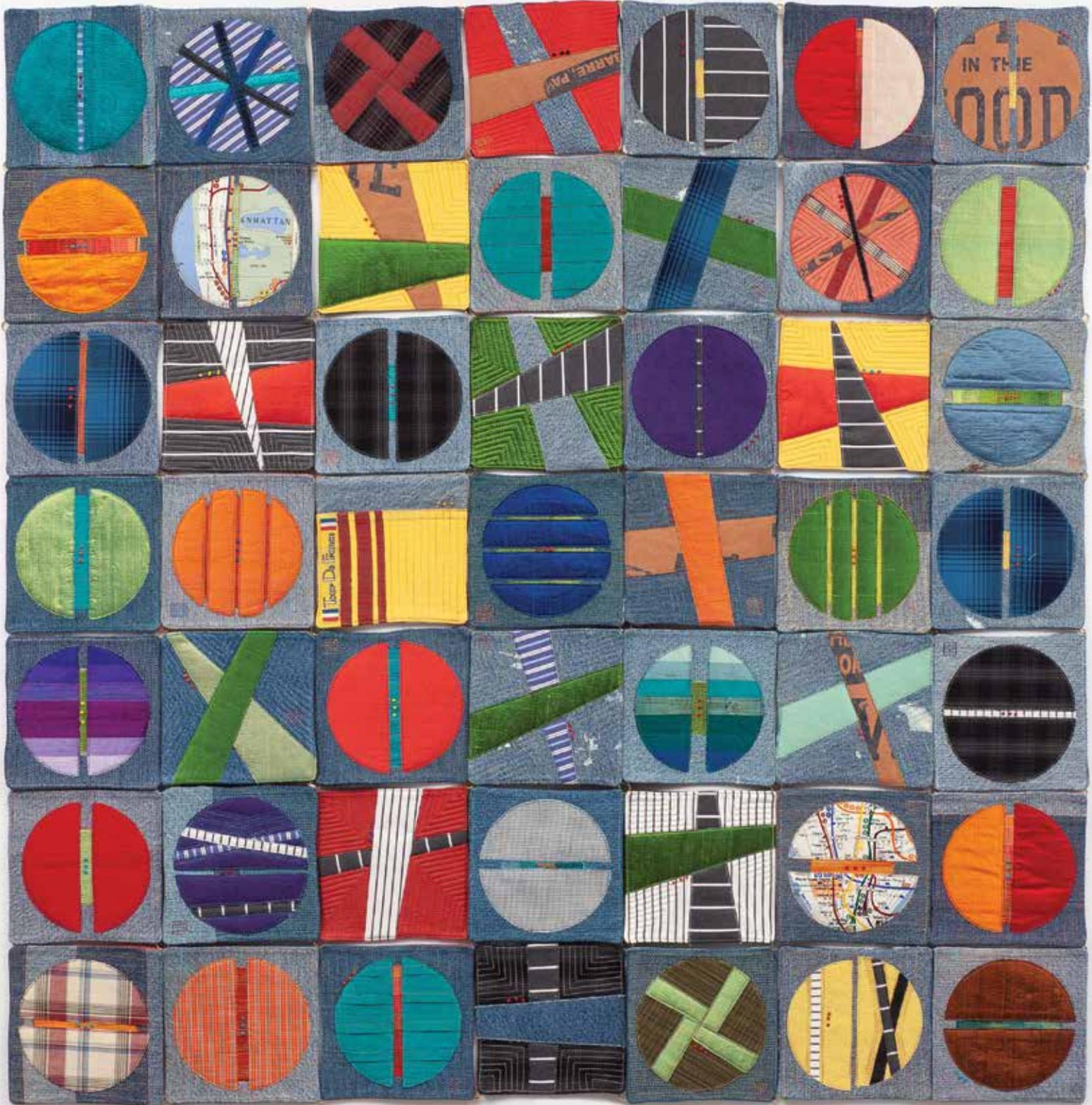


Philadelphia Stories

Cultivating a community of writers, artists, and readers across the Delaware Valley

SUMMER / 2021 / FREE



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ART



Broken Circles by Susan Leonard

Susan Leonard is a professional fiber artist. She collects clothing and other fiber scraps to create art quilts. Her award-winning art pieces have been exhibited in the US and can be found in private collections in this country and in the UK. *Broken Circles* is her response to the death of her adult son from opioids. Her symbols for love and forgiveness are stitched into each of the 49 squares. Visit www.susanleonardquilts.com.



Pie in the Face by Tony Squadroni

Tony Squadroni is a Philadelphia native with a lifelong passion for art. He dedicated his free time to sketching from an early age and attended the Hussian School of Art, graduating in 1972. Squadroni has been a freelance illustrator for the past four decades, utilizing a myriad of techniques and styles. Starting at the Wayne Art Center in 2001, he teaches drawing and cartooning classes at Philadelphia area art centers.



City Structures by Alan Lankin

Alan Lankin was born and raised in New Jersey and became interested in drawing as a teenager. After moving to Philadelphia, he took drawing and painting classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the University of Pennsylvania and Fleisher Art Memorial. He has exhibited his paintings in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Arizona. He lives and works near Philadelphia, PA. Visit www.alanlankin.com.



Thin Water by Robyn Burckhardt

A mixed-media artist, Robyn Burckhardt uses traditional materials in her artwork in unusual ways. Her paintings often begin with thin washes of paint followed by layered glazes applied with rags or her own hands and sometimes with brushes. Much of Burckhardt's work features images of anchorages along the Chesapeake Bay's Eastern Shore where she and her husband spend summers on their sailboat. Her work can be viewed online at www.robynburckhardt.com and in galleries near her Chester County home.



Poppy Pup by Laura Ducceschi

Laura Ducceschi's fine art photography celebrates the magic of life, light, patterns and colors. The recipient of more than 50 awards and honors from local, national and international organizations, her images have been exhibited at The State Museum of PA, Winterthur, Philadelphia's City Hall and many other venues. Laura lives in Pennsylvania, has a master's degree in education from The University of Pennsylvania and teaches photography.



Arcadia Pond by Corinne Dieterle

Originally a textile artist, Corinne Dieterle made the leap to painting some twenty years ago and has benefited from the instruction of several talented teachers. Based in Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, her work can be found in exhibits in galleries, annual juried shows, several Delaware Valley art centers, restaurants and libraries and is held in numerous private collections. Dieterle was the recipient of a 2016 Mt. Gretna School of Art Summer painting residency.



Museum Glass by Stefanie Lieberman

A graduate of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Stefanie Lieberman is an award-winning landscape, animal and still life painter. Found in private and public collections, her work has been featured in such publications as *American Art Collector*, *Atlanta Style & Design*, as cover art for *Gallery Guide* and in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. Lieberman lives in Philadelphia and teaches painting both privately and institutionally. Visit www.stefanielieberman.com.



Sea Garden by Suzanne Comer

Suzanne Comer explores the use of digital photography as an art form. She is especially known for using elements of her photographs to create award-winning photomontages. These works, as well as her unmanipulated photos, have been selected for exhibit in numerous juried shows each year. See more creative works at: [facebook.com/suzanne.comer.artist](https://www.facebook.com/suzanne.comer.artist) and [instagram.com/suzannecomerart](https://www.instagram.com/suzannecomerart).

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SUPPORT PROVIDED IN PART BY THE PHILADELPHIA CULTURAL FUND.



Mid-Century Triptych

Mary Rohrer-Dann

Stanley's Hunch

Shelly's fiancé. Dirk. What kind of name is that? Stanley's hand twitches. A horsefly bumps against the screen. Dirk's smooth. Maybe too smooth. Knocks back Scotch like it's water. Cocky. Ok, so was Stanley back in the day. But there's something else that he can't put his finger on. Dirk's parents—they're decent enough. They can be pain-in-the-ass-yacht-club snooty. But they've got the yacht, they've got the yacht.

And yeah, isn't that what he wanted for her, putting in 70 + hours building his business to give her the best? Even returning to the ring when cash was low. Nearly got himself killed. He'd do it again. You'd better believe it. Sent her to Germantown Friends when the neighbor kids went to Northeast. The pricey business college for girls up in Rhode Island. His Shelly won't marry no bum with a busted-up face and scarred hands. A guy who stinks of diesel fuel, fingernails black with chassis grease. *Find someone with smarts and money*, he told her. *In that order?* She asked, and he said, *Nah*, and they both laughed. Hell. But Dirk? Stanley could ask Marlene to talk to her but planning the wedding has helped ease that stepmother thing. It's nice when they laugh together.

Sometimes he just wants to lock Shelly in her room. She's been turning men's heads since she was twelve. She's got her mother's sparkle. Those blue eyes wide as the ocean. Every guy was in love with Julie. Even after she got sick. Docs falling all over themselves for that high-beam smile. The surgeon's face when he realized Stanley was Julie's husband! Like, *how'd this lout land her?* And Shelly introducing him last week to Dirk's father, who looked from Stanley to her, Stanley to her. Like, *how in the world does this happen?*

Now it'll be Dirk's job to protect her. Dirk. Christ.

Maybe it's just father-of-the-bridle jitters, but Stanley finds himself back in that old nightmare. No one said, but part of him knew Julie was dying. He knew and he didn't know. In his dream, he's in the ring, but can't see his opponent. There were just gloves. Huge. Black. Hammering hammering hammering. A hook to his jaw, corkscrew jab to his kidney. His footwork is shot to hell. He tries to twist away, but he's locked in cement. Another hit to the kidney and he's down. He'd piss blood for a week.

Dirk's Rehearsal

It's been building all evening, each under-her-breath comment his mother makes at the rehearsal dinner fueling it, each complaint from his future mother-in-law with her purse-string lips, Shelly yoyoing between giggling and pouting, and that look his father gives him as they argue over who will sit where, that same old look no matter how hard he works, how smart, the old fucker's never satisfied, he could sell a million boats, load each one with every option in the book, it will never be enough, he will never be enough, and it's that sucker-punch look his father sneaks in every goddamn single time, and he never sees it coming—*how does he never see it coming?*—and after the bullshit about the bar tab, the tip, the centerpieces, his lack of a tie, to top it all off, there's Shelly's stupid stupid giggle when they go parking after the restaurant, and when he levers the car seat down, she starts whining she doesn't want to have sex, *It's the night before our wedding, Dirk!* and she rounds her big blue eyes and pushes his hand away and fuck! can't he even get some relief. They've been screwing since their third date, and now she's going all virgin on him? and when his fingers move further up her leg she slaps him, not even a play slap like she sometimes does, his cheek stings, dammit! and that's it, he lets loose, fingers coiling into fists, he gives in to his rage, stoking it, pretending he is even drunker than he is, but his fists avoid her face and somewhere inside he recognizes he's been moving towards this all along; it's that cool calculation to avoid her face with his fists that shocks him, appalls him, makes him howl inside for who he once was, for who, until this moment, he might still have been.

Shelly's Secret

Shelly waits until her parents' bedroom darkens, then slips off her shoes, opens the door, moves through the dark living room where the cuckoo clock screams 2 A.M. and she stops on the stairs, realizing it's the last night she'll hear the clock at this hour and how sweet and sad this moment should be, but now it's just lonely and awful and upstairs under the fluorescent bathroom light bruises bloom on her arms and ribs and she knows *knows* that her father will kill Dirk if he finds out and it's this, this certainty, more than the white cake at the bakery, the white dress in her closet (thank god for its Victorian collar, the tapered lace sleeves that graze her fingertips), more than everyone waiting to watch her walk down the aisle, more than the shame if she backs out now, after all the decisions and preparations and checklists, the



fights over flowers and the dessert table that makes it impossible and her legs shake as she sits on the toilet to pee, shake as she washes her hands, as she wipes the mascara and glimmer shadow from her eyes—how blue and startled they look, pink-rimmed like a rabbit’s (is that why Dirk calls her *Bunny*?) and she stares long and hard, wondering what he sees when he looks at her, wondering how they’ve lasted this long (he’s always had a temper, he’s screamed at her, put his fist through a wall inches from her face, once even pushed her but instantly his eyes filled with self-loathing, and she always knew it wasn’t her he was mad at, it was work, his dad, the guy who cut him out on the Boulevard, the barkeep who told him he’d had enough, it was never her he was mad at and how tender he was afterwards, his fingertips tentative, gentle, but tonight was different, it was *everything* and for the first time she was just another thing in that everything, and maybe she should have just slept with him or at least given him a hand-job, after all, why shouldn’t he expect something

(how about a little sugar, *Bunny*?) to tide him over, but she can’t shake what she saw in his eyes, something calculating and cold, but what would she say, how would she explain (her father *will* kill him) and so she turns off the bathroom light, tiptoes to her bedroom, searches the bottom dresser drawer for her old baby doll pajamas, soft and thin with wear, the elastic loose, and she climbs into her childhood bed, the sheets smelling faintly of sunlight, listens to the murmur of traffic beyond the park, and waits for tomorrow.

Mary Rohrer-Dann is the author of *Taking the Long Way Home* (Kelsay Books, 2021) and *La Scaffetta: Poems from the Foundling Drawer* (Tempest Productions, Inc.) Additional work appears/is forthcoming in *The Clackamas Review*, *Vestal Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Rat’s Ass Review*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Philadelphia Stories* (issue 2!) and other venues. Although she has long lived in central PA, she is still a Philly girl at heart, and is finishing a collection of story-poems based on the Philadelphia neighborhood she grew up in.



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Philadelphia Stories is a free print magazine that publishes fiction, poetry, essays, and artwork from writers and artists from PA, NJ, and DE and makes it available to 5,000 readers every quarter. We’d love to see your work!

Find submission guidelines at www.philadelphiastories.org Free to submit year-round!



The Time on Dalí's Watch

Poem by Nick Cialini

In the near-dark morning, unhook the moon
and pin it in its dark and velvet box.
Pull out your crumpled self from the cedar chest,
unroll it, drape it out to dry –
somewhere the sun, freshly stitched
into the seam of the sky, can reach.

Listen, in that singing sunlight,
to the cicadas tick off quick seconds –
the seconds of clocks that toll the hours
with gasps of thunder. Clocks rigged together
from the teeth of stars and the bones of the ocean.
Minutes don't matter to those inscrutable gears.

When your shadow rises to greet you,
reach out into the night; retrieve yourself, dew-dried;
roll it in on itself, like a large conch shell; stow it
away in the cedar chest. As you sleep,
keep your ear low and listening for it beneath the heart-
beat of the one beside you.

Take the moon from its hiding place –
the secret box you keep in your lingerie drawer –
like an heirloom Cameo, its image worn smooth,
and clasp it into place, just out of reach –
a little farther out the window than last night.

When your bed is laid out against the stars,
make quiet love to the rhythm of thunder.



Nick Cialini lives in Lancaster, PA where he teaches literature and is a PhD candidate at Temple University. He adheres to Joy Harjo's principle that "life begins at the kitchen table" by sharing food and games with those who matter most to him. This is his first poetry publication.

Freeze All Blue & Black

Poem by Andrew Weller

Should I just leave you in this frozen night
since you're no help? Go there and plop that heart
in the gut bucket. We've packed the fridge tight
with cabin food already, so for the parts
we'll keep, we'll pack some snow on them. Your deer
should make decent venison jerky. Look,
it's just dead meat. There is nothing to fear
about a dressed deer. Now, down past the brook,
Dad leaves the organs deep in the thickets
and then he wipes the blood off his hands.
Here's his rag for that. Take that gut bucket
then go dump it in the snow like a man.
But that heart, I always chuck it far back
where it can wait for spring all blue and black.



Having grown up in Chester County and worked in Philadelphia, Andrew Weller has a deep connection with Eastern Pennsylvania. He just graduated from The Pennsylvania State University with a Masters and Bachelor's in English. He continues to write in his spare time while starting his career as a technical writer.

Just Before

Poem by Robert Coles

In a hospital room
I stand next to your son,
watching you drift
in and out of consciousness.
I give you flowers,
their stems clipped.
You drop them in a pan
of shallow water.

Outside, I can see the bus station
near the last stop on the subway line.

Remember when you moved to Mount Airy,
on the second floor? We talked all night
about politics. Then Watergate broke, and
you foresaw that Nixon would fall.
You always drove me home
pounding your palms on the steering wheel.

Kamal takes a napkin and wipes your mouth—
“Are you hungry Mom, do you want a drink?”—
while I keep asking if you know my name.
You raise yourself and say it once,
just before you fall back.



Since 1990, Robert Coles has published over one hundred poems in various literary journals, anthologies, and magazines. His most recent poems have appeared in *Peregrine* (Spring 2017), *Mudfish* (vol. 20, 2018/vol. 21, 2020/vol. 22, 2021), and *Cura Magazine* (Fordham University, Spring 2019).





Something a Ghost Told Me at Dachau

Mark Antony Rossi

I'm not the type to fall under the spell of a false religion. The lesson has been on the books for ages. The catastrophes supposedly done out of desperation are more closely connected to opportunism than conviction. It's been irrefutably argued that even Hitler was not a true believer.

However, lies, particularly the Big Lie, have real world consequences. Moments after I walked into Germany's first concentration camp in Dachau, a hand gripped my right shoulder. A voice rattled my cranium, ominously stating, "The whole of Dachau is guilty."

I didn't ignore its exhortation. But its meaning was sidetracked by overwhelmed senses. Waves of human sweat permeated the air of dirty stained wood barracks. Forty-seven years later and I could still smell the perspiration of condemned prisoners. I visited the memorial of Methodist pastors murdered for their faith. Dachau was not a killing ground for Jews alone. Nazi's arranged high altitude experiments in sealed chambers for Russian prisoners of war, Roma, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, and various Catholic and Protestant ministers.

I sat in the cinema and watched films of victims with shattered ear drums, suffering from hallucinations and brain damage stumble out of chambers and die. Their disfigured bodies hauled off to a crematorium on site. Once I saw the ashes of human remains float above the camp into the environs of the town, I immediately understood what the voice exclaimed.

The town of Dachau was regularly visited with ash raining down on its cottages and streets. After the liberation the townspeople told visiting journalists they had no idea what was going on at the camp. Security forces prevented them from asking questions. The Camp's walls and four towers were not tall enough from many in the town's buildings and elevation to block forced labor, torture, and the bodies of failed escapes hanging across barbed wire.

But the raining ash sticks in my conscience. The whole of Dachau is guilty. Each day walking to the bakery covered in black human ash. Each week walking to church wiping away the last remains of people utterly destroyed. How do you explain this? How do you answer your God when the time comes? Why shouldn't Hell open its mouth and swallow this place like a rat eaten by a snake?

I left the Camp, and that hand left my shoulder. Many people were killed in that camp for being artists. Maybe one reached out to me to make sure I do not forget what I saw. I am no cosmic judge. How an entire town is morally weighed is beyond my understanding. I needed a drink and a good dinner. I did both in another town. Every so often, staring at the sky and wishing eternal peace for the persecuted.

Mark Antony Rossi is an USAF Cold War veteran, poet, playwright, and host of the literary podcast "Strength To Be Human" <https://strengthtobehuman.podbean.com> His work has been published in *Bombfire Lit*, *Earth & Altar*, *Lethe* (Turkey), *Leere Mitte* (Germany) and *Uncomfortable Revolution* and has work forthcoming on *Ariel Chart*, *Granfallon*, *Indian Periodical* (India) & *Route 7 Review*.

WRITER'S SPOTLIGHT
Tuesday, July 6th
7:30pm

Join us for our virtual bi-monthly "Writer Spotlight" series where we highlight two writers from various genres.

This month, poets **Adam Falkner** and **Warren Longmire** share their craft approach and writing tips.



Dear Renee

Poem by Ellen Stone

We used to sit together every day, the dusty bus, those long dirt roads.
Your father, old when he was young, hobbling to the barn at milking time.
My sister keeps embroidered pillows in the closet with her holidays, hums
all through the house, long and slow. Are you that kind of woman now?
Renee, my dumb heart cannot remember If I ever played with you in school
or if I left you by the swings for those girls who only let me be the monkey.

Did I forget you, your long braids in that wet field of grass? I was the one
who swallowed all the knives, key tied round my neck with a grey ribbon.
Today, I brought out the flour bowl and rolling pin, the salt and baking powder.
Habit you'd do without. Kitchen quiet, emptying, its low deliberate light.
Renee, I didn't use the wheelbarrow. Nor stripped the chicken from the bone.
Can you understand my lumbering, my rusty hands? Do you miss our home?



Ellen Stone grew up in the hills of northeastern Pennsylvania. She advises a poetry club at Community High School and co-hosts a monthly poetry series in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Ellen's poetry collections are *What Is in the Blood* (Mayapple Press, 2020) and *The Solid Living World* (Michigan Writers' Cooperative Press, 2013.) ellenstone.org.

What Our Fathers Didn't Tell Us About the War

Poem by Kelley White

that they were young, but the enemy soldiers were younger
that they sometimes loved their buddies more than they loved
 their wives and girlfriends at home
that they made up bawdy words to the most sentimental and sweet
 of songs
that they hallucinated
 on liquor
 on marijuana
 anti-freeze
 and heroin
that they dream of it now and dreamed of a war in their own back
 yards while they were overseas
that they loved their mothers
that they feared their fathers
that they lost religion
that they gained it
that they kept a single toe from an enemy soldier for a few months
 and can't remember why or where they threw it away
that they were hungry and ate food from another man's backpack
that they were thirsty
 and drank water that was mixed with blood
that they slept while their best friends masturbated to their sister's
 pictures
that they cried
that they didn't cry when their hometown buddy drowned
that they saw children die
that they killed children
that they loved their children
that their children grew forgotten
that their children ran away



Pediatrician Kelley White has worked in inner city Philadelphia and rural New Hampshire. Her poems have appeared in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Rattle* and *JAMA*. Her recent books are *TOXIC ENVIRONMENT* (Boston Poet Press) and *TWO BIRDS IN FLAME* (Beech River Books.) She received a 2008 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts grant.



A Stranger's Time

Drew Kolenik

I've never been less than an hour early for my train. I don't know if it comes from a sense of heightened preparedness or an ongoing current of anxiety that doesn't even let me sleep in on weekends. Years of sitting in an airport two hours before another passenger arrived ingrained this practice into me. For so long I hated the limbo of traveling yet sitting still. I ended up counting the seconds as they strolled by to occupy my brain. I don't mind the time now. It's a moment to pause. It's a moment to observe the world around me I take for granted every day.

I walked into 30th street station at 1:15pm. I gazed at arrivals from the entrance way trying to find my train to Connecticut. I took note that it was harder to read this sign now than it was last year. It seemed constantly staring at a computer screen for the last ten odd years had started to wear away at what was once 20/20. I walked towards gate three which housed tracks three and four as my Acela never left from anywhere else. That never stopped me from matching up the numbers on my ticket and the ones on the sign about twice every minute. Look down, 2170. Look up, 2170. Gate three, track four, as usual. It was 1:20 now. I had seventy minutes to kill.

I found a seat on the aged wooden benches that offered lodging to travelers much more homesick than I. I put on my headphones and tuned out the sounds of the mostly empty train station but kept my eyes alert. I watched the people around me lug around their suitcases, make phone calls breaking the news of another delay, while a man filled out some form on a clipboard. A bird had haplessly flown its way into the building. It sat a mere three feet away from me. I took out my camera, but it flew away before the lens could shutter. Almost as if it was telling me the moment was not meant to be captured. *Please, I wish only to be a fleeting memory*, it seemed to say to me.

The man with the clipboard now stood opposite me. Using the top of his bench as a desk. I noticed his continuous glances and wondered if he wanted me to fill out his survey or sign his petition. Whatever it was, he was furiously working away at it. He grabbed my attention with a wave of his hand and spoke. I couldn't hear him. I took my headphones off and he repeated the words.

"Can you pull down your mask for me?"

I was confused but automatically obliged.

"Give me a smile." He enjoined with one of his own.

I replied with a mix of confusion and amusement "Are—are you drawing me?"

He began walking over to sit next to me and motioned for me to return my mask to my face. He sat next to me and began to tell me about himself. Well, more accurately he told me to look him up on my phone. I obliged. I typed "Irving Fields Philadelphia" into the search bar and waited for the results to load. There he was. The photos that appeared depicted him in nearly an identical outfit. The flat cap and scarf he wore perfectly fit the role of artist he was playing. His square frame glasses still hung over his nose, only helping him see the page below him and not my face. His dark skin devoid of wrinkles did not reveal his age but the rasp in his flamboyant voice and grey moustache did.

As if he was reading from a script, he began to recount his story to me, detailing the articles that appeared. He spoke in muffled words, and his story didn't seem to come to him in chronological order. I did my best to listen carefully and closely as my eyes flickered back from him and the clock hanging on the wall. He wanted me to look at him for the drawing, but enough time had passed that fear of missing my train began to creep in.

As far as I could tell the story begins the day he was struck by a car. To put it bluntly he said the accident left him both physically and mentally fucked for a number of years. Almost to add validity to his story he lifted his left pant leg revealing his prosthetic leg.

"Say Ouch!"

"Ouch."

Whether the medical bills or the unemployment during those dark years, he ended up living on the street. He spent a long time living without a warm place to sleep until he got an idea. He began going to the grocery store and asking women if he could draw their portrait or help them with their groceries for something to eat. No doubt the unusual nature of his request stood out to people, and he found himself with a new source of income and, more importantly, food.

"I would always ask women, and they'd say 'well, I'm not



wearing any make up'. I told them it wasn't a picture! It made no difference to me."

Eventually, Irving's habitual workspace became Pat's Cheesesteaks. In the same manner that I met him many people found themselves sitting across from a man with pencil and paper in hand sketching away asking them to hold perfectly still mid-meal. One of those subjects just so happened to be a journalist reviewing the restaurant. They began talking, having about the same conversation that I was now engaged in, only eight years earlier. By the end of the exchange Irving became a part of an article. As he told me the story, I could sense the pride and accomplishment in his words. Being written about adds legitimacy to one's craft. I hope I'm doing the same for him here. When he asked me what I did, I told him I was a writer. I'm currently fulfilling a promise I made to him with these words.

"When I first started out, I only drew women and sometimes their boyfriends. It seemed to pay the best. But now I can draw whatever I want. Now I only draw pretty boys like yourself, but remember, I'll always be pretty boy number one." He joked with a level of sincerity.

The words did not really faze me as I had prepared myself for anything at that point, but I did take it as the unusual complement it was.

Being published helped him find a home, he told me. Irving continually reminded me that he used to be homeless. He wasn't any more. I couldn't help but feel sad about his constant reassurance, knowing how many people must have treated this incredibly friendly and eccentric man less than human. He no longer had to draw to eat, but it clearly meant a lot to him. I could tell he wanted the first word associated with him to be *artist* and not *formally-homeless*.

"I'm drawing to feed the homeless now."

He was about to ask the question I knew was coming from the moment we began speaking. But I didn't mind.

"Can you pay for your portrait?"

"Sure."

"Alright, that'll be a thousand dollars." He laughed.

"How about twenty?" I countered.

"Yeah, alright, man. That's beautiful, thank you."

Art and money exchanged hands, and I saw his work for the first time.

"You like it?"

"I love it man, thank you."

"Give it to somebody you love. And tell them they're beautiful."

"I'm going home right now. I will."

An hour had blown by, and it was time for me to board.

"You know, before he wrote that article about me, I had no idea Philly was known for cheesesteaks, and I've lived here my whole life."

I laughed and thanked him for making my wait infinitely more entertaining. I won't lie. The likeness isn't exact. But I really do love the drawing. I'd like to think the portrait was free, and I paid him for the story. I suppose, that's why I always show up early.

Drew Kolenik is a creative writing student at Temple University. Since a young age, he has always had his hand in one creative endeavor or another. He has taken his passion for story-telling and daily journaling to begin the search for his audience.





The Color Absence

Poem by Ezra Solway

The color absence is yellow and blood
red, bones of glass shattered on the floor
with no broom or dustpan in line of sight.

Did you see me walking the other day?
I was delivering you in the flex of my arms,
sleeves folded back to conceal the rips

of laughter. I wonder if you still hold
the last words you spoke to me in your
pocket like a brand new set of car keys.

Don't you worry that I forgot my jacket
in the freezing cold rain? Or maybe the wind
rubs its hands together on the front porch

waiting to come back inside. The color
absence glazes its palette in the summer
fallow, knocking sugar skulls against pine

doors, brittle to the touch and slapped with
salt water. If endings spring forth like a geyser,
then let me catch the steam on the way down.



Ezra Solway writes in Philadelphia where he received an MFA in Creative Writing at Temple University this past spring. His writing has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and featured in The Jewish Literary Journal, North of Oxford, and Small Leaf Press, among others. You can follow his writings on twitter at @SolwayEzra

The Elements

Poem by Anne Yarbrough

for Delaware City Oil Refinery

From here I promise you will see it all --

those clusters of towers
their various diameters and heights
lifted into cloud-clotted sky

bespeckled by summer sun
grounded by a low plinth
composed of wide shallow domes

grounded by marshes clotted with nests and lairs
clusters of golden phragmites
rising up there

then water, lapping
where eels unscroll, abiding in the dark patches
on their way to the Sargasso Sea

not a sea as you'd imagine it, just
the ragged floating place they dream of --

a falling sequence of materials
from solid to liquid to gas, a game
of animal vegetable mineral --

old cast-iron composed of scraps of dying stars
grounded by a burning fall
torn caterwauling out of the ground

casting fire and steam into that floating sky
while within, the compression of life forms --
fern bones and beetle wings from long ago

transformed to gasoline and other gases, or lighter fuel
diesel laced with hydrogen, or propane --
gases, liquids, steam, fire -- fluid forms

in drifted tatters lapped by sky and water
smithereens unfurled, swarming
toward some remembered place.



Anne Yarbrough's work has appeared or is forthcoming in Poet Lore, Delmarva Review, and Gargoyle. She lives along the lower Delaware River.



Holy Cow

Jeannine Cook

I am trying to make sense of things, which is why I find myself ruminating. Chewing like a cow on my thoughts. Cows also ruminate. Differently though. After ingesting lots of grass, cows find a place to lie down to more thoroughly chew their food. This process of swallowing, “un-swallowing”, re-chewing, and re-swallowing is called rumination, or more commonly, “chewing the cud.” Perhaps my mental cud chewing is some undiagnosed shit, as I have more than once been called a bull shitter. Maybe it’s some spiritual shit, as I have more than once been called a heifer.

During my ruminations, a thought from years ago or months ago or minutes ago, a sneaky motherfucking thought can get caught in an endless cycle that moves through my mind, down into my gut, up into my heart, and back into my head all day for days. This week’s rumination was on Bill Gates. When news first dropped of his divorce with Melinda French Gates, I couldn’t understand why a couple married that long would divorce. Just didn’t make sense to me in my naivety about relationships and such. But then I read he’d been a serial philanderer, and maybe something worse, for years. This took me back to my ongoing thoughts about John Tubman. I wonder what it felt like for Harriett to love a lover who betrayed her and still not be able to get him out of the rotation of her habitual thinking—looking for nutrients that were perhaps never there.

And that just sits me down in the grass with my questions, not about Bill or John or Harriett, but about humans, about humanity, about the cows. Is there a goal for reckoning with the atrocities done to the folks on this land, or is everyone just chewing cud, full of it. What would it take for folks to trust each other enough to confront history healthily on a massive scale? Is that ever going to happen or is it not even what people want? Are we out to pasture and don’t even know it? Being led to some ultimate slaughter because we’ve never stopped chewing long enough to digest what has happened here. To extract the lessons, expel the shit, and not lap it up again and again for no reason, no reason at all on repeat. How do we repair the harm of slavery, Jim Crow, and lynching? I grind these questions through my teeth, down into my gut, throw them up, lick them down, throw them up again, sleep with them on my stomach, wake up with them on my face.

I wonder if I, who unlike cows that ruminate out of necessity,

am doing so as a trauma response? Am I eternally grazing? Do I get to have memories of my dad’s size 11 hooves stomping my mother’s face in my mind forever, forever ever? Oh, the amount of intrusive reviewing and revisiting and revising that I put myself through after a speech or a panel discussion or after I’ve met someone whose thoughts make me think twice. Always wanting to rewind the time, to break things down just a little bit more, just a little bit longer. I can lie paralyzed by thoughts of a single color, a silly word, or a fumbled phrase. Is this something that will eventually go away? Do I want it to? I think the older I get, it only happens more.

I ruminate over people too. I sit and think and think and think about Kanye or my Ex or my future love or my future Ex lover and wonder if they are ok and if there is anything I could do to help them or to help the people in my life who are like them? I even think about how their brains work and wonder whether they ruminate too? Do they reflect on circumstances in ways that require large swaths of energy—relive moments of emotional unrest or emotional bliss while waving their tails under the summer’s hot sun? Do questions about Malcolm and Mariama and Mumia know no end in their minds like mine? Do they get so lost in their thoughts that they see someone talking but cannot make out the words they’ve said with lips just flapping from side to side in the wind?

This Erykah Badu on and on and on-ism is also something I do with history. Sit myself in the haul of a ship tightly packed with piss and vomit and blood and death at my feet and at my head. I am Antoinette Sithole running beside a dying boy through Soweto. I am Winnie Mandela 491 days solitarily confined. I, too, chew with the ancient aurochs and swim with the ship jumpers.

Someone told me to practice writing the ruminations out. Not a therapist, just a fellow ruminator who reported to have found a way to reuse their unmanaged, unmitigated written ruminations to reimagine. To release them like an unruly herd. I want to reimagine what the American version of the Truth and Reconciliation Trials would look like? A social epic I suppose. Can we stand to memorize other people’s lines? Like future replay in reverse.

Rumination was originally defined as repetitive thinking about negative effects and their possible causes and consequences. But rumination can also be beneficial when it focuses on reckon-



ing with an error—one's own and those of others. Like spending hours thinking about what healing feels like in our bodies, in our minds. Rumination is also helpful for goal attainment rehearsing a task—seeing ourselves, smelling ourselves, in a future as we wish to see it. When was the last time you ruminated on a world repaired? A people healed? Remembering that finding social nutrients is an all-day job and gave yourself the whole day to do it. Write out your regurgitations, prepare for reconciliations that repair the harm because we can ruminate on the problems until the cows come home, but how much more can our minds really take and who is it actually feeding?

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For the last 10 years, Jeannine Cook has worked as a trusted writer for several startups, corporations, non-profits, and influencers. In addition to holding a master's degree from The University of the Arts, Jeannine is a Leeway Art & Transformation Grantee and a winner of the South Philly Review Difference Maker Award. Jeannine's work has been recognized by several news outlets including Vogue Magazine, INC, MSNBC, The Strategist, and the Washington Post. She recently returned from Nairobi, Kenya facilitating social justice creative writing with youth from 15 countries around the world. She writes about the complex intersections of motherhood, activism, and community. Her pieces are featured in several publications including the Philadelphia Inquirer, Root Quarterly, Printworks, and midnight & indigo. She is the proud new owner of Harriett's Bookshop in the Fishtown section of Philadelphia.

Busy Night

Poem by Chris Ritter

The car alarm jabs the neighbors awake
every fifteen minutes when its bark
sets off the strays in their chorus
of call and response and the supermarket
down the block has an alarm, too; it throbs
like a synthesizer overlay on an old disco track,
but the neighbors don't dance except for
the young couple across the street who hustle
out on the stoop to the rhythm of their
raised voices, the angry tempo of go ahead
and do it, of big man, of bitch, while
sometime traffic on Broad Street whispers
its wheels on asphalt to hush its roll
through streetlights' amber cone before the siren
song of the EMT's carting someone in the truck
to the ER on the other side of town while neighbors
wish, maybe, that they were in one of the planes
overhead, the belly-lights sly wink like
saying, You know this is all bullshit, right?
before it screams down onto the runway
at the airport across the river - or perhaps it's
the ringing they hear borne in the brief quiet
of their own bedrooms, the brazen scurry
of blood through their ears' capillaries, the rattle
of breath only they can hear like a dream
they can't quite rise from, a song almost recalled,
its ancient refrain on a loop they can't shake,
in the mystery of sleep, awake, a puzzle, impossible,
like how, after all, day breaks without a sound.



Chris Ritter is a Philadelphia native living and working in a South Jersey suburb.



The Nation's Biggest Writing Conference Comes to Philadelphia

Christine Weiser



Photo by Paul Gargagliano



AWP 2022 Keynote speaker, Toi Derricotte;
Photo by Heather Kresge



Photo by Lily Daniller

In March 2022, Philadelphia Stories will be a premiere sponsor of The Association of Writing Programs (AWP) Conference, taking place in Philadelphia. Here's what that means for local writers.

The AWP Conference & Bookfair is the biggest annual writing conference in the United States, and it will be taking place at the Convention Center in Philadelphia for the first time in its history in March 2022.

The conference expects more than 12,000 writers, teachers, students, editors, and publishers of contemporary creative writing to gather from **March 23-26, 2022** to participate in hundreds of events – and Philadelphia Stories will be a premiere sponsor of this event.

This premiere sponsorship represents a unique opportunity to not just showcase Philadelphia Stories magazine to this national audience, but to showcase Philadelphia as a hub for the literary arts.

The Winter 2022 issue of Philadelphia Stories will be distributed at the conference, and it is our goal to ensure this issue represents the diverse voices that make up our great city. Here are two ways you can participate in the issue:

- **Submit your work:** If you are a writer currently living in or from the Philadelphia metropolitan area, you may submit your fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or artwork to be considered for the special AWP Winter 2022 issue. We are specifically seeking submissions from diverse perspectives: all ethnicities, races, abilities, and gender identification. Find our guidelines here: <https://philadelphiastories.org/submission-guidelines/>

- **Submit your literary organization to be considered for our AWP Resource Guide:** The Winter 2022 AWP issue of Philadelphia Stories will include a special Resource Guide listing the wealth of literary resources available in the region, including independent bookstores, literary organizations, writing workshops, reading series, and more. You may submit your organization here to be considered: <https://forms.gle/LWXq8W3tYpfnmou8>

As part of our AWP sponsorship, Philadelphia Stories will be offering scholarships to writers so they can attend the conference and bookfair. We also plan to have plenty of fun, hosting free readings, meet-ups, and cocktail parties.

We look forward to working in partnership with the Philadelphia writing community to showcase our city as a place where the literary arts thrive.



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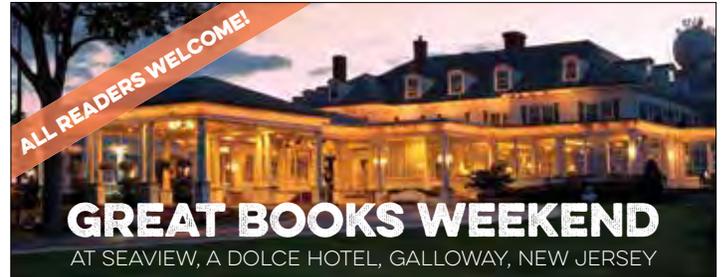
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Cynthia Arrieu-King teaches creative writing and general studies and is a former Kundiman fellow. Her poetry books include *People are Tiny in Paintings of China* (Octopus Books 2010), *Manifest*, winner of the Gatewood Prize selected by Harryette Mullen (Switchback Books 2013), *Futureless Languages* (Radiator Press 2018; audiobook on Bandcamp) and *Continuity* (Octopus Books 2021). An excerpt of her experimental memoir *The Betweens* (Noemi 2021) can be found on Fence Portal. Her writing has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Poetry*, *Boston Review*, *BOMB Magazine* and the *tiny*. She edited the Asian Anglophone edition of *duisie* (issue 119) and Hillary Gravendyk's posthumous volume *The Soluble Hour* (Omnidawn Books 2018). Her updates can be found at cynthiaarrieuiking.blogspot.com.

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