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ICON, the magazine for literature, art, and photography of the Trumbull Campus of Kent State University, is sponsored by the English Department in conjunction with the Art Department and is funded by the Student Affairs Council.

Faculty, students, former students of the Trumbull Campus, all Kent State Campuses, and other universities are invited to submit poetry, essays, fiction, art work, or photography. We welcome submissions from anyone--student or nonstudent--in the Trumbull County area.

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After great pain, a formal feeling comes—
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs—
The stiff Heart questions was it He, that bore, And yesterday, or Centuries before?

The Feet, mechanical, go round—
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought—
A Wooden way
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone—

This is the Hour of Lead—
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow—
First—Chill—then Stupor—then the letting go—

— Emily Dickinson

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—Emily Dickinson
BEN JONSON, WESTMINSTER

In days of yore
the men who would be great
must claim entitlement and pay for space
among the men who lie in crypts
beneath the Abbey floor.

The great and nearly-great
are buried here,
their names and dates and eulogies
are written clear.
They lie in marble crypts beneath the floor.

Ben knew all this
and went to claim his space
and pay the fee,
to be forever with the blest
who lie in crypts, no less, beneath the floor.

His purse was slim that day,
he could not pay the treasurer.
Did Ben evade,
or did he think he’d paid to rest
in treasured crypt beneath the Abbey floor?

With pomp and panoply and tears
they gave poor Ben, now well in years,
his last entitlement,
eternal rest among the best
who lie in crypts beneath the Abbey floor.

Poor Ben was left in trusted hands
the sexton and the sexton’s man.
The treasurer was there to see
that only those who paid the fee
would lie in crypts beneath the Abbey floor.

The precious space would be reserved
for great men who deserved the best.
He would not let
a dead-beat in to rest
in marble crypt beneath the Abbey floor.

(Continued next page)
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(Continued next page)

E. JANE JOHANSON, Ph.D., is a native of Scotland, graduate of Edinburgh University, scientist poet, painter, lover of people and places, and professor at Toledo University, though she is currently spending the academic year teaching at the University of the Pacific. In addition to poems which have appeared in numerous books and magazines, she has published four volumes, Loving and Leaving and Living Again, From Under the Brim of my Hat, Spirits & Seasons, and One Day at Shirley’s, the last two co-jointly. Her award-winning poems have appeared in several volumes of “The Best of . . .” Ohio Poetry Day Publications. Her love of her native land, the mountains and seas, and places like Paris and Westminster Abbey, along with the rivers and woods of Ohio, are often revealed in her poems. But most outstanding is her droll humor—a humor broad enough to send tears streaming down the cheeks, especially of those privileged to witness an oral presentation of her poetry. We have such a poem, historically accurate though it is, in Ben Jonson, Westminster.
THE
HART CRANE MEMORIAL
POETRY AWARD

THERE WAS A WOMAN WHO USED TO GIVE ME FLOWERS

When I was ten I heard her called a whore,
the sentence fletched with barbs that stung my spine.
I'd followed her through years of phlox before
that word bored itching in my brain. Define
the user of a hoe! But that could not
explain the rancid tones of voice that fell
like spattered ale-foam on my father's hot
hearthstones. Unfitting with her bouquet smell.
I later learned the meaning of the slur,
through tears watched twitching suns contort with lies.
Then wicked moons mimed coins, men's grins and her—
while rage enlarged to learn what to despise.
My childhood, white phlox petals, all my prayers
quicksilver dropped on knife-edged granite stairs.

Long days uncoiled the ancient codes within,
preparing me as resident temptation.
I saw the pausing eyes my next of kin
imposed on me, their sullen fascination
with hip and thigh, my budding breasts. Were they
designs of sin? Oh, for an older friend!
The one I'd once known quickly moved away
since father "had a word with her" . . . "You tend
your lessons, girl, forget that piece of trash;"
he growled when I inquired. I missed her more
that season, watching her garden's backlash
of weeds where beauty used to rise and pour
against our wall. At summer's end, I knew:
What my father called her wasn't true.

But why did he degrade her? Why such hate
a child could feel its pulse? The evening fire
hissed and cracked like a rabbit gun, a spate
of sparks gnawed on the rug. He cursed the spire
of smoke that rose like one ghost finger prodding
prospective hosts. He drained another glass.
He started teasing, yellow-smiling, nodding.
I never learned effective ways to pass
him off. A choking feeling, hot and brittle,
abashed excuses trailed me to my room
attended by his grinding "Surly little—"
My door closed on the rest. The quiet gloom
encased my mind till sleep brought amnesty.
I woke, my father reeking over me.

— Glenna Holloway

Through Your Eyes
— Stacey Hauser

Spring 1987, ICON
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HART CRANE MEMORIAL
POETRY AWARD

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— Glenna Holloway
Letting Go of the past . . .

— In every parting there is an image of death.

— George Eliot
Farewell the Schoolbus

There are moments I miss from my girlhood
And times that I yearn for my youth—
The stairs that I ran in a three-bound span
And my teenaged grasp of Truth.

I miss my three little children—
The poems we read, and the fuss
Of Mother’s Day boasting its love-burned toast.
But I sure don’t miss the bus.

For the bus came at quarter of seven.
It groaned through our streets, loud and cruel;
Its streams of light would shatter the night,
And it swallowed the children for school.

At six-thirty the bus stop was crowded.
Round the table my children sat still,
Reading cereal boxes in slippers and soxes
And whining they really felt ill.

Then the tempo picked up. One would tell me
Of the book—overdue—that was lost.
Had I money to send? He could pass with a ten.
And the other moms never got cross.

Now a girl locked the door of the bathroom,
And a son stood and howled in the hall,
And a husband would rave he had nowhere to shave
And his paycheck supported us all.

At six forty-four I was frantic.
At six forty-five I would roar,
‘Here’s your money—your note—here’s the paper you wrote—
Here’s your boot—here’s the Bus—here’s the DOOR.’

Now those days are a dream. From my pillow
I open one eye to the cold.
The bus comes at seven, and oh it is heaven
To smuggle in bed and be old.

— Elizabeth Hoobler

It’s Over

Here
In the pre-finals-week corridor
With the snowflakes falling white against navy-blue skies
Outside
After the rush of knowing it’s over—
All of the feverish, rain-soaked pilgrimages
From the parking lot to here, done
All of the quizzes on uncovered material, handed in
All of the condescending, offending declarations, silenced
Now
I have time to reflect on what I have learned
... And on what I have reflected.

— Margaret L. Pinkerton
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Seven-Ten

Today I saw the house where I grew up;
   It looked so tired and worn.
The porch was sagging on the left side,
   The window blinds were torn.
They’ve painted the mailbox at our house—
   Now it is red and gray.
I longed to go to the front door;
   I wondered what I would say.

"Could I please look in the cupboards
   That held our dishes and plates?
Would you mind if I went to my bedroom
   Where I used to dress for dates?"
I’d like to peek in the broom closet
   Where my brother hid for a day.
I’d like to crawl up in the attic—
   Our favorite place to play.

"Do you mind if I walk across the yard
   Where Smokey’s doghouse sat?"
If I closed my eyes real tightly,
   I’d see him chase Thompson’s cat.
I would love to lie in the cool green grass
   Where once our swing set stood.
I’d like to remember us swinging—
   Those days, they were so good.

I noticed they cut down the pine tree,
   The one Dad bought for Mom.
The maples are pretty as ever,
   But they blacktopped part of the lawn.
The brown siding flaps at one corner,
   The kitchen pane has a crack.
But despite the flaws, it seems unfair
   That I never can go back.

The iris are blooming at our house,
   Purple and straight and tall.
The tulips have had their glory,
   Now they’ll rest until the fall.
As I started my car to drive away,
   I realized suddenly then
There is only one constant at our house,
   The address—"Seven-Ten."

— Jeanne Bryner

A HOUSE FOR SALE

The rooms that once rang with laughter echo only silence—like new fallen snow on a winter’s night. The house is softly silent, like summer’s gentle rain in mid-afternoon. Gone are the voices of children who played with me under the snowball tree. The aunts and uncles who gathered on the front porch on a summer evening while my cousins and I chased fireflies are only misty images.

Gone are the times the house was made for. In my mind those times are faded photographs: Sunday dinners after church with everyone sitting around the dining room table, Aunt Carrie making fudge in the kitchen after supper, monopoly games on the back porch with friends during summer vacation.

Someone will buy the house; perhaps a professional person, as it is in a commercial area. When the new owners walk through it, they will only see its business potential. Never will they be able to feel the memories. Nor will they ever know it was here that I said my first prayers, made mud pies out by the old water pump, shared secrets with my cousins, gashed my knee riding my bike, listened to Elvis Presley while doing my homework, fell in and out of love, went back to school, learned to believe in myself, and experienced the love of God in times of deepest joy and sorrow.

Somehow I must close the door for the last time, treasuring all the years of living that have made me the person I am, leaving behind me that which I no longer need, knowing other doors will open. The house and the yard will stand hushed in thenewness of spring, like the voices and forms that once gave life to it. To me it is so many things and more. To the casual passerby it is only—a house for sale.

— Sandra Percy

Abandoned

— Robert S. Segall
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FINAL PARTING

We were inspiration for the poets;
The love songs were written for us.
We had true love that would grow by our nurturing
And would last forever.

We said, "For better or for worse."
But when the better turned worse, we turned away.
Those poems and those songs that were ours—
Now just empty words.

There was a time when we were as one.
We were so close and so much a part of each other
That sometimes it was hard to know where I left off
And you began.

Now, as we go our separate ways, I try to remember
That tears must come before laughter,
And there must be nightmares before dreams can be fulfilled;
So with sadness and pain, but also with hope,
We break forever the bond that held us
And let go of the past.

— Barbara A. Banish

Parting

We said goodbye,
we meant it.
We said hello,
we both wept.
Our foolish hearts
were torn between
longing and doubt.
We'll say goodbye
as lovers.
We'll say hello
as Friends . . .

— Betty Hall

Time to Let Go

I will not visit graveyard,
Talk to stones,
Beseech the sky.
She was my mother, and I loved her,
But she had no right to die.

She was my anchor, my renewer,
And she filled my life with hope;
Now I dread the life before me,
Have no choice but learn to cope.

I watch my little daughter
As she captures butterflies
Transformed from caterpillars
Born to reach and touch the sky.

And I remember when my mother
Didn't want to let me go,
But she knew this world could teach me
More than she could ever show.

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— Margaret L. Pinkerton
Sudden—That Summer

I remember the time
we stood together on the veranda,
hand-in-hand,
watching the rain
sweep in from the west,
southwest.
I remember the lightning reflected in your eyes,
felt the passion stir,
flickering with each flash.
I remember the distant thunder roar,
heard you whisper my thoughts.
I remember the gentle rooftop tattoo,
summoning ... pleasure.
Then suddenly
the wind ripping us apart,
blowing us away,
dropping us when spent.
I remember the time ...

I wish you did.

— Dana Ormerod

LETTING GO

The look in his blue eyes is one of realization,
A sadness too many people have seen.
Each morning he awakes to face the empty side of the bed;
It’s cold, and the sheets are still fresh, not slept upon.
His house reflects a person who has gone physically
But who is not far away mentally.
Her knickknacks line the shelves, and items collected by them
Shout memories with each glance he takes.
The whole house has a woman’s touch, the subtle beauty every woman has,
The beauty that touches a man’s heart.
The beauty he has no more.

— Kimmer Lee Shimko
Suddenly—That Summer

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we stood together on the veranda,
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His house reflects a person who has gone physically
But who is not far away mentally.
Her knickknacks line the shelves, and items collected by them
Shout memories with each glance he takes.
The whole house has a woman’s touch, the subtle beauty every woman has,
The beauty that touches a man’s heart.
The beauty he has no more.

— Kimmer Lee Shimko

— We are such stuff
As dreams are made on,
And our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

— William Shakespeare

Spring 1987, ICON
Silent Victory

That morning she was the first in line for the tiny lavender bathroom. Her heart was pounding like a racehorse coming down the final stretch of the quarter-mile. Washing her face, she scrubbed hard, wanting it to shine. The bathroom mirror was cloudy; a crack at the bottom was held together with a piece of dirty brown masking tape. In the upper left-hand corner, a decal of a pink swan (with a missing wing) watched as the excited thirteen-year-old with plain brown eyes, slender nose, and thick, caramel-colored hair flowing carelessly down her shoulders, performed her grooming rituals.

How she longed to wear her hair loose, with a couple of barrettes to keep it back from her face! But, her stepmother forced her to “keep that horse’s mane up in a gum band!” She detested the ponytail; after all, she was practically a woman. Her breasts were budding, yet she wasn’t allowed to wear a bra. How embarrassing! She was always careful to wear a full slip, not wanting her hard nipples to push against her blouses.

While brushing her hair, an impatient knock at the door from her sister urged her to get moving. She might as well brush her teeth now; she knew there was no way she could eat today.

Her stomach was in knots, was bouncing inside her, doing flings with her heart. Today was the final tryout for the junior high cheerleading squad. More than anything, she wanted to wear a cheerleading sweater—more than letting her hair down with only two barrettes, even more than wearing a bra.

What could her stepmother possibly do? She might keep her from a brassiere counter, keep her from changing her hairstyle—but, surely her stepmother had no control over her becoming a cheerleader.

She would find a way to work it all out after the tryouts. There would be a way. She wanted it so badly—she needed to know she was good, as good as all the other girls in her class. Maybe a small corner of her needed to be—better.

Not that she could ever compete in wardrobe (she wore her sister’s hand-me-downs), in hairstyles (they only permitted the infantile ponytail), in grooming (she was firmly forbidden to shave pits or legs), and was certainly not permitted the luxury of a pair of silk stockings. Bobby socks were so awful! But, there you have it—no other options. She was no match for her peers, except when it came to cheering. Here she was on equal ground.

She practiced constantly—every recess, every gym session (when she could sneak a jump), even when she took the trash out at home. She whispered chants to herself, imagined herself in front of the crowd in a fiery orange sweater, short black pleated skirt, pom-poms, Bobby socks, and saddle shoes. The Bobby socks were acceptable here—in the mind’s eye of the prospective cheerleader.

Stuffing the black and white checked shorts into her blue notebook, she took a deep breath and mid-air, she said, “Laurie, three days later her gym teacher and cheerleading advisor, Mrs. McHenry, called her aside. Mrs. McHenry looked like a kid herself in the wedge-blue wrap-around skirt and carefully ironed white blouse with tiny red sailboats floating over her breasts. With her right hand awkwardly poised in the air, she took a deep breath and announced automatized “good mornings.” There hadn’t been a good morning in that house for a very long time—well, not since—she bit her lower lip hard. Thinking about her mother was still painful.

She couldn’t think about that now. Not today. Today she was going to be somebody, not just another skinny kid with a long caramel-colored ponytail who lived in the projects. She was gonna be a cheerleader.

At her friend’s house it was like Ozzie and Harriet’s, People laughed; her friend’s mother was plump and smiled a lot. Her friend’s mother cooked breakfast and kissed the kids good-bye. Whenever her friend, Linda, complained about the way her mom packed her lunch—well, she wanted to scream at her. She wanted to say, “Hey, be glad your mom packed your lunch; be glad she’s pleasant—but most of all, be glad she’s home.” But, she never said these things. She knew Linda would think she was weird. Maybe Linda wouldn’t walk to school with her anymore. As nice as her friend’s house was, she was bewildered that somehow she always felt—well, relieved—when they walked out every morning.

Linda asked her about the tryouts. Was she scared? Did she think she had a chance? When she answered, her words were so hurried, her voice so crackly, she wondered if it belonged to her. She wondered if anybody belonged to anybody in this world. She wondered if you needed to belong to be happy.

(Continued)

She wanted to be happy. When she was in front of the crowd, in the fiery orange sweater and black-pleated skirt, her mind’s eye could see her face—it was a smiling face. Not the kind she used to please her teachers or get her parents to stop yelling at her. It was a victorious smile, the kind one gets after success in battle.

Showing the checked shorts into her locker, she closed the cool, tan metal door and released a deep sigh. The next time she’d be at her locker it would be to fetch those shorts and race to the gym for tryouts. She knew she would not hear any of the lectures in the morning classes. She would write by rote, do math calculations from memory. All the time she would be in front of the crowd, tiger on the orange sweater, brown curls tossing with each jump, two barrettes restraining the sides, white teeth showing beneath the victorious smile.

When the third bell rang, she closed her eyes, and said a prayer (not that she believed, but it couldn’t hurt). Mr. Butler, her government teacher, stepped close to her desk, cleared his throat, and asked politely, “Are you okay?” “Fine,” I’m just fine, Mr. Butler—I’ve got to rush.”

In the locker room there was a sweet-smelly cloud of hair spray and rainbows of new, striped pastel short sets. She tried not to care that the dumb checked pants were faded from so many washings. Their pastels would not make them jump any higher. The lovely knit stripes would not give them rhythm. Hadn’t one of her sisters heard a varsity cheerleader say that she had a lot of rhythm? You bet! She was gonna use it today. Her palms were cool and sweaty, her mouth dry. She put on the faded checked shorts, that phony smile, and went out into the arena.

She never even saw the kids in the bleachers as she put her body into motion. Her limbs and lungs were in perfect time, her heart and stomach quiet now—pacing themselves. The height and stretch of her jumps were awesome. When she finished—well, it was as if someone else had been inside her, and now she smiled. She honest-to-God smiled—the beam of a winner. She had that feeling inside her, the one she knew when she knew she had just finished in was an “A”; the one that told her her answer was better than what the teacher had expected. It was that feeling that made her sail through the afternoon. The list would be posted by seventh period; then she would know if her feeling was correct.

The twenty-two girls swarmed to the bulletin board like bees to a hive—some swearing, some crying, some quiet. She waited until the crowd thinned. She swallowed hard and walked to the faded green bulletin board.

Her name was there. Her name was there. She was—a cheerleader! Her heart and stomach did three flips, her friend Linda was kissing her, and hot streams flowed from her eyes. So she said a silent thank-you prayer (not that she believed, but it couldn’t hurt).

Now she would make a very careful plan. The games were scheduled for Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. She would find a way. There would have to be a way. What could happen? No one could take this from her. She belonged! The girl who didn’t wear a bra, with hair pulled tightly back—well, it didn’t matter. In the tiger-faced sweater no one would know she was braless, and maybe she’d put some yarn over the gum band, or maybe she’d let her hair loose and buy two barrettes to hold the sides back. Yes, that’s what she’d do.

Three days later her gym teacher and cheerleading advisor, Mrs. McHenry, called her aside. Mrs. McHenry looked like a kid herself in the wedge-blue wrap-around skirt and carefully ironed white blouse with tiny red sailboats floating over her breasts. With her right hand awkwardly poised in the air, she took a deep breath and in mid-air, she said, “Laurie, your stepmother called today. She said she didn’t know anything about the tryouts—that you wouldn’t possibly have time for the games. I’m sorry, Laurie; I tried, but without parental permission...” Her voice trailed off—it went somewhere with the sailboats in her blouse.

Mrs. McHenry sounded like she had tumbled overboard without a life jacket.

Standing there in her sister’s old black and white striped dress, braless, and with her hair pulled back in a taut ponytail, she felt as if someone had just “sucker-punched” her in the gut. She couldn’t look at Mrs. McHenry. She could only twist her right foot and mumble something that sounded like a silent thank-you prayer (not that she believed, but it couldn’t hurt).

—Jeanne Bryner
Jeanne Bryner wondered if anybody belonged to anybody in this world. She wondered if you needed to belong. She answered, her words were so hurried, her voice so crackly, she wondered if it belonged to her. She was weird. Maybe Linda wouldn't walk to school with her anymore. As nice as her friend's mother was, she detested the ponytail; after all, she was practically a woman. Her breasts were budding, yet she wasn't allowed to wear a bra. How embarrassing! She was always careful to wear a full slip, not wanting her hard nipples to push against her blouses.

While brushing her hair, an impatient knock at the door from her sister urged her to get moving. She might as well brush her teeth now; she knew there was no way she could eat today. Her stomach was in knots, was bouncing inside her, doing flips with her heart. Today was the final tryout for the junior high cheerleading squad. More than anything, she wanted to wear a cheerleading sweater—more than letting her hair down with only two barrettes, even more than wearing a bra.

What could her stepmother possibly do? She might keep her from a brassiere counter, keep her from changing her hairstyle—but, surely her stepmother had no control over her becoming what she wanted most—a cheerleader.

She would find a way to work it all out after the tryouts. There would be a way. She wanted it so badly—she needed to know she was good, as good as all the other girls in her class. Maybe a small corner of her needed to be—better.

Not that she could ever compete in wardrobe (she wore her sister's hand-me-downs), in hairstyles (they only permitted the infantile ponytail), in grooming (she was firmly forbidden to shave pits or legs), and was certainly not permitted the luxury of a pair of silk stockings. Bobby socks were so awful! But, there you have it—no other options. She was no match for her peers, except when it came to cheering. Here she was on equal ground.

She practiced constantly—every recess, every gym session (when she could sneak a jump), even when she took the trash out at home. She whispered chants to herself, imagined herself in front of the crowd in a fiery orange sweater, short black pleated skirt, pom-poms, Bobby socks, and saddle shoes. The Bobby socks were acceptable here—in the mind's eye of the prospective cheerleader. Stuffing the black and white checked shorts into her blue notebook, she took a deep breath and left the blurry confusion of breakfast behind her. She disliked breakfast at her house. The occupants were in perfect time, her heart and stomach quiet now—pacing themselves. The height and stretch of her jumps were awesome. When she finished—well, it was as if someone else had been inside her, and now she smiled. She honest-to-God smiled—the beam of a winner. She had that feeling inside of her jumps were awesome. When she finished—well, it was as if someone else had been inside her, and now she smiled. She honest-to-God smiled—the beam of a winner.
The Season of Love

It’s time to wrap the presents,
But there aren’t any there,
It’s time to throw the tinsel,
But all that catches it is air.

For the Reverend told the parish
Santa never really was—
“He’s a myth that steals from Jesus
The preponderance of love.

“He’s an artificial icon
For the children to adore—
He’s the lie that’s told to children
For the benefit of stores.’’

He stood confident and righteous
As he gave his revelation.
He disregarded the discerning
Children in the congregation.

One child in particular
Who had listened most intent
Received a different message
Than the Reverend had sent.

As her hand slipped from her mama’s,
Who, the pastor said, had lied,
She built a wall around her heart
And bowed her head and cried.

She won’t answer why she’s crying;
She won’t pray to God above;
No, she won’t believe in anything
That has to do with love.

— Margaret L. Pinkerton

Francophile at Heart, Submerged
Within Her Travelogue

I dawdle here in daydreams; in
fleeting moments of seasonal imagination
when winter lingers far too long
and goldfinch trilling bubbles
beneath snowblower blades
to whisk me into safer storms.

I study relentlessly your
brilliant neon streets where
lovers share café-au-lait conversation—
and dreams, bright as poppies,
burst from slick-skinned pages
to lure me past these lunatic winter hours
into brighter times, easier places.

I silently savor croissants flakier
and fresher than their cardboard cousins
I hoard at 35¢ a piece when
they’re advertised at IGA—and
decant vintage wines to be sipped
in sensuous sophistication, releasing
giddiness and atmosphere
at ice-water prices . . .

’Til Bobby blows in from
the sanctity of second grade, hands me
his own gleeful December drawn bumpy
from stubs of brown and grey, with his
perennial tipsy sunshine smiling down.
And despite season or mother’s darkened mood,
we bundle ourselves against the storm
to head for Golden Arches, our
own private triumphs still intact.

— Pearl B. Segall
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INTENTIONS

His intentions, no matter how sincerely they were made,
Soon became no more than broken dreams.

Intentions flew away through giddy song.
And the wine excited me beyond control.

I fear that as death comes, to wrap her cold, cold
fingers around my soul,

I shall inevitably remember the irresponsible
boy inside the man.

And the soul which he never gave to me.

— Mary L. Newcomb
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— Mary L. Newcomb

Lost Love

— Stacey Hauser

Letting Go

of life . . .

— One life: a little gleam of time between two eternities.

— Thomas Carlyle
... you should be here...

The old gang gets together
Years have gone by—
We’ve all grown many years older
Have married & borne children.
We talk about our lives
How we’ve changed & how we’ve remained the same.

... you should be here...

We share memories of the past

... you should be here...

A part of our happy reunion—
But where are you?
Where have you gone?

There’s an emptiness inside our hearts that doesn’t go away. It doesn’t seem that long ago, but yet it really does.
Somewhere in time, our dear friend disappeared into the night.

We were only sixteen back then—
 Barely old enough to know what life was all about, but you thought you knew. You thought your problems were so big that they’d never go away.

It was a dark October night that ended it all.
Ended your problems for good...
Ended life for good.
Ended your chances to experience the beauty, the joys yet to come...

... senior prom
graduation
college life in the late ’60s
true love from a man
your wedding
giving birth to a child
the warmth of holding your infant in your arms
watching your children grow...

Back then, you didn’t think about the goodness of your future...
What beautiful person could possibly emerge from this young girl?
What wonderful life could possibly evolve after time had healed the wounds?

We miss you, dear friend.
We wish we could’ve saved you from yourself.
We wish you had foreseen the possibilities in life—

That today you might be here growing older with your friends who loved you so.

— Judith I. Terlecki

The Last Smile

The light casts a pale glow over her wrinkled face, but the eyes are bright and a thin smile creases the corners of her mouth.

Her fragile hand is held by her best friend, lover, and husband.
He was a strong man; now a single tear shows that even the strongest of men have weaknesses.

They shared their lives, and those years are passed between them with that one smile.

Days of hardships, trials, and laughter they have seen together.
Children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren have made their lives complete.

She heaves a sigh, a worried look shatters the smile... only for an instant.

Their minutes are few. The smiles begin to fade; she closes her eyes, he tightens his grip, and one smile is gone.

— Kimmer Lee Shinko
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— Kimmer Lee Shimko
The Fading of the Moon

Where shall we go
when the moon fades away,
when darkness surrounds us
all through our day?
Which knob shall we turn
when our key will not fit?
Where will we stroll
and where will we sit?

September has come
and we, like the moon,
are fading and singing
a long-ago tune.
The notes are familiar,
but only to us.
Like the leaves of September,
we soon shall be dust.

I wish that the moon
would take us along
to a place where our notes
could keep singing their song.
To a planet where we
would never grow old,
where wrinkles don’t matter
and hearts don’t grow cold.

My darling, if we
must fade like the moon,
then let it pass quickly
as a storm cloud in June.
We’ll hum one last bar
as we stroll in the park.
Our moon—he is fading,
it soon will be dark.

— Jeanne Bryner
DADDY

You said:
Please let me go, Honey.
Please pray for me to die.
I'm ready to go;
This isn't living anymore.
I can go now
Because your mother is ready.
And—remember—
Love is eternal—I will always love you.
Forever.
Love is forever.

Yes, Daddy, I prayed for you. Anything you wanted—and it killed me inside
To let you go. But our bond goes on. You're never far from me:
I still bear the nickname you gave me.
I still hum the nursery rhyme you sang.
I see you when I hear Guy Lombardo
Or eat chocolate-covered cherries.
Your lips are on Paul's face
And John has your build.
Jesse has your temperament
And Dianna, your kind eyes.
I believe in the faith you showed me
And, like you, I'm at peace.
I let you go,
But you remain.

— Marla K. Richards

Letting Go

of emotions
and
good intentions . . .

— Life begins on the other side of despair.

— Jean Paul Sartre
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WALLS OF GLASS

Six-year-olds
Cannot see barriers
Built to hold back fears.
The little boy sensed
The fearsome, unspoken thing
Hanging in the air
As he watched Mommy go.

Adult family and friends
Knew that spoken truth
Would cause each other pain
So absorbed it, for a time, in silent shock.
They approached her only when clothed
In fragile smiles and averted glances.
In the hospital bed,
She chose a veil of cheerful calm
To cover a quaking heart.
All crept softly past the issue,
Not wanting to cause the tremor
That would break down
Their protective walls of silence.

Behind the concealing door of night,
In the darkest corner of the solarium,
The solitary, self-hugging, huddled figure
In the cold, green vinyl chair
Cried.
Can this be happening?
Will this be the end?
What will it be like?
I need someone to touch me.
I am so afraid.

But,
Six-year-olds
Cannot see barriers
Built to hold back fears.
Waving frantically from his window
As Mommy pulled slowly away,
The child cried out—
And in reaching for her,
Plunged his hand through the glass.

— Marla K. Richards

Through the Glass

— Wanda Kover
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— Marla K. Richards

Through the Glass
— Wanda Kover
Profit First

We’re in the black
The ruling class noted;
Large profit this month.
Right decision was voted.

We let go of five hundred;
Now wasn’t that small?
Compared to the population
That was nothing at all.

They’ll find a job somewhere
Perhaps out of state;
They’ll get unemployment.
Who knows their fate?

We appreciate your labor,
Some ten years and up.
To prove our gratitude
Here’s our company cup.

Contact the treasurer—
We’ve decreased our losses;
Now we’ll contribute
To more worthy causes.

— Diane Marie Victoria

At Father’s Knee

With sputtering lips and flashing eyes
He spat out his hatred
For the other race, his fellow man.
White hood and robe symbolized his cause.
His sense of superiority was as inflated
As his chest and fleshy face.
There he was for a nation to see
Courtesy of the media,
Which made him proud.
He brought us shame.
When will it end?

The camera’s view widened to reveal
A child at his side;
A child smiling with love and admiration,
Looking up to
Her father.

It will never end
Until children are released
From the bondage of hatred.

— Maria K. Richards

Letting Go

as children
grow older . . .

— A time for planting
and a time for
uprooting the planted . . .

— Ecclesiastes
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It will never end
Until children are released
From the bondage of hatred.

— Maria K. Richards

Letting Go

as children grow older . . .

— A time for planting
and a time for
uprooting the planted . . .

— Ecclesiastes
TO MICHAEL

After all these years of nagging,
Your room is finally clean.
The bed is made, your desk is clear;
The rug—I remember now—it’s green!

But as I stare upon this starkness,
It’s a hollow victory that I find.
For I see the years roll backwards
As memories flood my mind.

You’re a little boy, on your first day of school,
Your eyes are large and round with fright;
Alone on your bed is Raggedy Andy;
You’ll tell him about it tonight.

Now you’re a boy of twelve years old,
Surrounded by camping gear;
Neither snow, nor rain, nor threats from Mom
Can keep our Boy Scout down this year.

Of the many awards that hang on your walls,
The “Eagle Scout” stands out from the rest;
I remember my tears of pride that day
As I pinned it on your chest.

With one final glance at this strange sight before me,
I wonder, “What price is knowledge?”
As I experience these feelings of pride and of loss—
Because my baby’s off to college!

— Barbara A. Banish

YOUTH

The seagull cries high above the child’s head.
The youth looks skyward and the sun catches his blond locks.

He races after the gull, running across the sand.
The waves lap at his footprints.

He is young and runs on . . .
Catching his breath only when the gull vanishes.

Tears appear and slide down his sunburned cheeks;
He was sure he would catch a friend.

But in a moment he is running back, back to the safety
Of his mother’s arms
As he has done before.

Too soon he will be the gull, and will not cry.
And may not return.

— Kimmer Lee Shimko
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— Kimmer Lee Shimko
Barriers

The mother rings her young sons
home at noon time, the rusted bell
dangling from the eaves
far more trustworthy than her autumn voice
of fetching them home from the mysteries
of neighbors' hearths to hers.

She knows that soon they'll leap
the barriers of assorted backyard fences,
even climb mountains to answer her call
so long as they're able. And it is this
qualification that distresses her most:
the knowledge that this season, too,
shall quickly pass—shall fall softly
upon the gentle swell of years
she collects as trophies to be figured
among her most prized possessions.

She is aware of a disturbing lump
that catches her throat
like the peanut butter sandwiches
the boys will shortly devour,
dry and sticky and making the effort to swallow
a difficult one.

She resists the urge to clang the chime
one last time; knows that all too soon
these fences won't require even their leaps.
No longer will they even be regarded
as barriers.

— Pearl B. Segall

TWINS' B'NAI MITZVAH

...he'll soon proclaim
them men before
the eyes of God, of
family and congregation;
worst of all, before
this mother whose eyes
see only twenty
tiny chubby fingers
affixed to lanky (loving)
arms, small white
high-tops, newly polished
(shining as their innocent
belief in omnipotence
of dads)—replaced now
by man-sized pontoons
defined as adidas, perfect
for basketball courts
(and, one must assume,
homecoming courts, all
in due time).

Between the chanting
of prayers, of vows
and speeches, she realizes
nothing is forever. What more
fitting day than this
to slowly, slightly
lessen obsessive grip
and let them try
a tentative step
in manhood's shoes?

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Poetic Justice #16
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— John Milton