

The 2River View

20.2 (Winter 2016)



new poems by

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ISSN 1536-2086

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Randolph Bridgeman

RV guy is a republican--go figure

he was giving it to the wife
when on the down stroke he drove
it home like a gretzky slap shot
and gave himself a hernia
for which he took workman's comp
for the next six weeks
and during the operation they
used one of those defective meshes
they're always talking about on tv
so he settled for an undisclosed sum
and moved his family into a new house
with a mortgage that went upside down
so he took the government bailout
his children got educational grants
and in the hard times subsidized housing
because they couldn't live on
the minimum wage while they struggled
to get through college
and while he don't mind inviting his gay
granddaughters and nephews to
thanksgiving dinner because you know
whatcha gonna do every family's
got one or two
that's where he draws the line goddam it
marriage and equal rights that's out of
the question
and he'll be the first to tell you that he's
voted republican in every election since
the 70's because hell no he don't believe
in big government

Hannah Bessinger

How We Deal With It

At 2:00 a.m. I am still
awake. Because
my bed is empty, because
my computer screen flashes
the news that two
were killed, dozens injured
in another shooting, in another
theater, but this one closer
to my home. Closer to
you. And all
of this happened while I sat
outside on my porch, my phone
clutched tightly in my fingers,
waiting for you to drop
my heart into the ocean
with your words, waiting
for it to grow eyes in the brackish
water like a deep sea fish
that grows so used
to the dark
he expects it,
adapts to the small
ache behind his scales
each time he swims
through shipwrecks,
through the bones
of long-dead sailors,
seaweed streaming
from their skulls.

Hannah Bessinger

Letter in July

The hot rain beats
against the bricks of my
house. It runs down
dirty. The women walk
by sticky and ripe
as newly knifed peaches,
dresses clinging to their skin
like damp napkins.
They are everywhere. Their voices
clatter into misplayed cadences.
Last night, when the worst
heat had lifted,
I went dancing just to feel
the bodies of strangers. The sheets
of skin that felt nothing like you.
There were waves of it, smooth
and smelling of cheap perfume
and cheaper wine.
All day the buildings heave
out smoke. I have taken up
walking and counting
my steps. I have memorized
the name of each
street and the cracks
in the pavement. My bed
stays made until morning.

Robert Clinton

Blue Whale

Look at the blue whale's skeleton displayed
outside a lab in Santa Cruz.

Look hard, even if it's just a photograph,
because it's living, trapped, and angry.

Whitened jawbones propped above the pavement.
Rigid static shoulders, empty eyes, tail petrified.
A rib cage bigger than a Baptist church.

Imagine your own bones scrubbed with thick
coarse brushes. The brain—they hired some men
to lug it away. The great flukes are in the Great Hall—
well, models of them. The four hundred vertebrae.

But don't you hear the unsundered life?
Hums in your hair? and more, don't you hear
his brother's drums and bagpipes, out in the bay?

Robert Clinton

Late Summer, Wilson Mountain

On the paths up wizened Wilson Mountain,
pygmy mountain part of Dedham Mass,
turbulent with constant dozen motley dogs:
the drought I see has stuck up all the creeks,
so now you have the sloe black mud and reeling roots,
and too the leaves are falling, oak leaves, aspen,
falling in a thin foil porous to the sun
so far but some weeks hence a heavy noisy
slick and crashing trail of gold handprints,
hiding rocks and roots on paths up summit,
while supposed snow dares balance ghostly
in the bare treetops and waits for winter and the
dogs and all their black paw prints. I outlive old dogs;
nor man nor woman can live after me, nor anything
save mud and rocks. And I rebuke the rocks.

Lenny DellaRocca

The Angel's Song

She calls to you from across the twilight of long ago and not yet. Each morning, light makes air a tuning fork of color. She plucks a feather from her wing. You float above a town made of short stories. This is where you belong, floating like a sigh above the trees. When your feet touch ground you wake to footprints leading to a crib where an infant sleeps beneath a blanket of murmurs. Open your eyes. This is the day you were born.

There is a song in your head.

Lenny DellaRocca

Saints of Electrocutation

I read a short story about a woman who was hit by lightning and for
the rest of
her life she was able to perform small miracles. Her hands were always
hot. She
met a man who had also been struck and when they made love smoke
rose from
their glistening bodies. Afterward her house smelled of charcoal and
lavender,
green and violet blooms crisscrossed their flesh in a factual network of
iridescent trees.

I worked in a factory assembling transformers, testing them with
bursts of
voltage. I'd dial the juice up or down based on the number of red
wires. Some
were a few inches long, others a couple of feet. Sometimes one of
them touched
my lap or wrist. The jolt threw me off of the bench. If you saw me
naked, you'd
see tattoos that look like angry angels where I was kissed and burned.

Clark Holtzman

My Fear

John the Baptist
walks into a bar on Forty-second Street
and orders a Perfect Manhattan . . .
everybody gets the joke but me.

It will rain today in sympathy
with the wrong crowd—you know
exactly who I mean but
I don't: it rains for me.

I slip in the bath tub
and bang my head hard. The sign
on the Pearly Gates reads, "_____"
and besides they are padlocked.

Wouldn't you know it? Just
when I'm finally feeling like myself
again, an old me is at the door
demanding to be let in.

"If I told you once, I've told you
a hundred times," I shout through
the keyhole, "I am the master of my fate.
I am the captain of my soul."

Clark Holtzman

My Furtherance

I have run far today, fast,
and I am miles from where I stood
wondering into the distance,
looking there. How dim
seemed my furtherance then.

Tomorrow is another day,
but it will be the same day.
I will stand and wonder
at the distance I am to run.
And I will run. Miles.

One day, maybe soon,
you will find me panting
on a door step, maybe yours.
I will be further along
than anyone thought possible.

It will be a good place to rest.
The day is turning to dust,
interiors brighten, stir.
Inside are the aging widows
of men like me who ran fast, who ran far.

Michael Meyerhofer

The Animal Morgue

I'm sure there are more depressing places—
say, a day-long tour of Auschwitz—
but surely, room must be made on the list
for the veterinarian leading us back to collect
the remains of Lieutenant Fuzz
from one of a half-dozen stainless steel
drawers shut along the wall of this
refurbished kitchen, so that as we take turns
cradling her, it's almost like the morning
we opened the dresser to find her
fast asleep on my work slacks, unfazed
by however long she'd been trapped
in mahogany darkness, merely stretching
like a lyre washed in bedroom light
before sprinting away to hunt her fill.

Michael Meyerhofer

On the History Channel's Lack of Imagination

I like the idea of parallel dimensions
if only so that I can get a medal
for beating the crap out of anyone who believes

in ancient aliens—as though our ancestors
were too dense to move a statue
or jigsaw limestone into a skyscraper,

like we're living in the only time it's possible
to turn over a bucket and dream
of a helmet with an umbilical cord.

Karen June Olson

This Time Around

We walk white halls and gaze in grace.
Another medicated room, a woman sings,
her mother's body curls toward shadow.
You choke. No hymns of comfort
for your mother and dead son.
Bare elegies given over to a priest—
what can he know of a mother's loss?

A mob of complaints
labors between breaths so shallow
words are work to form.
The sheets are thin as skin,
vinyl pillows,
the certainty
of cold canned beans.

It's a cloudless night,
nothing to stop the stars
from mapping the sky.
People depart.
Cars pass on going somewhere.
We imagine the leaving.
See the moon, the big white moon?

Karen June Olson

A Struggle to Get Out

The silver lake at home
is unmoved, as flat and dark
as a grave waiting.
Not a ripple.

You struggle to live,
gulp air like a fish reeled out of water,
a captive in their arena.
They draw blood until you empty,
make mute with morphine and masks.

For five days we wait.
Rub oil into your feet,
sleep on bedside chairs,
call in the girls, sing
songs and fragments of prayers.

Time is bruised
with transcendence and blunder.
We wonder as we open the window
for the small bird banging against the glass,
if it's right.

Corey Smith

Quantum Resurrection 3

Oh Bulldog
Who was found on the road,
 Paws scrambling and hinds splintered
Into bright shining slivers of
 Scarlet meat and shards of bone;

Who wandered lost into the terrible
 Twilight of no headlights,
Searching for touch from
 The ones who left you unattended.

Oh Bully, I bury
 The life I end prematurely;
Oh brother, who I bury in the muddy road.
 Whose grave I dug shallow in the muddy road,

And grasps no meaning
 Of life and death,
Who turns tiny circles and begs
 For his hind-legs to halt the hurt

Oh Dog,

Who begged me with dark eyes,
 Whose chest labored for every breath
Whose head I crushed with a framing hammer,
 Having been on my way to frame.

Oh Bulldog,
Who keeps this man from sleep—

Corey Smith

Quantum Resurrection 4

At your grave
When I look down at you I wonder
What it's like when it snows—
Like when a tree falls in a forest,
If I'm not here are you not either?
I age
You're young.
This is the last place I saw you.

At your grave
I think about when Mom's car broke down
And we walked miles
In the cold.
I carried you.
The snowflakes fell on my head, not yours.
I held you tight to my chest
Drudged with burning muscles
Towards the far-off horizon
Where the yellow sun dropped into the twilight
Colliding with night's chilled scent.
We had miles and miles to go ...
And I wish we did tonight—

Now,

When the sun falls into twilight
My sight of you fades,
Limb from limb I'm tired.
I'll build a fire near
The yellow rocks beaten white
By the icy surf near here

I want to be able to warm you.
To press my chest against the frozen earth.

Ellen Stone

Leaving mental health

Again, the snow, like whispers
like wondering. When I come
to see you, will you look
like you—face soft/open
like field/breeze pond-stretch

mostly calm, mostly the same?

Or will the waves have stitched
in you the crags of hawks, ready
for songbird, ready for steel flight
to anywhere, wind-swirl, silver
like metal, like sleek-aim, like
bullet?

It is not your words, o mother.
It is the face I watch, all bones
stretched down to rock-cliff,
sheer edge, sharp drop,
planes of cheek, eyebrows
of quarry. Glinting beak
needing to find the next blood-
let, the next soft thing to dangle,
crush and capture, necessary

to keep you living.

Ellen Stone

Snow: the letting go

Today the snow is wandering,
 over the backyard gate, fleeting.
Forgetting intention, losing purpose.
 Aimless as school out in June.

This is the secret of adolescence.
 Hodgepodge, it fills space like snow.
When you leave it, you forget.
 But, here and now, it's called drifting,

a blizzard of momentary. A "What are you doing
 right now?" Each thought gathering,
joining on to the next. How snow caves form.
 Aren't they the best insulation?

The igloo of my daughter's mind. What room
 I can find her in, the place she calls
Hers/not/mine. I always thought the bricks
 were made of mud, or clay. Not river current,

able to freeze over, but always flowing underneath.
 O, no wonder I am always looking
out windows measuring snow. Wanting the covering
 but, not remembering. How temporary, how replete.

Scott H. Urban

Black Ice

So God decides
He's going to pull the rug out from under you.

Two tons of steel
slide like a puck across a rink.

You thought you knew that curve
as well as the scoop of your wife's back.

You'd think there
would be screams, explosions,

but it plays like
a silent movie with one sharp gasp.

Lesser angels of negligent
friction propel you up the frosty lawn.

The grille kisses
the ceramic hem of the skirt

of the girl in the front yard,
one finger held to her lips, always saying *ssshh....*

Earl's January 1st

When he wakes up
it's still morning,
but only because
it lacks two minutes of noon.

It feels like someone's
wadded up a dry rag and
stuffed it in his mouth.
Damn, he thinks, that's my tongue.

Scott H. Urban

He's not in his truck.
He's in someone's sedan.
His breath and the night's chill
have turned the interior into an icebox.

He hangs on to the steering wheel
as if it were a life-preserver.
He pulls himself upright
and what's in his stomach
threatens to spill back over his teeth.

He gets out of the car,
an old Celica he doesn't recognize.
He's off the side of route 627.
The bumper is kissing a tree trunk.
But I didn't wreck, didn't wreck.

*Shee-yit, I'll never mix booze
and those pills again.*
It's not bad, as resolutions go,
but, like most others,
it won't last the day.

Geese fly overhead,
their vee pointing south.
Their rude honks make his head throb.
*Stupid Earl, they seem to say,
asshole Earl.*

He wishes he could lay hands
on his shotgun.

Rachel Weber

First Date

in the middle of the bistro
 you took off my shoe
 and rubbed the arch of my foot

i wore the backless dress
 to shed my skin more easily

small globes spinning
 no curtain to shield
 nor shame to have

this introduction
 plates on a marble floor
 spoons against the glass
 or heart
 halfway in your lap
 sipping at your lips
they never asked us to leave

though you fuck like you eat
 our meals were untouched
 as we slipped words and dreams
 between our mouths
 and licked the corners
 of each others thoughts

Rachel Weber

Here

Somehow we always end up here
talking about the things we're not supposed
to talk about,
like death and sex with other people.

We end up in such odd places
you, at your ex-wife's door
euthanizing Louy, the cat,
me, on a plane to Haiti
saving children from
illiteracy.

Surely we will end up
somewhere odd together or
maybe at matched horizons,
honeying and making love
forgetting the all too tangible
thickness of our pasts
that fragments rather
than fascinates.

The 2River View, 20.2 (Winter 2016)

Contributors

Randolph Bridgeman is the recipient of the Edward T. Lewis Poetry Prize from St. Mary's College of Maryland. He has four books of poems: *South of Everywhere* (2005), *Mechanic on Duty* (2008), *The Odd Testament* (2013), and *The Poet Laureate of Cracker Town* (2015). His fifth book, *The Ugly American*, is forthcoming in 2016.

Hannah Bessinger earned her MFA in poetry from North Carolina State University. Her work has appeared in *These Fragile Lilacs*, *THRUSH Poetry Journal*, and *The Southern Poetry Anthology Volume V: Georgia*.

Robert Clinton holds an MFA in creative writing from Goddard College. His poems have appeared in journals such as *The Antioch Review*, *Hanging Loose*, and *Ploughshares*. Sarabande Books published *Taking Eden* in 1998.

Lenny DellaRocca has previously appeared here at 2River and other recent poems have appeared in *Albatross*, *Chiron Review*, and *The Potomac*. His chapbook *The Sleep Talker* has recently been published by Nightballet Press.



Clark Holtzman lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. His poems here in 2River are from his in-progress manuscript *The Fool's Alphabet*, a collection of 70 poems arranged alphabetically from A to Z.

Michael Meyerhofer is the poetry editor of *The Atticus Review*. His most recent collection of poetry is *What To Do If You're Buried Alive* (Split Lip Press).

Karen June Olson was recently selected to participate in the 4th annual juried Poetry Writing Workshop with Marge Piercy. Her poems have appeared in journals such as *Mas Tequila Review* and *UCity Review*. Olson lives in Webster Groves, Missouri.

Corey Smith holds an MFA from Wichita State University. He now lives in Wichita, where he teaches high school English. His poems and short stories have appeared in numerous small press magazines.

Ellen Stone teaches at Community High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Her poems have appeared recently in *Dunes Review*, *Passages North*, and elsewhere. Her poetry collection *The Solid Living World* won the 2013 Michigan Writers Cooperative Press chapbook contest.

Scott H. Urban lives and writes in southeastern Ohio, where he works in youth rehabilitation. His most recent poetry collection is *God's Will* (Mad Rush Press) and his latest anthology appearance is in *Every River on Earth* (Ohio University Press).

Rachel Weber has been teaching English for 11 years at Sachem High School East on Long Island, New York and is a graduate student in Applied Linguistics at Columbia University.

The 2River View, 20.1 (Fall 2015)

About 2River

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry and art, quarterly publishing *The 2River View* and occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series. 2River is also the home of Muddy Bank, the 2River blog.

Richard Long

2River

ISSN 1536-2086

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