

# The 2River View

15.1 (Fall 2010)



*Joseph's Passing* © 2010 by Mark Flowers

New poems by  
Brendan Constantine, Jeff Friedman, Howard Good  
Georgia Kreiger, Marjorie Maddox, Shireen Madon  
Jane McKinley, Michael K. Meyers, Charles Rafferty  
Steven Schreiner, Virginia Slachman



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Michael K. Meyers

## Living Thing

A UPS man, a large cardboard box at his feet, was on the porch. The side of the box facing me was perforated and red words warned, *Alive*. After signing, I explained that I had a spotty record housing living things—they sickened and died, I told the guy, or worse, they lingered. He appeared sympathetic, so I asked him if he wouldn't mind taking the box around back and putting it on top of the trash. Someone better suited to the care of whatever inhabited that box, I explained, would surely wander by and retrieve it. He wasn't convinced. Under no circumstances, he replied, could he do that; then turned and climbed back into his truck. The box was light. I marched around the side of the house to the alley and set it atop a lidded trash container. I put my ear to the cardboard, listened, heard nothing, and opened it. Inside was an orchid—two spindly stalks each ending in fist-sized magenta blooms. I recognized the handwriting on the decorative envelope as belonging to an ex-girlfriend, a passionate, and forgiving young woman, who, before giving up on me had died, *and* lingered numerous times. I tipped my head back and looked up at the wires slicing the sky into wedges. Had purpose or reason anything to do with the arrangement? Suddenly at my side was old man Zwick, an alley-walker decked out top-to-bottom in Bulls sweats and Nike hi-tops. Looking down at the orchid, Zwick's face twisted in puzzlement. "You just gonna leave it?" Zwick had nothing but time, so I told him everything.

*Brendan Constantine*

## **The boy has come back**

the boy  
from the night-market of Sixth Street  
is at the door with his bicycle & his eye  
black as quarry mud. He won't face me,  
speaks to my neck, shoulders down,  
ready to close. I want to say this right:  
he looks like someone stole his antlers,  
like lamplight is heavy, like a photograph  
of a photograph. He says some men tried  
to eat him. He remembers that I fed him.  
Can he sleep here? Maybe live here?  
Do I have anything to cover his eye?



*Brendan Constantine*

## **I dreamt I was your finger**

the one you lost as a kid, clipping roses  
with your mother. It began with falling  
from your hand, from the dripping V  
of the shears. I landed in the ripe mud  
forgetting, who I was leaking out in pulses:  
I am a girl. I was a girl. Whose thoughts  
are these? The dark, the dark. The earth  
carried your voices, I could feel myself  
talked about, looked for, not found,  
though I pointed & pointed. I'm coming  
back to you, slowly like an arrow shot  
underground. I woke knowing this.

*Jeff Friedman*

## **Breakdown**

When we hit a slick spot on the road, my mother's purse tumbled to the floor, and her hairpins shot everywhere. A small blue bird streaked toward the spinning sky. In the back seat, my sister's slender arm dropped to stop me from hurtling toward the windshield but found only empty space as I bunched on the itchy carpet like a rabbit in the grass. The car stopped twirling with its back wheels inches from the edge of a cliff. Now the electric windows smoked and the front doors burst into flame.

In an instant my father grabbed the blanket from the trunk and beat out the blaze. While my mother gathered her hairpins and clipped her loose strands of blond hair, shaking her head and mouthing the words, "some shortcut," he winked at us and said, "Between you and me, Mullin sold me a lemon."

Cars were few and far between—I counted ten in two hours—and each time one raced toward us my father waved his arms and shouted for help, but no one stopped and after a while, tired of standing in the road, he pulled out his ukulele and played "O Susanna" and kept my sisters laughing until, miraculously, a patrolman arrived. "That's a fancy car," he said and gave us a ride.

At the motel, I strummed the ukulele until my thumbs blistered, and fat horseflies skimmed the windows. In the noonday heat my father and mother slept, and my sisters, lying in their twin beds, whispered to each other that we'd never see the ocean.

*Jeff Friedman*

## **Paradise**

Five of us were here a moment ago, but then came a cloud, all of us coughing and choking and when the cloud cleared, Seth was gone, and then came a flood tearing apart our city, ripping through buildings, and Jason flew headfirst over the waters like a dolphin coming up for air, but then the wave grabbed him, and we never saw him again, and then came the drought and men with forked sticks, and Esther dissolved into sand and salt pelting our faces, and then came the bombers and the missiles, and Saul exploded under the tent of stars and all we found of him was a ruby from his royal crown, and then came the nights of fire, the conflagration that surrounded us, the air boiling, Rachel shrieking in a feverish fit, as she fell deeper and deeper into her final dream, and then came the dove and the rainbow and the offering of peace, and then came the ravens dripping blood from their beaks, the hyenas ripping into flesh, and then came the voice out of the wind as I lay down with all the unburied bodies.

*Howard Good*

## **Armageddon, Mon Amour**

1

Low-flying planes surrender their tears. The choice is always the same, wake up for good or turn over in your sleep. In the peach orchard the children seek the scant cover of leaves. You're pretty sure there's no E in lightning.

2

Follow the weather of longing, fat, pink Rubenesque clouds, signs that say Evacuation Route, the sound of heavy doors opening and closing in the architecture of voids, as the gunship slips away, the queen of hearts and her retinue on deck, and the murk of twilight shushing the world and everything in it.

3

Police on horses tried to keep control. People ran along the streets, opening their mouths and shrieking, little fountains of blood gushing out. She had pictured it beginning differently. What o'clock is it? a red rooster wanted to know. The blood stood in puddles in some places in the road. It was all strangely old-fashioned, the sunlight in her hair making a glory about her head.

4

It was like seeing someone you love go mad and do horrible things. Those who couldn't walk were beaten. In an insignificant café down a back street, parents exchanged children. The air was all murderous iron, a long wailing sound, invented especially for the end of the world.

*Howard Good*

## **Birdsong**

Traveling  
at night

who has time  
to update

their résumé  
Spiders

have always  
eaten flies

Oh love  
we're beautiful

anarchy  
birds nesting

in the holes  
made by grenades

*Georgia Kreiger*

## **He Comes**

For a time he lived between my legs  
where our urgent collisions seemed more  
than the common fuck, more like he wanted

to break through the boundaries of skin  
and mind and dissolve himself in the depth  
of a woman who, he insisted,

did not remind him of his mother. A woman  
more pliant and yielding than the clumsy  
young girls who offered themselves cocooned

in their own interests, a woman who knew  
that his sickness drove him to seek  
shelter on the inside of someone

who provided herself like an abandoned cabin,  
whose heat was seasoned by distant fires,  
hard nights, needs beaten to a sheen.

And when his breath caught  
and he breached, almost, the sovereignty  
between him and me, filling the space with sound,

my emptiness echoed his cry: the purr of wind  
through loose windows, thrash of deer through brush,  
the call of faraway trains at night.

*Georgia Kreiger*

## **Pocket Knife**

What struck me most was how gently  
his left hand cupped the elbow to steady  
the arm and turn out the white expanse  
near the wrist where the veins are visible.  
And how slowly, tenderly, he positioned  
it, held as one would when cutting a steak  
for which one felt only the mildest hunger,  
his thin wrist bent slightly over his work.  
The almost translucent flesh dimpled  
under the pressure and formed two plump  
ridges on either side. I told him once  
that I would be willing even

to bleed for him.  
And when the flesh split, and the line  
he drew down my arm turned scarlet  
and welled up and ran thickly toward  
my hand, I felt the bloodless despair  
that cutters describe  
rush out of me  
and the room swirl almost  
with the rhythm of his breath.  
And weightless I rose  
toward a beckoning twilight  
as we sat leaning over  
the slow flow that startled us awake.

*Marjorie Maddox*

## **A Colleague Falls to His Death at Niagara Falls**

Of course, somebody caught him  
on film, a small, bright speck,  
like dust on a lens twitching  
in indecision on the edge  
of the world's roaring  
whoosh of wet wonder.  
But close up,

who was there as he lifted  
one leg after another  
over the unpearly gate and dove  
headfirst into irony?

A man and his lover?  
A schoolgirl and her mother  
("Look, Mommy, the man is flying")?

Or all of us  
who dare breathe  
the thick sound of grief  
when it swims in the ear,  
plunges to the inner  
rush of nothingness?

Somewhere in a dark room, a man watches  
the film of a stranger's death  
and tries to pause the reason  
for leaving ground for water.

We, too, listen as the mind's reel  
clicks its possibilities  
so unromantically.



We scan newspaper conjectures,  
hum sad ballads on the way to work  
where someone new sits  
at the man's desk,  
adjusts honeymoon photos,  
whistles songs of the sea.

We do not know the wife  
huddled alone on their anniversary  
in their large home  
questioning why  
or knowing.

Soon, we will search the man's words  
for reasons that are not there.  
We will go to the service to view  
the body that is not there.

When the music sounds,  
we will carefully type ourselves  
into the credits.

*Shireen Madon*

**Think: Species**

Tell me: Anything could begin. The way the wood thrush sees herself in a pool

of tar beside the lake, and she, like a pool of ink, sits dark and upright to watch

the sky sink: shallow, polluted bowl beneath our feet. We grow upward

from this place, the bottom of the lake, and find our fingers filters,

believe ourselves capable of knowing how to find a place of air. Believe variable,

believe the plastic covering the top of the water, believe it's what to expect.

*Shireen Madon*

## **You Are Everything But Alive**

I've watched you for days, and your small thirst,  
but the water can no longer hold you or your iron

wing that is a room no longer a room, or a fragment  
of bayou where water moves quickly. What is the name

of this tree that melted to a red stone that asked us  
*Where are the others who used to live in the water?* We have no

answer other than to say, take in the sight of sun  
as though it's the last one. I close my mouth to stay

alive, to watch you become the same hard substance,  
buried in kelp, then desert, then glacier, then this, again.

*Jane McKinley*

## **The End of Summer**

We're halfway through supper  
before we notice the sparrow  
dining next to us on the terrace,  
partaking of tiny seeds from bluegrass  
growing in the cracks, so unafraid  
we fear he must be injured  
or ill, unable to escape, easy  
prey to the neighborhood cats,  
settled so low on the bricks  
his breast feathers touch,  
leading us to imagine a mangled  
claw tucked underneath,  
so I tell the story of the one-  
legged chickadee who returned  
each winter to my parents' feeder,  
and we watch as the sparrow  
makes small wobbled hops  
from brick to brick, his breath  
labored, pushing out his sides.  
Behind him, a mouse runs down  
the foundation of the house,  
disappearing into a large clump  
of sage, and before we can name  
what we're feeling, my husband  
stands up, and the sparrow flaps  
his wings, rising into sudden night,  
high above the climbing rose,  
now smothered in white  
by the sweet autumn clematis.

*Jane McKinley*

## **The girl who wanted to be a river**

It hadn't always been like that.  
There was a time she endured  
the way a stone does, with water  
washing over her, wearing away  
the surfaces, or fire licking  
her edges black. She could bear  
the cold then, the way snow feels  
when it's beginning to stick, but  
things can change, and so did she.  
She learned to breathe through leaves  
plastered on her face, to admire  
the oak's asymmetry, to move  
at a stone's pace without a hill  
in sight. She wanted to rush,  
to babble, to flood the world  
with what, to her, was newfound,  
but something held her back, as if  
the stone she'd been had grown  
into an obstacle, old ways dying  
hard, tripping her up, bruising  
her shins till they shone blue-black.  
Still, she wanted to be a river,  
to keep moving without losing  
direction, to stream toward the sea  
as if it were everything, as if once  
the fresh had mingled with the salt,  
she'd never dream of turning back.

*Charles Rafferty*

## **The Man Who Worried**

He collected obscure ways of dying—  
chimney fires and Ebola,  
silo explosions, a man crushed  
on a fishing boat deck  
when the net gave way above him  
and the mackerel waterfalled down.  
His collection led to a certain way  
of carrying himself in even  
the most mundane scenarios.  
Every man had mayhem on his lips.  
Every woman kept a derringer  
and a meth habit at the bottom  
of her purse. Even the supermarket  
was a place he might buy  
things to undercook.  
The end of his world was  
everywhere—ubiquitous as air,  
the moon that could crush him,  
this very moment, as it fell  
through the bedroom drapes.

*Charles Rafferty*

## **The Man and His Missing Rock Collection**

My mother brought me a dozen stones  
from an Alaskan beach—pink and gray ovals  
that brightened when I wet them.  
They were paralyzed for years in a glass bowl  
on the knick-knack shelf, until my daughter  
found them and began mixing them  
with the stones my father had brought  
from Ireland, and the stones I had  
from Arkansas and Maine, and all the stones  
people had given me from Africa  
and Spain. These were not spectacular stones—  
just little eggs of color that could fit  
inside a pocket, the tiniest pouch  
of a travel bag. Once they were all together,  
I couldn't tell whether they came from Alaska  
or my own back yard. So in a fit of order,  
I flung them as far as I could  
into the woods behind our house.  
I regretted this even before their small  
stampede had stalled among autumn leaves.  
I would miss the clack of them  
in my daughter's hands, how she'd pretend  
they were jewels or meteorites  
lined up on the living room floor.  
Now, the largeness of Alaska is lost  
in suburban woods—among the tree forts  
and the graves of pets, the light of my neighbor's  
porch at night so bright it kills the stars.

*Steven Schreiner*

### **At the Artists' Colony**

Drought. The grasses whipping  
the blood red briars  
latent and sapless, chidden,  
unbudded. Before  
I came into the field  
away from the others  
I walked with a painter  
down the dry road  
kicking up pebbles.  
The wild turkeys flushed so suddenly  
I was glad  
to have started them  
and to watch, nothing more,  
as they took to the trees  
to pay no attention to me.  
Here, I give you  
the thin blue river  
visible at her temple.



*Steven Schreiner*

## **Sunday Night**

Maybe I'm no one anymore than anyone is someone  
if only for someone else's sake.

Why is it impossible to say what the sound of cicadas is,  
sometimes a zillion castanets, sometimes derision  
and mimicry, what a river of bones  
might say if it ran like water.

Summer. What to make of the heat? Life  
stricken. Even the petunias shrivel,  
they begin to look like old popes,  
and wither like those papery squash blossoms.

There is no one to undress and I feel oddly  
famished by that. Perhaps this autumn  
under her sweater a woman's heat  
will be revealed to me. If it be  
October's will.

Virginia Slachman

## The Usefulness of Stars

Ivy vine thick enough to strangle. Well, that's its job. Someone cut  
this one off three feet  
from the oak's root base, left it  
forked as a divining rod, going white, lichen laden,  
brittle as an old bridle. Even dead  
still clinging. In Kentucky

unmortared stones laid by hand run chest high for miles. It's easy  
to love the world's heavy-labored, useful  
work. Also the ones who do it.  
When a stallion breaks down, they give it  
a shot, then the dates go up in brass on the stall:

*Secretariat: March 30, 1970 – October 4, 1989*

Too much early grass, maybe. I try to leave  
the world a little bit  
each day. Rilke said it will feel odd  
to be dead, suddenly no longer  
among the accustomed, but I don't  
know. Maybe the afterlife  
has simple instructions  
since we'll be starting over  
again. That ivy  
bugs me. Why hang around after? But I'm not one to talk, always  
looking for signs, divining rods  
for the soul. Where it's buried is somebody's secret.  
I've noticed it's good lately  
to leave large blank spaces between things. As they do  
with racehorses—big winner, then  
gone. I'd like to mention my father  
how he loved the usefulness of stars: *In order to properly  
navigate you need a  
precise point of departure.* Orion, other stars I forget the names of.  
What do you suppose  
those men were thinking laboring over the miles  
of fences they fit together by hand? They probably didn't look too far  
down the road. Definitely

hard-muscled men  
to look at those slabs they hoisted up, snuggled down, fit into place.  
Then the next  
one. They might never have looked  
at the stars, never wondered whether that silver cup from the  
Civil War  
lay buried beneath their feet. Useful men,  
there at some point  
on the earth, then they died. I bet they didn't notice  
the unfilled  
crevices of their lives, I'd like to be those men, see what it feels  
like—clinging that hard  
to nothing.

*The 2River View*, 15.1 (Fall 2010)

## Contributors

Brendan Constantine has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *RUNES*, and elsewhere. *Letters To Guns* was released in 2009 from Red Hen Press. He is poet-in-residence at Loyola Marymount University Extension and the Alzheimer's Poetry Project.

Jeff Friedman has a fifth collection of poetry, *Working in Flour*, forthcoming from Carnegie Mellon University Press. His poems and mini stories have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *North American Review*, *Poetry*, and *The New Republic*.

Howie Good is the author of a full-length poetry collection, *Lovesick*, and 21 print and digital poetry chapbooks. With Dale Wisely, he is the co-founder of White Knuckle Press.

Georgia Kreiger lives in Western Maryland and teaches literature and creative writing at Allegany College of Maryland. Her poems have appeared in *Antietam Review*, *Literal Latté*, *Maryland Poetry Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*.



Marjorie Maddox, professor of English at Lock Haven University, is the co-editor of *Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania*, and the author of eight poetry books and two children's books. Her short story collection was a Katherine Anne Porter Award finalist.

Shireen Madon has poems appearing in *DIAGRAM*, *Fault Magazine*, and *Western Humanities Review*. In June 2010, she was Poet-in-Residence at the Artists' Enclave at I-Park.

Jane McKinley, a professional oboist, is artistic director of the Dryden Ensemble, a Baroque chamber group based in Princeton. *Vanitas* received the Walt McDonald First-Book Prize and will be published soon by Texas Tech University Press.

Michael K. Meyers teaches in the graduate writing program at The School of The Art Institute in Chicago. His quick fiction and audio have appeared in *Chelsea*, *Chicago Noir*, *Fringe*, *Nano*, *Quick Fiction*, *The New Yorker*, *Word Riot*, and elsewhere.

Charles Rafferty directs the MFA program at Albertus Magnus College. His most recent book is *A Less Fabulous Infinity*. He recently received a grant from the NEA and the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism.

Steven Schreiner teaches at University of Missouri--St Louis. His recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Cardinal Points*, *Gulf Coast*, *River Styx*, *Tar River Poetry*, and elsewhere. He is the author of *Too Soon To Leave*, and the founding editor of *Natural Bridge*, a journal of contemporary literature.

Virginia Slachman is the author of two collections of poetry, recipient of the Elliston Prize in Poetry, an Ohio Individual Artists prize, and publishes in magazines such as *Salmagundi* and *River Styx*. She currently serves as associate professor of English at Principia College.

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### **About 2River**

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry and art, quarterly publishing *The 2River View*, occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series, and, more recently, blogging and podcasting from Muddy Bank.

### **About the Artist**

Mark Flowers holds a master's of fine arts in painting from Western Michigan University. His work can be found in 27 public and more than 300 private collections. Throughout his career, he has won numerous awards for his art in both regional and national competitions. He was also named one of the 100 Art Alumni for the Centennial Celebration at Western Michigan University.

### **Richard Long, Editor**

2River

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