

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 waterfalld 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.

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*.



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Shireen Madon has poems appearing in *DIAGRAM*, *Fawlt 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

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