



***POETRY
FROM
NANCY'S CLASS***

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ACADEMY***

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Preface

Vaccine for the Soul

Poetry is “vaccine for the soul” someone wrote and this spring that felt apt. For the first time in years we were able to meet in person and see faces and smiles and feel connected. Thirteen writers met weekly for four weeks and worked together to make meaning of the raw experiences of life. Some poets used the prompt “childhood fears”, some wrote of small joys, some followed their own muse into new discoveries. When a community of writers gathers and share ideas, bursts of creativity and depth often emerge. This chapbook, compiled by Virginia Richardson, reflects some of that creativity. Following the workshop, poets read for an Arizona Senior Academy program that was well attended – a huge success! Enjoy this collection and consider following your own muse into a poem.

Nancy Fitzgerald
Instructor of the poetry seminar

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BEYOND TIME AND TERRITORY

I walk the ancient paths
trails of time and territory,
Rugged cliffs descend to water-polished stones,
early morning brilliance.
Trees stand thick and dark,
a front for awesome mysteries
Mountains pierce the clouds
and shelter wide green valleys.
I do not know if these are the “trailing clouds’ the poet wrote about,
But for me, now, they are the way to the Glory.

Joanne Birdwhistell
2022

August 1949

Post-Hiroshima children
dreamt what adults were not saying.
They felt the rabid black mongrel
slipping its chain.
Pale at inadequate desks
they totaled up fractions,
attuned to the silence
preceding the sirens
and bleached plume of blistering light.

--Marilyn Skinner

UNINVITED

You came into our country
Uninvited
no passport
no visa
no photo ID
no-one noticed
until raging fevers
pounding headaches
took your victims breath away
You were identified, You
had a country, You
had a name
COVID 19
Scientists came
tests were done
people were dying
old people first
those less immune
You widened your travel
more countries to visit
your plague to share
PANDEMIC
the air everywhere
filled with droplets of
doom, quarantined locked
in our homes we
hid behind masks
You met our Scientists
vaccines would save u
our arms pierced, months
again more, too late for
many, millions have died
You now wear disguises
A B C Delta Omicron
Variants. When will
YOU—die!!

What I Want My Grandchildren to Know

**Bake cakes and keep animals
Know wonder and rapture
Love God – give gold away
Take pleasure from beauty
Grow flowers and hike
Make sense of your childhood
Walk the beach and forgive
Let music surround you
Laugh and light candles
Travel smile and sail
Be bold with your love
Watch birds, learn to listen
Stop and give thanks
Make friends and keep them
let go when you must
Find work you love
Hold hands in the dark
Trust mystery and pray.**

Nancy Fitzgerald

NOT REALLY

“Not really, dear” she replied
quizzically
My own Mother!
Not know me?

I see her here, there
We phone often.
Secure in our
love.
Always!

But different times
with separate lives
and places apart

Truths not stated
little or big lies
“All is fine”
all the time

So I ask. . .
Do I know my sons?
Well,
Not really.

--Virginia Richardson, 2022

Dear Grandma

Grandma,
I hope you are somewhere happy now.
You were as bitter as strong coffee
Left out overnight
Grandmas have soft laps to sit in
Not you
“Get off me girl. Can’t you see I have work to do.”
Grandmas had pockets full of sweets
And wonderful smells emanating from the stove
Not you
“That’s for your grandfather. Tell your mama to take you home
If you want to eat.”
No smiles just exasperated sighs
No kind words just sharp-tongued scolding
I wondered why you didn’t love me.

Later I understood.
It was not me you hated.
I was a proxy for my mother
I was the child who would not have existed
Had you gotten your way.

My father was the boy the girls dreamed of
Skin the color of coffee with cream
Big brown beautiful eyes
Bedroom eyes my mother told me one time
To my chagrin and her amusement
Tall and well-formed
And charm enough for a platoon of men
He played the field.
All light skinned girls with naturally semi straight hair
Nappy haired dark girls need not apply
Looking too black was not considered attractive
Skin bleach and hot combs were necessary beauty tools.

He was your favorite wasn’t he Grandma
You loved him fiercely and he returned your love
your other children who were too busy for you.
You picked out the perfect bride for him.
A beautiful girl with light tan skin and dark
Chestnut curls cascading down her back.
A figure like Venus de Milo

And a lyrical voice that seemed set to music
She was over the moon.
He was smart as well as handsome
And knew how to talk to white people
A crucial survival skill.

So he stopped playing the field and started dating her
They were teens but people married early.
Not many choices for jobs in those days.
Your husband was a Pullman porter It took
Him away from home for long stretches
But it was a good job. With your son’s charm and good looks
You were a shoo-in for such a job.

All was going swimmingly

then he met my mother.
You did not understand
What he saw in “her”
Your girl has lovely skin
And a beautiful figure. You said
That girl is dark and skinny
But she has a beautiful face, Mama
And her skin reminds me of deep rich chocolate.
It’s beautiful.
She’s two grades ahead
If she doesn’t care then neither do I. Mama
She’s Catholic
She is smart and funny he said
And not like any girl I have ever met. She is not easily impressed.
She likes me for me.
He lowered his voice and looked down at the floor.
Next to her all the other girls seems shallow.

“All the other girls” you. Asked
Yes mama, he said.
That’s when you knew it was over.

The girl you chose for him, was humiliated.
She railed at you.
How could he prefer a dark, skinny girl; to me.
It was the ultimate insult.

Cont

She and her mother would never speak to you again
The courtship lasted nine years.
He joined the Army and became an officer
She got into the only nursing school
Willing to accept a black woman
 And became a registered nurse.
They married on a lovely morning in late April

St Augustine Catholic Church

Your son had converted.

--Roxie Mitchum-Horn

Relapse

I am arguing with myself again
I don't know why I bother,
 I always lose

To surrender is never easy
Each relapse a little death

White flag waved, I collapse
Into the gray shroud
 Until it's over

Hush, baby. It will be alright.

--Melissa McInerey

Big Scream on Little Walker

A 1954 beige Buick,
invisible in the blizzard,
winds up Little Walker Mountain,
an annual holiday migration
to Florida from West Virginia.
Tree limbs grow ice daggers.
Ditches hide under snowbanks.

Horizontal across the back seat,
a child sleeps bundled but unbuckled,
oblivious to windshield fog, storm slam and howl.
Whines of spinning wheels wake her.
Her world slides sideways toward
collision . . . yawning chasm . . . cliff fall.
Then the clunk, the grinding catch of guardrail.

From the front seat the mother delivers a slap
and words that sting. "Screaming doesn't help!"
The child's eyes close. Hot tears cross a burning cheek.
She buries herself back into blankets,
wishes for warmth of real arms. From her shroud
she hears the clank of tangled chains, medieval mail;
The father prepares for Snowmageddon.

--Leslie Evans

Huckleberry Picking

4 a.m. before the sun comes up in July
Load the Chevy truck with five gallon buckets.
Pack a lunch of boloney, apples, twinkies, and hard-boiled
eggs.
Off we drive for Manscreek Mountains to find
Huckleberry bushes

A long drive singing songs to entertain the children
We see deer, elk, bear, skunks, squirrels and quail.

Finding the spot to hand out pails to each child.
They ate more than they picked.
The berries sweet, plump and sticky.
Three for the bucket and one for me.

The bottom of the bushes empty,
Wild animals had eaten them first.
Your back would hurt from bending over and picking.
The buckets fill fast because of lots of berries
easy to pick by the handfulls.

Lunch break is a treat and a rest.
It is early hot—we load the truck and head home.
The berries washed and put in zip-lock bags,
then marked with date.
Berry pancakes.
Pies frozen for later use—
A scoop of ice cream added when pies come out of the
oven

Huckleberry picking was well worth the work.

—Janet Christensen, 2022

Winter in the North

There is a stealthy, quiet terror that creeps
When the blood red mercury drains away ...
And the sun cannot muster a shard of warmth despite its blinding light

Walls shiver and crack in the cold ...
Floors turn frigid on bare feet ...
The night's tortuous touch etches works of art in frost on shuddering windows

Cars groan against the unbridled cold
Everyone and every animal pulls inward
Heavily cloaked and steeled against the grim possibility of death

Suspended

Naked and helpless as the Alberta clipper rolls in ...

Kidnapped by icy blasts to the face with a step outside
Pained by too full a breath in the bitter cold
Days on end of '30 below'
When the snow squeaks and crunches under foot

Afraid ...
Waiting...

Tired...

Until... *that day... that one triumphant moment*
when, warmed by the sun, the first droplet of water escapes winter's grip
and splashes from the cutback snowbank
then another and another...
The trickles become tiny rivers that carve through the harsh and unforgiving
landscape

Glorious new life
And the pungent smell of spring mud

Winter's back is broken

--- By Kellie Poulin, 2022

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December 7, 1941
Fear Resolution

When I was very young
My world became embroiled
In the chaos of conflict—
Fear was in the air
As the country went to war—
Our coastal city was very vulnerable

My house—
So near the ocean
That the stillness of night
Amplified the warnings of
Buoys bouncing
Among the waves

Their mournful song Reinforced a feeling of dread

Patriotism was infectious—
Men young
And old
Went to war—
Some to fight
Some to help the fight

My Aunt Agnes looked like Rosie the Riveter

And always the ethereal fog
The warnings of the buoys
Telling the same story
Of mystery,
Of uncertainty
Fear of unknowable danger

Airplanes overhead—
Ships on the horizon
Watched from the upstairs window
Dog tags around my neck
A necklace of identification
Separation anxiety

A multitude of visitors
Hotels filled
Homes opened
Goodbyes said
Sons
Shipped out

So much to perplex a child

The waves washed in with a perpetual sigh
The buoys echoed
With their plaintive cry
High emotions churned
And I wondered about it all
While the world burned

--Gayla Curtis

The Little Shrub

Edging a hiking path one day
I saw a struggling creosote
Hikers had not noticed
Trode on it.

It was short, desperately
curved
With no long limbs.
It had struggled.
The Stunting was severe
And hard to look at.

No spare blossom
Plain, and brave.
Not worth a glance.
(But what good is our
glance?)

The little shrub
Is still in place
Tough, and small
A perfect size
And may outlast us all

--Abigail Hagler

Ode to My Master

Oh, you powerful one—
You run my life.

You bring me good news
and bad.

You wake me when I'm sleeping.

You entertain me when I'm bored
and act like you know it all.

You save my memories--
and then hide them from me.

You tell me where to be
each hour of my day.

You keep me in touch with my friends
and know all their numbers.

I'm lost without you--
you always show me the way.

You are my Master—
and I am your Humble Slave—
Dear Cell Phone.

By Charlene Tosi
March, 2022



Joann B



Nancy F

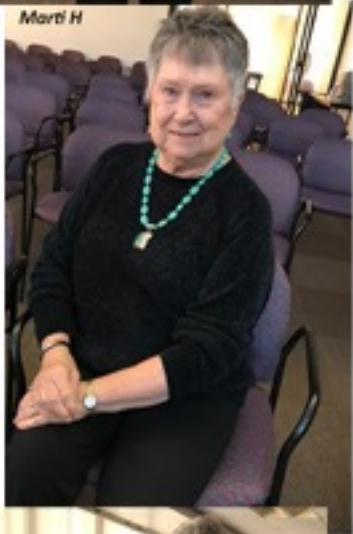
Kellie P



Roxie M-H



Janet C



Marti H



Virginia R



Abigail H



Marilyn S



Our Musical Interludes
Gayla Curtis &
Suzanne
Ferguson



Leslie E



Gayle C