

Jeweled Traveler

Emerald green and all a-flutter,
Sparkling in the summer sun,
Dashing here and darting there,
A wonder ever on the run.

Heaven's tiny jeweled traveler
With throat of shimmering red,
Humming like a little motor
As you busily zoom o'er head.

Backward, forward, up and down,
Defying nature's laws,
Sipping golden nectar
With every rapid pause.

A garden is enamored
If your presence is found there.
Nothing in the universe
Can do what you do with air!

A Fork in the Fjord

My grandmother, Anna Svensen, was born in 1894 in Risør, Norway. In 1906, when she was just 12, she emigrated to America with her parents and six siblings, traveling aboard a Danish ship and arriving through Ellis Island. There, they faced long lines and uneasiness as they waited for approval to enter the US. It is hard to imagine their long journey across the Atlantic, followed by that anxiety.

The family moved to Staten Island, New York, where everyone started school and began their American life. In 1914, Anna married John Olsen and a year later moved away to Brunswick, Georgia. With World War I ramping up, jobs were plentiful in the shipbuilding industry. My grandfather was a skilled boat builder, and they settled in Brunswick. Anna gave birth to her first child, my father, Oscar Emil Olsen, in 1917.

Family tales had Anna and her sisters canoeing to grade school on the Storfjord near their small fishing village in Norway. I think of that scene when considering difficult decisions in life. A beautiful young girl paddling through cold waters to get to school, most likely thinking about the unknown future in America.

Like the fjords carved through stone, we carve our paths.

Anna carved many paths over her lifetime that are far different from mine. However, those forks in the road, where hard choices were made, I see and feel just how much I take after my grandmother.

Pretty Boy's Antidote

Pretty Boy was the moniker the woman gave her pet parakeet. She enjoyed his bright blue and green feathers and his cheery disposition. She taught Pretty Boy to sing many songs. One day she ordered a new vacuum cleaner. It arrived with a tube-shaped attachment perfectly suited to vacuum out Pretty Boy's bird cage. You know where this story is going! The phone rang one day while vacuuming and Pretty Boy ended up in the vacuum cleaner bag!

She panicked! Tearing open the bag, she found the parakeet alive but covered with dust, dirt, and soot. She rushed the formerly colorful bird to the bathtub and turned on the faucet, almost drowning Pretty Boy. Realizing the error of her solution, she grabbed the hair dryer to blow dry the drenched bird!

A few days later, at a church social, the editor of the local newspaper heard of her catastrophe and sent a reporter around to get this unique human-interest story. As the reporter was about to leave at the end of the interview, he asked the woman, "By the way, how's Pretty Boy doing now?"

"Pretty Boy doesn't sing anymore," she said. "He just sorta sits and stares!"

We live in melancholy times with excessive blues on the news. Pretty Boy's antidote to despair is feistiness. Feisty is a never-say-die hardiness, boldly standing up when all around you are timidly hunkering down. Feisty is the exhibition of spirit, passion, and determination. The birthplace of initiative, drive, and growth, feisty gets people out of bed and off to work early without a pessimist excuse or a drag-you-down dread. Show your bright colors. Stop "sitting and staring" and start standing and caring.

End of a Day

Pirating the sunset, a jet trail glowed pink against palest blue.

Although the sun had set, the light had not yet drained from the sky. The bats declared it nighttime by their presence, but the ambient glow let gentle evening linger. The faint blue dome above slowly darkened to some opulent shade too stunning to name.

As the day continued to age, the now black trees became mere silhouettes. Distant headlights twinkled through them, masquerading as lightning bugs. The stars were tiny pinpricks in the black tissue paper sky.

And still the day crept away. How could it go when all it had brought was so lovely?

Ever shorter, ever darker, ever quieter, until under cover of darkness, the day left forever and another one seamlessly eased in to take its place.

The Wind

The snow melts and the earth turns green as we wait for March to bring on springtime. We watch for wind and any movement of foliage.

The sun is bright against the azure blue sky with scarce white clouds hanging on slightly just for an appearance.

Two friends stare out at the vast field before us and watch as green blades of grass move slightly in the breeze.

Our kites are waiting to catch any light movement. Will it be enough to lift them higher and higher than we hoped for.

We grab them, we giggle and we chase the wind. We give it our all and trusting those fragile strings do not snap and our kites lost forever.

They fly, they fly higher as the colors flash against the sun, and the tails twist and turn like ribbons trying to catch up.

We did it, we did it, we scream with laughter. It's moments like this where we chase our dreams, and friendships are bonded forever in a field of green.

Big Tree

Placing my left hand on the main trunk of the pine tree, I reached up with my right arm, extending my fingers until I found a small nub where a limb had broken off. Carefully, I raised one leg and placed my toe onto a lower nub, using it as a ledge to lift my body until my left hand could find the next branch. And in that way, feeling and searching the tree for the path up, I began to climb. I looked up and saw what seemed like an endless maze of branches above. Sweat was already beginning to bead on my face. I did not look down. I focused only on the one branch right above me. With each move I made, sticky sap painted my body. Because I wore only cut-off jeans and a short-sleeved shirt, the tree began to claim small bits of me as I climbed, leaving red tattoos where once smooth skin had been. I ignored the pain. My blond hair tangled, sacrificing strands while gathering the browned shedding needles of the tree. The sun danced in gray and white shadow and Big Tree kept the rhythm, swaying gently; soothing me, guiding me. My breathing calmed as it synchronized with the tree song. Eventually, the other trees were below me. They seemed to listen to some natural law and stop their growing. Not Big Tree. He grew freely, unrestrained.

Sunrise Revival

It was time to make a decision. Stuck in the limbo between making the wrong choice and not making a choice at all pulled at my heart, each pluck sending vibrations of anxiety along already frayed nerves.

I shifted and stretched, reviving my senses. Muscles protested the sudden movement after sitting rigid and huddled, arms wrapped around my knees, on the sandy shore of the pond for most of the night.

Not long before, the water's edge had begun to shimmer as the sun rose higher above the horizon, sending rays of fresh sunlight across the dark, inky surface. As night faded away, the beauty before me sharpened and came into focus, like waking up after a dream.

Birdsong broke through the last of my weariness, alerting me to the spectacle that nature was about to perform. Smooth, green lily pads dotted the dark water, some lined up in paths for the creatures of the pond to travel. Amongst them, Water Lilies.

Each flower began to open, bursting with light and goodness that couldn't be contained one moment longer. Sharp, pink petals took turns lying down, slowly revealing a bright, golden core like the sun itself.

As the radiance continued its ascent, shadows began to grow, gathering between the trees and tall grasses lining the pond. But the Water Lilies paid them no mind.

I became enraptured with their resurrection, filled with vibrance and warmth. Dormant and hidden through the dark night but rising to meet the day with all the magnificence of a mountain top rising from the mist.

The decision came quickly then. I would rise and be bold, not content to be defined by the darkness. Adapting. Blooming. A new appreciation of the beauty in the world greets me like an old friend. Renewal. Revival.

Sunflower

Sunflower, stand tall

Raise your blooms up to the sky

Follow the Sun, now

My Favorite Place

It's called the Jelly Elephant, and it's both a building and a community of friends who come together over a shared love of music. It's the brainchild of a man named Bray Carr and it happens every Saturday night in the little town of Gordon, Georgia. People come from all around to take part and to listen. You can run into musicians from Macon, Atlanta, and sometimes farther afield. The core is a group of Bray's friends and those of his wife, Erica, both talented musicians. Entering through the glass door at the front of the building, you're greeted either verbally or with waves and smiles, depending on whether they're playing or taking a break when you arrive.

Groups of mid-century modern couches, chairs and a table or two line the left side of the long narrow room. A few more chairs, a keyboard, and the circle of chairs and microphones for the musicians take up most of the right side of the room. Art works and musical instruments hang on the wall of exposed old

brick. White waves of looping “hair” cascade upward from the ceramic head of the lamp next to the “hot spot,” where the currently performing musician sits. Mannequin legs hang through a hole in the corner of the wooden ceiling. A papier-mache pachyderm rears up on a shelf between the couches on the audience side of the room.

The Jelly wears many hats: Music venue, social club, therapy clinic. Entertainment, enrichment, sometimes even enlightenment flourish there. Deep conversations in the wee hours. Silliness and camaraderie at all hours. We hold each other close through hard times and heartbreak. And almost every time I go, they play The Band’s song, The Weight. This place and its people have taken a weight off me.

Magenta Mountains

Magenta mountains
reach out to the burning sky.
Do you think they ever worry
one day the sun will not rise
to meet them?
Not for fear of darkness or
their ability to fare the night.
No, I think they just long
to be touched by the light.
Don’t you?

The Emerald Chamber II

Palos Verdes HS was perched on bluffs looking out over the majesty of Lunada Bay, and down a steep treacherous 75-meter descent to the boulder strewn wreckage of the Greek ship Dominator that ran aground in my junior year 1961.

And I would sit in English class watching the swells grow into waves that crested and crashed into the frigid, kelp-streaked, blue anthracite of the Pacific, while Mrs. Muir diagrammed sentences on the blackboard. Accurately but in vain.

No, I wasn’t paying attention. But I was concentrating--if that’s the same as daydreaming.

I see myself, legs astride the bright yellow Jacobs and swinging the nose of the surfboard towards a rocky shore. Quick, hard double strokes as the beast raises me, then tilts me straight down. I snap to a standing crouch and explode down the face of this near vertical ten-footer to the bottom of its belly. Wait for it....Now, lean hard right, toes, knees, hips, and back arched, burying the rail in a whip turn that swings the board around so quickly it parallels the wave with a challenging SMACK against the face of this foam-flecked monster.

The abruptness of the turn has cost me forward momentum. The Jacobs and its passenger drift up the wave towards a menacingly translucent lip that's now curling overhead. Quick, two steps towards the nose, deep crouch, left foot extended, with my weight forward we plummet down and across the universe, the peeling curl spitting out over my back. And for a few seconds... I am chambered in tight emerald, dark to my right, silver to my left.

Then, bright sunlight as I blast out the tube's opening, just as my wave begins losing its vertical. "Thank you." I gently lean right turning the Jacobs, up the lowering swell, and gently down the spent monster's back.... Ambrosia.

Amsterdam

Several years ago my daughter and I traveled to Amsterdam. What a beautiful city, dissected by the canals, with cobblestone streets and gently arched bridges crossing from one block of buildings to another. We walked for miles every day, explored museums and sights. At the end of this visit, we had carved out an extra day to take the train from Amsterdam out into the countryside to visit the world famous Keukenhof Tulip Gardens. We thought the train ride would be fun, but uneventful, with all of the beauty waiting for us in the tulip gardens at the end of the ride. Imagine our surprise to ride past mile after mile of billions of glorious, colorful tulips. They weren't mixed like acres of bouquets, but rather the tulips were laid out in endless solid stripes of colors like rows of ribbons in a notions shop. Flying by the train windows, mile after mile, were endless stripes of pinks, rose, yellows, lilac, oranges, deep rich purples, and creams and whites, each stretching far into the distance as far as we could see. Imagine a crocheted blanket made of dozens of stripes of colors. This was the landscape we watched in awe as the train raced by, more beautiful because it was so unexpected.

We had seen pictures of the world famous Keukenhof Gardens with the gently curving stone paths winding between and around clumps of tulips bursting with colors, shapes, and combinations of complementary arrangements. Tulips have smooth edges, fringed, irregular, some with only a few petals, others looking more like roses. This we expected and anticipated.

But those acres and miles of glorious, colorful stripes draped across the land, bursting with beauty, were unexpected.

Often, the unexpected leaves the most lasting memory.

The Dock

As a child, I never sat on the dock. I frolicked! I ran and twirled and hurled myself into the dark, cool water at the end. The dock was old, even then, but I didn't know it. Didn't care, really. Its only purpose was to hold me and get me near the water. Unappreciated, it sat there like a stalwart soldier, always at its post. It didn't show its age much then. Maybe needed a fresh coat of paint, but it was sturdy and dependable.

I was a teen when I became friends with the dock. It seemed to love the sun as much as I did. There it sat, resolute, basking in the warmth of afternoon sunrays. After a swim, I would spread out my towel and lie on the dock until I was dry. Content to watch as the water lapped around the pilings that held us just above the surface of the water, I began to notice the dock as a separate place, not just a convenient way to get to the lake.

I went away as a young adult. College, then dream chasing to find my place in this world. The dock became a destination. It was home. Back to visit, I would plan get-togethers on the dock. Parties raged. Cocktails, music, dancing until late in the night, the dock seemed to bounce in rhythm. It never showed its age. I never thought about it.

Time passed, as it always does. I returned to my home place, looking to establish myself once again into the rhythm of the place I left. I visit the dock with coffee in hand, meeting the days with contentment. Still the dock stands. Aging now, my old friend seems to sigh and settle around me. I belong here.

Bars and Stripes

Forgotten behind a forbidding frame,
Grieves the mind of a man shut away.
Dreaming of freedom from a debt,
They insist, only days of his life can repay.

Lingering sunlight leaks into his cell,
Highlighting the time not yet passed.
Tangled inside him, in knots of resentment,
Are the answers to questions not asked.

Hourly jingles, the keys of his keeper,
Remind him of all locks and doors.
Thus, through thick steel bars, society teaches:
Steal only through loopholes,
Kill only in wars.

This bluebird sky

You've been around here before,
I'm sure,
the trees have kept your tune—
Their limbs, so wonderfully adorned,
only move this way with you
Yes, it seems we've met,
indeed,
the cool of your embrace—
Frustrates curiosity
beneath Sun's watchful gaze
As far as I can tell
prevails
your determined guise—
which gathers every shy exhale
to defend this bluebird sky

Dancing in the Rain

A light, steady rain on a
hot summer day summons
two sisters, ages 7 and
10 to come out and play.
Twirling umbrellas,
the two girls sing silly songs,
giggle, and dance with innocent abandon.
Like moths drawn to light, they
are soon drawn to nearby mud puddles.
Squeals of laughter
skip over puddles as the
girls plunge into the mire, and the
dark sludge oozes between
their toes.
As the soft drizzle turns into a hard rain,
the two laughing girls tilt their faces
toward the darkened sky with mouths
wide open, catching raindrops.
When home calls with thoughts
of warm towels and dry clothes
they answer with
one final splash!

Dancing in the Twilight

a flame-colored dancer whirls across the land
swaying to a happy tune
as day turns to night
singing Sha-La, La-Laah

the towering Georgia pines
wave and say hello
echoing across the valley
as time loosens its hold

a golden fox appears
then vanishes into
the tall grass
before the wind can learn its name

fading blue ripples outward
the lake dreams
with quiet longing
for another summer day

a family of deer
raise their heads
resting in the hush of dusk
welcoming what is next

enveloped in invisible currents
the butterfly spreads its wings
unable to tell where its dance ends
and another's begins

keep dancing in the twilight
keep dancing in the twilight

Solitary Waves

She steps onto the beach to count her blessings, the breeze catching on the cotton of her nightgown. The salt, the sea, the sand, and the moonbeam that skates across the waves keep her company in the aging evening. These may be the warmer waters but the rising tide still carries a bit of the night's chill to her skin as she walks across the flattened shore. Whatever thoughts brought her out of bed, she lets them go

here, breathing as the waves break just below her knees. The tracks she left in the sand are fleeting, and she hopes the same for her: the anxiety that still lurks just beneath her skin, a mix of sweat and gooseflesh.

'It was a dream,' she thinks, that sent her away from her twisted sheets into the open air. 'Was I drowning?'

She'd brushed up something in those sleeping hours. Fingertips skating against something dark and terrible.

Whatever it was, it's too far away to worry about now. The remaining shards of it sunk beneath the waves, dragged back into depths she doesn't care to fathom. Let the waters keep their secrets, the surface is all she cares for. The shifting light and shadows are enough to sustain her for a lifetime. She steps out of the water and away from the shore. Blades of grass wipe the last grains of sand from her feet and she slips back through the door into the quiet house, spirit settled like the dust on the very top shelf. She peels back the covers and pulls the sheet flat before settling beneath the cotton, letting the final hours before sunrise slip away.

Spring at Lake Oconee

Before the summer crowds and after the yearly onslaught of pollen, spring gifts me with an enormous bounty of miracles. As soon as I step outside, I take a deep breath and smile.

Dawn, first light. Sun slowly peaking above the horizon, skies pink, cotton candy clouds, warmth creeping, but the air still cool and refreshing. The smell of freshly cut grass, honeysuckle, blooming flowers.

Mama birds singing their hearts out as they build their nests. A brilliant red-headed woodpecker pecking away on the utility poles, while in the distance another taps out his reply. Bushy-tailed squirrels chasing and chattering and adorable, mischievous chipmunks rapidly darting by. Sweet, soft bunny babies quietly nibbling, tiny ears twitching.

Ducks with their babies behind them in a row, waddling awkwardly and quacking constantly, while above the powerful osprey soars, searching, diving, and tirelessly working to feed his family. A solitary Great Blue Heron, spindly legged, silent, still, vigilantly stalking at the edge of the water. Tuxedo-attired Canadian Geese noisily honking, constantly bending their elegant necks to the ground in search of food. Occasionally a magnificent bald eagle will land amidst the geese, sending them scattering as they show him the proper respect he deserves. He spreads his powerful wings in warning if they return.

Tiny, miraculous, iridescent hummingbirds hovering and dive bombing each other at the feeders, as butterflies, bees, and dragonflies quietly float above the flowers. This springtime morning world is alive with colors you can barely recreate in art—the dizzying array of pinks, purples, reds, blues, greens, corals, and oranges, in all their varying shades from palest to intense. I love the quiet and peaceful feeling at this time, with only the occasional fisherman at the dock to break the spell.

Sickly Smoothie and Smooth Sax

The coffee shop was the halfway point of my bicycle ride on this sultry Georgia summer day. A smoothie sounded better and better as I pedaled along the rural roads.

Approaching the railroad tracks at the edge of town, I saw—and heard—wha? A dude in a bathing suit was standing on the side of the road playing a saxophone! I considered stopping, but I was really ready for that smoothie.

I eagerly entered the shop. Peaches are my favorite fruit, and they had a peach smoothie. I could hardly wait to experience the fresh, juicy deliciousness. The girl behind the counter proceeded to make my smoothie. Then, the horror...

She pulled out a jar of store-bought peach preserves from the refrigerator! I was too wimpy (or too thirsty) to back out. Oh well, at least it was wet and cool and had some calories for the ride home.

I sat in the shade outside, drinking the smoothie and hoping to hear Saxophone Dude across the railroad tracks. I caught a strain here and there, but the AC unit outside of the coffee shop mostly drowned it out. I got back on my bicycle and headed toward home.

As I crossed the railroad tracks and approached Saxophone Dude, I had to stop this time. He didn't play anything I recognized, but it was lively and happy. It was as if he had all this music inside and just had to share it with the world. I was grateful to be there to scoop up a little of it. When he finished his song, I applauded, and he smiled. The smoothie had given me some fuel for the body, but the music gave me fuel for the soul. Expect adventure.

Mornings at the Barn

Mornings at the Barn

Nice warm bed to snuggle under the quilts

Gotta get up and go to my lovelies

Not to the job as for so many years

Boots on, hats and gloves

Out the door the cool crisp air embraces me

Infusing me with the energy of creation

I sing in jest "I'm late, I'm late for a very important date."

At the first stall stands the black mare

Head always out to greet me

We share breath as taught by a weathered Peruvian Cowboy

Life breath to life breath

Spirit to spirit

Treasured way to begin the day

At the next stall is my grouchy old man, same age as me

Sometimes he turns away refusing connection

On good days he greets me with soft familiarity

Old gives freedom to make the decision

Accepting our preferences
To be alone or together
Scoop up the grain. She stomps impatiently. He tells me to hurry with snorts.
I listen as they slurp. The rhythm of contentment. The air of calm.
Both mosey out to the green grass
Coats glowing in the morning's first sunlight
I muck stalls humming, singing and praising
And remembering first meetings, first rides
The old sweaty mule unhitched from the plow
Me hoisted to his back and led by Papa to the water through
The picture pony brought to our house
My old man placing his head on my chest at first meeting
So we knew we were meant to be together
The grandgirls now grown excited still to visit their steeds
How good God is

Rugged

Comfort underfoot
In shag or wool.
Wash and dry, shed-proof, stain master,
Wall to wall, non-skid, hall runner,
Good at throw or best at show.
Indoor or outdoor, active or leisure lifestyles.

Some, you know, are great for laps,
others thrive at work.

Once they weren't even house trained—
By nature,
Dogs are rugged.

Watervale

To call Watervale a resort is an overstatement. Located on the western shore of Lake Michigan, it was a lumber camp in the 1880s. Horses hauled logs down the center road past the Inn, Casino, and Post Office, over the sand dune, and onto a pier to be loaded aboard schooners. During WWI, after logging was completed, a German doctor from Chicago bought the property as a safe place for his family. Sturdy wooden houses were built and named after the doctor's daughters. In time, the property was bought by a family who began operating it for vacation rental to families such as ours. If you had an early summer rental, you might give a hand installing the window screens. When unpacking, you might find a squirrel's nest in a bureau drawer. No one minded. We were at Watervale, a place to climb the dune to Lake

Michigan and watch the sun set. While children jumped from dunes, adults enjoyed a glass of sandy wine, connecting with friends from last summer, and making new friends. A rite of passage at Watervale was the hike to Old Baldy, the highest sand dune around, some 200 feet tall. To get there, we had to hike a couple of rugged miles through mosquito-filled woods. Reaching the top of the dune, we had a grand view of Lake Michigan directly below. The kids ran and tumbled down into the cold water. Adults picked our way down and began the trek back along the beach. Turning around, Old Baldy shone white with grasses growing along its sides and top, and clear, blue Lake Michigan directly below. The hike to Old Baldy was the height of the vacation, a memory-building time between parents and children. These are fond memories for my family. Watervale is held in a preserved land trust. It remains unspoiled, subject only to the rule of nature, waiting to fill the minds of new generations.

A True Ghost Story

In a long-ago poetry class, we were given an assignment that was strictly an exercise in structure: write a five-stanza poem, with five lines in each stanza, and five words in each line. No more, no less.

I struggled all week, to no avail. Finally, the night before our next class, I decided to make one last attempt. As I reached for the light switch on the wall of my home office, I heard a “tap-tap-tap” on the window. It scared the bejeebers out of me! (Did I mention my office was a second-floor bedroom?) It turned out that a storm was brewing, and the wind was blowing a tree branch against the window. By the time my heart rate returned to normal, I had my poem:

Ghost Stories Late at Night

It startled me, the branches
Tapping on the window pane
Late that windy, wintry night,
As I entered the room
Before switching on the light.

They threw an evil shadow
On my office window blinds,
One I'd never noticed there.
Perhaps it was the wind
Giving me such a scare.

“I'm coming in, you know,”
It seemed to tell me.
But silhouettes, not whispered jeers
Caused the chills as I
Walked in, despite my fears.

The wind laughed at me
As I quickly reached out
To turn on the light.
The shadow disappeared, but howled:
“I still see you tonight.”

I peeked out the window
And shrugged off the feeling
Of growing colder and colder.
As I turned my back,
Something soft touched my shoulder.

The Lucky One

I took a shortcut from Jesup north to Lyons to catch I-16 to Macon, but it didn't work out that way. I got lost like tears in the rain. Along the way, a signpost offered Metter and Mt. Vernon the only two choices at a highway fork. I bore left on a guess and soon passed another sign: “Oldest Loblolly Pine in Georgia” — 2 miles ahead. When I arrived, a gold-colored chain and four iron posts encircled the old tree, and further up mounted lights waited in place.

About an hour farther north, I came upon a boneyard of identical tombstones in neat rows—hundreds of them—following the land's contours until they curved out of sight. These stones carried no names, no honors, no mention of war—only numbers: 185, 371, 254, and on and on. Random and faceless, it was the Reidsville Prison cemetery.

Signs said east to Lyons and driving a while more brought me to the outskirts of town where I slowed for county road work. The summer air was thick with the smell of mowed grass and cicadas cutting sound through the humidity with a rhythmic whine when I saw a county worker on his tractor. He was a black man and when he took off his hat and wiped sweat from his eyes, the sun caught him in such a way as to turn his face a brilliant gold. Gold like an angel, I thought, before I passed him by.

Soon after, I merged onto I-16 and drove to Macon. When you finally know where you are, you realize you were never truly lost. You were the lucky one instead.

Everything

everything around us is changing.
it's too fast,
too loud,
too volatile,
unearthing every unforeseen circumstance.

hold me down and plant me in the ground,
let me grow and sprout
but just enough to see the top of the world
from the exact same spot.

i don't want to grow old,
but sometimes i do.
i want to see things only leaving will show me.
if i stay, i lose myself and keep the pedestal.
the pedestal they put me on.

what if the ground gives out?
what if i scrape my knees?
what am i meant to do when nothing feels real?
everything around us is real.
but it's changing.
you see the growing and you try to encourage it.

i want nothing more than to stop.
i don't want it yet,
i want time.
but change isn't on a fixed frame,
and everything and everyone around me
needs to give me a little more room.

the past i knew is there,
but it's crackling with flames.
do i emerge new or do i go up with it?
for what do you fight?
everything around us?
i can't tell through the smoke around my eyes.
it's a mix of red, gray, and green.

i choose growth more than anything.
i can't be restrained, and i'll grow wild.
so something in my bones tells me
it's out there.
so i'll run
and run
and run

to chase the change
because everything around us is at stake.

Untitled

There is a piece of lake under a bridge that I want to hug.
I want to hold it close and take it with me.
It's My piece of specialness.
If it knew what it meant to me, it would smile.
Remain, and remain still for me please.

There's a patch of forest, on a bit of road, that quietens me.
Its feathery branches protect and reassure me, and
I thank it as it envelopes me with a zwhish.
Stand tall, and stay gentle for me please.

There's a hopeful moon, shining thru my window, that's causing a pause.
I am privy to its beauty.
Does anyone see it? You must see it.
It keeps giving and giving and giving.
Glow, oh moon and share your presence with me please.

Adored

I remember
your hand
holding your hand
the sun finding its way
leaves swaying tall trees
the long walk down
Sunday morning streets
the church
the small white church
sitting on the corner used to be a house
walls knocked down to
make like sanctuary

I remember
the feeling
the feeling of being looked at watched
a prince
adored

by church hats and old ladies
white chiffon dresses
and polyester prints
by shaved old men in grey suits
choir robes hymnals
collection plates and communion
Jesus on the cross
the clock on the wall
they marveled my shyness
a quiet boy
sitting still in the pew
the mama's boy
in the knee high brown suit
you made special for me

CATS ARE CUTE!

Cats dress up . . .
In old clothes and boots.
They like to yuk it up . . .
'Cause they don't give a hoot.

Cats even like dogs . . .
Who chase for a thrill.
They like big ole green frogs . . .
And fresh salmon on the grill.

Cats are cute . . .
But they don't think so.
They would like us to think . . .
They're just lazy and slow.

Cats like to climb trees . . .
And wear birthday hats.
And when they feel good . . .
They'll even wear spats.

Cats can run very fast . . .
Faster than you and I.
And they can do this . . .
Without blinking an eye.

Cats will never balk . . .
And hardly ever back down.
They even know how . . .
To walk on water and not drown.

Cats don't like to ride . . .
But have fun at the beach.
They'll even go shopping . . .
Just to buy you a peach.

Cats are a lot of fun . . .
And even have whiskers.
They really like milk . . .
And "Little Friskers."

Cats are smart . . .
And simply like no other,
They'll play hide-and-seek . . .
With your little brother.

Cats are never afraid . . .
Not even of dogs.
They go to the Everglades . . .
Just to chase alligators and frogs.

SHE CALLED IT GOSPEL BIRD

Grandmama dropped fat chicken legs into a worn paper sack—shake, shake, shake—her kitchen castanets marking time until each piece was floured and ready for the cast-iron skillet. Angry grease popped and spit. I moved back, but she stepped closer. Her bare fingers slid each piece into the bubbling fat.

"Cook, you biddies." She turned down the flame and eased a cover over the pan. "I need a cigarette." Gospel Bird, she called it. Sunday Supper. A ritual feeding whose roots lay not in the Southern Baptist church of her youth, but in a different kind of communion. No less profound, no less sacred. No less caring toward my brother and me, abandoned babies who spent a lifetime hungering for more than food. She served us skillet suppers and fierce love that fed our souls, our bodies, our will to survive. Tough as cast-iron, she took us in without hesitation or complaint. In retrospect, she must have experienced doubt and consternation over raising her daughter's children. If so, we never saw it. I could measure my childhood in flour clouds and slow-melting Crisco. Such everyday fare kept us tethered and fed.

Seedlings

They rode in silence over the corrugated tracks, etched deep from generations of use. The boy rode shotgun, resting his slight hip against the steel guard over the tractor wheel. The grandfather, his gnarled hands concealed beneath cracked tan leather, guided the steering wheel with practiced ease, turning now and then to check the willowy seedlings that filled the trailer's bed like a dense miniature forest.

At the path's end, where the land sloped and settled into wetland, now teeming with duckweed and sedge grass from the warmth of lengthening days, the grandfather turned from the path and aimed the tractor east, towards a place where the flat expanse gave yield to a crescent-shaped knoll.

As they drove across the field, the sun breached above the line of ambiguity that separates earth from sky, revealing an ombre of tangerine, amber, and gold.

When they reached the base of the knoll, after pressing his muddy boot to the brake, the grandfather gave a nod to his grandson. They stepped from the tractor and walked to the trailer.

Today, the 13-year-old would be his grandfather's strong hands, feet, and backbone, planting the young blue spruce, his grandfather's favorite tree, inside the knoll's rich, dark soil.

"Something beautiful to remember me by," he had said to his grandson as he told him of his plan, tears spilling over the starburst creases that bracketed the outer corners of his blue-gray eyes.

But the boy knew the trees weren't necessary. He would never not remember him.

Clay Dancer

While her dance on earth bid her stay,
she came to love her feet of clay.
Though they crumbled and caved
in life's tidal wave
of unknowing,
she learned to reshape them
and fire them
with the glowing
golden embers within her heart,
the place that remembered where she got her start
on wings of angels delivered to birth,
royalty not subject
to the mirth
of fault-finders with cast iron feet bound to the earth,
impenetrable and too deep
to leap for the stars,
and catch fireflies in jars
on hot summer nights
when naked feet
find delight

in the dance that bid her stay
while she came to love her feet of clay.

Seven Miles Down a Dirt Road in the Middle of Nowhere

In the summers of 1970s Middle Georgia, time moved slow as cold molasses beneath the heat rising off dusty red clay roads.

Seven miles down a dirt road past Goat Town, the world felt far away from everything. Pines swayed beneath blazing skies, and the air smelled of silage, fresh-cut grass, and that rich earthy smell that rises after a summer rain.

Before daylight, Mama would holler through the bedroom doors,
“Get up while it’s still cool enough to pick the garden before the sun comes up.”

Apparently sleeping past sunrise was considered a direct path to laziness and moral failure.

Half asleep, we stumbled through dew-covered grass into the garden where unknown bugs clung to us, and rough okra leaves irritated our skin till we scratched half the day.

Children worked because everybody worked. We picked black-eyed peas, tomatoes, corn, and enough itchy okra to make you scratch till Christmas. We bottle-fed orphan calves, moved cows from pasture to pasture, and drove tractors before we were old enough to drive cars.

And somehow, those summers still felt beautiful.

Afternoons settled quiet over the fields. We sat beneath the sweetgum tree shelling peas into old enamel pans, swatting mosquitoes and gnats, laughing, and enjoying nothing more than each other’s company.

At night, Grandma and Grandpa sat in old metal chairs on the porch talking about the good old days while us grandkids ran through the yard catching lightning bugs in mason jars beneath the warm Georgia night.

I spent years trying to outrun those dirt roads and eventually crossed oceans to live in Dubai.

But no matter how far you wander, some part of your heart always finds its way back home.

Peace Found

feathers unruffled
eastern sky breaking calmness
heron silhouette

A New Beginning

A new beginning:

Sun rising.

Fog lifting.

Choices to make:

Body awakening.

Senses sharpening.

Wonderful sights:

Dew shimmering.

Cats zooming.

Natural delights:

Thrashers chatting.

Figs bursting.

Eyes closed. Inhalation.

Jasmine blooming.

Honeysuckle bursting.

Choices to make:

Woodpecker hammering.

Lizards bobbing.

Savor what comes your way.

The grass is green most every day.

Maggie's Return Home

The days were long, but the years were short. Maggie had been dreading this trip for months, yet she knew returning home was necessary for her healing heart. She was headed back to her roots—back to the place where she had been raised and where her parents had spent their entire lives. But now that they were gone, the visit would not be easy.

Her parents' rustic cabin sat beside a winding creek in the North Georgia mountains. Towering peaks stretched across the open field behind the cabin, making the landscape feel almost magical. Early morning fog rolled over the mountains while the crisp air carried the earthy scent of pine trees and damp soil.

The creek held the sweetest memories of Maggie's childhood. When she closed her eyes, she could still picture her father standing in the water wearing his old waders, carefully casting his fly rod across the current. He would stay there for hours, fishing until he could no longer see his line in the fading sunlight.

As children, Maggie and her older brother spent endless summer days swimming in the cold mountain creek. They searched beneath smooth river rocks for salamanders and crawdads and laughed as tiny fish darted around their feet.

Even after all these years, the creek still felt like home. As Maggie stood listening to the rushing water, she realized some places never truly leave us. Though her parents were gone, their love still lingered in the mountains, the cabin, and the memories waiting beside the creek.

Fairy Song

How lonely for the grown-ups—

There's no magic in the night.

No rustling wings, no pixie flings

Are for the grown-ups' sight.

When fairies like a child, they say,
They come to steal that child away,
And blowing soft on beetle horn
They march into the coming dawn.

And wasn't I just stolen so,
To live among them long ago?
But somehow lost I came to be,
And growing up—and old—is me.

And now they seem to fade away,
And I must wait till I am gray,
Before the wee ones come once more
To prattle softly at my door.

And feast on cakes of honeyed whey,
Drink primrose wine at end of day,
Dance to the cricket's chirping bow—
Whirling sprites in the pale moon's glow.

How boring for the grown-ups,
Blind as bats despite the light.
They never see life's mysteries
With their grown-up kind of sight!

A Package Deal

The sun spawns a halo over
the horizon,
and I notice the warm milky
glow of the moon,
still visible in the early
morning sky.
There has never been a day
like this day,
nor will there ever be again.

In the shadow-stitched
perimeter of dawn,

fog invades the cove
and dampens the air.
It's too soon for the whine of
boat motors,
the chatter of squirrels,
or even the twittering song of a bird.

Still as a statue, I watch
the poltergeist-white
mist morph into specter
shapes that rise
and hover above the lake's
surface.
They pause as if to say hello
and then sidle off
with the breeze.

Whatever the weather, the
hour of the day,
or the season of the year, for
the tuned in and the
tuned out alike, it's a package
deal—a fresh supply
of never before delivered free
of charge, day after day.