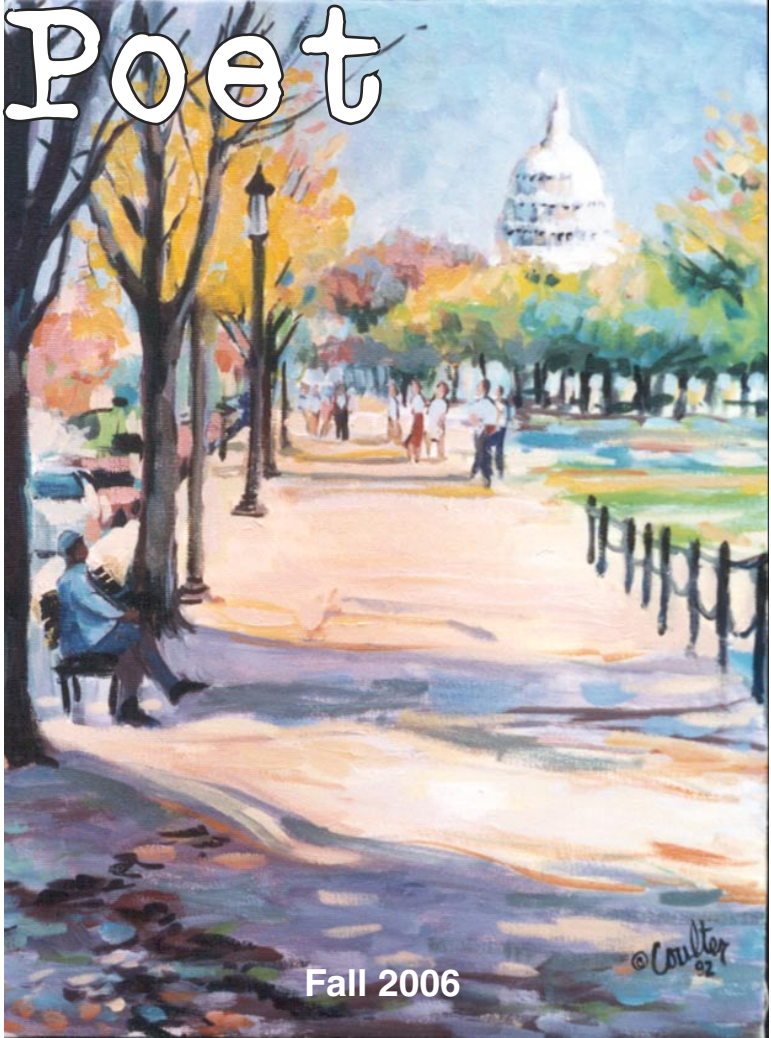


The Federal

Poet



Fall 2006

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THE FEDERAL POETS

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Introduction

THE FEDERAL POETS is the oldest continuously active poetry group in the Washington D.C. area. First convened in 1944, it is a nonprofit organization open to all poets without regard to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or political affiliation.

Members of **THE FEDERAL POETS** meet at the West End Public Library in Washington, DC, on the third Saturday of every month to read, analyze and discuss their poetry. Visitors are always welcome. Members and visitors who are planning to attend should bring 20 copies of a recently written poem for distribution to those present. The poem will then be discussed with a view to enhancing its chances for publication.

The chief aims of this organization are to improve the members' poems by the exchange of constructive criticism and to increase their exposure through publication and readings.

The Federal Poet, containing the best poems written by members, is published semiannually. Local and corresponding members receive it and may submit poems to the editor for consideration and publication.

THE FEDERAL POETS is a chapter of the **National Federation of State Poetry Societies** and the **Academy of American Poets** and is also affiliated with the **Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines**.

For membership information, write us or visit our website.

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Rainbow

i judge this book by the pages between its colors

Steve Russell

I died, and nothing

changed. The same
voices continued to
speak the same words,
but it had nothing
to do with me,
not even
the word "me".
Voices were vaguely
colored winds. Bodies
of friends moved, but
not in any time, not
distinguishable from
memories. There were
dreams, no end of dreams,
but no waking, perhaps
no dreamer, of if there
were, no dream recognized
its dreamer. And this
happened while yet
my body lived, but
it was death - there is
no other.

Dean Blehert

Cabeza

Are you going to the beheading?
I don't think so.
I find beheadings upsetting.
I won't be headed that way.

I dread that flicker of insight
when the head falls.
Sentences are only words,
but swords are words with a hiss.

*After the beheading I felt strangely detached.
I was at my enemies' feet.
Is this how soccer began, on a field of battle
with the victors shouting: "la cabeza, aquí"?*

*Did he not smile while wielding the sword?
And now, washing up, does he see
the smile of a skull beneath the stream,
or is it a reflection of himself?*

Lee Giesecke

Blue

Blue knows no bounds when you look
upward. It shadows you like a shepherd
until you notice it. Blue is the infinite
ceiling of earth, the blue door, the blue
corn tortilla. Blue sneaks out beyond
the white of clouds, looks at itself
in the mirror often, a teenage girl.
Blue can't cry for long, its cloud eyes
move to the next weather like the wind
around corners. We could all fall
from the blue sky, leaving behind
the blue of sad mouths,
the blue rose of mystery,
the blue of your voice,
the blue hand across the page,
the blueness of anger, tart and swift.

Mary L. Westcott

Things

There are so many lovely things to lose:
the sound of water lapping on the sand,
the red fox pausing at the edge of the woods
to listen.

Pam Blehert

Thinking About Leaves

How the wind forms
channels, each vortex
full of channels

the secret shape of
the tortoise shell cat
lost in their depths

do they know, do they
ask, which ones spin,
which plummet,

which float, drifting
as if they might fly forever

Ann Rayburn

Water Worship

I no longer listen for the silent swish
of ocean spray, the shush of falling
surf like a mother soothing her young.

I no longer hear the satisfying sprinkle
of stones and shells, or view the waves
encroach on sunbathers' space.

I no longer witness the white shells winking
at green flottage, watch the sand shift
crisp and salty, recede in gurgles.

I no longer marvel at the murmur of sea foam,
get tipsy from the swells of froth and spume,
mash mussel shells at surf's edge.

I no longer drift with tides like floating flotsam,
enveloped by gushes of green brine,
smashed on sea music.

I dive at last, fearless as a minnow,
to the land of damselfish and coral,
calm as a yellow light, soft as a turtle's womb.

Mary L. Westcott

Walking with William Blake Near Capitol Hill, D.C.

I wander through each guarded street
Near where the Elected ebb and flow,
And mark in each closed face I meet
Pride of power, price of woe.

Another Officer's beeping scan,
Another Alien's cough of fear;
In every check point, every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear.

How the collateral Mourner's cry
Every body count appalls;
And the hooded Prisoner's sigh
Runs in blood down whitewashed walls.

But most through midnight streets I hear
How the hapless Soldier's curse
Blasts the maiming of these years
And blights with tears the Victory hearse.

Judith McCombs

Dancing with the Snake

After Adam and Eve leave we put on our formal clothes.

Her, a silver tiara and a pink ball gown that clash

with her mottled, dry skin. Me, a tie made of thunder,
jacket puffed with clouds, and suit pants that tunnel

deep inside the world. I bow first on the green meadow,
watch her body slither out of the tree's branches.

She cries at the celestial music I pipe in from above,
while I try to recall steps we used to practice

before she left, and I created all things but people
in my holiest garden. Why did we ever stop? she asks,

and I whisper, Who said we did? After all, I can still touch
the indentations on her scales that used to sprout wings.

If I can remember how she flew above the parting waters,
tears melting into lakes, then I can call back everything.

Donald Illich

(This poem was originally published in the "Sierra Nevada College Review," Volume 17, Spring 2006.)

Parable of War

One night a troop of monkeys came to the edge
of their forest dominion and beheld
for the very first time a moonlit lake.
None of them had ever seen the moon;
in fact, they did not see it even then,
for trees blocked their full view of the sky.
But one monkey saw a smirking face
baring fangs within the moon's twin
reflected on the smooth waters below.
His whooping got the whole troop going strong,
declaiming war upon this new menace.
At last, launching their strike from a high limb,
the monkeys made a chain of arms and legs
and tails descending to the surface.
Meanwhile, light from the real lunar orb
caused their silhouettes against the heavens
to be so strong that in the lake's depths
a crocodile took notice and swam
so calmly and quietly to wait
under the column of approaching flesh.

H.H. Judd

(NOTE: loosely based upon a Buddhist fable.)

The Line of Thought Forsaken

“Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,”
the poet chooses one (it’s about choice,
the professors tell us), and “ages and
ages hence” will sigh that “that has made
all the difference.”

If there is choice, if we can decide,
if we are more than mechanism,
then how can one choice
preclude later choices?

Either I never chose “the one
less traveled by,” but was impelled
(as anyone yellow would be)
by my traveled-by phobia, resulting
from childhood trauma because
my mother...because HER father...
because... (because, because,
but never get to BE CAUSE),

or, truly, I chose—the wonder
of knowing I stand at a forking
of worlds and can create
the future; that instant when “sorry
I could not travel both and be
one traveler,” I become an infinitude
of travelers and comprehend possibility,
each path’s promise, as it curves or rises
or horizons out of sight, more real
than where now I stand;

and if I chose then,
why not again and again? Are there but
two worlds to create?

Even if, from ages of letting the world
choose for me, I have selected a tight corner,
there is always some minuscule choice left me,
which, if exercised, can extend the array of choices
inch by inch, like a tunnel dug with a spoon.

Ages and ages hence (if there is choice)
I'll say with a sigh, "As I chose then,
I choose now; stand back—I am about
to make all the difference."

Dean Blehert

A Late Casualty of WW II

*(or man dying in a box
in a stack of boxes)*

Beneath a wall my aunt had decorated
with antique maps
and lithographs of young officers
peacocking in their 17th, 18th, and 19th century
military regalia,
my uncle sat
belted in the plaid bathrobe
that hid his gray pajamas.

A tube taped to his nose
dangled down his chest
snaked along his thigh
ran down his calf
and along the floor to the bedroom closet
which hid the tanks
that contained his week's supply of oxygen.

Remembering from an earlier visit
the little GI tank
that trailed him from room to room
on a two-wheeled caisson
like some affectionate, mechanical pet,
it was a shock to open his closet door
and see his carefully-pressed dress uniforms
shoved aside to make way for the two huge,
battered-looking brutes
(on assignment from Walter Reed)
standing at attention,
waiting for their replacements.

Day after day
Charlie sat on his sofa
breathing with what remained of his lungs.

Childless,
he cradled a calendar
in his lap

with his medical appointment times
penciled in the dated squares
and gazed out a picture window
at a sky barren of interest
except for the occasional vapor-trails
of barely-visible planes.

Then he looked down again at his lap
and admired his wife's neat, secretarial script
that filled the calendar squares of his last months
with the increasingly futile consultations
with army doctors of the Fort Myer Command...
and soldiered on to the end
loyal to his unit
in a high-rise apartment block:

Dying at fifty-four
courtesy of cigarettes
packed in C-ration kits
by the female factory-hands
that did their patriotic bit
on the Home front.

Charles Gerald DuBose, Jr.

Cindy Cindy Cindy Lou

Cindy Cindy Cindy Lou
Love my poems more than you
You used to be my rhyming queen
Now I love my M-16

Cindy Cindy Cindy Lou
Tell me what you want to do

Hunter Alexander

Some Questions for Pablo

Are we the last, Pablo, who will ever watch
meteors streak the reflection of the Milky Way
mirrored in a high country lake?
Or walk from under the darkness of the Frasier Firs
onto a meadow so green and a sky so blue
that the sun was like a star in a sapphire over emeralds.
Remember those bees on every bloom on every stem?
The firs all since died*...

Are we the last, Pablo, who know
that the proper way to cook chicken
is to first wring its neck,
that barbeque on a Friday night
means jumping into the hog pen with a rifle
and shooting the first pig that attacks?
Are we last, Pablo, who will know these things
for the next thousand thousand years.

H.H. Judd

* This is true - all were killed off by a tiny invasive insect.

Reminiscence on Black Bear Resort

Oh, the crease of pain at your absence,
the night stark in its bleak futility,
our eyes closed against the music
of leaving, lips parted, skilletts
seared with new made butter,
flying place mats transported by fall winds,
yellow leaves on mountain oak, logs leaping
fire-red into the hush of country.
Against the darkened sky, the stars
disrobe at last, lustrous as a new lover.
The moon's silver curves, my arched
back leaning into the heat of you,
your sweat against my bones and softness.

Mary L. Westcott

Bed and Breakfast

for Stephen

A stolen weekend
consummating our one month meeting—
between mourning your once vibrant sister—
her picture appearing to me only as someone alive—
and our mooring safely together.

Before I met you, I was like Sisyphus,
perpetually heaving the rock uphill.

And to finally come to the top!
How easy to believe now.

Your sister, who didn't believe
in religion—exudes the beauty of the diseased—
eternally young at the age of forty eight.

Still it is time to celebrate—
if not this life
then all the lives that will follow,
and impress us with their confirmation.

by Marjorie Sadin

A Mother Waits

He always was a good boy: sensitive,
Stubborn perhaps, not diligent in class,
But with an artist's soul. What I would give
To see him aid the priest once more at Mass,

Swinging the censer with devotion. He
Was grave and handsome as he served the Host
And lit the altar tapers. Faithfully
He praised the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

He looked so thin and lonely on the train
To art school and—he hoped—to fame. But why
In failure did he choose to stay where rain
Fell on the city's poor as from God's eye?

When I grew ill, he came back to my side,
His tears cascading in the oil lamp's shine.
I begged him to be strong before I died,
And I caressed his face—a mirror of mine.

Gaunt, ragged, barefoot, the new ones come through
With numbers on their arms. From my cold place
I ask them of my son. Christian or Jew,
They stare in horror. Some spit in my face.

More years than I can count, I've had to wait.
Why do they treat me so? What have I done
That I should be regarded with such hate?
And why will no one tell me of my son?

Miles David Moore

Getting a New Muffler, Clarendon

A village, really—
delivery trucks with no tires
rust in the alley.

Early morning. I walk the neighborhood
as the job gets done. At the beauty parlor
a woman's hair gets piled ever higher.

A small town overtaken
by the city—with an empty ballroom whose sign
proclaims you must be 21 to enter,

a bridal shop whose mannequins
affect distant stares contemplating
the weekend's crop of brides.

Back at the muffler place
a TV screams Saturday morning cartoons
at me in the waiting room.

Glimpsing the big, crooked
chrome pipe, my muffler, hauled into the garage,
I crave the quiet it will bring.

Martin Dickinson

A Journal

Here's my not-so-subtle way
Of writing myself into your life,
This gift of a small, blank book.

Of course, I will want to look
Inside—or will that bring us strife?
I cannot see. I cannot say.

Mark Dawson

ISO HE

I want to share my life with someone.
I hope he didn't die in Al Qaeda's war.
Or he hasn't moved to California.

I want to share my life with someone.
I hope he didn't fail to see me on the subway.
Or overlook me in a French restaurant.

I want to share my life with someone.
I wonder what he's eating for dinner tonight.
Or what he wants to do tomorrow morning.

I want to share my life with someone.
I wonder if this is he seated next to me.
I wonder if he wonders if I am she.

Averille E. Jacobs

Poem-Tinis

Last night I packed a martini shaker with poems.
I shook the poems until they were sub-zero.

I drank them very dry, straight up.
I had them with lemon twists.

All night long I downed one after another.
Poem-tinis. I couldn't drink enough.

In no time I was slammed.
Soon I was slurring my verses. Curses!

Averille E. Jacobs

The Green Pea Soup Cat

Maybe
Chinook was looking
for color,
a new fashion design for his coat,
not yellow or red, nor purple or pink,
not orange nor blue—green maybe,
the color of the meadow nearby—

Grown in length
the young cat was agile and quick
and—they
were eating at the dining room table,
Chinook was totally forgotten!!!

“I am here as well,” he purred,
jumped up into the air—very close to their chairs,
stretched his length—reached over the table,
put his paw on the nearest plate:

“What’s this—something for me?”
and—he got it!
The soup plate tipped—all in it spilled
toward Chinook, the curious cat!

Well, he got his color—from head to toe,
running down his coat—changing
even the carpet to green
and Chinook
into
the Green Pea Soup Cat!

Ingeborg Carsten-Miller

Los Angeles

Walking your summer streets,
I wind up melting with laughter
like a punctured red balloon.
What would you say to me,
Los Angeles, if one day,
finding my god amid your palms and smog,
I were to disappear, leaving
only my smile hanging brightly in mid-air.

Would you lie like a large question mark,
punctuating the coast,
penetrating the sea?

Pam Blehert

High

High
is a consideration of position,
relative upness or downness.
I am an eagle falling into an abyss
over a relative distance.

Hearing the voice of a friend
from miles away,
I am high.

Pam Blehert

I Met a Man

As I was going to St. Ives
I met a man with flight-deck eyes,
And every eye spied satellite grids,
And every grid had weapons hid,
And every weapon, scorched-earth breath:
Breath and weapons, satellites, lives—

How many are going to St. Ives?

Judith McCombs

(Displayed in the Poetry Gallery, Executive Office Building,
101 Monroe St, Rockville MD, 16 October through December
2006, 7 am-6 pm M-F.)

Ceremony

I pull my clothes from the dryer.
Separate socks from shirts and slacks.
Then I carefully, slowly iron and fold each shirt.
Then I fold the slacks.
Then I grab each pair of socks and roll them into a
 little ball.

Colors, shape, texture.
Simplicity surrounds me.

I've accomplished something!
I'm an accomplished person.
I move
and marvel at the way space never seems too large for
 the smallest task.

The universe applauds!
I'd like to thank the universe for making this moment.

Steve Russell

Life in the Cube

Please keep noise levels down so as to
not disturb others in their cubicles.

Do they hear
the velcro screech as I tear open
my wrist guards and slide in my wrists?
the tapping of the keys as I work and eat?
the nasal drip that makes me clear my throat
or the cough I try to suffocate
with a single kleenex?
the protest of the plastic lunch container top
as I pull it open?
the snap of the newspaper as I slap it out with my hand
and try to glimpse the news?

Do they hear me
shine up the knife I brought from home?
see the reflection of my face, grow narrow, distorted
in the stainless steel,
as I contemplate my next move?

Do they hear me
cut the peach into so many pieces
it oozes all over my hands?
Do they hear me lick them clean?

Do they hear me
pick the knife up by its blade
and wrap it tightly in a napkin
except for the point exposed
so I cut my finger just enough
for a little blood glistening
to seep on my keyboard?
Do they hear me?

Nancy Allinson

I Left my Heart in Melbourne

I left my heart in Melbourne
A rift in time and space
Before becoming airborne
To go back to my place

I left my heart in Melbourne
In blueness of her eyes
In every club and tavern
In which we spent our times,

In parks, in zoos, in forests
In places where we roamed,
But more important further
I left it in her home:

I left my heart in Melbourne
Inside her warm embrace
As though inside a cabin
Containing all of space

Where sweetness flowed like river
And gentleness like snow
Fell on us, and we shivered,
As her gifts Life bestowed:

I left my heart in Melbourne
And I returned, half-me
And half-impassioned maven
Of the Eternity:

Which we had found together
And by it were transformed—
Two spirits, of one feather,
In sunshine and in storm

Desiring to make heaven
And in its light to burn:
I left my heart in Melbourne;
To Melbourne I'll return.

Ilya Shambat

Presence

for Nancy

The little girl is afraid of the dark:

*is it as light as a duck?
does a feather feel sad to you?*

Her father reads to her,
it's a story about her mother, and the life the three of
them shared:

*how old is your anger?
does the rain cast a shadow?
where does it live?*

What about *his* story?
That unwritten chapter
without an author, Fatherhood:

Which hour wears a promise?
What month sounds like a vow and doesn't break?

The girl listens to her father:

*how deep is the weather?
does your mother still play with you?
must snow melt so soon?
where does it hide?*

The little girl hears her mother who isn't there:

*do dreams float?
is my voice a feather?
does the moon change colors while she's sleeping?
what's taller than a wish?*

Which angel holds in her hand
your first and last names, and all of their secrets?

Steve Russell

Brown Suede Shoes

My dad, the bargain hunter,
Brought home a big cardboard
Box brimming with new shoes—
No idea where he got them.

He dumped them in the middle
Of the floor and eight
Small hands frantically dug
Through them for a choice
Twosome.

I spied a luxurious pair
Of brown suede shoes
And quickly snatched them!

Ouch—they were so tight!
But I limped about
For months pretending
They didn't hurt.
Oh, vanity, thy name is . . .

Norrene Vogt