

# The Federal Poet

Fall 2008



# The Federal Poet

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**In this issue, we include an  
"in memoriam" section  
dedicated to the poems of  
Averille E. Jacobs  
who departed this life  
October 20, 2008**

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THE FEDERAL POETS  
9039 Sligo Creek Parkway #1409, Silver Spring MD 20901  
<http://www.blehert.com/TheFederalPoets>

## 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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### Three Hawks Perceived

The first one false, a winter shape  
upright in the poplar's leaning claws:  
in dawn's first gusts I saw it sway,  
its stub-head bent, surveying all  
the night-held openings for prey.  
Then—did it turn, or preen?—I saw  
the glints of new ascending light  
gleam from a belly-breast and eye.

The next was true, a gliding shape  
almost too swift to apprehend;  
broad wings outspread, flight feathers splayed,  
it streaked the field to a lower stand  
in the swaying tree. Then a third—its mate?—  
stooped to our downhill oak, intent—  
but no life stirred. When the last took wing,  
the second followed, clamoring.

I watched there while the deepening light  
played with that gestalted shape--  
that loop of wood, backlit, upright,  
seemed still to send its totem gaze  
past transient hawks and prey alike.  
Dawn slowly blurred. Dark tree-lines changed.  
I strained to see, in the poplar's heights,  
that hooded kindling come to life.

*Judith McCombs*

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"Three Hawks Perceived" was first published in: *Measure: A Review of Formal Poetry* 3:1 (2008): 106.

### Leaf As Not

Winter trees simplify the wind.  
Then no wind, air crystalized  
around my frozen pause,  
and my ears fill with blood flutter,  
sough and whine, in me  
the absent wind, the leaves  
of absence.

*Dean Bleher*

### Sunset: Winter Solstice

Who combed the angel-haired clouds  
and brushed them with light?

And let the sun down red  
and gray and bosky?

Old woman of the world,  
let down your hair,

Weave the frozen world's end,  
the green world's stirring!

*Judy Neri*

---

"Sunset: Winter Solstice," was printed in *The Country and Abroad*, a New York State arts paper, in December 1997.

A Former Elementary School Teacher, Aged 78

She puts on one dress  
and over that, another  
and around her waist  
ties a belt  
with a dangling buckle

and then sits, waiting  
with her purse  
cradled in her lap  
for the neighbor's boy  
who, ringing the bell of his bicycle  
and rustling the unraked leaves,  
rides through her yard  
and carelessly tosses a newspaper  
towards her house

when she stumbles onto her porch  
(fumbling for something to give —  
some change, or some chocolate)  
there is no one there  
and bewildered, she closes the door  
upon another non-event  
in the endless days of her retirement

\*\*\*\*\*

and frequently, at night  
she awakens to tinkling dog-tags  
passing beneath her bedroom window  
and to the transit  
of the other domestic product  
(of an indifferent neighborhood)  
that rustles the autumn leaves  
of her neglected yard

*Charles Dubose*

## Vested Interest

The falling feather's spiraling, drifting freedom  
is mortgaged to wind. Wind's raging freedom (highly  
leveraged) is secured by variable air pressures  
dependent on fiat issues, currents  
of warmth and light, derivatives

from a sun whose seemingly random plasmic  
convulsions we trust because they are distant,  
roughly circular and golden or, if one stares too long,  
platinum. Besides in our temperate zones,  
the sun-spew of ion storms reaches us through  
microscopically intricate hidden networks --  
veins of leaves, dew twinkle, burst  
of an orange's tiny juice sac  
on the budded tongue.

The credit of an all-pervasive, invisible God,  
moving all, has collapsed, our system of bonds  
and freedoms sustained by sheer momentum.

A feather spins past my face.  
I puff at it, beginning to suspect that the universe  
is owed to me,  
but I shall not foreclose.

In fact, I forgive all debts.  
The universe is a free market,  
without attachments.

(But, Oh, my ageing body, my wife, my friends –  
I am hedging!)

*Dean Blehert*

## October Crisis

Copenhagen, last night of October, '62.  
Halloween, day I was born  
twenty-nine years earlier. Four days  
before, Dave and I had gone to  
*Østerbrogade* to watch the Danes stone  
our embassy. Kept a low profile.  
Maybe they'd want to stone us too.  
*Yankee Go Home! We Don't Want  
Your Nuclear War!* Now all is quiet  
again. Khrushchev blinked and pulled  
his missiles out of Cuba. No longer on  
the brink of war—threat over for a while.

Dave flew out this afternoon.  
Now it's the evening and I'm all alone,  
down and dejected, just drifting into  
November. I'm sorry for myself.  
I'm pissed at Dave. He could have  
stayed over. It's my birthday, and nobody  
in Copenhagen knows it but me.  
The last sun of the month goes down.  
The cold black sky is coming at me.  
I call Auntie Louie in Perth, she doesn't  
pick up. Last letter, she called me,  
*lonely boy*. Not much family left.

Go to *Tivoli Gardens*, find myself  
a girl to help me celebrate—at least,  
there's always that in Copenhagen,  
city of gorgeous, available, unhappy girls,  
confused by all their freedom—*just  
another name for nothing left to lose*.  
Her name is Birgid. Sweet and pretty  
and sad. On the rebound, maybe.  
I strive to charm, but I know I'm  
using her. I guess she's using me too.  
We both have our fantasies. Tonight,

mine is a *happy birthday* party. What  
are hers--a man she can trust?--a rosy  
domestic future?--a wild Halloween orgy?

Fantasies intersect sometimes, *not*  
*this time*, I think. Just want this day  
to be over. I take Birgid home, kiss her  
very gently. She's puzzled, but still sweet,  
keeps her cool---I say goodbye. Tomorrow,  
I'll leave Copenhagen. Make a new start.

*Alec McRae*

### **Roadkill**

I imagine God  
is a crow  
pecking away at my fears.  
God consumes and consumes.  
I grow thinner and thinner.  
A ghost appears  
on the side of the road.  
Courage.

*Nancy Allinson*

## Broken

Why isn't "Death"  
a swear word?  
"Bloody" is,  
and "God," and "Damn,"  
even "Stupid."

When my son was little,  
"Broken" was for him.  
What could be worse  
than to be "broken"—  
a broken toy,  
or, in injury, a broken you?

You can be broken so badly  
you cannot fixed,  
or even so badly  
you no longer exist.  
That's death, of course.  
It's so obscene  
no one swears by it.

*Lee Giesecke*

## **Averille**

I sat next to this beautiful woman  
on and off for the past two years,  
her words brushed my skin softly  
as we read our poetry together.  
I always wondered why she was so quiet,  
not offering much feedback to the group.  
I always had a loud comment.  
She reminded me of a delicate swan;  
sitting very erect with focused eyes and ears.  
I don't sit next to her anymore,  
I didn't know she had cancer and died.  
Maybe I can be a swan too...

*Pamela Passaretta*

## **Unwinding**

Stillness. The wind has died.  
We are dis-gusted. Then,  
in a rush of tattered leaves –  
we are re-galed.

*Dean Blehert*

## Averille Jacobs In Memoriam

Averille was a member of the Federal Poets who also participated in open readings at the Kensington Book Shop in Kensington, Maryland and read at Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., Flashpoint Gallery, and The Creative House of Writing in Washington, DC. She appeared on WOL's talk radio *The Mo Better Man Show*. Her poems appeared in *Divided City* and the Federal Poets bi-annual Journals. Her poem "Mr. Jenkins' Last Martini" was selected for Jeffrey Zeldman's Internet haiku contest. Her "I, Aries" poem appears on Madam Lichtenstein's Starry Eye Internet website. She wrote poetry from her junior high school days until her death.

After fighting cancer for about a year, Averille Jacobs, member of The Federal Poets and a good friend, passed away Monday, October 20, 2008. We will miss her.

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To select the following poems, we reviewed over one hundred pages of poetry. It is evident that Averille loved to write poetry and we hope, in the poems we've selected here, that we've adequately represented the breadth and depth of her emotion, love of the world, and sense of humor.

**God, You Around?**

Oh God,  
Someone?  
God?  
You here?

If not;  
where the terrorists attack?  
God,  
you not here?  
Then where?

Dear God,  
one of your children has jumped.  
His white shirt billows as a shoe flies off.  
Catch him; he looks confused.

Pray.  
Must I?  
Let me pray.

God are you listening?  
You hear me?  
Oh God.  
You here?  
Someone?

God, you around?

*Averille E. Jacobs*

### Gift Boxes

You are a constant opening of gift boxes,  
with no idea of what is inside.

The charm lies precisely in the fact that I don't  
know what I'll find.

The true joy comes in not knowing what I'll discover.  
This makes you unique.

Upon opening these boxes your essence,  
like a thousand white doves, is released.

You are a constant opening of gift boxes.  
You are a gift box I give myself.

*Averille E. Jacobs*

### What Shall I Tell My Heart?

Now that you are gone;

what will I convey to my skin? You won't be there to stroke it.

what shall I say to my hair? You won't be there to brush it.

what shall I utter to my fingers? You'll no longer suck them.

what will I whisper to my lips? You'll no longer kiss them.

what shall I tell my heart when it asks why?

*Averille E. Jacobs*

### **My Daughter's Mirrors**

I detest my life.  
*Stop standing before that hate mirror.*

I dislike my body.  
*Are you looking in that fat mirror, again?*

I love my mom.  
*Stay in front of that mirror.*

*Averille E. Jacobs*

### **Heart Songs**

You hear the songs in my heart  
and sing them back to me.  
What I feel in my soul you sing beautifully.

Your songs will sing to me  
for as long as you hear the songs  
of our friendship in my heart where love belongs.

*Averille E. Jacobs*

### **Last Night**

Last night I dreamed weatherman Al Roker and I went  
out to eat.  
Magically, he inhaled 12 donuts.  
Without magic, I downed 8 cheeseburgers.  
We ate, and ate, and ate throughout the dream.

Guess what?  
When it ended,  
I awoke fat again.  
What a night.

*Averille E. Jacobs*

---

Note: Al Roker is an American television broadcaster, best known as the weather anchor for NBC's Today Show. He has struggled with excessive weight.

### Come Dance With Me

I am music.  
Let me soothe your boredom.  
Put on your boogie shoes.  
Kick your feet high,  
strut your best steps.

I am music.  
Let me banish your worries.  
Snap your fingers,  
clap your hands,  
glide across the floor.

I am music.  
Let me help your sadness fly away.  
I am jazz, salsa, disco, or ballroom.  
Whatever your flavor,  
feel me in your soul.

I am music.  
Feel my rhythm.  
I am music.  
Dance.

*Averille E. Jacobs*

## Mathematics Never Liked Me

Mathematics never liked me.  
Algebraic expressions expressed  
nothing but distress.

Geometrical figures gagged me  
with pollutions instead of solutions.  
The Exponents' Laws found my flaws,  
turning my No. 2 pencils to dust  
and my mind to disgust.

Trigonometry tricked poor,  
unmathematical me by locking  
away its functions and  
throwing away the key.

Addition addled me;  
Multiplication mutilated me and saddled me  
with principles and rules more complex  
than the other principals—those fools that rule the schools.  
The Order of Operations was so out of order,  
I felt like running for the border.

I was angered by Angles, tangled in Triangles,  
and rattled by Ratios as they danced "The Cool Jerk,"  
forcing me into moves that wouldn't work.

Naughty Negative Numbers purposely traded their powers  
with their repulsive Positive cousins by the dozens  
for hours and hours and hours and hours.

Polynomials pulverized me, Trinomials terrorized me,  
and Fractions fractured me mercilessly,  
making me weak, making me squeak like the chalk  
when I performed at the board while my classmates roared.

Though I tried evasions,  
Second Degree Equations  
gave me third-degree palpitations.

I think it's clear that Mathematics disliked intensely me.

*Averille E. Jacobs*

### Osama?

I went on line to find a date  
I entered "in a radius of 20 miles".  
Within an hour or less, an answer came back.  
"We have no match for you".

Not to be deterred.  
I entered "300 miles".  
Again, "no match for you" appeared.  
Feeling dejected, I entered: "within in the USA".  
Later that day came the same response.  
"No match for you".

Deeply dismayed, I logged off for the day.  
The next day still feeling wounded  
I entered: "within the world".  
Two days later,  
"We have a match" greeted me.  
"One match in Afghanistan".  
What's a girl to do?

*Averille E. Jacobs*

## Ode To Michelangelo's David

David, I stand before you in awe wondering,  
*"Do you have a distant cousin?"*

*Averille E. Jacobs*

## Don't Judge

Bag ladies are not faceless,  
only homeless.

Street people are not scum,  
because they drink rum.

Don't abhor them.  
You might become them.

*Averille E. Jacobs*

## Selkie

If you mosey down the coast by boat,  
you may become shoaled,  
lightly rocking, going nowhere,  
tangled on a spur of coral,  
flattened on some sandbar  
or impaled, sunk, your boat become driftwood.

Instead, take to the ocean,  
waddle into the waves,  
get below the surface of things, into  
the green glow, tangle wood of kelp and seaweed.  
Discover your gills. Let them open.  
As you move, grow crowds  
of clanking barnacles,  
shimmering wakes of seaweed.  
You move silently through  
ocean landscapes, greeting  
schools of fish, sharks, sounding whales,  
porpoises about their proper business.  
Go climbing the mountains that go down  
down into the dark lands, swim  
the silver path of the moon.

Later, reaching a likely coast,  
emerge from your watery land,  
bit by bit, only down to your eyes.  
Peek at them, the surface dwellers.  
Have they had time to survive?  
Perhaps, you shall have them back  
when the ozone hole grows  
and heat melts the icecap.  
Then, you may take these  
finless creatures  
for long walks  
in a forgotten paradise.  
Till then, sing softly,  
Selkie.

*Pam Blehert*

---

Note: a Selkie (or Silkie) is a mythological creature sometimes thought to be a mermaid or merman or seal.

**Time**

In 23 years  
So many things have died  
At least they say.

Yet, before me?  
How many beautiful languages  
Were learned, spoken  
Then never heard again?  
How many declarations floated word by word,  
Developed, tuned, then lost?

After people existed  
They went where —  
To God?

It seems the world  
Is growing and shrinking  
At the same time

New thoughts come to me  
Something changes every day  
While I sense what is dying.

Should I grow like time before  
Or study and mourn what has died?

*Julie Kritzer*

## Pines

*Do you remember that pine, the one that stood firm on the bank of the Arc, bending its spreading boughs over the river at its feet? ...letter from Cezanne to Zola, 1858*

Cezanne befriended pine trees from his childhood in Provence, painting their towering crowns of needles, their swaying boughs, in a harmony of blues and greens, while other strokes caught their strained and twisted trunks: immense cadavers, he called them, bent by *mistral* winds. Like the boys who threw rotten cabbage stalks at Van Gogh, village boys pelted Cezanne with stones as he, clad in a black wool coat after morning mass, trudged up the rocky path to a sandstone ridge above the sea, palette and easel in hand, past wild rosemary and thyme to an ancient quarry rising against the high Mediterranean sun. "He spends entire days on mountain tops reading Virgil and looking at the sky," wrote Gauguin. Overlooking geometric shapes of towns, Cezanne communed on canvas with his only friends, the pines.

*Bonnie Naradzay*

## Fall Kill

Leap! Slash! The cat has caught 'em –  
Two jeweled leaves of autumn.  
I stroke her – "There! You've got 'em!"  
She elevates her bottom.

*Dean Blehert*

## **The Ballad of the Biting Bugs**

A mighty gathering of bugs,  
the insect hoodlums, rascals and thugs,  
assemble each day in a secret place  
to plot against the human race.

A tick and a chigger get into a fight  
over which eats the most in just one night.  
A no-see-um cries "I may be small,  
but ounce for ounce I can beat you all!"

The horse flies brag and strut about;  
their bites are biggest, they have no doubt.  
The wasps and the bees wave their stingers around  
threatening to zap any flesh they've found.

The mosquitoes step to the blood-lust dance  
and practice on their sucking stance.  
The Tormentor assigns his squadrons their jobs,  
as the fire-ants set out in a frenzied mob.

The victims attack with traps and spray,  
but soon retreat in sad disarray.  
The bugs return, their banners unfurled,  
proclaiming to all "We Rule the World".

*Ron Vardiman*

### **The Coat That Walked Away**

My coat vanished on a cold January night,  
Taken from a bookstore  
During a reading sponsored  
By the Federal Poets.  
On blustery days, I keep eyeing people  
Wearing similar coats.  
If I spot my coat being worn by someone,  
What will I say?  
Pardon me, sir,  
I might say,  
Do you know that you're wearing my coat?  
Would I say that?  
Or  
Pardon me, sir,  
I'm making a citizen's arrest.  
My lawyer and I  
And those two big guys standing behind you  
With papers in their hands  
Would like you to come with us to the police station.  
I keep wondering  
If my coat  
Has found a good back.  
I hope that it is well cared for  
And has a good head over its collar.

*Hunter Alexander*

## FISHING BY THE RIVER MEKONG

Sitting under the bright sun  
and the canopy of trees,  
with the soft and kind breeze  
his fishing rod was moving lazily,  
as if reluctant to catch fish  
for its master.

From a distance, a melodious tune  
waving through the wind,  
hypnotizing the poor fisherman.  
Was it a song about a girl longing for her suitor?  
Or a boy lamenting the classes that separate them?

The fisherman was half asleep,  
when suddenly his rod was jerked from his hand,  
and pulled to the river;  
then out popped a green dragon opening its mouth  
so large that its sparkling teeth and red tongue  
was ever ready to swallow its prey.

What a twist of fate!

*Ninie G. Syarikin*

### 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*

---

"A Mother Waits" appeared originally in *WordWrights*

## Housecleaning

From last year's birdhouse,  
the song sparrow gathers old twigs  
and fluff. She sits on the fence,  
spits them to the ground,  
as if with a small curse.  
One white feather she saves,  
a talisman, carries it to a bush  
next door, ready to weave again.

For my part, I have discarded  
your last flannel shirt, straightened  
the dog ears you left on the pages  
of my books. Imagining your aftershave,  
I fling open windows, light incense  
while I scrub the floor. My heart cracks  
like a windfall limb. I do everything  
but spit on the ground.

*Ann Rayburn*

## Sundays

Sundays we eat  
potato fritters at  
the Golden Nugget,  
blueberry flapjacks  
from old diners,  
homemade banana  
pancakes on sofas,  
watching videotaped  
*Saturday Night Live*  
while rubbing boogers  
out of our eyes.

Sundays we pour  
syrup on the morning,  
chew up chores,  
spit towels in  
the washer, lick  
gooey floors with  
mops, flow around  
the house till we  
collapse, read sci-fi  
books, take naps.

Sundays we split  
the newspaper into  
sections: comics  
for the youngest  
brothers; sports  
page for the oldest,  
left by the toilet;  
editorials for dad  
crumpled next to  
the La-Z-Boy.

Sundays we try  
to stay in bed,  
snug in Star Wars  
covers, rooms closed.  
Kitchen pots clang.  
Bacon and egg smells  
assault our noses.  
Dad yanks open doors,  
yells, *Shit, shower,  
and shave, gentlemen.*  
*We have work to do.*

*Donald Illich*

---

"Sundays" appeared in a 2008 issue of *The Distillery*.

**Award Winner**

The story  
that wins  
the award  
grips –  
throws  
a rope  
around  
your neck –  
lets  
nausea  
run you  
to the next  
restroom -  
activates  
your sinuses –  
lets  
your nose  
demand  
tissues galore –  
blinds  
your eyes –  
brings  
thunder  
and  
lightening  
to  
your ears –  
plays havoc  
with  
your mind –  
might  
even  
involve  
your heart!

*Ingeborg Carsten-Miller*

## Palette

She has taken over the picture  
with a toddler's thick black lines,  
striking through my plotted leaves –

*this is what matters* – dissecting  
the pointillist penciling  
best viewed from a distance.

The strike-through precision  
of her crayon almost Modernist,  
as Picasso would secure a frame

for each primary color, a roping-off  
from what surrounds it.  
Spelling it out: *This will help you,*

*with your aging eyes* - too old  
to have a daughter this young,  
too hesitant to finish this tree

on paper: have I started in the right  
place, how deep have these roots  
grown and do I keep them

invisible as an iceberg's core,  
the ballast that battens down  
the shine? The trick is

to sketch the borders  
before it moves, because it will.  
Now I can see the branches

loaded like springs;  
I can see time unwinding  
my steady hand.

*Donna D. Cowan*

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