

Sol Magazine

Spring 2008



Featured Poets

Dede Fox
Erica Lehrer
Richard Mullen
Amy Nawrocki

John Rice
Andrea Tantillo
Gita Tewari
Barbara Wade

Clover Park

Boys climb playground equipment,
hide behind trees, under picnic tables,
shoot stinging pellets from air rifles,
argue about who's out, who's dead.
Shouts punctuate actions,
their voices set the rhythm
for adults walking through the woods.

In June a crowd gathered,
memorialized a soldier,
celebrated his twentieth birthday,
talked about a boy who played war here.

Neighbors listened as humble
ministers, proud politicians,
stood on gazebo steps,
protected from the sun
and other hazards,
spoke of young men who love God,
shoot guns on command.
Boy Scouts raised slack flags.

Now his mother lies on dedicated
benches under night's camouflage,
seeks comfort from stars,
asks why *her* son.

Fourth of July in Clover Park:
Boys shoot firecrackers--
whistles, bangs,
smoky detonations
behind her house.
Stop!
Not here.
Not now.

Fence posts, like six-foot guards,
Stand at attention around three sides
Of their yard, not even a single knothole
Hints at what lies beyond.

On the trail, I creep past their backyard
In winter when fence boards contract
Leaving small gaps, an invitation
To peek as I walk.

Like the biting wind, disbelief

Dede Fox

Reading the Shelves

Librarians read shelves by placing books in order,
Alphabetically and numerically:
NIE for Nietzsche follows NAD for Nader
As surely as 032 *Guinness Book of World Records*
Precedes 292 *Greek Myths*.
796.7 *Monster Trucks* roar past 629.8 *Robots*
And 796.334 *Soccer scores*
Against the 796.323 *Chicago Bulls*.

Librarians pull books forward on the shelves,
Volumes shoved roughly against inflexible shelving,
Release pressure from delicate spines,
Coax book supports into place,
Shelf by shelf, row by row, day after day,
Bring order to chaos
And enlightenment to the masses.

At home books stack up or slip away.
Tattered self-help books spill over into open places
Where Virginia Woolf once lived in perfect harmony
With Heinlein, Dave Barry,
And the *Reader's Digest Home Repair Book*.
Dust bunnies hide behind *Goodnight Moon*,
And Shel Silverstein searches for *The Missing Piece*.

Once a year librarians snake
Around public libraries in Conga lines
While book companies feed them chocolates.
No wonder bartenders count out cases
And pat their pockets
When the library convention comes to town.

Barricades

Nips at me as I see
On their patio they have set a screen,
Perhaps a massive bed sheet pulled
Tight over PVC piping, to block all view.

What fears, taut as that bed sheet
Must haunt those uneasy neighbors
Who prefer viewing a blank screen
When on the other side
Through a winter wood
Cardinals fly.

Erica Lehrer

Moonrise: Katahdin

I sleep on the ground, body supine, on a mattress of fallen pine needles overlain with crumpled flannel shirts. Gazing up through spruce boughs and spider silk, I lament all my life lacks, all that I seek, as *Abenaki* spirits whisper words new to my ears.

Listen:

Tonight the stars play a symphony so lyrical, so tender, its rhythms seep into my being. My heart will never be the same. Moonlight shimmers and flickers, teasing me with its silvery light, calling *Omki!* Wake up! and *Wajemi!* Kiss me!

All I want is to be held in a lunar embrace – right here, right now – under a sky of limitless possibilities.

As They Were

The children are gone now. So, too, their childish voices – the boy's dropping to a deep baritone, the girl's acquiring a no-nonsense timbre.

Some days the sound of children's cries is enough to make me spin around as Memory's sticky fingers tug at my skirt, flinging arms around my neck, zooming in for a close-up, eyes drooping heavy with sleep – as they were, as they were.

Unforgivable

You disappointed me at every turn, yet still I believed in your beauty, your style, the captivating *je ne sais quoi* of you, choosing you over all others.

This time, you danced into the realm of unforgivable.

So I unbuckle the straps that bind me to you one last time, bandage my blisters and bruises, and throw you to the back of the closet, where too-pointy stilettos and shabby sling-backs gather dust – slamming the door.

Mothers in the Park

None of us could take our eyes off her: the radiant little girl with captivating dimples, sea-green eyes, the wavy blonde hair of a Botticelli angel cascading down her back.

Her laugh made *us* laugh, and we were overtaken by a giddy optimism that life held untold delights.

The fairy godmothers certainly gave her all the gifts – beauty, charm, a sunny disposition...I hope mine is like that, said Lucy, shifting her pregnant belly while her son played at her feet.

Just wait, we overheard a woman on a nearby bench tell her companion. *That little girl may be all dimples and curls right now, but she's going to grow up to be a very homely woman....*

At that moment, we understood how it must have been the morning of Sleeping Beauty's christening – after all the joyous blessings, a jealous curse.

Struck By Lightning

Like the autopsy report, her diagnosis failed to include a few assorted facts. Example one: how could I have known she'd wear a bulletproof vest to the dance? A stranger question floated off into the copper sky while a storm approached, and perhaps I didn't see a gun flash beneath the dark thunder and splattering drops. Yet for a long moment, on that polka-dot patio, before the rain forced both of us inside, before the music ended, I saw the red summer sun glinting on the glass until the curtains blushed softly, and fell.

Dusk

erode the stone cavern echoes	silently swallows stream and dart
a pool of black water	the rough stroke of wings

Richard Mullen

Hear Tell Of....

You look like you fell out of the house
Every bathroom at our hotel has a telephone
Orville entered the revolving door.....
O nothing, just words
Your connection is being terminated
Why do you insist on being called
by your name
I don't know how. His head suddenly
fell forward into a plate of linguini
The day before the Cubs clinched the pennant
He wins a lot of bets with that trick,
and he knows how to dress too
She landed on her head, and there was
an odd popping sound
like a light bulb exploding
You have been found innocent and guilty
Life imitates

Aspiration

As the flu, I travel a lot.
As a candidate for the Board of Directors, he crushes grapes with his bare hands.
As the video cameras looking down on Big Lots, they bristle with consternation.
As a thought, I scatter freshly cut grass.
As a third baseman, he stretches back over a hundred years as one of a numbered retinue.
As pebbles silent on the streambed, they are smoothly shaven.
As the publishers of coffee-table tomes, we keep a journal.
As the hero of a film of my own life, I turn out to be.
As errata, she disappears without complaint.
As the drumbeat of encroaching death becomes ever louder, I fear the forest at twilight.
As Bluto, he perspires without much success.
As a lottery, you offer affordable arithmetic lessons.
As a foreign investor, he places anonymous bids by telephone.
As brackish backwater, it wishes you luck.
As a useful bit of information, you answer the phone when it rings.
As a grain of sand, she sometimes thinks of herself.
As a bare light bulb in the attic, it gathers dust.
As a marble fountain in center city, she is the whoosh and swirl behind the whoosh.

Café Guerbois, Paris, 1862

The way the painting goes,
after posing for the last time
her ginger hair fell freshly out
of a wrapped knot, the charcoal barrette
that held it clicking on the ground.
She stood before him, his rival's wife,
naked under lucent pinks and blues,
the image of her body rumored
into form, scratched there like a hologram.

In the sticky loft where she had posed
for him, he wore a three-piece suit,
his full beard rounding out
the slack of his face. Drifting away
from the chatter of his fellow artists
he broke free from monotonous card games,
still accustomed to drinking Turkish coffee
and making do with walnuts in the candy dish.

He finalized each pearl of white paint,
each lapis stroke of midnight,
each mixture of brown on the palate,
in the shining light of the studio. If art
could survive mockery, it would plunge
through the thickness of vanity and the depth
of jealousy. He would never invite her
back. If ever friendship were sacrificed
for love, the *Salon* would dry up
like spilled burgundy on the table.

From the Red Side of the Brain

I dream of raspberry mornings—
pinwheels and puzzles stream
in the magenta dawn of my mind.

Where do the berries go
after the harvest? Once the birds
bring their shadows around, how
many plump sugar pills
find passage to my mouth?

Slow time braids the sun
with green leaves and the soon red
of puckered lips, full wits.

Amy Nawrocki

Not Quite Silence

At the new Globe Theatre in London,
two actors perform the balcony scene
from *Romeo and Juliet* in sign language.
The slap of hands, like soft petals,
susurrant in a small room, falls
pianissimo to my ears. At this place,
you feel vowels spring into the atmosphere,
ample and enduring—a harvest of sorts—
as when fruit is taken from a tree
or bush and prepared for wine.

At four a.m. this morning,
your tongue nuzzled against my neck,
and the ensuing susurrations,
cool and invisible whispers,
so sweet their beauty could only be
like a thousand sad petals falling
onto a garden's floor, said to me, "hush,
love, winter's nearly over." It seems
the only thing we have left to do
is squash grapes with our feet.

Prototype

Bless the first day of class
in its confined clutter. Notebooks
stacked and piled like sculptures that
say to the first lesson, I am ready
for you to feed me. Catapult us
into the realms of academia.
I picture chimpanzees swallowing
pineapple white sheets in open cages.

Get your hands dirty, I tell them,
love the pages, the print, smell it
and remember papyrus. Break
the spine, hold it up to the light,
tell me who you are, author, tell
me your secrets, help me make sense
of your world. Transmogrify.
Cave dwellers, hierophants—make friends
with the exclamation point, bond
with the asterisk. Play with dirt.
Play with dirty words.

They quit towing icebergs into the Gulf years ago, the glaciers stopped calving even before that – the few that are left have retreated to high mountain valleys. Today it's all distillation by evaporation – the oceans could never go dry, right? I thought again of the Emerald City in that flickery old celluloid as I looked at the towers and turrets gleaming on the distant desert floor, the silver pipelines snaking past this mesa across sand and scree to suck up the sea days away. The mounds of salt have grown into sparkling hills over the past twenty years. Wind turbines' perpendicular pylons ring the plant's perimeter, as surreal as a troupe of giant Manx acrobats, the three great blades of each slowly whop-whop-whopping in a carefully choreographed stationary dance of power production. I wait for the call to tell me the Water Boys have blown another pumping station and try to remember when "hydro-terror" entered our vocabulary.

Remains

Now there is only this old book embossed with his name. Faded ink, lined pages mossed over with brown foxing, precise calculations, linear projections establishing clear relations between those several substances no one thought to try. The rats didn't die, even thrived. He was caught up in his research, paid no attention to Brownshirt fools - his tiny lab, his magnificent mind, his only tools. They took him on a clear day sparkling with fresh frost, with all the others. You dare ask what we have lost?

Equinoctial Anthem

As the Earth oscillates, adjusting its axis equinox to equinox, the sash of sunlight crossing the tall bookcase alters its angle in compliance, still spilling into a pool of light on the floor no matter the season.

Ma's cello, Holliger's oboe, Rampal's flute, Segovia's guitar - any or all - spill into the pool creating a peaceful blend of alternate waves. There is nothing else by which to gauge the day except the sound of my pen filling an empty page.

Pedirub

I never really felt compelled to bring you paper hearts or cherry tarts as tokens of my love – the hand lies safely in the glove after all these years, yet discovery is still a romantic pastime.

A special day I don't need to remind me of the Lover's Creed and fragrant flowers I should buy – the ones that surely die in a day or two while chewy chocolate towers melt into Daliesque boxes. Come on, take off your soxes – I know a thing or two about well rubbed feet and how they help your heart beat.

Elegy

After the fire, when the wind had finally lost its desire, the hill was as still and quiet as unmined seams of coal far below. He walked up the dark gash where the wood had stood green for a hundred years.

Disoriented, bereft of landmarks, he was rendered footless by the ankle-high cloud of ash which settled behind him obscuring his footprints. He turned. Had he come this way, or that? He'd never know or even care now that nature's indifference hit home in all its hopeless irony.

He stood before the charred chimney which pointed knowingly and mocked him with silent laughter from its gaping, toothless maw.

Travels

Racing toward eternal ends
Uncovering wistful dreams
Succeeding making no amends
Severing hardships at the seams
Electric currents drive the night
Lighting each infernal light
Lucid dreaming is the goal
Montage collections of the soul
Open minded
Rarely blinded
Roving un-reminded
Instant knowledge of all
Safely behind the firewall

The Lady

She wears a tattered gown of yellowed white
and holds a bouquet of many years.
Silver hair, neatly piled atop her head.
She smiles a little.
Wrinkles form around her painted red lips.
Eyes fill with empty sorrow,
salty tears stream down her cheeks.
In a room, dark and cold, only stillness, silence
her sorrow is alone.

Grandpa

We knelt by the fire
as grandpa wove his yarns,
uphill both ways and
plowing from daylight 'til dark.

We laughed when he grinned
teasing us with tales of
monsters, giants and bears.

And sat quietly as he
remembered the great war.

Each word kept us rapt
and each moment was a treasure,
when we knelt by the fire
as grandpa wove his yarns.

Andrea Tantillo

Lost Memories

Bleached boards break
-- weathered by years --
under the weight of the sun.

Snap snap crack
time presses past.

A careless ember
-- dropped by youth --
whispers, begins to sizzle.

Snap snap crack
flames burn through the night.

Dawn mourns the loss
-- destroyed in just one night --
of a time too faint to hold.

Snap snap crack
majesty turns to ash.

Iwo Jima

Fear and darkness
give way to strength
and courage.

A single moment becomes
an icon -- defines an era --
unites a nation.

The Soldier

In the distance there was an explosion.
In a uniform too tattered to determine allegiance,
He stumbled up the hill
Rifle poised, no enemy threatened
Graying black hair peeked out from under a dusty cap
Frowning, chapped lips
Empty eyes, wasted tears
A blanket of stars lit his way to the final battle
Brave and strong, he fought until the end
In the distance, there was an explosion.

Walking With My Father

My father walks with me down a dusky road
past fragrant bougainvillea bushes
as night gathers softly for its tropical slumber.
Frogs croak noisily in the gutter
and night falls quickly and loudly
as he points out the constellations to me
and deciphers the mysteries
of the African night for me. I feel safe
with him as we walk
hand-and-hand into the future.

I walk with my father past neatly
groomed suburban houses with shades drawn
and tidy green lawns waiting
for their next manicure. We talk
about the present and the past. He has
many regrets and often loses his train
of thought. We walk quietly together
thinking about the past
and waiting on the future.

My father walks with me as I walk alone
down empty streets
past split levels and ranch style houses.
Spring has arrived in the Midwest,
but I carry memories of tropical evenings
and starry skies in a faraway land
walking hand-and-hand with my father.

They Say

They say life isn't fair.
Where does that leave me?
Where does that leave us?
The broken hearted citizens of the world,
The child of war who wakes up to uncertainty
and chaos and never learned how to play,
the grieving spouse who lost her beloved
to a senseless crime
the man whose dignity has been stripped
from him by a life of servitude

They say life isn't fair
Where does that leave the victims
of genocide from Darfur and Rwanda?
We haven't learned the lessons of the past.
Humanity is evolving they say.
I say Humanity is missing in action.

Gita Tewari

Death

Death surprised me when it came
Quiet and unannounced
It came with a sigh
Stealthily and unpretentiously
Raising a host of unanswered questions
Unlike the contentious cry of birth
Death made no grand entrance to this place

Fear

Fear is cold and hard
And has sharp edges
It slices into your heart
And grabs hold of your soul
Just in time to kill your dreams

Once

once I was your best friend
you tickled my stomach
played Frisbee with me
I barked excitedly when I heard
your footsteps on the stairs
my tail wagging expectantly
I gave you the unconditional love you craved
sloppy kisses and loyalty unsurpassed

once I was your best friend
I remember walking in dappled
sunlight pools of joy
on a summer day that seemed
to go on forever
I remember running with you
down a sandy beach
beside a deep blue ocean

once I was your best friend
now I sit in a cage
waiting for someone to love me again
you said you couldn't keep me anymore
now I wait and hope
for another you to come along
and this time love me forever

Barbara Wade

leaving lately

on a day when death intrudes
the living stagger in its wake
no pulse of movement
yet distant sounds echo softly
through mortality's empty halls

blinding light filled windows
become dark, distant tombs
somewhere outside time
yet, within, we shine pristinely
as bodies lower into earth

puzzlement follows interment
nipping at our fleeing heels
gnashing about remnants
left scattered here and there
upon these barren fields

just another day

outside dawn is rising
children run shrieking
to catch school buses
and I sit staring at black fonts
on my computer screen.
the dog gruff's at the sounds
of life outside our fortress
the cat just stretches and yawns
i smell daybreak
and reach for sleep
as I draw the blinds
against another day

healing

if life were over
and time transparent,
if kisses were dreams
and I could hear you breathe
one more time,
if words were substitutes
for distance
and distance nonexistent,
if yesterday had never happened
and touch could fix
what is broken,

i would touch you...

death between sisters

you didn't ask me
if I could handle
anymore goodbyes.
you didn't question
my abilities to cope
when you informed me
of your impending death.
i stood mute as you
said what you came to say,
stringing your words together
with brittle accuracy,
this sharing between sisters.
i sat immobile
as i heard the words
pour over me
as waves of brackish
water, leaving behind
only bitter filth to hold me
in its nestled arms.
i did not ask you
to stop this brutal assault.
i did not ask you
to give me just a moment
to adjust to your going.
no tears fall yet
for your loss, for your
goodbyes, for your death.
i will curl fetal,
only after you have gone.

echoes of you

shattered hopes
scattered on the wind
of an old day,
left to land
where they may.
pools
of hollow laughter
in halls lay,
as I turn
to walk away.

I cannot see
the pain in my eyes,
but I feel
the singe inside
of a fear so great,
I try
to ward off this night
of lonely echoes...

even then

even if I composed a million poems
and wrote them in the sky with silvery stars
that spelled your name in lights so bright
they lit up the entire world
with their brilliance and ethereal beauty,
then watched as you tore them down
one by one and tossed them out
into an unending abyss so deep
their shine will never be seen again,
then covered them completely
with stones so heavy
that not even God could remove them...

i still would not love you less...

About the Poets

Dede Fox, an intermediate school librarian and teacher with Houston's Writer's in the Schools, loves her work. Third generation Texan, she enjoys spending time with her daughters, son-in-law, and Lucy-Dog. Dede's writing spans many genres. Credits include *The Treasure in the Tiny Blue Tin*, a young adult novel published by TCU Press, and nonfiction writing for Rand McNally and Highlights magazine. Her short stories and poetry have appeared in *Swirl 2006*, *Swirl 2007*, *The Poetry Revolt 2007*, *Poetry at Round Top 2007*, *A Summers Writings 2006*, and the *Austin International Poetry Festival 2008 Anthology*. A juried poet at Houston Poetry Fest 2007, Dede actively participates in Net Poet Society (Net Po So, a poetry writing network in Houston).

Erica Lehrer is a poet, journalist and founding member of Net Poet Society, a Houston-based poets' group. A juried poet at Houston Poetry Fest 2007, her recent poems appeared in the *2008 Texas Poetry Calendar (Dos Gatos Press)*; *The Poetry Revolt*; *The Weight of Addition: An Anthology of Texas Poetry* (Mutabilis Press, 2007); *Poetry at Round Top 2007* and at the Gulf Coast Poets website. She is a graduate of Princeton University (BA, English) and NYU School of Law.

Richard Mullen is an American, born and raised in Pennsylvania. For the past twelve years, he has been teaching literature at the University Antonio Nebrija in Madrid, and previously had taught at three universities in New York City. He has published poems in *The New York Quarterly*, *The Worcester Review* and *Mudfish: Contemporary Art and Poetry*.

Amy Nawrocki teaches English and Creative Writing at the University of Bridgeport. Her poems have recently appeared in *War, Literature, and the Arts*, *SNReview*, *Modern English Tanka*, *Lily Literary Review*, and *Chimaera*. She was a semifinalist for the 2007 Codhill Press Poetry Chapbook Competition. Her collection *Potato Eaters* will be forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

John Rice is a writer and artist. His published works have appeared in *TEXAS Magazine*, *Sol Magazine*, the anthologies *TimeSlice* and *The Weight of Addition*, the *Texas Poetry Calendar* and other publications. Rice was a juried poet at Houston Poetry Fest 2007. His artworks are in several private collections around the world. He has worked in medical research, and horticulture, and is president of Resk Maritime Resources, Inc. which provides commercial ship management, logistics and other services to the industry. He is married with four children and four grandchildren. His wife of thirty-eight years tolerates his vagaries and provides first-read constructive criticism of his writing. Born in Galveston, Texas in 1941, he lives and works in Houston but crosses the Causeway onto *The Island* with some regularity.

Andrea Tantillo has been writing since she was in elementary school. One of her earlier works, an editorial commentary, was published in her hometown newspaper when she was twelve. She holds a degree in English and Mass Communication from Southern Arkansas University and worked in various capacities at both weekly and daily newspapers in Arkansas and Texas. She currently works as an advertising copywriter for a Texas-based homebuilder. She lives in Webster, Texas with her husband Marcus and their cat JonGlynne.

Gita Tewari is a freelance Writer and Editor who lives in the Chicago area. Her writing has appeared in *travel-mag* (an online travel magazine), in *Long Story Short*. and in the *feministreview*. Her poetry has also been featured in the online edition of *Jolie Magazine* She has a Master's degree in communications from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

Barbara Wade has been writing poetry for over twelve years. She has participated in local poetry slams, and had poems published in the *Vermont Slamthology*, and in *Sol Magazine*. Barbara enjoys writing both poetry and fiction, is an oil painter and works as computer programmer for a local law firm. She lives in Amarillo, Texas where she spends her spare time attending plays and poetry readings, writing, playing with her four grandchildren, spending time with her family and her numerous pets.

Prior Publication Credits

Dede Fox

Barricades (*A Summer's Poems: InPrint Houston 2006*, Mutabilis Press)

Reading the Shelves (*Houston Poetry Fest 2007 Anthology*)

Erica Lehrer

Unforgivable (*A Summer's Poems: InPrint Houston 2006*, Mutabilis Press)

Richard Mullen

Struck By Lightning (*The Worcester Review*, 1990)

Mary Margaret Carlisle, Project Director
[Sol Magazine Projects](#)

Leo F. Waltz, Web Master

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES: <http://Sol-Magazine.org/guidelines.htm>