

The 2River View

9.4 (Summer 2005)



Ten Girls © 2005 by Barry Maloney

New poems by

Anna Evans, Judy Kronenfeld, Elizabeth Laborde
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The 2River View

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ISSN 1536 2086

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Cheryl Wood Ruggiero

reading a letter from war, in summer

wheels whir and tick
a cyclist passes
dust wakes, rolls over, settles back to sleep

leaves stir and whicker
a late cicada razzes
thunder walks, growls over hills, shudders into heat

by the time I've drunk this sweet cold tea,
and read again your letter that arrived at noon,
fat drops will fall,
then hail

winds will swarm and track
across my face and over seas to shores of sand and lightning-fired glass,
and on and on to where, beyond bulwarks, your heart must—oh, must—still beat

Cheryl Wood Ruggiero

Old Woman at the Warm Spring

I see myself simplify,
warmed from structure
into mist,
rising.

My faults,
wreaking fiery cracks
across my soul's sea floor,
secreted under
the hardening lava
of ordinary lies,
are simply, now, my faults.

And my breasts,
floating in this sulphur-scented water
like pale balloons
in loose and blue-veined cauls,
are simply, after all, my breasts.

Cheryl Wood Ruggiero

the service of palpitations

benign
say the physicians
it means nothing
when your heart
shakes a fist
in your chest

it means nothing
when your heart lets the rope
slip
and rappels sleep
far down the cliff
of consciousness
leaving you solitary
at the edge
with only the streetlight
filtering mindlessly orange
through gauze curtains

it is benign
when your heart offers you
death's cock-crow
as a familiar
waking after waking
so terror will be worn to a wispy rag
of morning twilight
by the time you arrive
at the fleeing edge of shadow
before that unquestionable dawn

Anna Evans

Quick, Slow, Slow

Hemingway's trigger finger
performed its final action
for the man of action—
bang: definitely dead.

But Sylvia knelt with her head
in the oven, waiting for the blue mist
to claim her blood
while she played this film
over and over:
switch off the gas,
open the windows,
go and hug your children.

Virginia filled her pockets with stones
and waded in from the river bank,
forcing herself ever deeper
when even the water whispered
Go home—your husband loves you.

Understand this: men know
they are fickle, while women
keep faith with death, hold fast
until those last, even breaths.

Anna Evans

Spontaneous Combustion

The words sound like fireworks.
You imagine rockets, catherine wheels,
flames licking the sky.
You think of a colossus,
blackened and crumbling to ash.

The truth is: the tiniest fleck
of sawdust, or fiber of cotton
sometimes implodes
from the knock-kneed pressure
of its hydrogen bonds.

There's nothing to see.

Judy Kronenfeld

5:00 A.M.

mired in a dream
of dissolution: teeth
dangling, bones
crazed—then up
but not, bodiless
as a ghost of mist...

your gathering
arm, sleep-warm
around my waist
and the soul
condenses back
to body
and the body
knits

Judy Kronenfeld

A Good Day with Dad in the “Special Neighborhood for the Memory-Impaired”

We play catch
on the patio.

Mourning doves lift off
from the shrubbery with a clatter

like rattles shaken
over a happy baby’s crib

and the baby’s
chortling answer.

I am three again.
Or is he three?

I have to aim care-
fully. *Allez-ooop!*

WHOOOPS.
I cavort for two.

Bird of Paradise
spreads stiff wings

in the locked garden.

Elizabeth Laborde

42 Degrees South

There is this place
I go with
Out you where
God forgets to dust
& the dust
Collects in
Wayward corners.

There is no map
Because path is
A word
In a foreign
Lexicon I have
Not picked up,
like journey &
direction &
motorcycles with-
Out riders on
Islands without
People. In this

Place without
Paths, when
machines
Crack against
Coconut trunks,
No one notices

If the tree
Makes a sound
When it falls
To the earth
because no one
Is there when
It splits in two.

Elizabeth Laborde

The Passing

I am dreaming the dream of a bird set outside a window one night. You said to choose—you, or the bird, a half-

chirping bird keeping you awake, tiny wings flapping, flapping, flapping, crawling against carpet, a bird who couldn't find mother couldn't find

baby—or you—a man of thirty-seven years twisting through Kansas, a place I never cared to visit, a man hungry for fields and ponds and

mice, a man who devoured everything. You said I had to choose, you or the bird—*the bird was dead*, you said, a *baby without*

a mother. I had to choose; your knife cleaved into the windowsill, Alaskan air poured in, where August was never quite night, moon

was never quite glowing in that place, that funny northern place where I had to choose between you in fits and starts of mescaline and adrenaline,

whose mother left you in a closet, whose mother left you for heroin, whose mother left you one day, for good. Had to choose between you

or a bird, you and a truck destined for winter storage, a winter in a remote village in a remote place with remote people who would never take us in,

or a baby, a bird I could have saved with enough crumbs, with enough drops of water from my fingertips to its tiny beak, a life I looked for

in the morning, that disappeared, only fireweeds left, stirring slightly outside the window, orange red against the sky.

Stephen Newton

Through An Open Door The Sight Of A Ticket

Through an open door the sight of a ticket
on top of a dresser in front of a window
a woman staring out into darkness with
hands clasped in front of her this person
who knows that she can no longer stay but
does not know what awaits her in the place
where she is going and yet she is about to go
through with this thing she started when she
loosened her moorings and pushed off from
shore a woman with her hands folded
looking at rain streaking the windowpane
about to leave a life that has fallen apart

Stephen Newton

She Was Outside the Bar Smoking

She was outside the bar smoking
in the alley and watching the moon
rise over the tracks wondering if he
was thinking about her all these years
later not sure why it occurred to her
what an idea that he might be thinking
of her but it came to her nevertheless
sitting in the twilight in a cloud of
smoke alone on this earth a woman alone
these things that come to us when no one
is watching the ideas that bring us closer
to an imaginary place where we matter
and we can rewrite our stories until they
make the sense we never could make them
say when left to their own devices these
stories that rely on the truth whatever
that may be and wherever it may come from
this pressure shaping our lives all of the
air above pressing down on us all of the years
compressing our thoughts until they conform
to something approximating coherence
and yet when we are least expecting it our
hands clasp and our knees buckle we find
ourselves in the position the one where we
are supplicant the one where we are saying
this is not right and there are deep scars and
I can't find my way out so if you are there
you had better listen or not but it would be nice
to think that someone was listening in this dark
the same dark where nobody was listening back then

Tara J. Pearson

Night Train

Lately, I have trouble even saying my own
name, like a wooden block in my mouth,
the splinters never gone.

The buildings of Harlem stretch silently upward,
bearing up the blank night, lit windows like
confetti tossed into darkness. The river swirls
and pushes salty water up the East River, heavy
in its banks. The train ratchets over the bridge,
lights flicker, and the new moon hides her face,
while mine is pressed to the dirty glass, looking.
Now, windows will only reflect what's inside:
scraped floors and dirty upholstery,
seven blank faced travelers.

Isn't this what you have always wanted?
—each thing you left
shrinks into darkness,
a life apart,
everywhere left to go.

Tara J. Pearson

7/67

Only this date on the back,
scrawled in your hand, ink yellowed
by more than thirty years, and
in the picture your arm thrown
around a small Vietnamese girl,
six or seven, rifle slung over your shoulder,
the way you crouch beside her, grinning—
it's almost fatherly.

The next photo of a man dead on the road,
the remains of his head resting in soft chalky gravel,
one arm cast above him pointing
aimlessly at the rice fields beyond.
The contrast dull, washed out,
as if the sun that day was so bright
it was hard to tell the beginnings and ends of things.

At nine I watched you cast out into the river, gossamer line
singing an arc over the churning surface,
morning light fell, shattered by trees, across your face.
I can imagine us there—so clear, displaced,
a snippet of movie as the channels change—
I watch you talk, how the fish got their names
what they look like—the slick shimmer of words: *carp, catfish, bluegill*.
I listen as the boat is pulled slowly by shifting current.
The world seemed so close—
wrist resting on the edge of the boat,
fingers grazing through sky and water.

How much can a man share with his daughter?
Now, almost five years after you are gone—
the light falls uninjured through the window;
flashing across the photos, it reflects off this page in your journal,
I read again, this time aloud,

*I killed a gook today. I wish I could get a hundred.
God I miss you. I want to come home.*

Catherine Perry

Dusk, Somewhere in New Mexico

He's got three hours to build the town,
Hardly time to grade the roads,

Glaze the bricks, relearn a level
From a lathe.

Where's the auger when he needs it?
The best recipe for concrete:

Sand, cement, gravel.
How much of each one, he forgets.

These tin sheets snap like throw rugs.
He plumbs posts to wire,

Scatters chickens like white moths
Among the dogs.

Something has to happen fast
To make the people want to come.

Something that will tug their guts
Like willow switches.

Something that will make them think
To bring along their dead.

Catherine Perry

Roughing It

By the third morning, nothing but Goretex and a good filter.
The brays of elk, strayed magpies, owls.
Tin spit of hunger, and then, second spring:
Lupines and salmonberries, goats knuckling down to the lake.
A trout trapped in the sedge and baked with wild onions.

Four nights on the cinders, and nothing comes to me
But an old brown bear expecting pastries.
He shits green for the baiters,
In this, the eighth kind of ambiguity.

Under the trees, I can't tell the wind from the rain,
The way my old man confused rain and the sizzling eggs
No one eats these days, one more loss
Blessed as marrow in a hambone
Or the lard my mother cut into flour.

No fish this morning.

Sometimes one removes a sharp object penetrating
A loved one's body. Often the future's made
By those who burn their toilet paper in the woods.

I could strip down among the sego lilies, risk giardia,
Court the gods, except that I know a man whose son had never spoken
Until, moved by a sound, said, "That's a rail."
If the rail, his father figured, why not the moorhen, the nightheron.

Smoke over Canada. In a tree at the heel of the mountain,
Six ravens with their wings spread. In that sticky instant
Between lighting and leaving, who gets to say?

Jayne Pupek

Contributor's Notes

Corbin White is 37. He lives with his wife in a basement in New York where he writes on the backs of paper bags and picks lint from the cat's navel. Sometimes words fall around him, tossed coins for the taking. Other days stretch as endless as winter's gray sky, leaving nothing to snatch but a handful of damp air thickening like mold. His wife complains, he could get a real job, save Sunday afternoons for treks to the library where all the week's pent up ideas will spill like semen from a man denied sex too long. She doesn't know what it means to his work, these days spent in partial dark, ignoring the phone because there isn't one, pouring over scribbled snippets of conversation gleaned from upstairs voices, ear pressed against pipe. She doesn't know how images ignite in slivered light seeping through the narrow window, how shapes settle on the unmade bed where he dreams of all the places his words might appear if only he can jot down this color, thin and uncorrupted, as it moves towards night.

Jayne Pupek

Eve Stranded In Kansas

I'm shucking corn in high heels,
trying to maintain my composure.
I wasn't meant to be a farmer's wife.
Adam's gone mad, hoards lint in his navel.
He smells like dirt, not the rich, dark soil
sold in plastic bags at Walmart,
but side of the road dirt,
dusty and stale as bread.
I can't tell you how many days
the sun has risen and set
and yet he refuses to bathe.

I'm meant to live in a house on a hill,
surrounded by lush gardens.
I picture myself bare breasted, daisy chains
around my waist, small cherubs
spoon feeding me lemon sorbet.
My ears crave the sound of falling water
and I don't mean this leaky kitchen faucet
whose drips I count like sheep. I ask Adam
each morning to pick up a new washer,
but he has more important things.
He claims I'm to blame for this life
of tin trailers and sagging clotheslines.
I'm the reason he goes out day and night
to chase away serpents coiled in his fields.

Thomas Reynolds

Bluegrass

The founder of bluegrass
wears an ill-fitting pork pie hat
and abuses his unattractive wife,
tying her to the bed,
telling her it was all her fault.

The ill-constructed cabin
overlooking the creek
is a sieve to winter winds,
draining away his will,
leaving only kernels of hate.

Just before sunset,
diphtheria killed the child
who played in the corner
building log cabins
out of corn cobs.

The cabin is dark,
save for embers,
and wind screams
through wall cracks,
echoes in the dead grass.

All night he plays the fiddle,
a gift from his father
three hundred miles away,
above the wife's moans
and rustling of bluegrass.

Thomas Reynolds

Trap

My old man
traps the south bank of Sand Creek
in a flat-bottom row boat.
At dawn, lower lip packed with Red Man,
shoulder strung with blood-flecked traps,
he trolls the broken limbs, stumps,
and rank stew-like swamp,
tripping over frozen deer turds
back to his hidden places,
sizing up the beaver or fox
with his bent hickory cane
and smashes its skull
with one fierce quick stroke.

The old son of a bitch
hit me yesterday
to warn me not to run away again,
and so I slept in the shed
curled up like a racoon cub,
dizzy like the sparrow that
cracked the kitchen window
and fell back stunned and throbbing.

Meanwhile,
his coyote
chews up two of his boots
and his leather poncho
and growls when I make a move
for the door. To distract him,
I toss him the old man's wallet.

Sitting on the woodpile,
I can hear him barking,
a mixed-up crazy thing
that would chew off his foot
to break for the woods.

JeFF Stumpo

decrescendo

My words are fragile and kept
in what used to be my wife's
jewelry box in what used to be
our bedroom. Sometimes
when a friend visits, memories
cling to the words as I grab
a handful, dropping in the hall
like pearls on that Sunday
morning, rolling to hidden places
in what used to be our home.

JeFF Stumpo

The Old Man with the Crazy Eyes

When I am an old man
I will write letters
describing the recipients' lives
rather than my own,
astounding them
with the simple trick
of having already been there.

I will wear an expensive suit
and walk very slowly
among teenagers
and twenty-somethings
so that, in their frustration,
they learn to question authority.

I will visit retirement homes and dance
with Alzheimer's patients
who will never know that I return
to my wife every night.

I will not offer candy
or tell stories to children,
but fix them
with a gaze so curious
that they create their own
tales in treehouses
of the old man
with the crazy eyes.

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Contributors

Anna Evans was born in the UK but now lives in New Jersey, where she is raising two daughters and a dog. Her poems have recently appeared in *The Absinthe Literary Review*, *Exit 13*, *Light Quarterly*, and *Verse Libre Quarterly*. She is editor of *The Barefoot Muse*.

Judy Kronenfeld loves to teach creative writing at the University of California—Riverside, but is thinking of retirement nevertheless. Her recent and forthcoming publications include *Free Lunch*, *Portland Review*, and the chapbook *Ghost Nurseries* (Finishing Line Press, 2005).

Elizabeth Laborde teaches creative writing at a high school in northern California. Her writing is influenced by the Pacific Northwest, Alaska and southern California. Notable publications include *42opus*.

Barry Maloney can be found most days in downtown Boston, speedily drawing the myriad images of life and passing phenomena; or in Dedham, Massachusetts, working from his home studio, where in June 2000 he put out his shingle as Master artist.

Stephen Newton is an assistant professor of English and director of the Writing Center at William Paterson University. His poetry and prose appear in journals such as *Pig Iron* and *Tattoo Highway*.

Tara J. Pearson holds an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College. She currently teaches writing and theatre at a public urban high school in Los Angeles.

Catherine Perry recently resumed the writing life, having spent the last decade raising children, earning a living in academia, and growing organic vegetables.

Jayne Pupek is author of the chapbook *Primitive* (Pudding House). Her first novel is being published by Algonquin Press.

Thomas Reynolds teaches at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas. His poems have appeared in *Alabama Literary Review*, *American Western Magazine*, *New Delta Review*, and *Pedestal Magazine*.

Cheryl Wood Ruggiero lives, teaches, and writes in the mountains of southwestern Virginia. Her poems and fiction are forthcoming in *CALYX*, *Potion*, and *Wolf Moon Press Journal*.

JeFF Stumpo is co-founder and co-editor of *Big Tex[t]*; founder and host of Javashock, the Brazos Valley's poetry slam; and author of the chapbook *El Oceano y La Serpiente / The Ocean and the Serpent*.



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About 2River

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry, art, and theory, quarterly publishing *The 2River View* and occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series. All publications first appear on-line, then in print.

Richard Long, Editor
2River
June 2005

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9.4 (Summer 2005)

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