

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

26



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 26, #4

the high cost of
living isn't so bad if you
don't have to pay for it . . .

the merry flea
from ARCHY AND MEHITABEL

WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 26

Number 4*

Designed, Edited and Published by Richard Spiegel & Barbara Fisher

Thomas Perry, Admirable Factotum

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The Salt Eaters — James Penha

In South Tapanuli, Sumatra

the family
shares a dinner
of rice
and salt
a few grains each
of rice
and salt
a main course
of rice
and salt
saved
to last
a treat for
the family

Cinder — James Penha

The child has
heart to crawl
among the hills
and suckle at the heaps
of refuse remotely
cuddled by the kindness
of them better souls
that know just
what babies need.

Richard Kostelanetz

C o m P a t R i o t
K i n d L e d
B a n K r u p t c y

Summation — Joan Payne Kincaid

In the security
of lower middle-ness
years of accumulation

oceans of dirt
blind windows
clothing-pile mountains
a table where bills
and documents dine
the only possible course
after silent screams
is run

The Jewel Thief — Fran Farrell Kraft

He cut quite a figure with his chiseled features and neatly trimmed white beard, set off by his elegantly cut tuxedo.

None would have guessed that he spent many of his days pruning bushes, trimming hedges, cutting grass and edging a garden path.

Among haute couture with faceted gems in pierced ears and on manicured fingers or lifted necks, he was a cut above.

None would have guessed that he had spent many nights relieving rich of well-cut baubles, had he not cut a deal for a 'tell-all'.

The Mitt — Bill Roberts

I stuff the leather glove
under the front of my sweater
and walked slowly
out of Woolworth's. Cool.

My very first glove,
a first baseman's mitt.
My position was third base,
but I was willing to switch.

Then I realized the star
of our little guys' team
the cleanup batter,
played first base. Exclusively.

After much stomach churning,
I returned to the store,
walked swiftly to the counter
where I had heisted the mitt.

I looked around and, as before,
saw not a single adult close by,
then removed the glove and
placed it on the counter,

I ran from the store, dejected,
knowing I'd have to borrow
my neighbor's old-fashioned mitt
for practice that afternoon. Crap.

Fine Liquor of Philosophy — Harvey Steinberg

Fragile plum-skin ornaments in pulp:
inside, the pit keeps
hard, centered, impervious
to bruises and worm-breakfasts.

At the tavern of plum-wine, sips
of "turned fruit" thin memories of home,
my face so deep in the cup
I can't hear shaking boards and voices nearby.

It's my choice, isn't it,
to stop thinking big about nothing, to join
cronies cultivating laughter,
to put my small seed among theirs?

I will go to Chen and say,
"Your second son wore a blue sash yesterday;
where does he get the fabric?"
I don't have to ask this question, but I do.
I'm not buying that cloth anyway.

Is my insistent mingling a keepsake of the Way?

In the corner, a keg of plum wine holds the answer.

Family Snapshot — Lee Evans

A forty-eight-year old man
and a one-year-old boy stand
on a sweltering backyard deck
in the good ol' Summertime.

One looks up with silent awe
at the other, who is demonstrating
forty-eight years of expertise
hip-swinging the pink Hula Hoop!

I stand before the snapshot,
and wonder how this scene will seem
when forty-eight more hoops of years
turn round, and stand him here like me.

The Shaman Who Sells Today — Eric Weiskott

will die tomorrow. Monks will chuck his casket
off the black rock cliff. *The sea, they say,
will roll him over the edge of This World.*

But today I wait on a wine cask
in his back room. On shelves, one million jars
shelter sea-glass pebbles from the musk of myrrh.

Pastels flow
from pebble to pebble, palettes
for one million futures.

Robed in purple, he enters,
gestures, murmurs *One million tomorrows*
and one today. The nearest jar

holds one jag of obsidian.
I memorize the scalloped edge,
the curve of noon light on the frozen rolls.

I gaze off the black rock cliff, shaking in the blast.
He's behind me, shouting *For fifty dollars, sir?*

Plus Shipping — Anselm Brocki

"It's barefaced electronic robbery," Mr. Clean, the well-off retiree, says to Iron Mike at the counter of the All-Nite. "I called Panasonic. They want \$170 plus shipping to fix my answering machine without even seeing it."

"I don't have that problem," Mike says slowly, without adding he sleeps in the alley.

"I'd have to be stupid to send it to them when new ones are going for sixty," Mr. Clean says. "I could hear it going inside, something spinning, but no result. It's got those special Torx screws underneath and little warning stamps about losing the warranty if you open it, like you're a criminal if you work on your own stuff."

"Pshaw, I had that bottom off in three minutes and lifted off two little mother circuit boards, and there it is—a tiny broken belt, letting only one wheel spin, thin as thread, making a circle no bigger than a fat lady's wedding ring.

"Putting the mother boards with those little pins you have to line up just right took me two tries," Mr. Clean



says, eyes excited, jaw tight, hands acting out the boards being replaced, "but I can hear the sound."

"Did you put in a new belt?" Mike asks.

"Just have to find out where I can get one."

"Bet they charge you \$170 for it," Mike says.

New Job — Anselm Brocki

Saturday morning
1940. Fifty cents
an hour as a laborer
for a contractor. Big
improvement over
thirty-five cents
for pressing pants
in a men's store.
Outdoors driving
a pickup truck
in the San Fernando
Valley to a row
of five hip-roofed
bungalows finished

yesterday. Easy work.
Just clean out under
the houses so they'll
pass inspection
and load the truck
with the scrap heaps
by six o'clock tonight.

Slide out the 16-inch
galvanized vent screen
in the foundation
and wiggle on my back,
nose almost touching
the fresh pine floor
joists, dragging along-

side a cardboard box
to pick up 1X6 and 2X4
cuttings, crumpled
lunch bags, wax paper
from sandwiches,
and a hip-shaped
whiskey bottle or two
that fell down during
construction, making
a game out of how many
wiggle-trips to the vent
each house will take,
proud, happy to have
a good job and able
to pay my own way.

Pens — Gale Acuff

I found this pen on campus. I find pens almost everyday. I walk with my eyes on the ground, not out of shyness but greed. Well, not *greed*—opportunism, perhaps. 23,000 students on campus forgetting, abandoning, neglecting many items of interest. I clean up after them but I'm not custodial help or waste management—I'm a teacher here. If a student comes by my office and has forgotten a pen I open the top right-hand drawer of my desk and

shazam—pens of all types: ballpoint, fountain, and markers. And all colors: I've found black, blue, red, green, yellow, pink. I could make rainbows or spectra. And pencils—I don't use them except to fill in the tiny circles on midterm and final grade sheets, or when the office doesn't give me enough for student evals at the end of the term. A student who comes to my office and doesn't have a pen gets a free one. Call me generous. *Here's your pen back*, one says. You may keep it, I say. I have plenty. *Thank you!* he says. Or she. I recycle them, the pens, I mean. I'm writing this now

with a little gem I found this morning
on a very long walk across campus. I still

haven't been to the university
Raptor Rehabilitation Center

—I've been on this beat only a few weeks
—but I have a campus map and know east
by the sun in my face as I amble.

Head south means turn right, through student housing
now housing no students—renovation.

Down Hemlock Street, where Socrates lives—that's
a joke—then right on Wire Road. I come to
something called the Facilities Complex
and walk through the parking lot—it's big and

I need the exercise. I see this pen
lying there for the taking. I take it
—I rescue it, I salvage it, I save
it. Not far away is a penny, Abe's
profile reflecting sun. Like John Wilkes Booth
might have said, I couldn't miss it. Pocket
it (right pocket) and I proceed onto
the front lawn and a large pond. I want fish
at the edge and swimming away from shore.
A frog, a turtle, a duck would be good.
I walk halfway around the pond and spy
a trail to the left and off through the woods
I go. And there's another pond back there.
The morning's spiderwebs try to paste me.

I take off my cap and wave it before
me, back and forth, up and down, breaking them
before they get in my face and creatures
can crawl down my shirt and compete with my
body for this space. Shug Jordan Parkway
must be behind me now. I turn my back
on the water and cut through the trail-less
woods and slide down an embankment and head
for the raptors. I wonder if they have
dinosaurs. *Velociraptors*. Ha ha.
I'm looking for Raptor Road. Hell is it?
Where the map says it ought to be it ain't,
only a dirt road ascending a hill
but the entrance is blocked by a steel gate

and the two signs echo *No Trespassing*.
I'd climb over but I'm not tall enough.
Tomorrow I'll return, I tell myself.
I'll ask someone where the Center is. I
need to ask a person who's like a map.

Technically, this pen isn't mine. It
belongs to someone else, though I'd thought when
I stooped to pick it up that it belonged
to itself now; that's what loneliness is.
I wonder if I couldn't sight the birds
of prey because I took something not mine
to take. I wonder if I put it back
just what the chances are that it will be

reunited with its master, the one
who gripped it first between thumb and finger
and choked out all the secrets I won't know.
Will it accept me as its new handler?
It's not my pen but I'm all it has now,
except itself, and if I don't wield it
is it still a pen? Am I yet a man?
It's too late now—it's taken me this far.
And it's not sanitary, picking things
up from the ground, but it's not like I put
it in my mouth. When I got home I rinsed
it off and didn't write with it until
it dried. *A Bic Atlantis*. That sunken
kingdom I'd also like to find. I'll be

walking along one day and looking down
and there it will be, if I could walk on

water. Actually, this pen's almost dry
but I've got others. I never buy them
anymore—I just go for a walk and
they appear, full-blown, like old what's-her-name
sprung out of the head of Zeus. *Athena*.



photographs by
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