

Poetry acts as a mirror for the mind and the soul, offering reflections of the self for all to see. This journal embodies that thought, containing original work by poets in the community of Hays. *Mirrors* celebrates the artistry of the talented patrons who participated in the 2020 Poetry contest and encourages all to express themselves through the spoken and written word. The poems within this journal do not reflect the beliefs or values of the Hays Public Library. The library shall not be held responsible or legally liable for the misuse occurring to the poems, including plagiarism.

## *Mirrors*

*Hays Public Library presents  
The 20th Annual Poetry Competition  
April 2020*

**First Place:** *The Last Red Glow* by Dawne Leiker

**Second Place:** *My New Sister* by Russell Heitmann

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# The Last Red Glow

by DAWNE LEIKER

Through pastures, dusty roads, weedy ditches,  
he scanned the ground for remnants of ancient life.  
Lifted tiny measures of solid earth.  
Fragments altered by tools or machines. Others still untouched.  
Against a blue horizon, he traced their outline,  
then dropped the rocks into his front pocket.

From the corner of his bed, after dark,  
He struck a piece of flint with hammer stone.  
Chipping arrowheads to Carson's monologue.  
Then, drawing the last red glow from his Camel,  
stashed the rocks in a coffee can.  
Slid the can under his wooden bed frame.

A quarter of the rocks are mine.  
Stored in a plastic box with red lid.  
A ripped piece of a cardboard label  
identifies the rare artifacts  
in Dad's handwriting:  
"Bob Bannister  
9-2-79  
4-1-82"

Gray and buff sandstone, quartzite, igneous.  
All smell like plastic, not earth, not Old Spice.  
After 30 years secured in Rubbermaid  
miles away from Bob Bannister's pasture.  
Decades removed from Dad's storm-beat hands.

It was his left hand that smashed the lead glass  
when a stroke ended his last summer day.  
Shards of glass from the bookshelf near the bed  
fell on gold carpet branded by cigarette burns.  
In a pasture, hot wind scattered dust from hidden rocks.

Did he see past the horizon, the rain-bearing clouds?  
Did he kick at buffalo grass with the toe of his boots,  
revealing hidden treasures. Ancient artifacts?  
His pulse raced and there was no trace of him  
Left in his eyes. No answer on his lips.

Enfolding his fingers, I touched a measure of ancient lives.  
Golden images passing on a distant road.  
The life-giving ancestors illumining his way.  
I traced their outline against sterile walls  
and saw the red glow of sunset inhale his breath,  
as living earth embraced her dying son.

# My New Sister

by RUSSELL HEITMANN

Moonlit summer nights in the driveway,  
our basketball bounced about not unlike idle gossip of the day  
We poked fun at friends, neighbors, people of the sort  
Her guilty look, laughing at someone else's expense  
She knew better, but giggled on anyway

Any brother can recount such memories shared  
Some perhaps look forward to recreating those throwaway June evenings  
with a kid sister and a worn leather ball  
I certainly do

But I can't,  
my new sister won't let me

My new sister traded her basketball for a bible,  
changed from an old tee shirt and gym shorts to a navy-blue vest and skirt  
Small town Nebraska nights under the street lamp gave way to the  
concrete jungle of a New York convent

My *new* sister, is a sister

I suppose I should be happy for her, she certainly is  
Her purpose is clear and defined,  
she belongs in that silly blue outfit more than she ever did in a grass-stained tee

This new sister, so far away, won't answer her phone for a quick gossip rehash,  
she doesn't have one anymore  
Her green iPhone now belongs to our father who holds it close like a locket,  
looking at her contact image, a folded snapshot tucked away inside  
Who knows what memories he recalls in his mind

My new sister doesn't visit much,  
New York is far away and nuns don't have frequent flier miles  
Daily doses of conversation and quality time are replaced  
with bi-annual visits and monthly phone calls  
She's as much a pen-pal as family,  
relegated to snail-mail correspondence

Christmas did bring mere moments of time together  
in a blink-and-you-miss-it affair  
However, catching up and small talk soon gave way to empty conversations  
unable to scratch the surface of moments once shared

Her life has new dedication and conviction to her cause and  
she is happy and content in her new surroundings,  
blissful and ignorant to the feelings those closest to her hold in their hearts  
But she is happy

These words, true and honest, are meaningless without her knowing  
They will remain locked to this page, un-mailed and unread  
Her happiness will not be soured by truth

Yet, what I wouldn't give to go back for one night,  
one more evening of bouncing old leather,  
laughing at forgettable nonsense, important only in that moment  
and basking in the normalcy I had no idea would soon end

# Water on the Floor

by LINDSEY BARTLETT

Sometimes your kitchen sink leaks  
water all over the floor, and you  
mop it up with old towels.  
The landlord bangs on the pipes with a  
hammer. Says, “we might have to call  
the cops about the eviction next door.”  
You nod, heavy pit in your  
stomach, when you think of the  
little girl, four years old, who lives  
there. Where will they go?

After too many second chances.  
“We’ve reached an impasse,”  
he says. Puts sealant around the drain,  
with calloused fingers. It isn’t your fight,  
but as with the water on the floor, you are left  
to clean up, carry on with an invisible burden you  
didn’t ask for. The burden of empathy is sometimes  
far weightier than wet towels, and busted  
water pipes.

# Time

by JOVAN MARTINEZ

Tick. Tick. Tick.

Life is but a dream

continuously fleeting, rippling, flowing.

It tussles and turns the tides on a moment’s notice  
leaving thy Captain at bay to steer the depths

Tick. Tick. Tick.

Memories long forgotten

weather the face, erodes the brow, attests the grit

It clenches the jaw, tightens the stern, and focuses ones’ azi-  
muth

leaving thy Soldier echoed in blood, sweat, tears

Tick. Tick. Tick.

Ashes to ashes...

Darkness lurks, light fades, final breath

steering the depths of time and silence

It ends.

Tick, tick, TOCK.

## The Empty Hallway

*by* KERI ASCHE

In the empty hallway,  
the dim lights flicker  
and coat the walls and floor  
with the color of illness.  
The life slowly drains out  
as the beat of the last steps  
fade into the distance  
and the last breath is taken  
in the empty hallway.

The silence is deafening.

## Stir

*by* Nathan Geist

Why do they say  
whisked away?  
That sounds terribly  
painful.  
A beating  
so severe,  
insides  
and outsides  
become the same.  
Is that  
what 'love' is?  
A meeting of  
The minds, bodies  
and souls,  
so rapidly  
and violently  
yet no blood  
is shed.

Then why does  
being swept  
off of everything  
including my feet  
hurt so much  
worse than  
simply falling,  
worse than  
cracking  
my egg  
of a head?

What I'd give  
for an  
easy beating  
like that.

## Settlement

*by Adeniza Fennell*

Perhaps this could be home.

Every touch confirms my theory and eliminates old traces of doubt.

A graceful step and a hand to be held, to cherish it would be a privilege.

Around the shoreline the wind speaks of your traces only as far as I may find myself fond.

I have found a love to carry what I am and in its essence I will remain.

If it is to surface in your mind what I have seen of myself, to the rest I will return,  
to the rest I will return.

I may not comprehend your depth,

whilst I still pace and contemplate finding my way through it.

Swallowing my pride has been a simple task, the only torture found is distance.

Painful, but tolerable, this land will bear my task.

Screws and nails and rust and sweat, but the result is what I crave.

I will plant roots deeply in seeking a return, I have found where I will lay.

Perhaps this could be home.

# Saturday Night

by Ann Anderson

Saturday night under the street light on our corner  
Our tribe of kid friends gathered.  
Tossing little rocks into the storm drains and  
A few friends ride by on their String Ray bikes, stop and talk.

My mom brings out strawberry slushes and  
Pieces of chocolate cake and we laugh.  
We make faces with our mouths open  
And the moths gather in the golden light above us.

Then we all wander back home and  
The streetlight feels safe as I look out my bedroom window.  
I write down a poem like this on the back of a school paper  
And I think about sitting under a streetlight when I was twelve.

# Poem About Hastings Closing Or Other Things I've Had To Say Goodbye To, Like When They Took 30 Rock Off Of Netflix

by TIMOTHY TARKELLY

Ashley Judd graces the cover  
of another thriller.  
A two-hour testament  
to the lengths men will go to for attention.  
Two-day rental, just a few dollars.

It's the act of course,  
of perusing, compromise,  
and finally the selection.

And the beauty in that green stamp  
at the base of the books' spines:  
used.  
Gently, but a real past,  
a whole life of shelves and suitcases,  
the pocket on the back of an airliner seat.  
But I am not a jealous lover.  
I will caress the creases  
as if I made them myself.

A whole section devoted to dice,  
twenty-sided windows into the future,  
an eternity of game nights  
and the compendium of canonical monsters  
to guide us.  
Plastic-wrapped, Fifth Edition, the best chapter of our lives.

And this was Friday evenings,  
or the awkward hour between dinner's end  
and the movie's start. The after-work walks  
when you just can't bear to go home yet.



The holy payday pilgrimages  
of new books and novelty drinking horns,  
of Pacific Rim posters for Christmas  
and the perfect Frodo action figure  
to live forever at your desk,  
watching you write,  
watching you live and record  
your most predictable adventures.

And now, Fridays have worn to antsy dust.  
A faded sign hangs from an empty husk  
over a wasted parking lot.

Except for every October  
and its pop-up Halloween store.

## No One Knows Where We Go

by KAREN THIBODEAU

No one knows where we go  
when the time runs out.  
Some say it's a clear bright light  
and there's a judgment when  
you might be sent back. Now  
I sit with my friend who is dying  
And ask those questions.  
I think I should be writing a script  
For the children's theatre program.  
I think I should be writing this poem.  
I pick up a book lying on the bedside  
table, a book on death and dying by  
Mr. Dunn who again and again writes  
about letting go and surrender and  
about life support systems keeping  
loved ones alive long past the ease of  
life. I think I should go eat lunch but  
I sit still, and as I sit and watch my  
dear friend breathing on his own, in  
and out, I become in the peace of this  
process with him. I too breathe on the  
brink of consciousness. I too ease away  
from anything except the breath, away  
from grapefruit and eggs at the market,  
away from oh pay the bill for theatre rental, away  
from even the stretched out cumulus clouds  
nested above the mountains outside the window.  
Away, but in at the same time in to the ephemeral,  
the warm air of the room, into the Zuni kachina  
etchings my friend made when he was of his  
own person. In to the silence between breaths and the  
compassionate hospital peace. In to the rubber  
rhythms of caretaker's soles as they tread the  
hallway outside my friend's room. And then  
in to the sunlit air and an intangible loving  
energy that keeps me from looking at the clock.  
I only know that here, by his bedside, here all life  
is given and all life is taken, like being on the shore  
of the ocean, like being spellbound by the waves of life.  
I don't want to leave. Everything is here.

# Breathe

by ANITA SCHEVE

*Just breathe*

Panic, chest tight, stomachache

*Just breathe*

Racing thoughts, bracing for worst, casing for exits

*Just breathe*

Nauseous, deafening, headache

*Just breathe*

Nervous, anxious, apprehensive

*Just breathe*

Negative, Relief, respite

Finally *breathe*

# Broety To Expand Your Brocabulary, Combrosed by Edgar Allan Bro with the Assistance of One Matt Riddle

by MATTHEW MCINTYRE

*I'll begin with short **brose** in reference to the muses. A brief message to those for whom **The Bro Code** confuses. This **broem** is a secret and not to be shared. One to be kept for no bro shall be spared. So speak not to friends, pals, or any of those whom you can't call your besties or lifelong **bros**. Lest suffer a consequence most hideous and foul, the worst I can muster that the code will allow.*

"Where for art we, bro?"

I asked of my friend.

"Our map is all ruined, brochacho!"

In a text he did send

We travelled that brode

One so few had seen

With 15 stones owed

For 16 bones paid in green

When we finally reached the brocean

The landscape we sought

He made a drinking brotion

For the brews I forgot

I offered brotato chips  
But so offended was he  
That our bromance had ended  
A true pal indeed!

But some bros are summer  
And others just fall  
Our brocation a bummer  
Because of the drinks and all

But brohana means family  
And just dudes is fine too.  
I crushed those cans without him  
Like any real bro would do.

For The bro code says clear  
And it says it just  
“Don’t cry over spilt beer  
Or a bro you cannot trust”

## Changing Tides

by BRITTANY MCCAMPBELL

Like creatures of the night,  
we moved swiftly with ease along winding roads in search of home.  
Under moon beams we made love in honeysuckle vines,  
ocean wave lips crashing upon rocky shores.  
When you’re gone, sea salt lingers deliciously on my tongue  
while peering over cliffs edge into your abyss.  
I’ve never been a strong swimmer,  
keeping close to lands familiar surface.  
But these fever dreams leave me drowning in the depths of your  
mind,  
rummaging around for a dry place to burrow in as yours.

Our love lives in moonlit skies amongst desperate wishes  
cast upon shooting stars.  
But our love doesn’t belong in a graveyard of dying wishes  
for hollow souls to stare up to at night  
in hopes of a fleeting memory.  
No, absolutely not.

You’ve been my moon, now be my sun.  
My sails feels the changing tides –  
raised for a morning glow departure.

## Corona 2020 Reflections

by NILA LAREA

Just a few, long months ago, when I heard the word “Corona,”  
I first thought it was just the brand name of some type of beer.  
But now Corona has taken on a totally different meaning,  
A word that speaks of possible sickness, death and most of all, fear.

Terms like infected, stay at home, quarantine, masks, even ventilators,  
Staying six feet apart, social distancing, terms for all to know, not just a few.  
Brings the reality of a real pandemic from across the world to our back doors,  
And taking necessary preparations and precautions. What’s our world coming to?

Yet, we see acts of kindness, communities coming together for a common cause,  
And now not just police officers and our military are the only ones on the front line.  
For we give our heartfelt thanks to all medical personnel, clerks, janitors, truckers.  
The list goes on, whose service and sacrifice truly now and forever radiantly shine.

## Dreameater v15

by URIEL CAMPOS

The machine needs to be fed  
Every day and without pause  
We must work to feed it  
So it can feed the masters

We work to serve the machine and masters  
As the machine and masters work to serve us

By drinking our sweat  
Chewing our fingers  
And inhaling our dreams  
The machine will keep climbing

But we work to serve the machine and masters  
As the machine and masters work to serve us

The higher the machine climbs  
The happier the masters are  
In turn trickling their joy down to us  
Evaporating from the heat, leaving a faint taste

Still we work to serve the machine and masters  
As the machine and masters work to serve us

It climbs without regard  
Darkening the skies and deteriorating the waters  
Crushing the elderly, poor, and sick  
The machine must keep climbing

For we work to serve the machine and masters  
As the machine and masters work to serve us

## Fan of Knives

by KRISTOPHER MILLER

Verse by verse,  
line by line  
I sharpen these words of mine  
to slice through life's disappointments and inequities  
and to cut through insecurities  
of society and self that need to be bled  
'cause what is shown and said  
can be an illusion  
where we all sink into delusion  
about where sound bites were really recorded  
and ignore the videos manipulated and distorted  
to feed our bias, our convictions, and our fears  
to distract away from the true menace that leers  
that calculates and monetizes all of our desires and dreams  
for in this postmodern world, nothing is what it seems,  
so I sharpen these words of mine,  
like a fan of knives  
so I throw them in all directions  
to stab into the pieces of newspeak, ignorance, and lies,  
and open them up to reveal their true poison and content  
but they are probably not enough,  
for humanity has much to lament  
and cannot repent  
all of its crimes and all of its evil  
for its downfall will reveal  
how far it needs to go to ascend its tortured state  
and to realize its confusing, conflicted fate.

# Flowerchild

by STEVEN SASSMANN

F L O W E R C H I L D  
is life a song  
climbing the mountains of sky  
swimming the light of the moon  
high in the blue light of dawn  
drunk on the red light in dusk  
i harvest the grains of the wind  
back back across the many-rivered sea  
surfing the tidecurrent season  
we leap through the horizon  
we sing across the countryside abloom  
each blossom more beautiful than last  
freshet choirs of petals pollens nectars  
the egg the seed the germ sing life  
tomorrow demanding today but  
i feel the tug of the polestar back  
the shift of light  
calling my children  
home

# Foot Print

by DEBRA IRSIK

What is a carbon foot print?

Do we have one?

Is it cause for alarm?

Politico in a twitter

With Greta's effect

What's the harm?

They site fake news

No global warming

Just radical environmentalist

Swarming.

Ignore the signs

Milk OSHA's gain.

We're doing fine

There's no acid rain.

Yeah, oceans are dying

Coral reefs shrinking

We have more earthquakes

Fires, and draught.

Pollution in water and air

And our lungs

Well, let's not go there.

We need fossil fuel  
To move ahead  
Don't fill our minds  
With doomsday dread.  
Petroleum and coal  
Fuels our homes and our cars  
Wind energy impedes our view  
Of the prairie and stars.

So, continue to pump, frack, and strip  
Poor Mother earth until she's sick  
Let the seismometers whir  
While we all gasp for clean air  
And follow our leaders with that  
Vacant stare.

Or

Initiate change  
You know...  
Walk don't ride  
Change the tide  
Adjust the stat  
Use less water please  
And if you need light  
Use L e d's

Don't waste food  
There's carbon there  
Eat local produce and share  
Recycle, re-purpose, re-use  
If you travel don't fly  
Take a cruise  
Turn of electronics,  
It's not too hard.  
Insulate better  
Use Energy Star  
  
Choose not to be  
A nation of sorrow  
Save our wildlife, our oceans, our children....  
You know  
Save TOMORROW!

# Griefstar

by MORGAN CHALFANT

I found Griefstar  
In a field  
Dead grass and water-logged  
point buried so deep  
it hit the heart of the world  
Sprouting like a gleaming question mark  
Would drawing it rend and tear  
Pieces, chunks, layers  
Or with one tug,  
could I free this sharpened shard?  
Starbearer of what it means to be broken  
pulled up like a weed, roots strangling life  
bulb of blood from the land  
opening like a flower from a punctured patch  
red tears quiver on a trapped blade  
like the droplets that roll from my butchered, burning hand  
there is no handle to grip  
not on grief, not on a heart, not on sorrow  
and grieving hearts don't come with a repair forge  
Perhaps tomorrow  
I shall wield courage enough  
to make that final pull  
sometimes to heal, one must hurt  
may I find some solace  
in bearing agony's full measure  
to the cosmos.

# Incarnate

by DAVID BYRNE

the wily old god burned  
fiery divided by thirds  
blessing the toads, the gar and the birds  
he forgot himself here  
emptied new crowned  
with beauty like mercy  
in a tough love town.

bound by intrigue to this contour of mind  
he scanned the woodgrain of winter's chill bind  
inhaled the putrescent digestion of snails  
embodied lubricious the mating of whales  
loitered between the forked branches of breath

till

like the meandering of river  
he sighed  
and tip-toed his way through death



# No Longer Blinded by the Sun

By GRACE MCCORD

Before I was blinded by the sun,  
I was baffled by the brilliance of the grass  
that danced in the wind beneath my feet.  
Weaving itself between my fingers  
and around my toes to help keep me from  
flying and touching the sun like the birds.  
The birds left me in awe.  
They were so close to the sun and all its splendor.  
I needed to feel the power the sun had;  
I couldn't stand just seeing in any longer.  
The trees I scaled that breathed in and out  
on my warming head weren't high enough.  
I had to get closer.  
Each breath I took was deeper than the last  
as I reached higher and higher.  
Soon I could see nothing but the sun.  
It burned so hot and intense  
that I could no longer feel the trees breath on my neck  
or hear the bird's songs.  
I could feel nothing.

Breathing grew harder as I realized  
the sun was not meant to ever be touched.  
I could never reach it, so slowly I fell back to earth.  
I saw the sun grow smaller as I returned to where I belonged.  
To the familiar touch of the grass in-between my fingers,  
keeping me steady. I returned to a place  
where the birds were never far from me, and never silent.  
Now when I scaled the branches of the tallest trees,  
I knew that their breath calmed me,  
and I needed to be near it.  
I now know where I belong,  
because I am no longer blinded by the sun.

## Judges

*Eric Norris, State Librarian of Kansas*

*David Goodlett, FHSU History Department Chair*



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