

# DISABILITY POETRY FOLIO

Edited by Christopher Salerno

Associate Editor

TQ #27

## Contents:

DANIELLE PAFUNDA	3
PETRA KUPPERS	5
SEAN J MAHONEY	7
JIM FERRIS	9
ARDEN HILL	11
GENEVIEVE ARLIE	14
AVA CIPRI	16
SHEILA BLACK	19
TRAVIS CHI WING LAU	21
TERESA MILBRODT	23
DOMINIK PARISIEN	24
RAYE HENDRIX	26
NATHAN SPOON	27
SUSAN NORDMARK	29
SUZY HARRIS	30
KIMBERLY JAE	32
SASHA PREVOST	34
NAOMI ORTIZ	36
KHAIRANA BAROKKA	38
EMILY K. MICHAEL	40
LESLIE McINTOSH	42
STEHANIE HEIT	44
RICKY RAY	45
ELLEN SAMUELS	47
KARA DORRIS	49
RITA MARIA MARTINEZ	51
MARGARET REED	53



## DANIELLE PAFUNDA

Danielle Pafunda is the author of nine books of poetry and prose, including the recent *Spite* (The Operating System), *Beshrew* (Dusie Press), *The Book of Scab* (Ricochet Editions), and *The Dead Girls Speak in Unison* (Bloof Books). She teaches at Rochester Institute of Technology.

### **In the end we were sunk cost**

By that time, we had been down there for decades.  
Seven of them, then eight. It wasn't the version  
of my body I would've have chosen  
to preserve, but neither could I turn back  
before I'd gotten my money's worth. Back was not  
even a direction, down there. Nor could I  
stop, as stopping had been forbidden. A clock  
winding down would be vaporized before  
sunrise. Sunrise would be pushed forward.  
The day would be wrung out of us if we didn't  
ring it, ourselves. By the time I got to the bog,  
I'd paid for this ride in time, in money, in spirit,  
in skin. I'd paid my considerable fee for passage  
with first optimism, then effort, then collagen,  
then the last of my well-worded thoughts. Or so  
I insisted, but, of course, I'd hoarded a few.  
Sewn into the lining of my cloak, where velvet  
split from wool, and a wormy ribbon of glue  
patched the flannel. I'd kept a few fine phrases  
double-wrapped in condoms, inserted deep  
into my vagina and my experience. A wire  
wore a bruise into the bridge of my nose. My eyes  
receded into the bloated terrain. No one  
suspected me of carrying. I laid myself back into peat,  
I laid myself down into frigid, I arched my spine  
for the last time to allow a shrew passage  
to the pitcher plant. For free. We shouldn't all  
have to pay. What a waste of time, what an investment.  
I was a green portfolio of loam and gasses.

**In the end, we found ourselves a timebomb filled with time**

Wax doll, skin doll, thin man, grass man  
braided, ginger, fiber, leather, a match  
in a scrap of wood, sigil or something  
scratched in the dirt. *I was nervous, now I'm full*  
says the friction *I was quavering, I tried.*

A belt woven of thick grasses  
whose pattern matches that of the manica.

Thick worm planchet reciting the lovers  
who waited for each other forever on either side  
of the old oak tree. A coat that hit the hem, red wool  
black tulle. Mud that smelled like the death of a queen,  
mud that froze and melted, melted and froze, a pulse.

## PETRA KUPPERS

Petra Koppers (she/her) is a disability culture activist who lives on the land of the Three Fires Confederacy in Michigan. She uses ecosomatics, performance, and speculative writing to engage audiences toward more socially just and enjoyable futures. Her third performance poetry collection, *Gut Botany*, was selected as one of the top ten poetry books of 2020 by the New York Public Library. She is the Anita Gonzalez Collegiate Professor in Performance Studies and Disability Culture at the University of Michigan, and an advisor on the low-residency MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts at Goddard College. She has led *The Olimpias*, an international disability performance series, since the late 1990s, and co-creates *Turtle Disco*, a somatic writing studio, with her wife, poet and dancer Stephanie Heit. She is a current fellow at the Black Earth Institute, a think-tank dedicated to re-forging the links between art and spirit, earth and society, and a 2021 NY Public Library Dance Research Fellow, working on *Crip/Mad Archive Dances*.

### Rock Symphony

I offer you these ancient fingerholds.  
Obsidian encrusts your whorls.  
Here are maps to stars I cannot remember.  
Feel this space cold soothe your temple --  
walk in liquid crystal glimmer.  
Feet lightly on the earth, toes lifted,  
grab tight, drift upward, heel down.

Muscular curve in this river's bed:  
fit that rock beneath your foot's arch,  
heel and toes ease together  
fish nibble along meridian line  
stardust tattoo inks epidermal wrinkles  
muscles grip neuronal fireworks:  
reorientation to the edge.

Still cool against screaming sacks  
jelly red tight around our knees,  
this evening bulge of inflammation,  
fissures gnarled long ago into crystal channel.  
Beam our difference to the stars.  
Fist gnarl. Glide across bony protuberance.  
Fatty bed. Spiral.

This rock lifts us up:  
dislocates balls of our feet,  
toes teeter, hollow breathes beneath.  
Bones try to cradle this giant pebble.  
This is the earth's curvature.

This is the flattening of years.  
This is star dust, now lift off.

Our toes smooth their path  
a massage against the earth.  
Force tightness against the bulge  
a spread, a manta ray mantle velvet.  
Strata convolute against one another.  
Our gravity is not of this Earth.  
Water gravity. Space gravity. Weightless spring.

SEAN J MAHONEY

Sean J Mahoney lives in Santa Ana, California with Dianne, her mother, 4 dogs, and 4 renters. He believes that Judas was a way better singer than Jesus and that dark chocolate is extraordinarily good for people. Sean will help run the Zoeglossia table at this year's annual AWP bookfair...lit by crips. His chapbook...Politics or Disease, please...is forthcoming (5.22) from Finishing Line Press.

**“...as a becoming frailty.”**

(after Susan Sontag)

Though they burden landscape with  
Mannered affects and skeletal remains.

Though they remain recalcitrant creatures  
Long since buried in last century's plagues.

Magical dying swans imprinted,  
Sought after, felicitous of praise,

Escorted by souring leg and faint lung.  
Yet passion for these conscripts

Does not perish in the heavy languor of  
Romanticized written works and soft, catty

Remarks. Desensitized soul, ashen face,  
Formed and deformed ever

Longing by nightfall. Nocturnal blossoms  
Revere truity and anguish.

Face breaking the laws of the moon.  
Unhealthy pallor:

Each delicate time a bud from the rising  
Branch is picked away a potent flower

Extinguished, cast back to humus.  
Streetlamps having no options save

A charm of cough culture carried in night  
“as a becoming frailty.”

Your prose edifying your flesh, your blood  
Providing remonstrations enough

That disease courts distraught metaphors,  
That these spiritually endowed pass horribly

Close, burdened, on a dark parlor shelf.

## JIM FERRIS

Jim Ferris is an award-winning poet and performance artist, author of *Slouching Towards Guantanamo*, *Facts of Life*, and *The Hospital Poems*. Poet Laureate of Lucas County, Ohio from 2015-2019, he holds a doctorate in performance studies and has performed at the Kennedy Center and across the United States, Canada and Great Britain. His current performance project, entitled “Is Your Mama White?”, uses his family history to explore race, class and disability as powerful components of identity. Ferris’s writing has appeared in dozens of publications, ranging from *Poetry* magazine to the *Georgia Review*, from *Beauty Is a Verb* to *Text & Performance Quarterly*, from the *Michigan Quarterly Review* to weekly newspapers. Past president of the Society for Disability Studies and the Disabled & D/deaf Writers Caucus, he has won awards for creative nonfiction and mathematics as well as performance and poetry. Ferris holds the Ability Center Endowed Chair in Disability Studies at the University of Toledo, where his research interests focus on disability art, culture, and communication.

### Doctor Vocabulary

my left foot hangs down and curls  
in like it has a secret to tell  
other feet and ankles, sole  
flat like a palm and confiding – no  
secret should be told lightly. I tell  
you this: the foot is ten inches long,  
heel to hallux tip, four inches wide  
at the widest point, next to the joint.  
Mottled pink and blue and beige,  
blood vessels, no sign of corns except  
on the bottom, I’ll find a mirror –  
the heel is round and a little red,  
the skin under the arch pale  
but along the lateral  
edge a ridge red like the heel –  
tell me now, how do you feel –  
the red broadens nearer the big joint  
(the metatarsophalangeal)  
but an inch or so under the fourth  
toe a circle of tough yellow gray  
callus ringed by a darker red – this  
is where my weight must go, a disk  
of toughness at the edge of what I  
used to call my sore leg when it, when  
I, were shorter – why do you call it

your sore leg, a doctor asked;  
sore now? No, wasn't, isn't,  
that day my vocabulary changed.  
Wish I could recall the doctor's name.  
Doctor Vocabulary.

### **A little something extra**

there is always wind  
along the river

the river flows  
from lake to lake

when I told Lucille Clifton  
a little about crip culture  
she told me she had been born  
with six fingers on each hand  
both given a little  
something extra

there is always wind  
along the lake

the wind blows  
against the current

when the star of the day  
told me go sit quietly  
at the children's table  
Ms. Lucille told me  
she was one of us  
one of us

can the wind blow  
from two directions  
at once—is that  
how tornadoes arise

the lake feeds  
the river feeds  
the lake

## ARDEN HILL

Despite being from Louisiana, Arden Eli Hill has never wrestled an alligator, only a kangaroo. Arden has published in places such as "Willow Springs," "Western Humanities Review," "Kaleidoscope," "Breath and Shadow," the Lambda Literary award-winning anthology *First Person Queer*, its sequel, *Second Person Queer*, "Hip Mama," "The Wellesley Review," "Strange Horizons," and most recently "McSweeney's Internet Tendency." Arden's first chapbook, *Bloodwater Parish*, an exploration of race, gender, sexuality, and adoption in southern Louisiana is forthcoming from Seven Kitchens Press. In case you are still thinking about the kangaroo, Arden won.

### Blue Boys

The boys are turning into mermaids.  
Water weed wigs. Clenched tense feet like fins.

All the mermaids are swimming downwards.  
Weight carrying flesh, their nipples  
harden in the cold like pearls, like  
bully hearts, so small and tight.  
Teenage fists. All the boys,

all the beautiful boys.  
They become diving birds  
air rush and breaking  
tense surfaces they sink

as if the stone on the river bottom  
is reachable, as if it can be pulled up  
when breath becomes air bubble when  
vision becomes grey and murky.

Where is the anchor for boys' blue hands  
To discover lifting from the riverbed?  
Where is the clarity of future I survived on  
at twelve, sitting up from the enamel casket  
of a bathtub when I couldn't make myself drown?

In the river, the mermaids do not understand  
the scale-less flesh that accumulates and softens  
in the silt. Boys become mermaids, dive, and rise  
become birds, beautiful broad-winged birds.

I watch the shadows lifting hollow bones  
and heavy hearts. An invisible phoenix,

like a fire, plumes from each body.

After men pull dead boys from the water,  
the river looks still and innocent  
like a bully when he sleeps.

### **Yellow Watermelon** (for S, for connecting fruit to home)

We don't eat yellow watermelon.  
My mother looks away  
when my grandmother asks for shrimp and beer.  
My mother insists my grandmother change  
clothes before she takes her out.

We don't eat yellow watermelon.

We wear cotton. We don't pick it.  
Oh Lordy. From dark fingers to the dark hair  
beneath my mother's pale panties.

We don't eat yellow watermelon.

I don't learn my people's tongue.  
Instead, the teacher twists Parisian French into my mouth  
like a not quite right tooth despite its whiteness.  
My grandmother learned English as a child in school, so well,  
she couldn't help me with my French homework.  
I pointed to every object in her house.

*What's that? What's that? What's that?*

We don't eat yellow watermelon.

Oh Lordy. My mother slaps my hand before I can  
touch the pink jewels spilling from a dead possum's pouch.

We don't eat yellow watermelon.

I don't learn how to sew or fish.  
My mother learned to smoke when she was twelve.  
When I was twelve, I sucked on sugar cane.

We don't eat yellow watermelon.

My school went on a trip to Cajun Creole Village.  
Someone split a cane open for us. We didn't think it was sweet enough.  
We wanted white sugar, thought brown sugar looked like dirt.  
We bought a Nanette Nutria rat book from the museum shop,  
bought an alligator foot, bought a voodoo doll. We don't eat yellow watermelon.

*You know what I miss, they say, when they find out where I'm from?  
Yellow watermelon. Oh Lordy.  
Nothing is sweeter.*

I've cut green rinds into smiles, swallowed red flesh, spat black seeds.

*Oh Lordy  
Yankees don't know how good, how sweet.*

We don't eat yellow watermelon.

I had some once. Pale rind pale flesh  
seeds so soft you could swallow them.

It wasn't in my mother's yard,  
but a Whole Foods outside of Boston,  
*exotic* dripping down my chin.  
*How rare* the suburban tasters said,  
*Jesus, how very fine.*

## GENEVIEVE ARLIE

Genevieve Arlie (she/they) is a genderfluid Californian with chronic fatigue syndrome. They hold literature degrees from Stanford, Columbia, and the University of Iowa, where they were an Arts Fellow in translation. A nominee for Best of the Net and *The Best Small Fictions*, they're now a PhD student in English–creative writing and Presidential Fellow at the University of Georgia. Their work appears in *St. Petersburg Review*, *Flyway*, *Columbia Journal Online*, *Waxwing*, *Nat. Brut*, *Passages North*, and Zoeglossia's *Poem of the Week*.

### True Fresh

The geometer wishes he were David  
cut from stone by lightning, his mind

gyring wide into figures of space  
out of time, ever gauging the shock

of the word for the pathos, ever  
slinging the rock of his wound

at the sugared glass of me.  
I'd rather be the artist

himself, arms overhead atop  
a scaffold I built to the heavens

and still immortal, than perfect  
frozen in stone, however larger

than life in the image of God,  
the shepherd who slew the enemy

of art with the dead aim  
of righteousness, the rightful king

by love who would anoint a covenant  
he too could not keep and too late beg

forgiveness. But I always felt beautiful  
by comparison. Need feels that way

at first. Finally the harp grows  
weary of other viscera wound

to snap across its polished body,

the ceaseless plucking of its chords

as if in play, turtle shell weeping  
hollow with the psalmist's ancient grief

four thousand years of liturgy  
could not unspool. Finally

the harp would string  
its own guts, would sing  
itself to sleep, like the artist's  
breastbone pressed flush

against the ceiling, plaster  
still wet for the color.

## AVA CIPRI

Ava C. Cipri is a non-binary queer writer and activist with an MFA from Syracuse University. They are a Zoeglossia fellow, who co-found and serves as poetry editor for *The Deaf Poets Society: An Online Journal of Disability Literature & Art*. A Pushcart, Best New Poets, and Best of the Net nominee, their poetry is forthcoming in *Boulevard*, *Cimarron*, *PBQ*, among others. Ava is the author of two chapbooks; *Queen of Swords* (dancing girl press, 2018) and *Leaving the Burdened Ground* (Stranded Oak Press, 2018).

### Tethered

Some days jolt—

a shiver of muscle memory;  
a hearse that carried me twice.

*The tire swing  
tied to the rope,  
tied to the branch—  
to tree to ground,  
tied to the window frame  
a christening  
gown of spider webs  
before the latched door  
for everything stored in jars  
for winter bodies.*

Age two, I drank a Coke  
can of brake fluid  
left near my brother's tire,  
bled from his Jeep's breaks.

*The tire swing  
tied to the rope,  
tied to the branch—  
to tree to sky,  
tied to the cardinal's red song,  
a reckoning  
hour of coyotes  
before the fallen clothesline  
for everything stored in jars  
for summer bodies.*

Rochester's only ambulance,  
a hearse-combination-coach,  
the same one with its padded  
heavy leather, its opaque  
rear panels, that drove my mother,

pregnant, in its back bed  
30 miles to Rutland.

### **Ushering in the Year of the Metal Ox**

I bleed  
the first morning after  
the full moon,

*Aren't you done with me?*

Blood streams  
down my inner thighs  
between tampons  
to tiled floor.

I bleed out for days,  
take medication 3xDay to clot,  
to avoid anemia, again,  
the need for more iron infusions.

Cycle bound to the moon's,  
Cancer's ruling planet:  
Intuitive, suspicious, & protective.  
Driven North, a need for mountains;  
susceptible to dehydration.

I bleed for my mother's blood loss from my birth,  
loss for miscarriages & two abortions.

I bleed for the first Alzheimer's hit,  
*Shhh! there are spies . . .*

The second, yesterday,  
leaving her

in the memory unit  
I'm the disowned daughter:  
*Not mine! Not my daughter!*

I bleed

I bleed for her mother, her mother's mother, & all the way back . . .

I bleed for my choices—

the multiplying cells  
never daughtered  
that I dared name.

## SHEILA BLACK

Sheila Black is a disabled mother and poet. Her most recent collection is *Radium Dream* newly out from Salmon Poetry Ireland. Poems and essays have appeared in *Poetry*, *Kenyon Review Online*, *Ploughshares*, *The New York Times*, and elsewhere. She is a co-editor of *Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* (Cinco Puntos Press, 2011), named a Notable Book for Adults for 2012 by the American Library Association. She is a co-founder and current Executive Director of Zoeglossia, a non-profit to build community for poets with disabilities. She lives in San Antonio, Texas.

### Americana

I liked the anonymity of handing over the card,  
the feel of rough wool or silk and after the hot sense  
of shame in the tiny room of mirrors where the dimpled  
thigh and the slightly wild eye of “not enough” or “less than.”  
Who is the fleet and the strong; what is the image of  
the resurrection? At the moment after the miracle the people  
sit in the road suddenly content for beans and rice,  
nothing but time with its heavy shoes. I spent many hours  
scrolling screens as if this were the real or how was it the real—  
toggling from girl in silk underwear, corn silk hair, to migrants  
in the water riding on rafts made of scraps of innertubes, wood, rope,  
a cell phone still catching a signal in the center of the waves,  
which is as intimate and useless as a heartbeat. To drown  
facedown as if this were a public shame, the photographs  
shared, pixel, Tweet, a kind of public and therefore hollow  
performance of—what is it the person facedown believed  
or grieved when the sheer volume of water became too much?  
I liked the anonymity of stepping outside – a heavy muggy  
day when no one was out but me – dumpsters and a few  
confetti-like remnants of celebrations in vacant lots, the  
garages with the junk we acquired and could not figure out  
how to let go soon enough. I used to wish to be like the ones  
who know how to tread so lightly they leave barely a trace.  
Instead spend days pondering extinctions – the escalating rate as  
we fan out across the skin of the earth, the earth which  
knows our pain as clear-cut, strip mine, desertification.  
To give the young woman with the deliberately blank face  
my card and have her return to me a tiny pot of blue glitter  
with which I paint the lids of my eyes. To stare and stare  
into the desolation of a mirror and try to witness there  
the disruptions of time. To see the ones around me each  
holding a kind of angel of loneliness inside, to observe the  
settling above the shoulders, the strained longing—a mere  
flicker, not quite a motion—of what it would be for us  
to rise, a kind of yeast, a keening in the air, the flower  
of our collective life.

## Survival Instructions: Brazil, 1967

You have to learn it on your own,  
and this is hard—the flintier voice,  
the one that sounds more like  
a cough or a cry, that lingers  
like smoke in the throat, that  
could thicken even air. You have to tell  
the truth even to the ones you  
are scared will be destroyed by it.  
I dreamed all night of my first home  
and remembered children  
throwing rocks, remembered  
stumbling, remembered my brace,  
and the lock on the door,  
the calling in the night when no one  
came. So much is determined  
by the chance of being born.  
On our corner, the man with  
elephantiasis, caught from the shallow  
water, the mosquitos, the lack  
of options, the *only* water, and so  
his vast leg which he must live  
around as if beauty did not matter.  
We gave him coins, afraid to meet  
his eyes, which were the same as ours,  
behemoth leg so stiff like a balloon  
filled with water or worse. You  
can hardly bear to look but you  
have to look. Through the long glass:  
a city that is only another house  
made of light. You have to picture  
their eyes passing over and the  
speed at which they place you—over  
there. You have to learn what  
it is to breathe in the promise of  
such solitude, to say you will live  
*around*, you will know joy—whose  
world could be better than this one?

## TRAVIS CHI WING LAU

Travis Chi Wing Lau (he/him/his) is Assistant Professor of English at Kenyon College. His research and teaching focus on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literature and culture, health humanities, and disability studies. Alongside his scholarship, Lau frequently writes for venues of public scholarship like *Synopsis: A Journal of Health Humanities*, *Public Books*, *Lapham's Quarterly*, and *The Los Angeles Review of Books*. His poetry has appeared in *Wordgathering*, *Glass*, *South Carolina Review*, *Foglifter*, and *Hypertext*, as well as in two chapbooks, *The Bone Setter* (Damaged Goods Press, 2019) and *Paring* (Finishing Line Press, 2020). [travisclau.com]

### **Brain Fog**

*After Charles Dickens*

implacable

as much mud in the streets

as if the waters

had but newly retired

from the face of the earth

waddling like an elephantine lizard

smoke lowering down

a soft black drizzle

with flakes of soot

gone into mourning

for the death of the sun

undistinguishable in mire

a general infection of ill temper,

losing foot-hold since the day broke

(if this day ever broke)

adding new deposits to the crust

upon crust of mud,

sticking at those points

tenaciously

fog everywhere

fog up the river,

fog down the river

where it rolls deified

great (and dirty)

fog creeping

fog lying

fog drooping

fog in the eyes and throats  
fog in the stem and bowl  
fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers  
shivering  
a nether sky of fog

the raw afternoon is rawest  
and the dense fog is densest  
obstruction  
at the very heart of the fog

the groping and floundering condition  
most pestilent  
holds this day in the sight of heaven and earth.

## TERESA MILBRODT

Teresa Milbrodt is the author of three short story collections: *Instances of Head-Switching*, *Bearded Women: Stories*, and *Work Opportunities*. She has also published a novel, *The Patron Saint of Unattractive People*, and a flash fiction collection, *Larissa Takes Flight: Stories*. Her fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry have appeared in numerous literary magazines.

### **Gift (Return)**

The first time you brought someone back from the dead,  
there were trumpets and butterflies and camera flashes,  
gaping paramedics, daytime talk shows and book deals.

The second time you brought someone back from the dead,  
his wife kissed you and said you were a saint. He sat up  
in the road, said his back felt funny, and asked for a doctor.

The third time you brought someone back from the dead,  
the waitress dropped her tray. He had to be treated  
for second-degree soup burns and cardiac arrest.

The fourth time you brought someone back from the dead,  
your aunt clutched funeral flowers to her chest. Your uncle  
stared up from the coffin and said, "I knew you had a boyfriend."

The fifth time you brought someone back from the dead,  
he spat on your shoe and said the coffee and butter cookies  
were better in heaven. The ones in his cupboard were stale.

## DOMINIK PARIEN

I'm a disabled, bisexual French Canadian and I live in Hamilton, ON. My debut poetry collection *Side Effects May Include Strangers* was published by McGill-Queen's University Press in 2020 and my recent work has appeared in *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *The Humber Literary Review*, *Riddle Fence*, *Maisonneuve*, and others.

### **monster mine mon monstre**

the monstrous started in the self. by that i mean the tongue. in monster there was mine. mon. monstre. mon monstre. once i dreamt a man made himself small and climbed into my mouth. the man had teeth like knives and chewed off words i was learning. the man on my tongue said new language was the spawn of babel and boy you best guard yourself against those who would make you more like them. by which he meant there was something sacred in the singular. of course it was in my tongue so garçon and garde are some of the words he said while he lamented le sort de l'assimilé. like new language was both fate and spell. the man would think me the monster. in writing i have torn our tongue from him. made the man more like me. now i write "at this the man would have an angry mien" and i do not think of mine while writing mien. le mien. mon monstre. except it seems i do. maybe the man sits on my tongue still. lamenting the days i was sacred.



## RAYE HENDRIX

Bio: Raye Hendrix is a writer from Alabama. Raye is the author of the chapbooks *Every Journal Is A Plague Journal* (Bottlecap Press) and *Fire Sermons* (Ghost City Press). She is the winner of the 2019 Keene Prize for Literature and *Southern Indiana Review*'s 2018 Patricia Aakhus Award, and her work has been featured in *Poetry Daily*, *32 Poems*, *Shenandoah*, *Cimarron Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Zone 3*, *The Adroit Journal*, and elsewhere. Raye is the Poetry Editor of *Press Pause Press*, and she holds degrees from Auburn University and an MFA from the University of Texas at Austin. Raye is currently a PhD student at the University of Oregon studying Deafness, Disability, and Poetry. You can find more of their work at [rayehendrix.com](http://rayehendrix.com).

### Syndrome

Every child I might have had is a knot on a long, coiled rope, red to the touch. Think of them like this, like the song: *99 red balloons*. Think of them like caviar, red grapes, an arachnid's many bulbous eyes, a bowl of swollen cherries, a bowl of bloody cherry pits, red-fibered and fuzzy, all stuck together with juice, like the sticky red thread of the fates, twisting everything up. Red is the color of pain and it gets everywhere. Red knots bursting, spider eyes and fish eggs. Red is the color of love and it gets everywhere. My poor red maybe-children pooling fate into white bowls.

## NATHAN SPOON

Nathan Spoon is an autistic poet with learning disabilities whose poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *American Poetry Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Gulf Coast*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Daily*, and the anthologies *How to Love the World: Poems of Gratitude and Hope* and *Sonnets from the American: An Anthology of Poems and Essays*. He is the author of a debut collection *Doomsday Bunker* and the chapbook *Fail Better! Feel Great!!* and editor of *Queerly*.

### **Holding a Pinecone**

Leaves that have fallen are blowing through the language of ordinary lives. Hands that have reached out are touching the forearms of a lover.

This moment is a convergence of vectors in relation to each of their corners. One afternoon a couple drove to a nearby town and walked

what were for them old trails at a new park. Make it stranger the plain sky said. I will do my best the wind replied. It is important to appreciate the

things that almost matter. But what are those the earth asked. The tall grasses whispered as the couple walked along a trail that passed through a

field. There are never enough fields in the world one of them said. I agree although the world is nothing but fields the other like the wind replied.

### **From the Root**

Begin by knowing fallow time is the better part of life. Then open yourself to the prospect of being mesmerized by ordinary occurrences. You will soon recognize how so much of your life gathers around some lens or other which is almost the opposite of keeping a very varied diet. The past as if irretrievably is a patch of violets in a craggy

field. You could wipe your eyes and be satisfied before you take your next breath. This is how practical the beach of your life has become. Meanwhile the real trunks are bigger or smaller depending on the season. The hand is fallow. The head is fallow. The heart is fallow despite the mystifying streams tuning your other body.

## SUSAN NORDMARK

Susan Nordmark's writing appears in Michigan Quarterly Review, New World Writing, Los Angeles Review, and many other journals. Her work is anthologized in The Shape of a Poem, 2021, and in Peacock Journal's 2017 collection. She lives in Oakland, California.

### **Water**

In a lifetime there are one or two people who make love to you with gold. In a pinch, there is always thread. Blankets hold ghosts, drawer pulls open memories written in silk.

Early white sheets flare through cracked glass and my belly swells and pools. Glass is only sand boiled and stretched, a belly a pond of black leaves waving blind tongues, tasting for diatoms. Fish vibrate without warning. Nobody watched how rivers became oceans, nobody knows why whitecaps turn opal ash. Salt rushes under rocks into cornfields. Skin is a window that shoots holes from the inside, and glitter sprays my retinas with night. A website showed me what whales see, and I stopped hearing other peoples' languages. It's one long world curved between an empty sidewalk and a street full with sycamores dropping their pods.

A lamp. A box. A camera behind a door. Squares of wood floating out. A cat scatters blue, and crows scrape against clouds that disappear. The president sings in rhyme, dirt expands beyond speech, a murder ballad lies face down in a ditch. Fences blacken after years and shift into traffic, while animals bear witness saying nothing. Tell me the mezzanine is grown over with moss, tell me cars are spilling into the sea, tell me my computer is skating through slippery asphalt, and green libraries spring all together into space. These days forget swimming. Forget apples cleaning themselves with copper and linen. Forget the factories throwing oil into human throats. Feel the scent of all your neurons etching roots through benzene and sandstone into a creekbed you have never seen.

## SUZY HARRIS

Suzy Harris lives in Portland, Oregon. Her work has been published most recently in Switchgrass Review, Timberline Review, Williwaw Review and two pandemic anthologies. She is a retired attorney who is learning to hear again with two cochlear implants. Her chapbook about her hearing journey, Listening in the Dark, will be published by The Poetry Box in February 2023.

### **Could You Repeat That?**

Could you say that again?  
You said what?  
Pardon me?  
You found what at the store?  
You put the gift where?  
Sorry, I missed the first word,  
the last word, the middle word.  
Your name is...?  
Wait, you said what?  
Sorry, I missed that.  
Could you say that again?

## **Say the Word**

*Say the word baseball.*

*Say the word cowboy.*

*Say the word sidewalk.*

In this padded booth,  
the only sound is from these speakers.

It could be God talking  
and I, the disciple,  
leaning close to hear every word.

*Say the word hotdog.*

*Say the word...*

so soft now sounds  
falter and collapse.

This is me in silence  
waiting for the next holy word.

## KIMBERLY JAE

### Bio

Kimberly Jae is an award-winning Slam Poet ranking in the top 30 slam poets in the world by PSI in 2018. In 2019, she survived a stroke leading to physical disability and Aphasia, a language-based disability affecting her ability to read, write and speak. Undaunted, she has since won multiple fellowships, competitions (making it to finals and nationals in multiple countries) and has been published including in *Alt Minds Literary Magazine* (Canada), *Hawai'i Review* (US), and anthologies including, *In the Shadow of the Mic: Three Decades of Slam Poetry in Pittsburgh*. Her first full length manuscript, *Baptism*, was shortlisted for the Sexton Prize in 2021.

### *And COVID Spends the Day in the Field*

Sometimes I like to catch death  
with a butterfly net while sipping some  
kind of fruity Moscato from a recycled pickle jar  
My toes  
Crumple grass and ant hills  
I swipe the bugs away  
Watch them scatter about like black marks on dice  
rolling against the green to  
Crap out  
Fly into the net  
Beg my net to dance to the tune of  
Pandemic  
Heavy laden in low octane  
Violins, harps, piano  
And the rhythmic beat of heart monitors and  
Ventilators  
They drop like butterflies with plucked wings ya know  
These people  
Into my net  
It is heavy  
Overrun even  
I switch to something stronger  
Amaretto maybe  
Almond spiced cyanide  
Still sweet, a twist of sour  
Let the ice warm my lips  
I meant to write elegy  
Lament the slaughter  
But they do not lament for themselves  
I wonder why

My net is such a draw  
When it looks so much  
Like a mask



to be separated, like milk from meat,  
like the sheep from the goats.  
Parsed out in my white paper bed

where the lights stayed on  
all night, while those  
in the kingdom of the well

were busy composting  
coffee grounds, planting  
daffodils, fucking.

My body a fishbone,  
my body a stream  
of sleepless nights,

adrift in the scent of the lilacs  
the neighbors cut for me, carried in,  
reciting Hail Marys over my head.

When they wheeled me outside to see  
the branches defying February,  
winter was a strange, hot ghost.

I couldn't believe the sweat pooling  
in my collarbone, as if summer  
had never left. As if I hadn't.

## NAOMI ORTIZ

Naomi Ortiz is a Poet, Writer, Facilitator, and Visual Artist whose intersectional work focuses on self-care for activists, disability justice, climate action, and relationship with place. Ortiz is the author of *Sustaining Spirit: Self-Care for Social Justice* (Reclamation Press), a non-fiction book for diverse communities on dealing with the risks of burnout. They are a 2021-2022 Border Narrative Grant Awardee for their multidisciplinary project, *Complicating Conversations*. Ortiz is a 2019 Zoeglossia Poetry Fellow whose poems have been nominated for Best of the Internet and listed on Entropy's "Best of 2020-2021: Favorite Poems Published online." Their poetry has been published in outlets such as *Split This Rock* Poem of the Week, *About Place* literary journal, *Poems and Numbers*, and *VIDA*, and performed at events such as the Disability Pride Parade in Chicago as well as shared through performances around the country. Ortiz is a Disabled, Mestiza living in the Arizona U.S./Mexico borderlands.  
Website: [www.NaomiOrtiz.com](http://www.NaomiOrtiz.com)

### Ode to plastic cup

"The goal is for *no trash* to be sent to landfills, incinerators or the ocean."  
Zero waste definition, Wikipedia 2020

Weight of both reusable glass plus liquid means  
my one-way wrist twists down  
the only direction it bends  
sends drink to splash on carpets or slippery floor

Worse yet

non-flexing elbow means arm  
smacks cup across room with accidental gusto  
at least once a week

Beloved coffee cups  
shatter into h u n d r e d s of p i e c e s  
must dredge energy to clean up now  
hot beverages, my expensive habit

At restaurants, I have to ask for a straw  
slick perspiring drink  
pointless to even try to lift  
to lips with fingers, hand, shoulder  
Instead, I bat and slide glass across tabletop  
position straw below mouth, sip  
then push it back, nudge, shift

Except, every once in a while, I miscalculate  
or glass bottom catches on table surface

to topple and douse eating companion with cold beverage  
saturate my clothes and shoes good

Unless the cup is plastic

Oh, chemically bonded vessel, with your springy forgiveness  
to bounce passively on floor, patiently listless  
you wait for me to retrieve you in my own time

Oh, plastic cup

with your bright shiny colors  
your fun designs  
your resilient sides  
As scooter squeezes you between wheel and wall  
you may bend, but do not crack where you lie

Weight light, large brim  
I can sip straight from the rim

Glossy red party cups sold in long plastic bags  
last me month-long jags  
I stock up, dollar store deals  
just what works for my body  
call it an accommodation  
this need for plastic cups

As disabled person  
independence is precarious  
daily-life and reason  
constructed upon a wobbly set of Crip-hacks  
get me from, *can't to good enough*  
Where is my place in zero waste?

## KHAIRANA BAROKKA

Khairani Barokka is a Minang-Javanese writer and artist in London, whose work is presented widely internationally. Among Okka's honours, she was a UNFPA Indonesian Young Leader Driving Social Change, an NYU Tisch Departmental Fellow, *Modern Poetry in Translation's* Inaugural Poet-in-Residence, and Associate Artist at the UK's National Centre for Writing. Her books include *Indigenous Species* (Tilted Axis), *Rope* (Nine Arches), co-edited volume *Stairs and Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back* (Nine Arches) and her most recent book, *Ultimatum Orangutan* (Nine Arches), shortlisted for the 2021 Barbellion Prize.

### prayer as fistful of praise

dear blood, i remember  
your child arms, and our father,  
propping me up on a sidewalk  
on our way home from wretched hospital  
in a foreign squawk of city.  
my memory is cloud of protection,  
i do not recall most of life in great detail.  
it is all there, contained under a breath  
of haze, a smothered dulling of incision.  
i apologize again for worry,  
and thank you for the qur'an  
that you kept close and reread, retread,  
then gave to me when i left again.  
these are prayers in return;  
in prayer, we revisit understanding  
steadfastness of kin. dodo says  
'brainwaves are non-local'  
for the seventy-hundredth time.  
i believe him because i know:  
you seem calm, from afar.  
i will return your child-limbs'  
help to me, return how you've carried me

up the stairs at home, as i carried you  
when a very small child, shrieking  
until the night i told you a story.

## EMILY K. MICHAEL

**Bio:** Emily K. Michael is a blind poet, musician, and writing teacher from Jacksonville, FL. Her poetry and essays have appeared in *Wordgathering*, *The Hopper*, *Artemis Journal*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Welcome to the Resistance*, *Nine Mile Magazine*, *Rogue Agent*, *Narrative Inquiry in Bioethics*, *Split This Rock's The Quarry*, *BREVITY's Nonfiction Blog*, *Barriers and Belonging*, and *AWP Writer's Notebook*. Emily's work centers on ecology, disability, and music. She is the poetry editor at *Wordgathering*, and she curates the [Blind Academy](#) blog. Her first book [Neoteny: Poems](#) is available from Finishing Line Press. Find more at <http://emilykmichael.com>.

### Social Mobility

“So childhood too feels good at first, before one happens to notice the terrible sameness, age after age.” — John Gardner, *Grendel*

On covered sidewalks dancing blurs escape the rain  
and revel in our release from class. I deploy  
a pristine staff to keep my route, its quiet  
tapping I alone am trained to hear.

In restive crowds my cane predicts the way—  
discreet and pale among the uniformed legs,  
a key to safe passage. Grazing the slick cement,  
it translates the inches before my feet: to find not treasure

but empty air. Everything unmapped is too cramped,  
too loud—the thump of backpacks hastily slung on shoulders,  
the slap of loafers on the wet ground, the squeals—so many already  
drenched. I move ahead, cane cool and precise. Fingers married  
to the rubber grip, I am extended along the sweep, claiming more space.

Then my emblem of inclusion trips a vacant traveler—  
and I change from human interest to sightless  
misfit. Foreign. Grendel pawing

at the door. Pretender in a plaid skirt.

Because this is a numbers game. Only  
I divine the muddy walk with a white cane.

LESLIE McINTOSH

Leslie McIntosh is black, gay, cis-male, neurodivergent, an older millennial, a poet, and a psychologist. He has received support, in the form of residencies and fellowships, from Breadloaf, Callaloo, Furious Flower Poetry Center, The Watering Hole, and Zoeglossia. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Split This Rock*, *Obsidian*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Witness*, and elsewhere. He is an Assistant Poetry Editor at Newfound and lives in Jersey City, NJ.

**you claustrophobic. no, you claustrophobic, stop playin' but don't go nowhere.**

I knock aggressively, I've been told.  
I knock like there is money involved,  
I've been told. Fist bruised, begging  
an oaken door. Its carvings  
embroidered on my knuckles.  
My clothes stuck to places,  
sweat-cold,  
I wish they weren't.

I've been on both sides of these,  
doors and clothes,  
and though this should be  
obvious, it's the same obvious I use  
to barricade entryways,  
in my brain and otherwise;  
simple as shoulders shrugged high  
then dropped like bricks  
resigned to a reluctant wall,  
like protocol, like sex  
on the 3rd date. People  
who pen their birthdays  
into my calendar uninvited.

Me,  
the doorless courtyard, yet ladders droop over my edge—skin

that wants to fall apart  
but loves itself anyway,  
its fissures sneak along a male form,  
gravel-chinned, want-hewn,  
lined with locks mouthing words  
that beg  
to be played with  
roughly, by another's fingers—  
for their tumblers to be

pulled out  
into pillows of rust; red, arthritic  
with history, useless aggregate.

A map knew how to locate me  
but damned if it knew how to address—  
how to link the place  
to any meaningful neighbor.

The rust sits in a pile,  
softly at first, but then  
like a twilight.  
The hemisphere of my tongue  
is the wedge of a world  
that divides and divides  
and has nowhere else to go,  
so I'm never done  
trying to say.

## STEPHANIE HEIT

Stephanie Heit is a queer/disabled poet, dancer, and teacher of somatic writing and contemplative movement practices. She is a Zoeglossia Fellow, bipolar, and a member of the Olimpias, an international disability performance collective. Her poetry collections are the forthcoming hybrid memoir poem *Psych Murders* (Wayne State University Press, 2022) and *The Color She Gave Gravity* (The Operating System, 2017). Her work has appeared in journals such as *Sonora Review*, *Rogue Agent*, *About Place*, *Ecotone*, *Anomaly*, *Bombay Gin*, *Dunes Review*, *Typo*, and *Disability Studies Quarterly*. She lives on Anishinaabe territory in Ypsilanti, Michigan where she codirects Turtle Disco, a somatic writing space, with her wife and collaborator, Petra Kuppers. [www.stephanieheitpoetry.wordpress.com](http://www.stephanieheitpoetry.wordpress.com)

### 0 (zero)

There are openings, sometimes circular or circles masked as rectangles where your breath has to pace itself at a certain rate for passage. 0 (zero) as the end of a countdown. Or beginning – like pelvis / head in relation to spine. Endpoints that aren't points but whole beings with anatomical structures that sing. 0 (zero) party invitations where the space is the event. There may be streamers, glitter, lipstick stains, sweat, traces that bodies have been there and cared for geometry. It is possible the objects only start to dance after the bodies have left.

### chafe

cold recedes in bursts  
ground vibrates  
there is a stinging  
tendrils move  
itchy feet come unnumb  
roots remember themselves  
subtlest green palette whispers the edges  
floss through dried leaves  
tongues lick air  
weather change tastes  
sage musk crocus  
a lost hour  
little & big hand  
stab toward yellow  
saving time  
spry spring nervy

## RICKY RAY

Ricky Ray is a disabled poet who lives with his wife and his old brown dog in the old green hills of the Hudson Valley. He is the author of *Fealty* (Diode Editions, 2019), *Quiet, Grit, Glory* (Broken Sleep Books, 2020) and *The Sound of the Earth Singing to Herself* (Fly on the Wall Press, 2020), which was longlisted for the Laurel Prize. He was educated at Columbia University and the Bennington Writing Seminars, and his awards include the Cormac McCarthy Prize, the Ron McFarland Poetry Prize, a Zoeglossia fellowship and a Liam Rector fellowship. His work appears widely in periodicals and anthologies, including *The American Scholar*, *The Moth*, *Waxwing*, *Salamander*, et al.

### **The Music We Are**

This morning, the snow blew off the limbs  
in a fine mist of sparrows.  
They pecked at the air and disappeared.

Addie and I descended the hill,  
my eye sockets on fire, her shoulders sore.  
The wind played the pines like violins.

I wanted to pull out my flute and join them,  
but the music we are,  
I couldn't access the scale.

Listening strung me along the lyre,  
but revealed me no score.  
Looking was no better

than holding a mirror against a mirror.  
Taste was the tongue  
trying to describe the taste of itself.

Touch asked whether  
the subject was the feeler or the felt.  
Smell came closest,

every other sense  
commandeered into its service:  
Addie lost the deer tracks

in the powder and hovered,  
scanning until she caught the scent  
and cracked the whip of her body

into its trail, as if she were the thrust

at the tip of God's baton,  
satisfying the yearn in the air.

### **Preparing My Broken Spine for the Afterlife**

Every day I say a prayer for my spine  
and it bends to laugh at the hope  
that a day could pass without hurt.

It should have known better.  
To bend is to spasm, to clench like a clef,  
to catch lightning as proof of life: *yelp*.

One day, I'd like to take it apart and hold each  
vertebra in the nest of my palms: thirty-three  
birds of glass—so much shiver and shatter,

so much brittle-boned flight. I'll set them in a line  
on my favorite shirt, the indentations a ladder  
towards comfort, if such a place still exists.

I'll pat each of them on the head and step back  
to admire: all that agony, so simple and quiet.  
I'll find a lost song in my throat and sing to them.

Something about how the furious stars we are  
won't always be so violent. And when my voice  
gives out, I'll pick up a post-hole digger

to dig them a different kind of grave:  
not a shallow trench, but a long, narrow door  
to the dark. I'll thrust and lift, release the dirt,

thrust, repeat, until the Earth swallows  
the metal, handles, my hands, wrists, forearms,  
future: *finis*. Then I'll lower the coccyx, the sacrum,

and each of the members of the three congregations—  
lumbar, thoracic, cervical—until the trinity glows  
and the last click of bone-on-bone signals:

kundalini: complete: the curse of scoliosis  
untethered, unfettered: a slither in the weeds:  
my spine more aligned than it ever was in me.

## ELLEN SAMUELS

### **Bio:**

Ellen Samuels is the author of the verse memoir *Hypermobilities* (Operating System, 2021). Her poetry and creative nonfiction have recently appeared in *Colorado Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Brevity*, *Rogue Agent*, *Mid-American Review*, and *Disability Visibility: Voices from the Twenty-First Century*. She is also widely published in the academic field of disability studies, including her 2021 special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* on “Crip Temporalities.” Recipient of two Lambda Literary Awards, she teaches at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Find her on twitter @ehlastigirl.

### **To the Doctor Who Said I Was Not One of The**

people who don't even  
look at their feet, who  
shuffle the dust-

darkness, uncaring,  
unlistening, un-  
understanding their

skin's own  
speech. To the  
doctor who told

me not to worry  
my heel's numbness  
could rift to

crevasse, who  
explained I was not  
one of the kind

who forgets how  
to remember to  
heal. To that doctor

who clasped  
my naked, fractured  
foot, tracing its

trails and minnow-  
skin, I say

I am she: I am  
he: I am they  
who surface the

darkness between  
your words. Claw  
and fibula, hoof

and toe, schist jawing  
out from dirt, tibia  
to tarsal joint,

bunkmates, burrow  
twins, rage-siblings  
and sorrow-kin,

un-caring a way  
together across  
the cobble-

scattered path, un-  
mazing the  
signs, together

through the  
28 bones  
to find our way home.

\*Title references the poem "I Am Not One of The" by Cheryl Marie Wade.

\*The lines "I am she: I am he" are drawn from the poem "Diving into the Wreck" by Adrienne Rich.

## KARA DORRIS

### Bio

Kara Dorris is the author of two poetry collections: *Have Ruin, Will Travel* (Finishing Line Press, 2019) and *When the Body is a Guardrail* (2020). She has also published five chapbooks: *Elective Affinities* (dancing girl press, 2011), *Night Ride Home* (Finishing Line Press, 2012), *Sonnets from Vada's Beauty Parlor & Chainsaw Repair* (dancing girl press, 2018), *Untitled Film Still Museum* (CW Books, 2019), and *Carnival Bound [or, please unwrap me]* (The Cupboard Pamphlet, 2020). Her poetry has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *DIAGRAM*, *I-70 Review*, *Southword*, *Rising Phoenix*, *Harpur Palate*, *Cutbank*, *Hayden Ferry Review*, *Tinderbox*, *Puerto del Sol*, *The Tulane Review*, and *Crazyhorse*, among others literary journals, as well as the anthology *Beauty is a Verb* (Cinco Puntos Press, 2011). Her prose has appeared in *Wordgathering*, *Breath and Shadow*, *Waxwing*, and the anthology *The Right Way to be Crippled and Naked* (Cinco Puntos Press, 2016). She earned a MFA in creative writing at New Mexico State University and a PhD in literature and poetry at the University of North Texas. Currently, she is a visiting assistant professor of English at Illinois College. For more information, please visit [karadorris.com](http://karadorris.com).

### Wilderness as Hermit Crab

When I was a girl, I thought you just added water to make things real. Just add water to rice, bouquets, & mashed potatoes. Just add water to chia pets. Just add water to your wonder bra. A Water-Baby toy could cry like a real child. I used to bang my doll over & over against the wall to see if I could get her to spill. I wonder now about biomimicry, how long they studied & recorded babies crying. With metal plates in my arm, I felt more machine, a *cyborg detective*, watching those natural girls. Then I learned to borrow shelter against stares & storms: plastic cups & tarps, long sleeves & jeans. When playing tick tack toe with shelter, whoever makes the first move wins. I began to mimic a real girl—left my soul, *light-blue gown*[ed] & see-through, on *the cliff by the sea*, came to you *resembling a woman*.

you can fill the body

with only so much water or jump

into another body

of water

\*

a girl thought just wonder  
add bang  
spill biomimicry  
a *cyborg detective*  
*resembling a woman*

you can fill the body

with only so much [redacted]

[redacted]

\*

add

to make

real

add

add

over & over

&

more

&

makes

&

&

a real girl

see-through

## RITA MARIA MARTINEZ

Rita Maria Martinez's Jane Eyre-inspired poetry collection—*The Jane and Bertha in Me* (Kelsay Books)—was a finalist for the Andrés Montoya Poetry Prize and a semi-finalist for the Word Works Washington Prize. The poet's current writing raises awareness about triumphs and challenges inherent in navigating life with chronic daily headaches (CDH) and migraine. Her poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and appears in places like *The Best American Poetry Blog*, *Ploughshares*, and the textbook *Three Genres: The Writing of Fiction / Literary Nonfiction, Poetry and Drama*. To learn more follow Rita on Instagram @rita.maria.martinez.poet or visit <https://comeonhome.org/ritamartinez>.

### I Write for Cyborgs and Shower Chair Users

I write to discover why my head thumps on the right  
but not on the left when the weather plays Russian roulette.  
I write to elude Lady Depression who pursues me  
like a tenacious tabloid reporter, to transcend confines  
of an aching vessel, to venerate this body despite its going on  
strike over a week following the Covid vax, to honor ribs  
that felt kicked in after, to praise caregivers like my spouse  
whose steady hands unspooled a roll of camo-blue kinesio  
tape over said ribs making me feel like an Olympic swimmer  
in our blue sheets though I could barely roll over.  
I humble myself before the majesty of adjustable beds,  
revere my splendid Tempur-Pedic, its righteous remote  
that gently raises and positions with a mere button push.  
This is the closest I've come to living like the Jetsons.  
I'm holding out for the George Jetson bathing experience:  
almost sentient motion-detecting shower heads and jets  
anticipating every need as I'm washed, rinsed, dried,  
moisturized to perfection. Right now I'm content  
with the underappreciated shower chair, brushing my teeth  
while seated as my spouse lathers my back and hair.  
I esteem the shower chair that welcomes and receives me  
during the post-migraine hangover when I'm unsteady.  
I write to vent after watching *The New Adventures of Old Christine*  
when Christine's ex-hubby and coworker mock her  
asking if she's going to need a shower chair.  
Why does society assume only the elderly use shower chairs?  
I write to vanquish my timid younger self, obliterate  
her fear of offending elders when mother advised silence,  
to annihilate the ableist statement disguised as advice.

I write for Paula Kamen's *tired girls*, exhausted legions of women inwardly rolling their eyes when asked if they've tried yoga or acupuncture, for those with chronic daily headaches and migraines living in Florida where it's humid and hot as fuck.

For spoonie sisters who've been fed some doozies:

*You should mow the lawn, You like being sick, Being tired is a state of mind.* I write for peace of mind, for those who use MAOIs, CGRPs, NSAIDs.

I pay tribute to legions of responsible opioid users—chronic pain patients deemed suspicious, often treated like drug-seeking addicts in emergency rooms.

I write for the modified: cyborgs who loathe metal detectors, borgs boasting internal or external hardware, implanted with neurostimulators combating back pain, incontinence, the never-ending migraine.

I write because I'm a cyborg.

## MARGARET REED

BIO: Margaret Reed is a poet and artist from San Diego, California. She is currently working on a collection of garden haiku exploring themes of grief, resilience, gratitude and connection with the natural world. Her poems are earthy and spiritual and feel like a breath of fresh air for the mind. You can learn more at [www.tenderzestcreative.com](http://www.tenderzestcreative.com)

### Mid-Winter Remembering

I forget lovely  
Lush green morning things exist.  
But oh, I know night.

### My Sorrow Someday Produces Beauty

I plant one tiny  
Why me and water daily  
With prayer. Then: sweet peas.

### Hearty Crop

Watch me plant my feet  
In Winter Spring grief and grow  
Jalapeno spunk.