



Poetry Sustains

Investing in Our Resources

A WCC Anthology Edited by Tom Zimmerman

~ Acknowledgments ~

This *Poetry Sustains: Investing in Our Resources* anthology is a production of the Bailey Library, the Sustainability Literacy Task Force, and the WCC Poetry Club, at Washtenaw Community College, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

It features work written on the themes of Earth Day and National Poetry Month by WCC students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends that was posted on the WCC Poetry Club website in April 2023.

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www.wccnet.edu/library

<https://www.wccnet.edu/engage/sustainable/sustainability-literacy-task-force.php>

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~ Maryam Barrie ~

Bleeding Hearts as Metaphor

I moved them here from a different town,
dug twelve Dicentra Formosa out of that yard,

dividing as I went. I teased apart the intertwined
threads, dug many holes, placed one bit of white root

into each. They are more than a hundred now.
Each day their pink-brown feathery tipped stalks

reach farther into the air. Soon the small white-capped
hearts will squeeze themselves out of the slender shoots.

Newly hatched, petite, they will breathe and gather
their forces as the pink and white dangles appear

to spread below their arching stems. Underneath
the earth, their slim white tubers stretch leisurely.

They tunnel deeper and fork in brave new ways.
They find the heavy leaf litter marvelous food.

They are coming – there is no stopping them. Even through
clumps of solid clay, each root goes its own way in the dark.

~ Maryam Barrie ~

Mirroring

Our first mirror may have been the moon's echo in a river,
or the thin image at the rippling lake surface as the sun cast

a wavery movement through the water glimpse of refracting light –
a girl's bright dress, the man's dark shadow moving behind her.

All the stories behind me I cannot see, the stories I am living proof of,
are lost. My mother's mother's mother died young in a sanitarium.

Tuberculosis? Cancer? Fragile nerves? Her many children cleaved
together – Clara, the eldest, raising the youngest, my grandmother, Ruth.

Was this the start of her bitter root? Or were the still births, miscarriages,
the children who lived only a day, the origin? Was that an old story

in the blood? Were her losses the beginning of my baby fever?
My daughters tell me about hereditary trauma, marvel at the bravura

of their paternal grandmother's refusal to go down into the tube
for shelter during the bombings of the London Blitz. She wanted

to die above ground, and so she did, after the death of her only daughter,
the cold silence of her marriage, her divide and conquer policy towards

her six sons. I invent the name of my father's mother –let's call her Badrai,
Pashto for full moon. Who was her mother? Aisha? Damsa? Mahzala? Nazo?

So many women's lives – passionate, dull, haunted, sheltered, loved, unloved,
sour, or sweet. They are the underbelly of my story, with foreshadowing

and symbols, repeating themes and dangers. In her early twenties,
my mother's pregnancy meant an abusive marriage. In my early twenties,
my abortion began the child hunger that is not sated. She taught,
I teach. She gardened, I garden. She escaped into books, I do too.

Her despair and paralysis became my deep well of anger and grief.
Ten thousand years ago, obsidian mirrors reflected faces so we could
reliably see ourselves. Now, glass with silver backing reverses our double.
At 16, I stood enraptured gazing into my own eyes – their flecks of gold
and maple circling the black center. These days I scrutinize my smooth
black mirror to scry for glimpses of their long gone skies and shadows.

I do not see them yet.



~ Meg Bowman ~

Him and Jupiter

rough on the outer surface
unapproachable, intimidating
one so alone in the universe there's a question of purpose
every layer surpassed
the more amazement I find

the weight of so much yet all is compressed
existences prove so much more than expected
vibrant colors bring life and love to me
thoughts of a brilliant mind swirl like rings
storms rage, a lone hope is that they can be calmed

to me, he is more lovely than Jupiter,
he is as beautiful as the universe,
his soul as pure as the stars

yet in his eyes, he is merely dirt

~ Carolyn Crane ~

New Frontiers: Kartchner Caverns

Whenever I visit my mother in the southwest, I try to take her to someplace she's never been before. My mom is over 90 now, a world traveler who still lives alone with relative autonomy. She's buried a husband, son, and grandson. She is as wise as her years. There isn't a lot she hasn't seen. When my dad was alive, they traveled to many places near their southern Arizona home, so finding something new can be a challenge. Amazingly, she'd never been to Kartchner Caverns, a state park about twenty minutes from her house. I went there a few years ago with my husband and sons, so I already knew how indescribably special it is. Not even photographs can express the cavern's intricacy and majesty. I figured the walk would be too much for her, half a mile in dim light, so we borrowed a wheel chair at the front desk, hopped on the tram, and I wheeled her into the side of a very ordinary looking little mountain.

Cavers Gary Tenen and Randy Tufts discovered the caves in 1974 and kept them a secret so they wouldn't get trashed by idiotic people. Thank goodness they did. Ranger Dave, who led our tour, said that men walked on the moon before setting foot in this natural cathedral. Dave, who seemed to be a reincarnation of Mark Twain (who himself was a big fan of stalactites and stalagmites), was quite solicitous toward my mom, making sure she could see clearly from her perch in the chair. Her enthusiasm got the better of her several times, and she practically leapt from her seat, holding the rail and staring at the unique and bizarre formations that always look to me more like beeswax than millennia of rock, water, and nature's chemistry. Wheeling her up and down the ramps, looking down at her soft grey curls and delicate shoulders, I felt a different kind of love for her than I've ever felt for anyone. It is not exactly a direct inversion, when the child begins to care for the parent. It is a sort of poetic payback, a retributive act that is in its own way romantic and warm. Pete, Ranger Dave's assistant, kept a special eye on us, locking the chair for me when we stopped on inclines, offering his own brand of humor in his deep baritone. "What's the difference between a cave and a cavern?"

A cavern has a gift shop.” Mom didn’t miss one joke, one soda straw formation or trippy “bacon strip,” or the deeply spiritual tone of the hidden world of Kartchner.

When Tenen and Tufts set out to keep their secret, they gave the caves the code name Xanadu. The most magnificent formation in the Throne Room they named Kubla Kahn. There are benches in front of this formation, and the tour ends here with a light show, complete with music. I sat next to her, she in the chair, I on the bench, in perfect silence. I thought of all the Masses she’d taken me to, then later dragged me to, all the Hail Marys and Memorares I recited with her throughout my childhood. Now, here we were in *my* church, and she got it.

Witnessing her enthusiasm for this gorgeous place filled me with pride. Once again I’d succeeded in showing her something new in her own back yard. She came into my room to tuck me in that night, and put her hand over her heart, holding it there, pressing gently. “Thank you so much,” she said, “for showing me those caverns. We will always have that now.” Our identical green eyes danced with each other a moment. All around us, we felt peace.

~ Hien Ha ~

As It Was

I am a flower
the water is blue
the sun is warm yellow
the grass is green
but why do I fret

I am a fish
my spikes are brown
the ocean is blue
the school fish swim upon me
but why do I fret

I am a flower
the water has turned into poison
the sun became too powerful and hot
the grass is yellow
why am I dwindling

I am a fish
my spikes have turned black
the ocean has acidified
the school of fish has died
it's too hard to breathe
How do I survive?

~ Hien Ha ~

Mother Earth's Suffering

Mother Earth the one place that everyone calls a home is slowly demolishing.
She is coughing out carbons and gas
She is blinded by the gloomy clouds created by humans
She cries when her fishes die from warm temperatures in the ocean,
her coral reef creations slowly rot and turn white
The trees she has watched grow up and slowly get chopped
one by one
She watches her children pour toxic into her air, water, and ground wondering if
she will ever recover again.

~ Diane M. Laboda ~

Every Wednesday

Every Wednesday we writers meet,
the presence of others builds courage;
each pen, each white space
becomes holy ground.

Every Wednesday it can happen at the store,
or on the bus—a word flows from
the woman across the aisle
and I catch it. It opens a sacred space.

Every Wednesday face-to-face
we challenge words to “get” us,
to splay open our hearts and listen
to the beat.

Every Wednesday I walk around the block
and look at my neighbors’ houses
and their open windows
with unfamiliar faces.

Every Wednesday in our boxes
we take each other’s temperature,
hold each other’s hand
through the rough spots.

Every Wednesday my neighbor looks out
his window at my house, takes in
whatever measure of normalcy
I choose to show him, and cares.



Every Wednesday for years
we come together as sisters of
the white space, comrades of
the space between lines.

Every Wednesday I look for the hawk
that surveys my yard for moving
morsels. I sit behind my window
and look for color to return.

Every Wednesday we allow our pens
to take us out of our bodies—
to be naked to each other, to be naked
to ourselves.

~ Diane M. Laboda ~

Life in Moments

We live our lives in moments perceived,
each and every one, through senses
with an instantaneous shutter speed,
a welcoming and curious heart, and put
in a memory file that shortens the older we get.

Each moment lived in an instant
can be caught in a photo or a video,
or a sound byte, or a flicker
of candlelight blown out
and done with.

Each moment floats in a memory file,
accessible through the mists of time,
submerged by others we've chosen
to notice and string together in our story
like pearls.

We ask each moment to stand still
so we can capture a photo, paint a picture,
compose a song, stay a little longer.
A freeze-frame captures forever
before it fades or mixes or skews.

We ask each moment to pause for
consideration, so we can capture its
essence fully, appreciate its wisdom
a little longer before it escapes
our notice.



We live our lives in each moment,
and its doppelganger photograph some time
later when we hope to relive it,
however insufficiently,
and realize only then, we had to be there.



~ Diane M. Laboda ~

Unanticipated Holiness

The other day, between rainstorms, a patch
of blue sky and sunshine appeared.
Knowing it wouldn't last, as clouds
on the horizon billowed forth,
I sat out in the sun and listened.

I heard, between gusts of air moving
across the lawn, birds chirping
in the language of light, about
seeds aplenty along the marsh
and berries still hanging on.

I sat in the sun and listened
for the opening in the heavens to yawn
and stretch like the brambles
and viney creepers reach out of the bog
toward the light and whisper.

I sat in the warm sun and heard rushes rush,
thrushes thrush, the groundhog
yawn into six more weeks of weather.
I heard spring yawn into February,
the hope of April and May.

I sat in the sun and listened to
each treasure I'd overlooked before
shine its light, hover in its colorfulness,
take a deep breath of today's air
and sigh in unanticipated holiness.

I sat in the sun and heard my own cells
loosen just a little, rub against each other
and smile. I felt the iris of my eye
grow larger in anticipation of reds
and greens blending in harmony.

~ Diane M. Laboda ~

The White Page

I crawl onto the white page in the morning
and look for a place to begin. I look between
the lines for clues to who I am going to be today,
what I'm going to say and who I'd like to meet.

It might be the me I know, or someone
I haven't found inside me—the person I really am,
the one I hide behind masks and costumes
and blank stares and nightmares.

She might be friendly or dense, angry or
very, very sad. I never really know who lurks
in the depths of me and wants to come out
to play or argue or sing.

She might be the persona I carry in my
heart or my backpack. She may be just the essence
of me, arriving on the express train from D-central.
No matter who she is, I've probably not met her yet,
or admitted to meeting her.

She may be the closest to real I can get, the one
I admit to pushing down, wrapping tight so
not even I can engage her. I would like to have
the courage to meet her someday—the real,
truly authentic me.

~ Mona Moorman ~

Coreopsis moonbeam waiting
to bloom,
Ready to spring on the
landscape
Growing, welcoming delicate
arms as the
Reliable season takes its turn
A yellowy member of life
Canoe shaped petals of sun
and butter
Repeat blooming
Multiplying
In a mass of green, filigreed
fringe
Working well with bold flowers
Airy
The coreopsis is an outstanding
performer
Versatile in open sunny places
and in the dry woods
Spilling yellow stars, erasing
hard lines
In the center or on the edge, in
gravel or loam
Alive with new blooms as the
desiccated heads drop off
Tenaciously surviving in
nature's splendor
Happy among friends.

~ Mona Moorman ~

Three Ten Oh One

Bare, brown branches wave on the revolution
Phloem and xylem ready their transport
Turn, you old Earth, and get us closer to the sun
The dank frogs want out of the slushy mud
Exiled until the vernal equinox permits passage
Another season of sensational birth



~ Sarah Smith ~

Fibonacci(s): Poetry Saving Me

To
write
is to
make sense of
this life in this world,
unraveling thoughts like knotted

thread.

I
find peace
placing words
upon this page. With
poetry, emotions process.

My
heart,
my soul,
my mind all
align as I am
freed from all personal burdens.

From
the
very
beginning,
poetry has saved
my life. A consistent outlet.

~ Sarah Smith ~

A Greater Purpose

I sink my toes into blades of grass as green and vibrant as emerald gemstones, as the beaming sun shines down and I enter into pure bliss; I lift my face up to the sky.

I feel the Earth's embrace as I fall deeper in love with the comfort of nature. When the responsibilities of modern civilization become too overbearing, I find solace in nature's presence.

When the world becomes too heavy and the chaos too burdensome, nature reminds me how simple life can actually be. The Earth cares for us, providing us with sustenance, life, a home.

The closer I feel to Earth, the closer I feel to the true essence of this existence. The Earth reminds me that this life is so much more than the rules of modern society, our purpose so much greater.



~ Erik Sparks ~

Resource Reflection

As we clamor ahead for money and gain
Beneath our feet a growing shame
We plunder and pillage for what earth may hold
The dire consequences remain untold
As we work to bring our fruit to bear
Its fruitful bounty remains unshared
Luscious oceans from shore to shore
Consumed by apathy it thrives no more
Its precious stone millennia old
Are fought in blood then bought and sold
Her woodland lands a sight to see
Burned down and cut so compliantly
Her inculpable creatures existed unclaimed
Now heartlessly slaughtered for material gain
Our air once existed so pristine and fresh
Now nefariously defiled to uncleanness
We once had our soil so rich and so pure
Negligence and diffidence have unsettled the score
Our unearthing of fuels fosters new industry
Erroneously polluting our land, air, and sea
What astonishing assets this world may withhold
And how quickly they are fought, bought, and sold
Someday we'll learn the err of our ways
Whether we learn it the hard way remains to say

~ Lillian White ~

Seasons Changing

Seasons changing
Rooms rearranging

Flowers blooming
Cats grooming

Love in the air
Sitting on our new porch chair

Deep breath in
Slow breath out

Change is inevitable
But this time it's incredible

~ Lillian White ~

What Makes the Tide

I found a place where the grass grows green.
A place where space and time stop and I'm in between.
Where fruit grows, a warm breeze blows, and where the sun meets the horizon.
Where my hips meet your hips and my lips meet your lips.
Where our fingertips collide and I finally know what makes the tide.



~ Tom Zimmerman ~

Ambivalent Spring

My boots are waterproof, but this is mud above the ankle cuff. It's Trey and Ann and I, the morning dogwalk. Sunny, forty-some degrees. The reeds around us, grass above us: hibernation beige but trending tender green. Ann says she smells a skunk, but allergies have stuffed me up. I've chopped my known world into morsels I can chew. But Trey is stronger willed. He looks a little like Anubis, sniffs beyond the mere quotidian. He ate a baby rabbit yesterday. "That's someone's Easter Bunny." Ann's dark joke. I'm thinking of our guilty brunch, the pig that died for my fried ham.

~ Tom Zimmerman ~

Two by the Sea

1. Le Negresco, Nice

It's BBC 1 on TV: "the troubles still in London." Murky morning: showered, skull thick-sided, empty. Heart grown larger, beating. Mediterranean eye-white blue, so indistinguishable from the sky. Two joggers on the Promenade Anglaise. A motor scooter buzzes dust. I crease a journal page. Wet-haired, with coffee: Ann. The stray dogs on the streets remind us both of Athens. Day's itinerary brings us Eze, a perfume factory, then Monaco. What matters more is what we bring to them.

2. Prince Edward Island

A walk in north Atlantic shallows, fine red sand of Brackley Beach. We met a lobsterman, Acadian, named Claude. A long hike through the Haunted Wood to Anne's Green Gables house. Saw cormorants and cliffs at Orby Head. A short talk with a globetrotting New Zealand nurse. Wolfed down a one-pound lobster, saw the pots, then drank good stout at Gahan House. Another tourist: said he's kept a travel journal years and years. I caught him jotting things I said. Yes, there's a lesson here. We can't absorb all that we sense. Still shaking sand from shoes that I wore new back then.





Mother Earth in Celebration
Photograph by S. L. Schultz