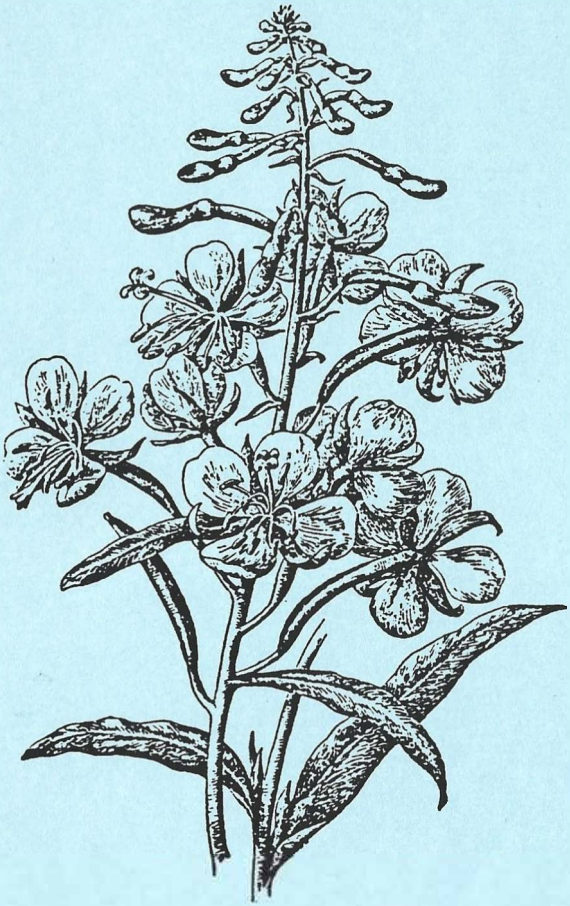
FIREWEED

Poetry of Western Oregon



Volume Five, Number Two
January 1994 $2.50

FIREWEED: POETRY OF WESTERN OREGON is published quarterly in October, January, April and July. *FIREWEED* publishes poets living in the western half of Oregon, though poems need not be regional in subject. Manuscripts should include a return envelope with sufficient postage. We also need a biographical note. Inquiries about submission of reviews or essays are welcome. Subscriptions are $10 for four issues.

Recipient, Oregon Institute of
Literary Arts Publishers Award

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Robert A. Davies

ANOTHER RIDE

The man in the black jacket
was waiting in front
of the Project.
I tooted my horn
old guy in an old
white Honda
and we waved.

We drove
to his mother's
a foster home
he said
for people with mental problems.
It was a neat enough room
considering all that had to fit in
including a mattress for him.

Their hug was big
for two who had fought the day before.
Now that he'd found a place
to live
we took his television, knapsack
a bible and a bagful of animals.
Since he'd come back
they went everywhere
together.

The neighborhood was rich.
To a man 14 years
on the streets
his narrow
basement room
in the ranch-style hospice
trees out the window
including a satellite dish

was all he could ask of heaven.
Before we got there
he said
This disease
has been good to me.

Judith Barrington

AT SOAPSTONE

In memoriam: Will Martin.

Though I never knew him,
his ashes fertilize these familiar trees:
alder, long-legged, precocious;
hemlock and spruce waving goodbye.
Random roots suck him up
and he is given away to the mist,
needles and leaves exhaling his name.

Though I never knew him, I see him
hammering these fine light planks,
the stairs that rise and rise to his study
way above the creek, his dream
of a child's treehouse made manifest
through long days of sawing.

At night, by glow of the oil lamps,
he played dominoes with his dad,
their scores recorded in the black-bound journal
beside watercolors of bugs like gems,
pencil plans for the covered bridge
and the musings of his last descending mood.

What does it mean, anyway, to know someone?
There's talk and touch, yes;
there's light on the brightness of hair
and a catch of breath close by in the night.
But there's this knowing too: the music of his chosen creek;
the yellow sheen on wood he worked with his hands.

BACK PORCH, ROCKAWAY

Remnants of red paint etched into the grain
like white wrinkles in a sunburnt face
but reversed: dark lines deep in the bleached wood.

Handrail's worn smooth by generations of hands:
children's sticky palms fresh from the taffy store
and warm dry palms back from the dunes

where hot sand cleansed the skin
till their lines-- *life, health, fate*-- emerged
like the grainy story of the wood itself:

A knot here and there rises from contour lines
as if on an ordnance survey map;

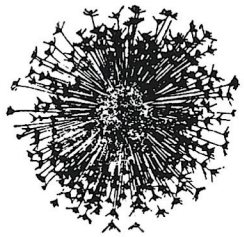
a sudden cliff where lines crowd together
whispers *watch out* and *danger,*

but always there are broad plains
where the lines spread wide apart--

they meander, these lines, in their own time
telling useful stories.

There's one called *Forest to Handrail in a Mack Truck*
and then there's the one called

Too Many Palms--
Or How the Human Lifeline Wears Down the Wood.



REVIEW: A "Book Response" to Lisa Steinman's *A BOOK OF OTHER DAYS* (Arrowood Books, 1993)-- winner of the Hazel Hall Award for Poetry in 1993 (Oregon Institute of Literary Arts)

"Review" calls to mind the hours of cramming before an exam, or the relentless broadcast of the decade's 300 top hits, and feels to me not to be a function I want to perform on a book of poetry. Instead, I would like to offer, to Lisa Steinman's *A BOOK OF OTHER DAYS*, a "book response"-- which allows for approaches other than mastery, reduction or regurgitation, which invites engagement and process-- for her book is a journey and a journal of process, seeking a way to engage in the world.

A BOOK OF OTHER DAYS, with each poem's last line linked to the next poem's first, asks to be read as a piece. In it, repeated words (as vague as "thing") and images (as homey as "dog" and as dogged as "home") accrue meaning and complexity. The poems-- rich, witty, intricate and enigmatic in their own right-- allude to and are informed by the work of Wallace Stevens. Steinman interplays with Stevens not only through titles, images, and phrases, but the entire book stands in the tradition of Stevens in a particular way-- the way the poet finds herself in the world, and the lack of easy answers for living there.

The first two stanzas of the opening poem give some important clues about this world.

> On the run again, I will not settle for this world
> in which we prowl like tourists for a good deal.
> I hold on only to memory, like the pear tree which bore one
> piece of fruit.
> We let it go brown in the windowsill, saving it so long.
> ....
> The road sign tells us bridges freeze first;
> the world is full of solid ground we know we cannot trust.

Not only is the world where we stand not trustworthy, but neither is memory, paltry and squishy as it is. And bridges, constructed to carry us over obstacles, across the water to the other shore (where we yearn to be), are the first place of treachery.

Disillusionment crops up throughout the volume, often expressed ironically with common turns of phrase: "These days, I try not to rise to bait;" and, "From here, there is no looking back,/ and coming home is no great shakes." "Rosaries," placed centrally in the book, describes the small parameters of the life that is attempted, a neighborhood life of "brief affairs with the world"-- walking the dog, worrying about the drivers in a collision. The poem ends,

> this is the daily news:
> our walks, our bodies,
> all homebodies, graying, alive according to a calendar
> which divides one day from the next like a string of days,
> on which we count
> our luck.

"Rosaries" makes a tentative shift away from self-mockery and irony, and toward compassion for the self and the world. There are a few pivotal poems which strengthen this shift, and in so doing, authenticate the speaker's repeated wish "to live a decent life."

"The Inner Man" describes a bleak and disillusioned inscape where "whole days slip out the back door," and "nothing comes to mind." The inner man "levels charges at winter":

> Here is where the snow should arrive
> to repossess the landscape. There should be
> snow angels, snow men, and newer
> creatures for whom there are no words.

But "should" doesn't occur; there is only rain, not transformation.

Spring, however, comes, and "The fathering is over." The man turns to his own resources:

> he will mother himself-- praise
> fingers, belly, feet, the parts
> that work hard daily, hungering
> for praise, of what is, solicitous.

He affirms his newness and innocence, his tender usefulness. These lines invite the interpretation, "hungering for praise of what is," that is, an embrace of the world in all its terrible beauty.

In some poems this embrace is quite small, tentative, or held back, but it gradually loosens or softens, and within it the poet comes home. Consider these lines from the last poems: "what's lost can sometimes be called home by sheer repetition of speech." And, "In practice, we are at home with ourselves/whatever we might think." In both, the strength of the deliberate act is recognized, acts that are not defined by the circumstances of the world, or even by our thoughts, but by the inner man/woman. Calling. Repetition of speech. Practice.

Where does this strength come from? Where do disillusionment and irony begin to lose dominion? I feel it early, in one of my favorite poems of this collection. In "Hum-Drum Days," the impetus of love invites imagination to break through the boundaries of ordinary perception, in fact, to create something out of nothing. I like this poem so much, I want to conclude by sharing it whole:

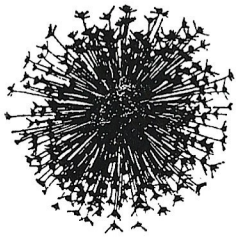
It's late, and daylight ends early.
Outside, everything smells of winter;
the forsythia has abandoned its leaves, leans
against the window, pointing in.
The clothesline's taut.
We are clearly waiting for something.

I want to give you the expectancy of this day
in which nothing
keeps arriving, beautifully,
in the gray variations of north.

Just imagine each morning
someone you love makes you oatmeal
and fills a thermos with tea.
Set on the dining room table,
it hisses small thermos songs

in harmony with the furnace, wind, and pipes.
You can hear the hum in hum-drum.
It's all you need to know.

Susan Spady



Jean Esteve

MOTELS

What I have done with all this money
has evened the edges. In the desert I stopped
at a large motel with a high peaked roof under a coin moon.
The pool was flat. Nobody swam in it that time of year,
that time of night. Dolores, the towels were white.
Last time they were pinkish, remember, and frayed,
when you were still in the fray, and our feet hit
cracked linoleum, the sink taps spit, and the toilet hummed,
Oh, Dolores, all fringes and zigzags,
I have trimmed and straightened everything. I walked smoke blue
motel carpet. I heated the room by turning a dial.
We were chasing down doom, Dolores, you found it,
hidden in hedges, the glistening frisbee that you refused
to return to me.

Randall Payton

UNTITLED POEM WHICH USES THE OCEAN

The mast is you, a metaphor:
your height, your inability to bend,

a sail, as seeming
and necessary as a rudder.

I've seen you take the wind
like cargo from Antigua,

heard you moan
to endure the rigging.

The sea is a child
collapsing on ancient springs.

Dry land is a tangerine
spoiling in the galley.

WE ALL LOOK WEST

I can look down on things from here,
the landing lights of Hawthorne,

the whole map of this town. I can cut
a clean shape into it and through it

I can watch the day collapse,
though everything's working

to keep me intact and occupied:
mosquitoes on me at sunset like lovers

testing the strength of trees.
And there's this golden retriever in my ear

and his best friend trying to read this
over my shoulder. I want to tell him

it's not a suicide note. I ask him
how much he wants for the dog.

REVIEW: *SOME TRICK OF LIGHT* by Jane Glazer (Adrienne Lee Press, 1993)

A year ago, Jane Glazer and I retreated to a small, toasty-warm cabin at the Coast, sank into overstuffed chairs, and reread letters we had written to one another twenty years before. I had gone to Istanbul to teach Turkish boys; she was then teaching at the high school in Eugene where we had worked together and become close friends. During her turns to read her letters aloud, I realized anew why I had rushed into school each morning to scan my mailbox for her familiar hand, why I had spirited myself away to read and reread the onionskin pages. Jane Glazer's fullness as a poet has been evolving, probably forever, surely since she was a girl on an Iowa farm, and in those letters I was lucky enough to observe its gathering force. With the publication of *SOME TRICK OF LIGHT* in a beautifully crafted book by Adrienne Lee Press, we can all appreciate her clear and lyrical voice, her textured imagery.

Many of the poems, especially those in the second section, "Into the Seaward River," begin in experiences she wrote about in those letters. They are deeply personal, and though I am drawn to them in the "beaten way of friendship," I appreciate them as any reader can, for how they help one human reach another. The section is framed by portraits of her grandmother and brother, but the most vivid figure is that of her father, who appears in almost half of this section's poems. Glazer is indeed "Veterinarian's Daughter," ready to celebrate birth and love and sexuality, to see the world in light of the "magic shine on each wet lump of life," and, like the father she describes in"The Cowl of Night," "to test the teeth of wild horses."

My copy falls open at "Suicide," the poem almost at the book's midpoint. Crossing a thirty-year span, the poem recounts how a young wife tries to make sense of the senseless. Glazer's startling images, used so deftly they enlarge the poem rather than call attention to themselves, keep sentimentality at bay. In one, the suicide's wound, "petalled out like a full-blown flower," allows the viewer-- wife and reader-- to look directly at that death, and as we do, to realize how this act will seed itself, remain alive after thirty years, for there is no way to end such memory, "no place anywhere to put the pictures."

But it is life that echoes all through this work, even through the many deaths that give the book, in Sam Hamill's words, its "elegiac tone." In another of the loving tributes to her father, "If Your Hands," Glazer recalls how "Nights around/our homework ended with your knuckles/rapping, tough, veined, square-nailed, wide./'Okay. Bedtime! Hit the sack!' " A few lines later, explaining why she rapped on his coffin, "We said we'd help each other/any way we could. Well, sweet ghost,/it's over. Knock on wood." Glazer sets the rhyme off, avoiding the risky reduction a couplet might give this emotion, but letting us hear life's echo, letting us know that love carries us on, generation to generation, lover to lover, friend to friend.

In "Signal Flowers," she makes a characteristic leap: "A cemetery west of the Wasatch mountains"-- and I recognize the friend who would, of course, stop to explore the stones-- "Father's Day, driving that empty landscape/and thinking of my father, I stop...." From the Wasatch she moves, in stanza two, to Fruili "By the empty house of Rilke's childhood" where flowers seemed to "appear from nowhere" and "Rilke felt/some ghost hand must have sent them...." In the third and final stanza, she links the nasturtiums she sees now "beside the ocean.../splashing orange on the cedar fence," with "The spring after my young husband died,/pear boughs the wind had broken off/sprinkled blossoms along the walk/... asterisks of stars beneath my feet."

The first section, "The Endlessness of Stars," does a sort of reverse tethering. In poems set clear around the globe-- Glazer spent two years in the Peace Corps in Venezuela and long stays in other countries-- from La Paz to Beijing as well as in her home city, Portland, she begins far away and brings the lines home. In "The Diagonal Path," for example, "From the bomb-shattered church" in Nicaragua "a dog hunts holy crumbs/so hunger-thin his ribs/rake shadows up the aisle,/a children's choir practices for *Navidad*....." That poem gives this section its title: "Ceremony and the season/ teach us to let the night suffice,/to feel the instability of air,/ the endlessness of stars." The final image of that poem affirms the endlessness of the human spirit: "outlined against the fading light,/a woman walks,/the path diagonal,/her lantern swinging/ to the rhythm of her need."

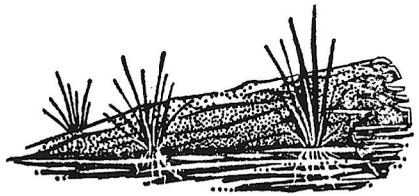
We see that affirmation again in the blood imagery in "Point of No Return," when a young girl, "brinking/onto instinct," sees her father washing her mother's menstrual cloths. Glazer's diction, always precise and vivid, here takes on remarkable clarity with that word "brinking," the girl soon to be washing her own womanhood. In "Final Disposition," the blood imagery colors her mother's poppies, "...those fandango folds/of red and black she doted on," now transplanted to Glazer's own garden where "they bloom/her blood's abandon...."

Women walk through many of these poems, their experience central to the spirit Glazer celebrates. In the title poem "By some trick of light, Anna Akhmatova,/whose poems I am reading, suddenly appears/the way Modigliani painted her in Paris,/or walking in St. Petersburg in 1910." Glazer, who is in Portland, "Along the reservoir,/the old, wrought-iron fence/is white with rime," incorporates this vision "in a ghost of my own breathing,/to praise her simple fire,/spare as a wooden match...." And then, as she does so often and so well in this volume, Glazer enlarges by moving to the elemental: "I think of the courage of women/how they endure,/how they walk miles to carry back water,/silence their pain, apportion/what's left of the rice./Keepers of eggs without shells,/they know how fragile the days are,/how hope can spill into the ground."

These poems are like "eggs without shells," fragile because of the emotion they bare yet ready to grow and assume a life of their own. I cannot identify where, but at some point while I was reading this collection, *SOME TRICK OF LIGHT* took on its own life, became not the work of a friend but itself, the way children of good friends become beings separate from their parents-- despite a familiar tilt of chin, a recognizable timbre in their voice. I recommend this book for itself.

In "Conjugal Ghost," Glazer returns to a high-school reunion. Right after she has described the changes in her classmates, "Flop is bald. Jack...sells insurance," she says, "I kept thinking you were there," and leads on in one of her seemingly simple, echoing lines, "Time passes, that's all." *SOME TRICK OF LIGHT* shows us how, through time's passage, a kernel, a seed remains, the past-- our own, our world's-- ready to flower, to shade or bloom whatever we do.

Hannah Wilson



Pamela Crow

THE INSOMNIAC REMEMBERS DOROTHY HAMILL

There was her hair; that shining wedge
cut that rose and fell as cleanly as the edge
of her blade. There seemed no strain
in her glide, no need to fight the brain's
intrusions. I will my mind blank
as new ice, but did I forget to thank
the gardener? Bills won't be paid,
my brother is sad, the quilt can't be made
to fit together. Dorothy must be married now,
and well. Does she scold her children, wonder how
much water goes in rice?
Such strong thighs
she had. She knew when to spin, when to catch
the rise of the violin. My muscles twitch
as unseen judges mark their pace.
I wrestle with each fall from grace.

GUEST POEM

Sharon Olds

THE EYE

My bad grandfather wouldn't feed us.
He turned the lights out when we tried to read.
He sat alone in the invisible room
in front of the hearth, and drank. He died
when I was seven, and Grandma had never once
taken anyone's side against him,
the firelight on his red cold face
reflecting extra on his glass eye.
Today I thought about that glass eye,
and how at night in the big double bed
he slept facing his wife, and how the limp
hole, where his eye had been, was open
towards her on the pillow, and how I am
one-fourth him, a brutal man with a
hole for an eye, and one-fourth her,
a woman who protected no one. I am their
sex, too, their son, their bed, and
under their bed the trap-door to the
cellar, with its barrels of fresh apples, and
somewhere in me too is the path
down to the creek gleaming in the dark, a
way out of there.

from *THE DEAD AND THE LIVING*
(Alfred A. Knopf, 1983)

COMMENT

Sharon Olds writes extensively about family-- parents and grandparents, sister, brother, daughter, son-- in the detailed, multi-faceted approach of a landscape artist. She fearlessly explores the seeming opposites in people and situations, digs beneath the surface to expose, examine. Her poems are brazenly, nakedly honest, sometimes shocking or frightening, but she is able to bridge past with present and future in a way that helps the reader travel safely through. One often takes a circular journey; where you expected to go is not necessarily where you end up. Sometimes you find yourself back again where you began, as in this poem, where the narrator has returned to find not only the lost past, but the "way out of there."

"The Eye" is not as remarkable in imagery as some of Olds's poems; however, it is a good example of her skill at storytelling, and her mastery of paradox (which is an oxymoron, I suppose). There is a superb balance between hot and cold, blindness and vision, sin and redemption. Everything is connected, in that it revolves around vision. Not only is the grandfather unable to see with both eyes, he refuses to use the eye that works and tries to prevent his family from seeing as well; in fact, his glass eye, the dead eye, shines brighter than the other in the light of the fire. His wife is either unable to see beyond "the limp/hole, where his eye had been..." or chooses not to see the darkness in her husband (where, paradoxically, he shines brightest), even as she faces him every night.

This poem makes a surprising turn following the narrator's realization that she is part him, part her, when it could veer off into recriminations. Here, the narrator becomes the "other," a common occurrence in Olds's poems. There is no false triumph of good over evil, and Grandfather and Grandma are held responsible for their actions, but redemption clearly is, or was, possible for everyone, had they chosen it. The grandparents are not only cold and blind, they are also the "...barrels of fresh apples...." The narrator is a childlike, sympathetic figure in the first few lines and later an adult who sees everything and accepts it, thereby making a leap from opposite to opposite to synthesis. And in the final lines-- the trap-door that leads to fresh apples, "...the creek gleaming in the dark..."-- we are back to paradox, and the circle is complete.

Jane Bailey

Hannah Wilson

WILD LARKSPUR

Massed as if for Monet, wild larkspur
dazzle the small wood beneath the freeway
between the river and millrace
where I walk with my dog each morning.
Blued petals rise from a palette of greens:
shiny grasses, flat, matte cow parsnip
leaves as big as elephants' ears,
lime-fringed fir, notched and crinkly ferns,

just such audacious mix as my sister found
imprinted on two yards of Egyptian cotton
she bought to salvage
my sixth-grade sewing project.
She cut a low-waisted bodice to replace
the one I'd ruined and pinned it
to the skirt of institutional green
the whole dress had been.
Like Rumpelstiltskin's prize pupil
I sewed seams and hem
willing my hand into small obediences
the only way I knew to thank her.

A thick scent of floral bloom
not sweet but wild
rises from this wood.

Miss Breckwoldt sniffed,
turned me once, bent
as far as her corseted self could
to lift my skirt for inspection.
-- Unsatisfactory-- she recorded.
The fabric was non-regulation and gaudy,
the stitching too fine to be mine.

VOICES

As if dropped by a careless deliverer
flowers spray the walkway where she fell,
mums and dahlias in seasoned gold and rust
against ferns against grey cement.
The jump is still news-- not the woman
whose name nobody knows-- but the fact
of her willing fall. Between classes,
like members of a marching corps, students
raise their eyes to the ninth-floor stairwell
while they nurse their books.
Impulse not pain
excites us. My son's best friend lay
beneath his sixth-story window, conscious,
telling the doctors
Voices told me "Jump!"
Yesterday someone in the elevator
heard her mumble
to be or not to be--
silent voices teasing,
Close your eyes,
pick a number from 1 to 9.

In the same enclosed lift she rode, I push 3.
Habit presses my soles down,
bends my knees for the bounce, but something--
the elevator's old; my own force vague--
something keeps it going, like a pulley
raising buried intent. I glide past my stop
frightened by my floating will,
mindful of all that carries us beyond
the expected: a sudden cramp, a late-night
call, a righteous taunting voice that knows
no reasoned hush.

Dan Hortsch

THE TREES

They will find them in my closet
and know they have seen them,
orange-red oak, chromed metal hardware,
not remember a time
when the trees were not there.
I bought them from the Regal man
along with black loafers that cost me
fifteen-ninety-five. When my dad,
drying dishes, asked me how much,
I gave my age, fifteen,
shaving the price into a small lie,
and told him I had earned that much
picking berries that day, a bigger lie.
I didn't tell him about the trees,
another five dollars, didn't tell him
then, thirty-six years ago,
what the Regal man had said:
Solid oak. They'll last you
a lifetime.

REVIEW: Chapbooks by *FIREWEED* Contributors

Harriet Kofalk's recent offering, *SEASONINGS: POETRY FROM PEACE PLACE*, was written and read at the 4th annual conference of the Environmental Study Group in Grants Pass. An opening poem announces the writer's intentions: "This place we celebrate." Kofalk examines the spider's web, the contour of a particular hillside, and writes, "while clearest is the view at hand/ gathering this moment/ this view/ we harvest from it the seeds/ for the next." The poems here, often untitled, are a celebration of the natural world by a writer who feels a part of its intricacies.

Brenda Shaw's title poem from *TOO COLD TO SNOW* also looks outward to the natural world, looks outside at a night, black and cold, where "the stars stare." But the greater part of this chapbook reveals a deeply interior journey, as in the final poem, "Flight," where the speaker considers the possibility of not returning from "the edge of sleeping." In between, Shaw's poems describe "Besses Baby" (a grandmother's endearment), the struggles of her widowed father, marriage, a Scottish home and harpsichord, and fog that might be either there or here. Using memory and dream. Shaw adds a new section to the bound notebooks of her Aunt Alta. If it is too cold for snow, it is just right for stories.

Adventuresome stories seem to be at the heart of *PORTAGE*, C.A. Gilbert's four-part collection, as he announces in his title poem, "It is time to ford the rapids./...I fully expect to get wet." Here the reader will find poems about a drowning, crabbing at Kachemak Bay, a Molalla homestead, cooking with Crisco, the Montana landscape where "gray eyes roam land." Longer poems are about the life of working-- picking cotton near Corcoran and working on the Valdez cleanup. It is in the final section where the speaker in "The Equation" says, "love/ requires a steady hand's/ lifetime to learn" that the reader begins to understand a central thread of these stories, the ways in which the poems serve to make experiences whole by "taking them to heart." In a final poem written for Gerald Stern, an arresting image reveals what Gilbert, like so many writers, is doing: "When the light goes off for the night/ you can still see the shape of the lamp."

Shapes are central to Quinton Hallett's collection *QUARRY*. Here is the sharp edge, the dark, questioning note: Jeanette, the maid, who lived next to the mushroom room; a singer whose larynx is removed accidently; a Peruvian child run down by an airport limousine; the carpenter who, from his wheelchair, sees his tools auctioned; an AIDS death; memories of a pink silk shantung dress and her mother on skiis. These are poems quarried from stone, dense, hard to ignore, problematic, poems the reader must walk carefully around.

A.S.

TESTIMONY: HOW POETS CAN SPEND THE WINTER

If you are a fair-weather gardener and walker, and now the holidays are over, and you don't ski, you may find yourself in some deep pockets of free time. As the valley weather clamps down, you may want indoor occupations other than steamy window gazing and napping. Consider these poetry activities, good anytime, but maybe a godsend this February!

*Adopt a locale and appoint yourself its official poet: the city of Salem, Eugene's Masonic cemetery, Portland Zoo. Consider the honor and reponsibility of the position. Learn your subject; develop poems that cover and reveal your beat.

*Yes, write sets. Lisa Steinman's latest sequence uses a last line to start the next poem. A set might spring from an inventory of household objects: bed, window shade, tweezers, sandpaper, shoes. Make a list of family and friends to write about or to write poetry epistles to. Start an exchange like that of William Stafford and Marvin Bell.

*Track intensively one poet you admire, reading poems, reviews, biography and craft pieces. Search out the books, used bookstores adding an element of lottery adventure. My pick is Josephine Miles.

*Form a reading group or reading occasion (with potluck) to say poems aloud (allowed!). For more extended exchange, discuss one published poetry book per meeting or two. Let each member select a title and get a local bookstore to order enough copies.

*Organize a public reading at the library or local school or college. Choose a featured poet and include an open mike. Publicize well and personally invite your friends.

*Send poems to magazines, five packets to five periodicals. That's twenty-five tries! Check *WRITER'S NORTHWEST HANDBOOK* 5th edition. Try to browse the magazines you are considering at a university library or major bookstore.

*Make a chapbook, a cheapbook: Today's methods move quickly from word processor to copy shop. Have fun with clip art or rubber stamps and with the selection of format and papers. Make a modest run of 50-100.

*Collaborate! When you work with others, the book project and other projects can be very enjoyable and energizing. Children, so confident in their tasks, can help move the agenda.

*Sure, write a bit of poetryofski! Include the funny colored clothing and the custom of buying tickets to the great outdoors!

E.M.

Ken Zimmerman

BEAUTY

Beauty, when you know it well,
puts its horns and halo aside.
It doesn't care much for heaven and hell.
Beauty would rather walk than ride,
would rather be a scent than a magic spell.
Beauty is content to reside
inside, like the clapper of a bell.

And beauty is beside us all our lives.
It doesn't need the lights on, knows
its way around the house,
doesn't flinch at kitchen knives,
is amiable with teacups and sparrows,
waters dandelions, feeds cheese to the mouse,
but beauty always leaves when guests arrive.

Beauty, when it applies,
is not admitted to the union,
but when it is forced to join,
beauty dies.
Beauty lasts longest in the dark, like onions,
and like cut onions, before you realize
what's happened, beauty is in your eyes.

David Ritchie

ALICE LAKE LOOP

The campfire
gives more heat than light.
You sit on the other side
wrapped in silence
smoky and dark
as your old flannel shirt.

> place love notes carefully
> where I find them by chance
> whisper love songs softly
> in the private ear of my heart.

ii

The campfire is dying.
I add another stick.
The night glows dark.
You make a speech
of no words, placing with great care
wood sap chips, pitchybark, needles
at the fire's edge,
a wordless speech of
pine scent
embers
and thin blue smoke.

The fire crackles
sparks scatter across the night's edge.

iii

The first day was hard.

On the second we find our stride
swinging gracefully
walk a long way.

There are many wild flowers
alpine mosses
and snowbanks carved by the sun.

iv

Up here the eye sees fifty miles
sees a hundred rocky peaks and no trees
scans a multitude of lakes at one glance.

Dizzy with height and fear
you don't stop to look.

> the emptiness below
> is hungry for you,
> reaches out
> draws you to it.

v

On down the slope,
rain.
A long hillside with no shelter,
clear but for stunted sagebrush,
damp clothes, one small fir.

The fir gives us welcome.
It won't keep us dry forever.
We hurry on down the trail.

Sun returns; the last huge drops
fall gemlike against the blueness
hang glinting in rows beside the trail.

vi

By the lake where many
horses have been tied
we share
a pan of ramen
and cashews the chipmunk left.

In distant years I will see
where his teeth undid my pack
think of you here, the trail,
this patch of sun by the lake.

vii

Long thin
hungry trout splash
in the icy lake.

Alice Lake gives us dinner,
then trout for our breakfast
while the first stars appear,
thin and sharp-edged.

There is home in a blue spiral
smoke through dark firs
campfire and smells of frying fish.

viii

At midday
the warm sun makes
old needles rise in vapors
reminiscent of strawberries
after a rain.
We rest and talk
of the trail winding under rocks
and through damp brush meadows.

ix

We finish our tea
pour the water out
on the dying embers.
A cloud of steam
carries dark ashes high.
I stir the fire
we shoulder our packs
turn our backs
on the small cold spot
burnt by fire,
needle-bed faintly disturbed
beside the trail.

Tess Yelland

FAULTS

Some mirrors strike you dead.
Or maybe it's the blue
light underlying all that white.
They say it leaches
spandex from the face as sure
as red escapes the lawn
chairs bleached near
glare-scorched summer fences.

The outskirts of my eyes
must be a dancing ground
for crows. And seals could race,
eels might slide down furrows
holding nose and mouth in line.
These scowls have weathered
well-- like rain on rock
or kisses wearing thin
stone toes of saints.

The map's imprinted now,
upward from the chin. Squints
pitched tents between my eyes
and pupils scan the shimmer
of a handshake with a snake's
sharp instinct. That thatch,
stickery with lies, so clearly
sprung from weeds, my younger lens
accepted like a spray of roses
from a hairy paw. Sometimes
I wish I were so blind.

I'm thinking that I'll chink
up the cracks that break
this face apart. Bulldoze
facial landscapes clean. Caulk
edges; lay down another coat
of paint. Great plates
shift slowly, seeking
toeholds in the weight of little
things. No one will know.

And then again, perhaps I'll bask,
every seam and sag exposed,
within this muscle of my skull.
Hatband snug above my ears.
Smug. Defying mirrors.

DRIVING A BARGAIN

My mother tucked loose
ends of rolled tarpaulin,
yellow and tarnished
with mold, tight as pipe
against flatbed boards.
"If I do this,"she said,
yanking hard, snugging
up the rope,"You owe
this lady a horse."

Two days north past Butte,
the tarp unrolled would stretch
taut across Bozeman hay
stacked high as a man.

She pulled herself up
on the running board,
crusted brown with winter
mud and swung her body
like a box of tools
into the cab.

Around the ears, her
hair curled like snails.
Black brows reached between
her eyes, and stitched across
the bridge of her nose.
She snorted at her own
joke and slammed the door,
Glass shuddered on steel.
Fingers combed back, tracing
scalp lines, fine as road
maps through the night.

Grasping the side view
mirror, my father climbed
up against the truck,
pressing his flannel
chest against the frame.
Tipped his head to fit inside.
She kissed him,
holding his ears like handles,
drinking him in with one
great gulp from the giant
cracked urn of his face.

He hung there, then stepped
down and kicked the rig
right between the ribs.
It bellowed, spitting black
exhaust and pulled away.

He stayed high-centered
standing in her smoke,
whacking his hat
like a loose strap
against the rail of his thigh.

INTERVIEW: DORIS AVSHALOMOV AND HOWLET PRESS

One summer in the late 1970's, while attending a poetry workshop at Centrum in Port Townsend, Doris Avshalomov was introduced to the letterpress printing process. Workshop students had been invited to typeset and print a poem of their own at Copper Canyon Press, and Doris instantly fell in love with the process. The following summer she signed up for a Centrum class on printing offered by Tree Swenson, and in 1980 she traded in her long-standing career teaching high school English for early retire-ment and a 1920 Chandler and Price letterpress.

And thus was born Howlet Press.

Reluctant to call herself a publisher ("The publishing part doesn't interest me; the printing part does"), in the fourteen years she's had the press Avshalomov has produced an equivalent number of soft-bound and chapbook collections of poems, beginning with her own work, *EQUISETUM*. Collections by such Northwest poets as Verlena Orr, Walter Pavlich, Dianne Averill, and Elizabeth McLagan followed. In 1993 Lois Baker's *TRACERS*, a Howlet imprint, competed as a finalist for an Oregon Institute of Literary Arts award.

While all the elements of each book's design are chosen and uniquely combined so as to best showcase the poems it contains, all Howlet editions share a visual quality that is at once spare and rich, creating a kind of contemplative hospitality which invites (and rewards) contemplative reading.

Having long been an admirer of both Howlet and its founder, I recently spent a morning talking with Doris, in the Northwest Portland home she shares with her letterpress, her husband Jacob Avshalomov, and their dog Birdie.

DH: **So what was it that attracted you to the letterpress process in the first place?**
DA: I'd been interested since early childhood in anything printed; I can remember how my brother and I used to collect our father's junk mail and play "office" with it! With the letterpress, it's just so exciting to put words together one by one, and it's a way of really getting to know a poem. Part of the joy might come also from having worked around so much machinery as an electrician's helper in the shipyards during WWII-- I did love those engines!

DH: **Once you knew printing was something you wanted to do, how did you acquire a press?**
DA: Well, I started watching the ads in places like *THE OREGONIAN* and eventually found a press advertised there. It was at the Portland Rescue Mission, where it had been used to print a weekly bulletin they put out. It was on the second floor of an old building with no elevator, in a room so small that the door had to be taken off and the press partly dismantled to get it out. It weighed close to half a ton, so even in pieces it was pretty heavy...eventually I found some piano movers, one of whom was interested in presses, and they moved it for me. Unfortunately, the Rescue Mission had sold off all the type, so I had to buy my own.

DH: **Where did you find type? And how did you decide what to buy?**
DA: I've acquired type over the years, some through ads, and there are foundries that still make it, though my press isn't being made anymore. I concentrate on the "Bembo" font-- I like it very much. Even in working with one style, it means having several different sizes and kinds of type. And then there are all kinds of ornaments...

DH: **Ornaments?**
DA: Like these... [Here Doris shows me printed examples: the Howlet logo (a little owl), a tiny swallow in red on one page, a tiny leaf on another.]

DH: **That 'howlet': Did you find the ornament first, or decide on the name of the press first, then search for an howlet ornament for the logo?**
DA: I found the ornament first, at a printer's in Washington. The "howlet" comes from the witches brew section in *MACBETH* -- "eye of newt, toe of frog...", etc. I do admire owls for their vision and stealth, but that doesn't really have anything to do with the press. Originally I thought I'd name it "Thonglaw Press"-- remember Thonglaw the elephant at the Portland Zoo? I was thinking of how elephants move in that slow lumbering way and with such great care. But then I found the howlet...

DH: **When you design a book, how do you decide about type style, size, ornamentation, and other elements?**
DA: Well, it's somewhat limited by what I have, so a lot of the decision about type has to do with sizes, and whether it's an economy thing or you want to make it as visible and legible as possible. Beauty and legibility are the only criteria for me [in the text of the poem]. As far as the titles go, it's the poet's preference.

DH: **How long does it take to set up and print an edition?**
DA: It has a lot to do with the length of the book, size of type, etc., of course, and each book has to be set and printed page by page. Generally, I can do one or two pages of poems a day, and that includes setting the page, doing trials to get it right, printing the finished pages, and redistributing type.

DH: **Have you had any interesting catastrophes with the printing process over the years?**
DA: Just one I can think of: There are supposed to be three rollers for the inking, but one of them was missing on my press. I found someone who could make one, and did. Now, this was the year of Mount St. Helen's eruptions, and when I started printing with the new roller I saw all these little flecks all over the page, and thought at first it was ash from the eruption that had somehow gotten in there. Finally I realized that the new hook for the roller was wearing down, and flecks of metal were getting into the ink and all over my pages. So I took off the third roller and have been using two without problem ever since.

DH: **What about the cost of producing and distributing a book? How is that handled?**
DA: Usually it's a shared expense with the poet, and the number of copies is determined by the poet. I used to do some distribution, and have tried using local distributors, but haven't had very good luck with them. The poets do most of their own distribution and promotion, though I take books to various bookstores, etc. Catbird Seat Bookstore [in Portland] has had autograph parties for my publications, and I also print a little flyer announcing the book and showing the letterpress process.

DH: **Why would a poet who wanted to publish a collection of her poems choose the letterpress process?**
DA: Some people would like the look of the letterpress product...people seem to realize that it's something special.

DH: **How do you choose or accept manuscripts to print? What's the process and the criteria?**
DA: Well, as I said, I only print manuscripts I really like, because the nature of the process gets me so involved with them. People interested in the process can write me about it, and enclose a few poems-- not necessarily a manuscript, but a few poems.

DH: **And if you were to characterize the kind of poems toward which you are most favorably inclined as an editor-- the kind of poems that would, in effect, characterize a Howlet Press collection-- what would you say?**
DA: It would be hard to characterize the works as a whole, but I don't much like poems that contain outrageous language, or lots of body parts and functions.... I guess you could say I lean toward the lyric, and I like intelligence in poetry.

DH: **If our readers would like to find Howlet Press books, where would they look?**
DA: Powells, Conant and Conant, PSU Bookstore, Catbird Seat, Reed, and the Oregon Historical Society have all carried Howlet Press books, but I think most of them are pretty hard to find, being out of print. Some may still be available from the authors, and anyone interested can write to me for information.

DH: **What can we expect next from Howlet Press?**
DA: The second book I printed was a collection of poems by the poets in my writing group, called *WINDSOCK POEMS*, and I'm now putting together a second collection, called *MORE WINDSOCK POEMS*. It will include work by eight poets, including Beth McLagan [author of *PECULIAR PARADISE*, a history of blacks in America], Lois Baker [who has published, in addition to *TRACERS*, an earlier collection, *PARTIAL CLEARING*] and Pat Enders [author of *PIONEER WOMAN*].

DH: **Thanks so much for the interview, Doris, and for showing me how the letterpress process works. It really is a special process...**
DA: I love it-- I love everything about it. It is the only thing I wanted to do all my life, only it took a long time to figure it out!

(For more information about Howlet Press, write to Doris Avshalomov, 2741 S.W. Fairview Blvd., Portland, Oregon 97201.)

D.H.

EDITORS' NOTES

The original editors of *FIREWEED* are very pleased to welcome Donna Henderson to the journal as a new editor. Donna works as an individual and family therapist in Monmouth, and she lives south of Monmouth in the country, near Airlie. Donna is a poet, and poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *WRITERS' FORUM*, *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN*, *CALYX*, *CUTBANK*, *TAOS REVIEW*, and *THE FEMINIST BROADCAST QUARTERLY*. Donna's special interests include translation and contemporary womens' poetry from North Africa and Eastern Europe. We welcome her critical eye and her passion for words.

A reminder: the April 1994 issue of *FIREWEED* will be dedicated to the memory of William Stafford, who died in August. We are pleased with the response to our earlier invitation to contribute. There is still time to submit either prose reminiscences and appreciations or poems inspired by William Stafford. The deadline is Feb. 15.

We would like to say to poets who have recently submitted to the journal that we anticipate a delay in response time to your submissions. This will occur because our April issue is a special issue. Normally we are able to respond within two months. Response time during February and March may be delayed one month-- we hope to resume our correspondence with contributors to our regular issues by early April.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

JANE BAILEY, Salem, is a nurse and a poet. Her work has been published in *FIREWEED* and *CALAPOOYA COLLAGE*.

JUDITH BARRINGTON, Portland, has collections from Eighth Mountain Press, 1985 and 1989. She is the founder of an annual summer writing workshop for women, The Flight of the Mind.

PAMELA CROW, Portland, is a clinical social worker. Her work has appeared in *SOUTHERN POETRY REVIEW* and *NORTHEAST*.

ROBERT DAVIES, Portland & Timber, is an editor of *MR. COGITO* and refuses to authorize a single pronunciation of the publication's name. He recognizes both "Cog-ito" and "Co-geeto."

* JEAN ESTEVE, Waldport, was a finalist in the 1993 National Poetry Series competition. Her poems have appeared in *CAROLINA QUARTERLY*, *FINE MADNESS*, *FLORIDA REVIEW*, and others. She reads at the Wednesday open mike readings at the New Morning Coffee House in Yachats.

* DAN HORTSCH, Portland, is a journalist whose poetry will appear in *FULL CIRCLE*, an anthology of poems about men's experiences. He attends a poetry writing group led by Floyd Skloot, including Tess Yelland, Pamela Crow and Kelly Sievers, all appearing in this or a previous issue of *FIREWEED* -- a Skloot School?

RANDALL PAYTON, Portland, writes on letterhead whose motto is "Credo quia absurdum est." Randall is a musician and graphic designer. His poems are found in *MISSISSIPPI MUD* and *STANZA*.

* DAVID RITCHIE, Portland, is Idaho-born and Reed- and Stanford-educated. He teaches at Portland State. *MOTES* published his work.

SUSAN SPADY, Philomath, has completed a collection, *MOTHER STREET*. At the October 1993 Oregon Book Awards, Susan received the William Stafford Fellowship in Poetry.

HANNAH WILSON, Eugene, is the fiction editor of *NORTHWEST REVIEW*. This January she read poetry with her friend Jane Glazer at Marketplace Books in Eugene.

* TESS YELLAND, Portland, attends a workshop led by Floyd Skloot.

KEN ZIMMERMAN, Creswell, teaches essay and fiction writing at Lane Community College. He is working on a long poem in terza rima and sending poems out from a book-length gathering.

* First appearance in *FIREWEED*.