

Front Porch Review



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About Forgiveness
- Emily-Sue Sloane

The heart holds the story close.
Etched like glass
by hurt and sorrow
it shatters on impact
again and again.

Broken pieces fall into the chasm
where grasses overtake them.
In its time, the earth
anchors a bridge
supple and sturdy enough
to bear the lightness
of forgiveness.

Told from a distance
the tale grows taller.
The mind redraws shapes
adds color and light
restores a lively step
to fading footprints.

Western Nature
- Wally P.





Along the Way
- Antoni Ooto

The cold shrinks kindness as it always does
when February locked in white,
returns to winter.

In this pausable moment the future rests
with its last day so unsure.

Creekside, atop and below the ice,
water weeps downstream.

Without purpose I drive across the bridge
past Churchville's Cemetery.

Blessed are the souls in this rested place
whose forever home comforts,
and mine still uncertain lies out there.

Look, Don't Touch
- Bruce Harris



Birthday Cards Then and Now
- Claire Scott

It used to be you would hop into your Chevy or Ford
the one with a dent in the fender from hitting the fence
one night when it was late and full of wine

It used to be you would drive to the village
and park right next to Annie's Hallmark
where you might spend the next hour picking out
the perfect card
one that wasn't steeped in sappy rhyme

Then you paid Miss Swenson a dollar fifty
asked how her elderly mother was doing, hoped her daughter
enjoyed playing the snare drum in the high school band
and went home and sat at your old wooden desk
staring out the window at the burst of cherry blossoms
while finding the perfect words to say you cared
and hoped this year would be filled with joy

It used to be you slid the card into its pale blue envelope
and put a stamp of a cardinal or a wood lily
in the upper right hand corner
looked up the address in your rolodex to be sure
and printed it in your best writing

It used to be you carried the letter to the mailbox
just outside the gate, knowing Jenny would be by
in a few minutes, unless she had to pick up
Daniel from school, and the card would be on its way
to Wynnewood or Salem or Westmont
where it would arrive safely in four or five days
and your friend would smile when she saw the handwriting

Now you subscribe to Paperless Post or Smilebox
only a few dollars a month and over two hundred ecards
at your fingertips, click a card, any card, and suggested messages
pop up so you don't have to struggle for words

Wishing you sunshine and smiles

Hope your day is perfect, just like you

much easier in this era where all we speak is emoji
then simply type in the email address and hit *send*
two minutes tops

Instantly beamed across the country

you can even ask the company to auto send cards
each year, so you don't have to remember
hours saved so you can sit on your lumpy couch
in your silent living room

So Cute
- Peter Morris



Pretty Bird
- Alan Toltzis

We think of parrots caged, perched
solo, mechanically shuffling side to side,
heads bobbing, bowing nervously. Nothing
like the ruffling gusts of feather-green
dissonance that swarms the magnolia trees,
dot the utility lines on warm afternoons.

Some days I can't see them but still hear
their shrill confusion infiltrates my house.
With the wild uproar these untamed
things spew, they spread not a glimmer
of gossip, start no rumors, defame
not one soul with their utterances.
No one has taught them a single word.
Pretty bird. Pretty bird. Pretty bird.

No Exit
- Russell Streur







Noise in the Silence
- Mark Decker

If you listen very carefully,
with your ears, your eyes,
your brain and your heart,
you will hear the loud,
but joyous sounds that exist
in silence;
It is a loud, bold tranquility,
a rapture of nothingness
that fills every human sense;
It's there, waiting in suspense,
for us to say,
"Hello silence, my old friend;"
In silence is the beginning;
In silence is the end.

Autumn Orange
- Flo Hayes



Games?

- Lois Greene Stone

Why is a computer-gaming input device called a joystick? My personal introduction to such was definitely not joyous.

New Year's Eve, 1984, at a Florida resort, in an area off the lobby, video games with coin slots covered for that night circled the room. Small children and pre-teens waited for turns at the machines. I could never manage pinball flippers and assumed these 'modern' arcade things might be easier. My initiation into video games began.

Pac-man. Could I gobble up computerized dots, turn circles blue, rack up points, see boards shift? How hard can it be to manipulate one fat stick? My Pac-man was devoured before I figured out how to make him run away. Each time the game outwitted me there seemed to be an urgency to beat a computer chip.

Missile Command. Both hands were needed. On-screen bullets shot, and I tried to defend my cities from destruction. "Run away" I blurted and tried to maneuver but the video always set up obstacles I couldn't overcome.

This wasn't 'fun'! Frustration and defeat are never easy. Even if I'd scored enough to enter my initials into the computer's memory for high points, another would erase that accomplishment by earning a digit or two better. CAN be more successful than a man-made metal rectangle, said the ego.

Human behavior, in that room, would have made an interesting psychology term paper. Some children showed anger outwardly; the score seemed to represent self-esteem. The 'I'm better than you' bragging, for a moment, could easily be directed to a player whose score was lower. Competition, generally lifelong, was becoming important. Yet there were some with patience as they waited, and a shrug of the shoulder when the video game defeated them quickly. Were they accepting it was a game, or learning how to pretend 'it didn't matter'? How did I feel as an educated adult, successful, creative, skillful, when a joy-stick was cumbersome and an object figuratively smirked at me? I began to accept frustration was going to be part of any video game, and for any age group, as the programmer knew more about psychology when these devices were made. For me, there were enough 'frustrations' without going to an arcade and paying to have temporary different ones.

Did those then-children who pushed ahead, puffed-themselves-up to make others seem less qualified, kicked the machine's legs in anger, become 'entitled' adults? Did those who shrugged, either realizing or pretending games were not personal challenges, become the adult versions of their 1984 beings?

Since 1984, I have avoided video games while others find them stimulating. My perception of play or social contacts is merely different, not better nor worse than another's.

When Covid forced us to be isolated, we contacted others via mobile phones and played games such as Fall Guys. But monsters, and war never seem to lose popularity as themes. Why? Is a desire to conquer, as with the real-world situations, why weapons and power are so universal? Bits of success encourage gamers to continue to play for 'larger' rewards. Without droplets of achievement happening, few would assume they could control a machine. Designers know that.

MRI's have shown gamers' brains increase dopamine release; dopamine is a mood regulator. Is this harmful? When, during video play, one level's-up, and excitement happens, is the sensation so pleasant that reaching for more creates a type of addiction?

So, what are the positives for, example, the popular World of Warcraft? Maybe it's about exploring an imaginary world, finding new places, being emotionally attached to the created character, and sharing with a stranger during play. Maybe some who are bullied at school find comfort in the gaming universe and have a relationship with people they'd never meet yet feel a community.

Since Pac Man, simple by today's standards, there's Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs). Considered addictive, there's no real ending to them. Released in 2004, one creates an Avatar, and there is in-game currency used. The player does have to buy a subscription with a real credit card and then may select a 'realm'. Yes, there are dungeons, and war, and so many of our current TV series are filled with visual weapons, pain, lying, power pushing; maybe these video games are not too different from many tv series or films in 2022.

If I were to wonder about the effects video games have on youth, might I also wonder about gangster movies, just the actual news daily in papers or available to see on electronic devices, destruction of a country for extra and not needed land, school children being shot to death merely by attending classes in their hometown building, and such? I might wonder which 'real' is worse, the fears from humans' inhumanity to other humans, or the fake ones played via video games?

Stephen King Country
- Len Kazmer





Percolation
- Lorrie Ness

Well water pilfers minerals from the land —
flavors our coffee with calcium and buttered loam.

Every snowfall melting, every apple rotting into the ground,
each body scattered below the tree

is filtered by ninety feet of earth and one ruffled sheet
of tissue paper. The aroma is nutty,

our cups brim between our palms. Warm
with the color of walnut bark scorched by a summer bolt.

As we drink it down, daylight is siphoned below the rim
where it mixes with the coffee. The liquid lightens

to chestnut, then acorn, then taupe.
The interior glaze is crackled and stained —

muddy channels form between flecks of enamel.
We swirl our spoons,

dredge up sediment from generations of brews.
They are all gathered here

as we swallow pebble and tree, switchgrass, and sky.
As we drink of fallen fruits and fallen hands.

The Pond
- KJ Hannah Greenberg





School Bus
- D.R. James

When its arched brow rises
from behind the country hill,
snub-nosed, a grin
for a grill, you remember
you're in second grade.

There's Cindy's old yellow dog
feigning outrage at your passing van,
his bark and lunge petering
to that bored, panting trot.
And there the synod
of grammar schoolers wrestling
lunchboxes into a line,
reinventing the rituals, the
hierarchies, the variations
of elemental courtship.

There the oil-rosy puddles
in rutted gravel,
the soaked toes, knots
of gossiping daffodils, tufts
of too enthusiastic grass,
the bristles smudged in sage and mustard
along the far edge of fields.

When you top the hill
you know you'll see the bus swing
a backward right in your mirror, right
onto the main road, so
you lean, small-palm
the cracked leatherette,
grasp the memory of cool steel
framing the seat ahead,
all your uncertain world
still straddling the smeared window
slid halfway down.

The same low sun stuns you
when you glance back, forward, run
your times-nines, wheel left
and head for school.

First published in *Oberon*

Signage
- Joseph Glaser





Aviso:

TOURISTS

CONSUMING THE
CITY!

The Sea Passes On
- Betsy Holleman Burke

A man walks toward the water
drops his cane, crosses himself
before he enters the waves.
He hesitates, retreats, fears

of what he observed on his slow
traverse of the rocky sand –
dried sea fans, fish skins, black fly
swarms, jelly fish, a dead crow.

He fears a sting, running tide,
unsteady balance. Beyond
him surfers bound from bright kites,
straddle boards, wait for big swells.

Just yesterday, he surfed too.
He smiles. Wades ever deeper.

Golden Morning
- Susan J. Wurtzberg



Virtual



Reality

The Tree As Witness
- Amanda Rosas

Our backyard tree is a low monstrous canopy
of sun warmth, fever green with braided fronds
that sweep my brow as I descend the steps out back.
The limbs offer empathy in the air, they
greet, embrace. This evergreen in love
with us equally as with the passage of lonesome times.
It leans, a passionate companion of gravity.
This tree has watched me arrive and depart, flee and
settle in, and I've never said hello or goodbye or
thank you, not once. For watching us.
For withstanding us. For surviving us.
Soon,
we will leave this house nestled beside this
old mother tree. Our growing, snacking bodies
are denying this humble home the kind of solace
it once knew and governed, stable and mostly in peace.
The next people who home this house will be
gentler, give back what they take from it.
We are just pressed to move on rather than repair.
Like the rife testament of trees reaching eternally
for the kingdom cradle of sky, like this century's
old house stalwart as armored knight right down
to the skeletal studs,
what else have we taken for granted?

Look, Ma, no head!
- Timothy Resau



You'll See
- Judy DeCroce

the eyes of friends claiming another year
as young as we always are

mirrors, photos – nonsense
that's a trick – a lie of life

only time lassos and holds
yet, perception does not

we were never so young
and certainly not this old

we're just the same
the same as we always were

we haven't changed, really...
just look into the eyes of friends...
you'll see

Primary Yellow
- Sherry Shahan





Guidelines

We publish thoughtful, provocative fiction, poetry, essays and visual arts.

Submissions are accepted year-round.

- If accepted, submissions may appear in any quarterly issue.
- Biographical information will be requested for accepted submissions.
- If your submission was previously published, please cite the reference.
- Simultaneous submissions should be accompanied by a statement stating so.
- If your work is accepted elsewhere prior to our evaluation, please notify us.
- All work must be original and in English.

We do not publish novel excerpts, memoirs, genre material, flash fiction (less than 1000 words), book reviews, erotica or works which rely upon explicit language or gratuitous violence.

Fiction can be up to 5000 words. It should be relevant to a general audience, compelling and thought provoking. Finally, it should contain a protagonist with a positive, articulated, universal goal (e.g., freedom from oppression) who actively struggles to achieve that goal, overcoming emotional obstacles in the process. We expect the protagonist's values and beliefs to be reflected in his or her behavior, which behavior initiates conflict with other characters. Ideally, the protagonist is motivated by a past wound which he or she attempts to heal. By story's end the protagonist learns something significant about human behavior.

Essays can be up to 5000 words. We do not publish essays which are life stories. We do publish essays which express perspectives about topics of general, timeless interest. That is, we are not interested in essays about current events but are interested in essays about the vagaries of human behavior. An example of an ideal essay is Mark Twain's *Corn-Pone Opinions*.

We are interested in poems which contain vivid images, resonating voice, rich language, discernible rhythm and thoughtful messaging. An example of these attributes is Mary Oliver's *Wild Geese*.

Visual arts which elicit the comment, "How interesting!" are desired. Submit visual arts as **.jpg** files; do not send **.tif** or **.bmp** files. Accepted visuals may be reduced to fit the available space.

Mac users, please be sure that your files are readable by Windows 10.

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Accepted material will be edited. If changes are deemed significant, the contributor will be notified and given an opportunity to accept the changes or request that the piece be withdrawn from publication.

Send submissions to gphillips938@comcast.net Send 1 prose piece, 1-5 poems, or 1-4 photos at a time. For prose or poetry, type or paste your submission into the body of the email message.

We will not open any unsolicited print attachments. Photos, however, should be sent as attachments. Include your name and e-mail address.

Please expect to wait up to one month for a reply. Occasionally, with email, there are technical difficulties. We cannot be responsible for delay or loss of submissions. To check on the status of your submission after one month has passed, please send a message to gphillips938@comcast.net.

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