

PIECEWORK

A Magazine of Poetry by Women



JENNIFER KIDNEY

Winter 1988

Red Dirt Press, Inc., is the result of the vision of eight women who wanted to provide more publication opportunities for women. The publication of this magazine of women's poetry, aptly named PIECEWORK, which draws on all the images of women's work that is done "by the piece," is dedicated to all the women who write poetry, sometimes in spite of their lives and families.

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GIFT

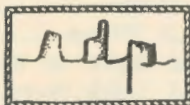
PIECEWORK

A MAGAZINE OF POETRY BY WOMEN

WINTER 1988

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A TRIBUTE

Janemarie Luecke, O.S.B., our friend and featured artist of the Fall issue of PIECEWORK, died November 17, 1987. As a tribute to her we are publishing section 10 of her poem "Reflections on Teilliard's Divine Milieu" and a poem written in memory of her.

10. BEYOND CHARDIN

The center spins, the outer rims converge
Into a mass of filament grown cold.
With all hope past, new galaxies emerge.

The ozone torn, ignited flames disturb
The layered rings until they cannot hold
And center spins. The outer rims converge

When unleashed rays of sun begin to purge
The green of earth. The burnt out surface rolls
With all hope past. New galaxies emerge

From gases sprung from fear and sung as dirge
Until some seer remembers: love has told
How centers spin, but outer rims converge,

Create new forms that live beyond the urge
Of fire, inhabit space, unite into pure gold
When, used hopes past, new galaxies emerge,

The moons no longer change, and sun preserves
An ordered consequence to life grown bold
Where centers spin, the outer rims converge
And, old hopes past, new galaxies emerge.

--Janemarie Luecke
from WILD BIRD EGGS

IN MEMORY LIE THE HOLY POWERS

(for Janie)

Even now my words work against the wind

and it's hard to write the poem
I've always wanted to write for you,
but what else is there?
You said a month ago,
"I'll have another ten years."
I should have learned by now
you could be wrong, but
I, like everyone else,
wanted to believe you a prophet.
Instead of ten years
even tomorrow will pass
without knowing you; then
the holidays will come and go
and know your absence,
you, who loved a celebration.
Now there'll be no call
for thanks giving;
instead I'll place a red rose
in your casket tomorrow
to replace the ones you never received
before your call to the convent,
and with it, there'll be a valentine
for all the ones you missed
in the third grade.
Instead of seeing you those ten promised years,
I will remember.

I'll remember you in the barn yard,
when we spent the holiday
at your Okeene homestead,
vying with your sisters
to tell the story of a childhood pig chase.

I'll remember you and me, wearing the roles
and lives of many women between us--
sisters, mothers, daughters, nurses,
lovers, teachers, friends--
all shifted like the center spins
and women's movement flows.

I the poet charged to live with memory
will keep your own images
of the girl Rosemary
who hung her head out the window
to watch the moving sea of wheat
in the western plains,
Rosemary who played Juliet
to an audience of "stupid, dull cows"
munching on hay below her loft stage,
alive with words.

I am one who will remember that
your immensity and your vulnerability
was your deep hunger for love--
your center spinning, collapsing,
your tornado whirling;
its energy and force turned you to pastures,
sent you star tracking,
to new galaxies, foreign lands,
the hearts of the universe,
and on to roads of the eternal,
relentless pilgrimage of tales.

But too I'll hold in mind
your book of poems
dedicated to me; we'll never erase that,
it marks the time,
as the poems mark the means
of being in relation.



JANEMARIE LUECKE

FEATURED ARTIST - JENNIFER KIDNEY

Jennifer Kidney was born in Clarksburg, West Virginia, and grew up in Washington, D.C. She attended Oberlin College in Ohio and received her Ph.D. in English language and literature from Yale University in 1974.

She has taught English and American literature and creative writing at Southern Connecticut State College, Oklahoma State University and at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. More recently Jennifer has worked as a software and documentation design specialist in the computer industry. She is currently the Executive Director of the Norman Arts and Humanities Council.

Jennifer Kidney has been an important influence on poetry writers of this state because of her teaching at OSU, her work as a Poet in Residence in the public schools and her work with the humanities council. She has helped students see the value of women poets by teaching these poets as important writers in the American tradition. One course that was important for women at OSU was her Emily Dickinson class.

Kidney has written and published scholarly articles and poetry in several journals, magazines and anthologies. She is the author of three chapbooks of poetry, ANIMAL MAGNETISM (Wowapi Press, 1985), ENDANGERED SPECIES (Renegade #2, Point Riders Press, 1984), FIELD ENCOUNTERS (Full Count Press, 1981).

We are pleased to present the work of another fine poet of this region.

WANTING TO BE A CATHOLIC

I wanted to be a Catholic,
to practice ancient sacred rituals
in the spooky dark of a cathedral.
I wanted a beaded rosary of my own,
a statue of the Virgin Mary, so pretty
in her long blue fairy princess gown,
the best doll of all. I wanted
to wear a uniform to school,
like Mary Lynne and Mary Anne,
the dentist's daughters, and be saved
from hand-me-downs. I wanted
a white confirmation dress and bridal veil,
a patron saint and a saint's name,
Mary, Margaret, Abigail.
And then I longed to be a nun,
mysterious in white and black,
elegant and chic. I wanted
pierced ears--"Like a Mick,
like a Wop" my mother shrieked--
the Italians and the Irish--
Catholics all. And finally I wanted
to write, but reading made me weep.
Not being Catholic denied me
Romance and half the symbols
of the Western world. Brought up
on Sunday school and a gentle Jesus
I could take or leave, I had no sense
of sin and nothing to confess.

--Jennifer Kidney

MULBERRIES AND ROSES

for Carol Yeatman
1946-1960

Imitating Poe, Carol and I
wrote stories beneath the mulberry tree
while her brothers' shirts on the clothesline
flapped in the breeze. Like Huckleberry Finn
we envisioned our own funerals, our secret admirers
revealing themselves in their grief,
and promised never to send each other
roses for remembrance.
We were much rarer flowers.

We knew that silkworms fattened
on mulberry leaves, or was it the berries,
or were THEY the new white berries?
Were those summer webs made of silk?
Carol climbed the tree to see.
The branches grew low and wide--and easy up.
But the fall was hard, flat on her back,
white as worm-web, breathless.
Had I taunted her to jump?

We'd gleefully steal
from her uncle's corner grocery,
getting away with nothing
as he winked knowingly:
Sugar Daddies, jars of olives
bulging from our pockets. We'd picnic
in the cemetery, the only park
in our part of town, and plan
our glamorous careers, romantic deaths.
We'd be Joan of Arc, Dale Evans,
Marilyn Monroe,
Florence Nightingale, Marie Curie,
Nancy Drew and more.

And all that happy time death stalked her
like a drugstore cowboy intent on rape
who won her at last,
and the last time I saw Carol
she was fourteen years old,
perfectly porcelain beautiful
like a girl in a magazine,
dressed in her Easter suit,
propped on silken pillows
in a casket, surrounded by roses,
some with my name--both of us betrayed.

--Jennifer Kidney

ADVICE

"Don't slouch," Mother scolded.
"You'll get a dowager's hump"--
whatever that was. Something like a widow's peak,
I supposed, something alluring and witchy,
like Snow White's stepmother.

"Stand up straight and wriggle,"
I thought Aunt Martha said
and I had rearview visions
of Jayne Mansfield and Marilyn Monroe
in slinky fish-tailed dresses
swaying out of sight while men
smoking cigars followed every curve.
She later enlightened me. The word
was "regal." "Imagine you are wearing
a tiara."

"You should wear a padded bra,"
advised Aunt Gertrude, jabbing
my breastbone. I slouched even more.
"After a few dates, you'll be less
self-conscious." Oh lord,
what did she mean?

"Great ladies always collect something,"
Grandmother instructed over tea.
I already had baseball cards
and a rock collection. "Something feminine,
distinctive, unique," she corrected.
"My demitasse collection, for example."

Mother warned, "Men are after
only one thing," and--at another time--
"Once you experience it, it will change
your life." She was right. It has--
over and over again.

--Jennifer Kidney

ICE CREAM

It's not the ice cream
as much as the desire,
although at times it does fulfill us--
cool but yielding,
melting under our tongue,
slowing infusing us,
never chewed and swallowed like steak.

It is the symbol of desire--
desire that haunts us even when met
with disappointment, failure, loss.
We still want it.
We still seek it.
Our beings echo
its calliopes and bells.

When I was a child
it was like a bicycle bell,
ring-ring, ring-ring,
up and down the summer streets,
calling us like a bigger boy
daring us to do wheelies on our tricycles.
I always felt the thrill.
Grandpa would jeer, "You want something
cold on a stick?"
I'd beg Mama for a quarter.
Sometimes in desperation
I'd steal one out of her purse.
I'd do anything for that ice cream--
even my sister's chores
for a share of her allowance.

The music-box melodies of the ice cream truck
evoke the sadness of childhood--
the ice cream dropped or too soon melted
or not gotten at all--
the dime lost down the sewer drain
or Mother's better judgment.

But I am still like that child
who runs jumping for joy into the street
to meet the ice cream truck,
who drops the coin in his excitement
or drops his ice cream
while the mean ice cream man
shows no sympathy--
who misses the truck or is passed by the truck
or, worse, run over by the truck.

I've been hit by that truck
over and over again. You'd think
I'd be chastened by the experience,
that I'd learn my lesson.
But, no, every time I hear that chiming
I'll take my last coin and dance out to the street.
I crave that ice cream,
I'll keep trying to get it,
even when any fool would know
I never will.

--Jennifer Kidney

IRON LUNG

We wore our green dresses
and merit badge sashes
to visit the girl in the iron lung.
We stood around her silver bed
in awe of her pallor as she lay in state
like Snow White in her coffin on the mountain.
She watched us in the mirror by her head,
sipped nectar through a straw,
asked and answered questions.

We made somores in her front yard
and told her what a pretty day it was
while all the time that foreign machine
groaned and heaved helping her breathe.
She was seventeen, had lain in her strange bed
for seven years, away from the seasons and the sun.
We wanted to know did she still grow?
Had she ever been in love?
When would the prince come to plant the kiss
that would stir her limbs to run?

--Jennifer Kidney

TURTLE CROSSING

Early one morning I found a turtle
Crossing the asphalt,
Pondering each step
As it extended a thumblike neck
Then waited for legs to catch up.
It folded into invincible armor
With the passing car
Or nosing dog.
What was the pot of gold on the other side?
This was no rainbow road.
Just a threshing mill
Where winnowing machines plow through turtles
Like tourists crunching gravel
Late for the 1:30 porpoise exhibit.
I hesitated,
Willing the helpless helmet on,
As stretch and tuck,
It reached the other side.

I was not thanked for my anguish.

--Jan Murray
Choctaw

TRESPASSER

Darting between
formations of brick houses
behind details
of rag clad housewives,
my dog escaped.
I searched in the early morning,
ducking pregnant clotheslines,
rows of them.
The air sweet with laundry
detergent and lint.
Between the underwear and blue jeans
I caught Bruce,
securing his leash.
Women watched through windows
with unmoving features,
except their stare
following as we walked.
The expressionless faces
demanded my excuse
for being out on a day so fair
with no task on hand.
Through their glares
I begged Bruce
not to dirty the laundry
or tear.
Undaunted,
Bruce raised his leg.

--Renée G. Benson
Altus

OBSERVATORY AT 2 P.M.

Daylight viewing is like
diamond shopping at the
mall, brilliance stabbing
out among deep-fried
pretzels, ping-pong voices
playing on the walls,
muted barkers from their
well-heeled booths.

We look, open our billfolds
with desire, think perhaps
we can afford such splendor
with a few well-spaced,
never-ending payments.

--Carol Hamilton
Midwest City

SAINT ANDREW'S CATHEDRAL IN WELLS

Four hundred statues grace these walls, and seven wells of water
Green the garlands 'round the base. Afloat on small stones foundations rest
Cushioned from earth tremors like an infant in the womb
Beyond the narrow nave, inverted, spiraling arches sweep
To tops of silvery limestone walls.

In retrochoir, lacy chantry chapels seem woven, fragile forests.
While southward rise wide, slabstone steps: uneven, concave, hollowed,
Hallowed by pilgrim's feet through centuries.

Under tierceron vaulted roof, a pilgrim's joy at such extravagance of praise,
Pale ribs of famous canopy seem bathed with rainbow tears,
Seeping in shimmering sunlight, and spreading singing colors
Through petaled, stained-glass windows shaped in stone.

A 1390 Anno Domini clock above displays jousting knights
Falling in continual combat, as chimes relentlessly toll the time.
Brass memorials distract the eye to search and find friezes
Showing cards and dice of ancient players.

Anonymous, witty masters of stone portrayed fruit-stealing jackanapes,
And etched in granite a face, wearing a toothache's frown:
Carved not for fame but in God's name to tell the whole.

In scamper rollicking, tousle-headed boys wearing white for choir:
They blend angelic trebles in liturgies at Evensong.

Outside, mendicant swans, indulged by clerics, float upon the moat,
And when they tug bell ropes, all soon are fed.

These glories of God's grandeur standing nigh ten centuries
Are etched upon a seeing heart:

The luminous, numinous holiness of "The Word" in stone
Majestically faces sunsets in western England's sky.

--Ruth Sigler Avery
Tulsa

ANONYMITY

I drive with Phaeton west,
To move again beyond my name.
The road slides neat beneath the tires
And takes me where no one can claim
That I should hear the telephone.
These strangers do not know I came
To be ignored, to eat alone.
They do not ask me what I think
Of astronauts or shooting stars.
My soul is now of blanched white bone
That cannot be disguised with styles
That fill the shops in malls, nor cars
That glisten, blind the same
As that crown on Apollo's head.
Through the heavens, down cloud aisles,
I let the stallions take the lead.
My moments drift and boil and build
Like storms with careless lightning filled.

--Carol Hamilton
Midwest City

WINGING FROM THE WEST

Among shadows of our plane
Briefly, we see our own jet stream
Play peek-a-boo
And smile at us as we pass through

Shocking pink dances off our silver wings
As misty white clouds block our view below
Of Indian red seeping through
In a no-man's land, it seems as though

UNTIL

We see fences, fences everywhere
Black cattle, white cattle in feeding pens
Box cars lined for miles on end
As far as eye can see.

INDIAN LAND

No more, no-man's land
Now. . . artists named ranchers
Lend a hand
Painting blue lakes, dabbled and dropped
Here and there, sketching their shores
With strokes of dubonnet and red.

THEN!

A waterless sandy red-rimmed bed
Squiggles and swiggles through the land
Cuffed with such vibrant hues
We've seen nowhere else,
Of deeper reds--deeper blues

NOW

Sailing, floating down in eerie silence
Threading our way through
The fast traveling clouds
We hear only a hum far away.
We seem to hover, wanting to stay
Above the barrier of white bumpity lumps.

THEN

Opening their bulbous arms
We burst through the sun
Looking down on fields with
Just a little left green.
Among bare brown trees, cattle graze
Dangerously close to ever thumping pumps.

WHITE SILOS

Dotted here and there
And thrusting up, up, up, to meet us
Derricks of steel. . . everywhere.

Winter is here

Christmas is near

Oklahoma City
2:47 P.M.

--Rosemary Bachle
Oklahoma City

OVER SWITZERLAND

Close by, hikers thread
the Stanserhorn.

I study the abyss,
adjust my harness, D-ring,
knee straps, pulley,
a litany of mechanics.

I pause
and vault headlong
upon an updraft.

Back, forth
coursing the valley.
Wind sounds buffet
my Dragonfly sail.

No more the child
flapping her arms, longing,
or watching the jagged
V's of geese form
to form again.

Later as a lover would,
I wait time after time
for that rushing
when speed defies gravity
and the plane lifts.

My arms and back
burn and sway.
Should I be Icarus
or trace these cliffs
down?

I crisscross the
millennium layers.
Quartz crystals mirror
my passing.

Too quickly pulled back to
pines, the rushing waters.
Alpenrosen
explode at my feet.

--Jill Holmes
Stillwater

DAWN-TREADING

When long and bony shades come creeping 'cross
These wornout toys and wishful dreams, I think
Of night as foe, not friend. For all is dross
To shadows from my midnight near the brink
Of Hell. I flail at insubstantial fears
That have no breath but threaten lasting licks
Of flame. These dragons play within my tears
And laugh when hurtled stones and twisted sticks
Are flung to keep their daggered barbs from me.
At sea I scull, and flinch when scaly nail
Shreds flesh and muscle from my faith in Thee,
And steals my golden winnings now so frail.
I grit my teeth. I tread the depths of night,
Face east, and wait for dawn to end my plight.

--Jan Murray
Choctaw

DOUBLE LIFE

With the first blood of the sun
Her day is an hour old,
Her coffee cup is cold,
And morning dishes are done.

She absently rubs dry fingers
As the school bus drives away,
And she flicks back the cobwebs of day.
A faint discontent lands and lingers.

But she carries it away
With the broom on the kitchen floor,
In the trash bags outside the back door,
In her duties, the everyday.

When the workday is finally over--
Laundry, mending, and showers,
Sleeping children in gingerbread towers--
She has no thoughts for a lover.

She seeks only sleep's gentle streams.
Everything life has held back
Or wrapped in a brown paper sack
Comes to her in brightly-wrapped dreams.

--Sharon E. Martin
Cushing

EYE TO THE FUTURE

Sometimes when I look in the mirror
I see my mother's eyes.
I wonder if she made all the mistakes
I make. I look into her eyes
so deep searching for some answers

All my fear and confusion
is reflected in her eyes.
Then it all melts away,
leaving only the love and knowledge
she has instilled in me.

Slowly her eyes become mine
and I can see in me
things that made her strong.
The confusion and fear are gone.
My mother remains, reflected back at me.

--Dana Goodman
Aurora, CO

FORTY

Women go crazy at forty
In Southeastern Oklahoma.
It's a well known fact.
Men discuss the phenomenon
At cafes, over coffee, at bars, over beer,
With women present, sitting silently.
Offering no argument, not
Even giving other women
A knowing glance.

They work, take good care of their
Kids, then something happens.
It must be menopause setting in.
Change of Life hits awful hard
In Southeastern Oklahoma.
Women are bad to want to exercise
At that age. A definite sign
Of frustration, speaks one man,
Adjusting his hunting cap.

And why more schooling when she
Has a good job, our bass boat,
Camper, and a good home, asks one.
Did you hear about Buck's wife?
Ran off with a coffee salesman.
Ol' Buck might play around
But he'd never do her that way.

PROGRAM

Women don't use their brains
After they're forty. Finally, the
woman nods. Why call attention
To herself? But, she knows she's going
A l

i
t
t
l
o
crazy,
t
o
o.

--Donna Merry
Oklahoma City

BREAKDOWN

Giving myself time to heal
means
the bills don't get paid
my credit goes bad
I lose my children
I lose my car
and clothes and
shelter and food

leaves me with nothing
but another breakdown

The fathers of hate
can't take my education
my woman-soul, my
creativity
Just because they took
my mind
my finances
my shelter
my food
my offspring
doesn't mean they
can have my brain
and my soul.
They leave me, they think,
with only their lies and
my torturous ancestors.

They didn't even allow
for self-esteem and
self-actualization
but self-actualization
isn't to be allowed in
females
so it wasn't considered
for me.

THE WEAVER

Weave your spells of magic
Back and forth
Across the earth's loom.
Gather the weft and warp,
The threads of music,
Into the silence of the night.

Plait the pattern of strings
Into the cloth;
Green and gold;
Colors of the winds
And water's movements.

Send the shuttle spinning,
In and out
Until the cloth
And the magic are finished.

—J. Leigh Perry
Moore

MEDICINE WOMAN

Lay soft skins over the crusty earth,
Put a blanket over my weary shoulders.
Bid me sit while you stir the fire.

Furrow your brow, tighten your lips,
Lift your dark eyes to gaze at me.
Measure my sickness and my health.

Summon the flute and drum,
Brew a drink to make our words like honey.
Teach me to breathe, to fall into a trance.

Let me dream my ancestor's dreams.
Let me be my grandmother's spirit,
Or my great-grandfather's tender nursemaid.

Give me a mystical union
With the Sun God, or the dancing butterfly.
You know the dance I need to try.

Pick a pattern from the earth or sea,
Or wind! And let it fall on me
Like a robe of blue serenity.

Your hammered silver flashes spirituality.
Your half-raised hand, in blessing,
Sets my own hawk free--to soar, to see.

Medicine Woman, touch of strength,
Medicine Woman, I come to you.
Medicine Woman, be there for me.

--Patricia Webb
Oklahoma City

LOVING

I wish I could give you the gift of warm water
In a smooth round light blue cup--
It would never change
Like the balm of wet warm oil
It would keep you safe always,
Tuck you in where you can't hurt
And breaking would be impossible

I wish I could give you the gift of red apples
In a rough-hewn handmade straw basket--
They would shine with my polishing
The glow strong and sure
Warming your eyes with my love
Tangible proof that you are
What a friend has needed you to be

I wish I could give you a silk lined box
Full of pink seashells and funny poetry
Written with perfection, words shaped carefully
As brown bowls catching summer rain--
Words that hold water always
That say friendship, this is it
Strong as shell and real as language

I wish I could bundle with satin ribbons
All this, this rare gift
Of reciprocity of heart--
And place it anonymously on your desk
Where you--with sunlight in your chocolate hair--
Would wonderingly untie ribbons always

--Karen Young Holt
Oklahoma City

IN '67

We yelled a lot in '67
when we weren't singing.
In '87 we begin manufacturing
giant stars,
Circling in space
around our homes
to protect our laws.
No one's talking.

Our doves ruffle,
restless in their woven nests
of discarded socks
buried in our dresser drawers,
premature.
You remember the doves--
We wore them around our necks
like dog tags.

In space we contemplate
a battleground
like Star Trek on
some foreign town,
Star Wars playing
at a solar system near you.

--Renée G. Benson
Altus

J.

Tonight
a voice from the past
crackled across the telephone wires.
I paused--surprised, afraid to say a name
for fear I was mistaken.
I guessed correctly--
 and was told of a life. . .

It wasn't you.
It never shall be.
And how I can be so certain
 of your silence
I can't say.
I simply am. . . certain

Our eyes met, a wordless goodbye
And we walked separately away.
Separate--apart--but you and I
Separate?
I never expect to see or hear from you again, but
Separate--apart--somehow those words
 don't possess their common meaning.
They do not apply.

We two were one
 In ways no mingling of bodies
 ever joined any.
We felt, we thought
 we needed, we were so much the same
Strangers
might have thought us siblings.
We loved so much.

Until then I had believed
Enough love, enough courage
and anything but death,
could be overcome, could be dealt with.
I learned.
And walked away.

--Shelly Bishop
Oklahoma City

AN OLD LOVE CALLS

You called and spring returns
To haunt my winter years,
To spade the soil around
A heart long dormant,
Salt watered with the tears
Of harvesting the fields
That came between
With lesser yields
Than graneries could store,
With lesser pay
For giving more.
You called, replanting
Love, with seeds of spring
For autumn harvest offering.

--Marjorie Brannon Skeen
Carnegie

THE CHILD'S DREAM

"Last night I dreamed that words were stones."
How many nights have passed since then
And still that phrase is buried under the sea-floor
And still my life washes back and forth above it
Like heavy water packed with fish.

Deep in the cloudy years I still see the image,
Drawn from some deep dream of a deeper place
Which left that phrase as its sole witness--
The strange child sitting at her mother's piano
With the sheet of music alien before her
Because the words and notes were stones embedded in the page,
Irregular patterns on a white surface.

And how shall I speak or make music, asked the child,
Seeing that the words are stones...
And these many cloud-covered years later
The haunted woman asks the same question,
Peering at her heart to seek the mystery
Of how stones change back to words,
That voice and music may arise transformed from their watery burial
Under the dark sea-floor.

--Evelyn K. Davis
Oklahoma City

HEARING TRIANGLES

(for Lou Anne)

it is hard to hear the triangle
when it is you
that are it
the thing the rest of us struggle to hear
the music on our lips
rimming bowls, and tenderly,
the rain...

my fingers play the cool curve of flute
and hot
the stars
shoot
like pieces of silver
swaying

i drown in this light,
hear the soft beat
of lovers grown beyond loving
suffer visions
of mad girls dancing raw,
white-boned,
wet with moon

the dance begs
the dancer, soft

and you
all bell and beat
are listened for...

--Karen Young Holt
Oklahoma City

NATURAL

Staring into the eyes of nature
I see your image,
dark
in the fading light
among dark brown trees,
branches outstretched
reaching
searching
grabbing at you
as you move
toward me
over the bed of leaves
brown and red and yellow.
Fall has come
the mother sheds old things
preparing for birth,
new life.

The crackling
of dry leaves
breaks the stillness
as you
step into the clearing,
your image
clearer now,
the lines of your skin,
the beauty of the
nakedness of your body
envelopes me,
drowning me
in longing,
to touch
to feel
your fresh softness,
your warmth.

Captured in the moment,
electrified
as my fingertips
rest against the flesh
of your shoulder.
Warm and soft
your stomach
against mine.
We become one
with each other
and with nature.
It is a it should be.

--C.J. Wilson
Norman

OF DOGS AND DADS

When Charlie lay at the foot of my bed, whimpering
in pain, struggling to maintain his dignity,
his trusting pleading eyes fixed upon my face,
you encouraged me to give unselfish love and grant him peace.
"Dear old dog, he should not have to suffer."
And through my tears, in the agony of my young heart,
I knew that you were right.
We helped him go.

Now you lie there in your bed
of pain, struggling to maintain your dignity,
as they denigrate your body and soul,
your trusting pleading eyes are fixed upon my face.
Even though you cannot speak, I hear your question.
I cannot answer--the cruel fiction of the suffering
servant is not my creation.
But through my tears, in the agony of my heart,
I know, again, that you were right.

--Nancy Ingram Kenderdine
Oklahoma City

THE CREEPING YEARS

In a rest home--two old men sat talking--one said,
I'm getting older fast and my hair is gone from my head.
I can't do much any more, just want to lay on my bed.

I know what you mean, said the next old man.
My step is slow, my eyes are growing dim.
I think I see someone and I run right into him.

Time went on and the first old man took to his bed.
He didn't know anyone after that,
And had terrible rumblings in his head.

The last old man said, My feet are moving slow.
I can just barely put one foot before the other.
I think I'll get an old wheel chair and a blanket for a cover.

One day the first old man wasn't around any more.
The last old man was so lonely at night,
He made an awful sound when he would snore.

Soon the last old man passed away
While sitting in his chair, with a smile on his face.
We knew he didn't have a care.

This goes to show, if we live long enough
Old age will get us all. It keeps creeping up
And creeping up, then we will hear the call.

--Pearl S. Johnson
Newalla

(Mrs. Johnson's sister Mrs. Naomi Stiffler of Earlsboro, sent us this poem, along with, "The lady is 80 years and gone blind. She spent most of her life caring for others, first younger brothers and sisters left in her care when Mother died, and then six of her own. Her life, which has always included writing poems and children's stories, has been a blessing.")

PEGGY JOHNSON

She swung the big guitar around
And made a backpack of it.
She threw her head back and let her soul
Pour out a song like I had never heard before,
Smoother and with more kick than any drink:
A song about a mountain she and her mother owned.

Now that wasn't the title,
I'm not even sure that phrase was in it,
But that was what I heard, you know,
Through the smoke the message came to me.
She looked funny there, guitar almost bigger than she was.
I laughed at her, and me, and Mom, and owning a mountain.

Later on in her performance
She told a joke about Janice Joplin.
I hoped she wouldn't go down like Janice did.
And I hoped I wouldn't go down like Janice did--
'Cause that's not the kind of thing you do
When you own a mountain.

That was a couple of years ago.
I didn't know her then, and I don't really know her now,
But I recall how electricity came out of her fingertips
And danced upon the floorboards near her feet.
And I remember how fine it felt to think about women
Owning a mountain.

--Patricia Webb
Oklahoma City

SONG LYRICS

Sometimes we receive poems that just sing themselves into a song. In this issue we are presenting four of these song lyrics that are poems, or poems that are song lyrics.

The singing quality doesn't come from the rhyme or rhythm, though that may be present, but comes from that lyrical quality that allows the singer to become subjectively nostalgic, melancholy, pleading, passionate, funny, even ridiculous. Song lyrics don't require the distance that poems do of their writers. The voice of a poem is universal; the voice of a song, no matter how universal the feeling, is always the voice of the singer.

Song lyrics offer promises, recall memories, protest and commend. You will find all of these and more in the lyrics we have selected for you. By giving your own voice to each of the lyrics, you will become the creator of the melody and of the performance.

LAUGHING THE BLUES AWAY

I'm a little older but the wind don't blow no colder,
Still chills me to the bone.
But I'm still growing, getting into knowing nothing.
That's what'll always keep me young.

CHORUS:

I weigh what I do weigh,
Say what I can say
To make this world my home,
And I love you laughing the blues away.
They'll always come but don't have to stay so long,
And we're just laughing our way back home.

I'm a little taller, and a dollar's still a dollar,
Always buys whatever it will buy.
But I'm still working and that million is still lurking,
Hidden from the corner of my eye.



PEGGY JOHNSON

(Photo by Marian Hulsey)

CHORUS:

I weigh what I do weigh,
Say what I can say
To make this world my home,
And I love you
 laughing the blues away.
They'll always come but
 don't have to stay so long,
And we're just laughing
 our way back home.

I'm a little tougher,
 but life don't treat me rougher
Than it did from the day
 that I got born,
'Cause I'm still a fighter and that
 load keeps getting lighter,
Long as I'm with you and we're
 laughing our way back home.

CHORUS:

I weigh what I do weigh,
Say what I can say
To make this world my home,
And I love you laughing the blues away.
They'll always come but don't have to stay so long,
And we're just laughing our way back home.

--Peggy Johnson
Oklahoma City

I THINK I'M READY NOW

I've never been the type
To tell you how I feel,
I kept it all locked up inside,
I was never even real.

Where are my tears?
Where are my dreams?
I want to find them again.

I stormed through so many lives,
Breaking hearts and making excuses,
I didn't slow down long enough
To face up to and mend the bruises.

No time to feel,
No time to care,
No time to heal,
Running everywhere.

I want to change with you,
To show you how I feel.
I'm tired of running away,
I want to come home to you.

To share my tears,
To share my dreams,
To share my hopes of love with you.

I've got lots of time,
Think I'm ready now
To try this thing
Called love with you.

--Mary Black
Los Angeles, CA

YOU WALK AT ONE END OF THE LINE

My eyes filled with tears,
My feet, hot with sand,
Walking to school
In red dirt land.

The oldest, at thirteen,
And working for bread,
A mom overwhelmed
With a houseful of kids,
A dad who loved us,
In a stupor on the bed.

Home after school
To feed chickens and swine,
Sustained by a message:
"You walk at one end of the line."

--Glennora T. Cullen
Oklahoma City

THE SPLIT-RAIL FENCE

I went to visit my old home place last Sunday,
And the old house is getting pretty old,
People have come and gone
Since I lived there, I was told.

The big oak tree in the back yard
Still looked the same,
But the rooms looked small and the hall looked short,
And the porch-covered well still remains.

The split-rail fence that was gone,
I wanted to see most of all.
I wasn't at all surprised because when I lived there
It was about to fall.

The fireplace that I liked so much is still there,
But parts of the house are just about gone,
The shingles from the top and the front porch
The storms had blown.

The sage brush was still growing green,
And quail were still raising their young
In the same place
Where the rail fence had gone beyond.

There weren't any cotton fields anymore,
And now green pastures were there,
All over the rolling hills,
Cattle, sheep and horses grazed everywhere.

The split-rail fence that was gone,
I wanted to see most of all.
I wasn't at all surprised, because when I lived there,
It was about to fall.

--Nettie Dillon
Enid

FOR OUR YOUNGER READERS

GRANDMOTHERS

There are so many people
Who seem to pen
Poems and Sonnets
Verse and Hymn

Praising a woman
Known to us all
A short little person
Who is ten feet tall

They come in all sizes
The descriptions varying
No two alike
Except for the caring

They all seem to have
A built-in device
Which sets them apart
And makes them nice

They are larger than life
Yet small enough to hold
So many different ones
Yet from the same mold

They can make the sun shine
On any given day
No matter what the weather
They seem to find a way

They seem always prepared
At any given time
To bake up some cookies
Or have a treasure-find

They always seem to know
Without hearing a word
When you need to be loved
Your cries always are heard

I have tried to describe
In my own small way
The meaning of Grandmothers
Well, that is to say

It is hard to group them
In one big lump sum
'Cause every one is special
I know, I've had one.

--Kevin Marie Scott
Oklahoma City

MOTHER'S LITTLE SECRET

When Mama was cooking and brother was small
I took my crayon and colored the wall,
In circles and lines of purple and red
I colored the wall until Mama said,

"I see what you're doing to your bedroom wall.
You're in trouble now and that's not all,
You ate a cookie when I told you no,
You went to Billy's room when I said, 'Don't go.'
You pushed your brother for no reason at all,
And now you're coloring on YOUR BEDROOM WALL!"

Then Mama spanked me and when she was through,
I made a face to her back and SHE KNEW!
Her face was not toward me, but sternly she said,

"MOTHER HAS EYES IN THE BACK OF HER HEAD."

--Terry McGill
Oklahoma City



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PIECEWORK is also accepting submissions of art work and photographs, especially seasonal to be used as covers for the quarterlies. Send black and white photographs or black ink line drawings to **PIECEWORK**, Red Dirt Press, Inc., P.O. Box 60693, Oklahoma City, OK 73146, by the submission dates listed above. Payment is in one contributor's copy. Please enclose a SASE.

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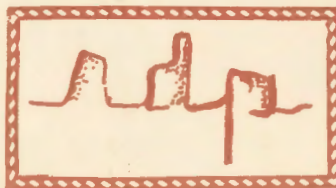
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"I salute PIECEWORK for publishing so many fine women poets in the region. So many new voices! It is one more proof that the best writers these days appear in the little magazines. Bravo to the editors and to the poets!"

May Sarton



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