

# PIECWORK

A Magazine of Poetry by Women



MOTHER/DAUGHTER

Spring 1987

Cover photo of mother and daughter,  
Tina and Laura Page, by Robin Smith

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**GIFT**

# PIECEWORK

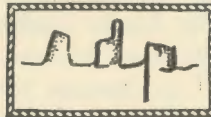
A MAGAZINE OF POETRY BY WOMEN

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## FEATURED ARTIST-DAHRA LATHAM

Dahra Latham, a seventeen-year-old Stillwater resident who is currently attending St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, is this issue's featured poet. Dahra has also lived in Guatemala, California and spent a summer as an exchange student in Sabris, France.

A National Merit Scholarship Finalist in 1987, she also won first place in the state French contest and fourth at nationals. Dahra participated in the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute at Quartz Mountain State Park, where she won a creative writing award in 1986.

Her response to our inquiry of why she wrote was: "When I was very young, I read easily, and when I had exhausted the books of nursery rhymes in the house, began reading 'adult poetry' without ever realizing that there was a difference. I have been writing ever since I was about five and, while I hope that my work has matured since then, I consider the compositions of children, myself included, to be worthy of serious attention. I believe almost all children would write if they were not taught that poetry is the realm of bespectacled professors and garret-dwelling lunatics. Why that would be wonderful, and why I continue to write, are things which, in the words of Louis Armstrong, 'If you don't know by yourself, ain't nobody can teach you.'"

We are excited to be sharing the works of such a young artist, and are also pleased to publish two works of Dahra's mother, Nelda Latham, in this same issue. Putting Dahra's work together and learning about her has been a collaborative effort between the women of the press and a mother and daughter--an effort which has reminded us of the potential of PIECEWORK to help women recognize the importance of our work and our relationships to one another.

We are making a way, as Adrienne Rich has said, for women to see "...eye to eye/ measuring each other's spirit, each other's/ limitless desire," and this is a "whole new poetry beginning here."

Thank, you Dahra and Nelda, for your work which we know will be a yeast, a starter, for our new bread, our "new poetry."



Creative writing instructor John Lane offers Dahra Latham some pointers on her writing at last summer's session of the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute, at Quartz Mountain State Park. (Photo, courtesy of Oklahoma Arts Institute)

I begin poetry  
in my true face  
Coming home,  
seal away weed-green contact lenses  
scrub away molten golden color that the world imposes  
rise through fathoms of falsehood revealing  
pearl-pale and storm-eyed body  
Stepped out of Renaissance portrait  
Shining like dolphin through ocean  
through ragged breaker of hair  
washed suddenly  
from red to brown.  
I take up the pen.  
And all the hard-birthered beauties I have ever read  
Fall about me an irrelevant rain.

--Dahra Latham

After rain  
In lavender weather I drove  
Stopped, backed, turned,  
And climbed to stop at a hill's crest  
Closed the door with an echoing sound  
And walked to gather you thistles  
Having no knife nor gloves, I sawed them with my key  
The thorns were fierce--they bit me  
And my blood ran hot among the green-and-silver leaves  
A grass snake coiled at the road's edge;  
I picked it too  
Went back to the car  
To bring you  
With a handful of thornflowers  
And a jeweled whip  
Hard news.

--Dahra Latham

## ANIMA

Silk and frenzy petals of sunflowers,  
and punk-cut blocks of pines  
the red clay opiate of masses  
of foliage perfectly balanced  
slide from my shoulders  
with the stiff rustling  
of snakeskin or taffeta.  
You remain.  
With daggers on your hips,  
And silence in your mouth  
in a red cape,  
and leather sword harness  
leaping  
from balcony to tree  
with blood in your teeth  
with the pointed ears  
and philosopher's voice  
of my other soul  
walking  
in your dragon shoes  
chiming  
through the porphyry columns of my heart  
your light laugh going before you,  
and swinging behind  
your white hair, bright  
as the scimitar of death.

--Dahra Latham

The light comes through the window--plants a cold  
and thin green liquor and I lie back drunk  
to turn before my vision for a time  
an immemorial regret.

I am seventeen: I have looked into fire  
until my eyes stung blind and all the world  
was white as ash, and then a certain flame  
ate all my flesh to ashes from within,  
and dropped in folds on the cold floor my skin;  
a small smoke from the pile  
rose and slid down the room on a small wind  
opened a door sealed like an ancient wound  
and saw the flat expanse of earth beyond.

I am seventeen: I have known the names of trees  
and their root's voices, slept within their wood  
with moss upon my breasts and on my belly,  
with owls-nests in my arm-pits, and my mouth  
dry-tongued with wormwood. Tension in my legs,  
and like a crystal dancer's my feet's points  
white arms reaching to heaven like a saint's,  
green fingernails for leaves.

Apples on the ground  
dissolve and feed their white flame hearts to sound  
that rings within me: I am seventeen  
and all around me ash-grey people go  
the muscles in my arms are made of snow  
and wire and slender filaments of god  
and all around the ash-grey people nod  
into a claycold sleep of desperation.

--Dahra Latham

CONVERSATION WITH THE MOTHER OF ROSES

The Woman:

O thou that stand within the strange  
and cinnamon-scented whisper of a wounded wind

(pricked, sharp, by icy-golden fire of thy sweet sway,  
and bleeding crimson petals down the sky...

How goes the day?

The Rose:

I see the time away and fear no rain  
wait until mariposa comes again  
laugh in the wind and whisper sly, sweet tales  
(incarnadine revenge on nightingales)  
and brew red wine beneath the wine-dark tree...

What know you of my children, gone from me?

The Woman:

They're gone to all the corners of the sea,  
And all who know love name them reverently  
And all who love them name themselves love's harpers  
That spread her song wherever song may be.

The Rose:

Somehow I always knew it would be so--  
They were such fair, sweet children  
when I saw them go.

--Dahra Latham

**SONNET 9: A CONVERSATION WITH MOTHER**

I watch as if from far away  
The thunderous progress of your face  
Within a little minute's space  
From emptiness to screaming rage.  
I shall not argue with you now--  
Why should I, when your ears are shut?  
No thought I muster can rebut  
The blue vein beating on your brow.  
The logic of your glazing eye  
Logic dethrones, and passion sets  
Above that power, that leaps from earth  
To chart the dances of the sky  
Upset the silent sky with jets  
And teach your human soul its worth.

--Dahra Latham

## ODE TO DECEMBER 18

I see the bark of the dog in the air;  
    Light and vaporous and grey.  
It matches the sky,  
    And for that matter, the day.  
Inside the cat is lying on the rug,  
    Black and soft and warm.  
The yule tree is waiting in its stand.  
    It is crooked, but nice.  
It will be cheerier later, when decorated  
The clothes are tossing softly in the dryer,  
Life is made of such strangely small things.

--Nelda Latham  
Stillwater

## GOD, IT'S WINDY

The wind sure howls  
    around buildings which are square.  
If we all lived in round houses  
    we'd have much quieter air.

--Nelda Latham  
Stillwater

## WHO WRITES POETRY? BERNICE MCDONALD DOES

When Red Dirt Press started planning a poetry journal, one of the publishers, somewhat fearful about our undertaking, asked, "But where will this poetry come from? Who writes poetry?"

We have had this question answered by the responses from women all over the Southwestern Region--sometimes in poetry, sometimes just letters. Often they write poems to celebrate "occasions" or to rid themselves of frustrations (creative activity does this!), or to share emotions. But many write poetry because it's what they do; as one poet writes, "We...write our poetry in spite of our lives and families."

Bernice McDonald is this kind of person. She writes poetry and has always done so, ever since she can remember, she says. When she was a child in St. Joseph's Orphanage in Oklahoma City, Sister Rosalee found some of Bernice's poetry in her notebook. After the usual questioning of "Did you write this?" and "When did you write this?" Sister Rosalee sent it away to a Catholic newspaper, where it was published. Bernice's first published poem at age eleven.

She continued to write as she grew up, because writing poetry was just something she did. She grew up and married and reared five children--and wrote poetry in Blueback and Mohawk notebooks. When one notebook was filled, she bought another. Writing poetry was not a driving passion in her life--it was something she did, like cook and clean and care for children. Other people were hardly aware that she wrote.

When Bernice's children were almost grown and she was working as a dental clinic supervisor at Children's Memorial Hospital, she read about a modern poetry workshop at Central State (then) College. She cajoled and threatened her hospital directors until they changed her work schedule so she could attend this class, the summer of 1966. As a result, one of her poems was published in OKLAHOMA POETRY, 1968. In 1970 she had a poem published in THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN. Bernice was not very interested in publishing, but she did keep writing poetry.

When the first issue of PIECEWORK came out, her daughter showed Bernice a poem by one of her friends. This prompted Bernice to bring her notebooks out of her trunk and show her daughter some of the poetry she had written through the years. First the daughter had to deal with this unrecognized part of her mother's life--then she brought one of the notebooks to us. It was a delight to see this woman's biography--her history--reflected in these poems.

When Bernice was asked about her writing, asked why she wrote poetry, she replied, "It's just something I've always done. I love rhymes and I love the music of words."

Red Dirt Press is discovering a community of poetry writers--some who publish and some who write in spiral notebooks and pack them away in a trunk. We are happy that a conversation about PIECEWORK unearthed Bernice McDonald's poetry. And we are pleased to publish these poems of hers.

### SIGNS OF SPRING

The signs of spring are a promise  
Of new beginnings, better ways,  
A promise of renewal, and  
Of summer's softer, lazy days.

The wistful sound of peepers calling  
In the early morning dawn,  
And near the edge of the meadow  
I see a soft-brown, speckled fawn.

In the swamp, the gray-brown phoebes call,  
And red-winged blackbirds sing,  
The trees are veiled in misty green  
And the crocus shyly peeps at spring.

I hear a chorus of gabbling geese,  
In the dark of the cold, clear night.  
And with their V-shaped flight, they sketch  
A trail across the pale moonlight.

The days are growing longer now,  
We've felt the last of winter's sting,  
I dislike the ice and the snow,  
But without it, we would have no spring.

--Bernice McDonald  
Oklahoma City

## THE BLIZZARD

Winter strikes with sudden fury  
From the sullen, lowering sky,  
With biting bullets of driven snow  
And screaming wind, a banshee cry.

Down from the icy frozen North  
The blasting blizzard strikes its blow,  
With vicious, hissing, slashing sleet  
That pelts the shivering earth below.

The tearing tempest brings with it  
The howling wind's crescendo wail,  
The spitting snow and scudding sleet  
That strikes the ground like minute hail.

Ice-laden trees with heads bowed low  
Before the frigid Arctic blast,  
Quiver and quake with each new gust,  
As though each one would be their last.

Hour after hour, it rages on,  
Until at last, its wrath grown quiet,  
It leaves a silent, weary world  
Crouched beneath its blanket white.

--Bernice McDonald  
Oklahoma City

## JUST MADNESS...

The crazy woman

in the attic got loose again today  
lamenting dark yesterdays failures  
first love and other disasters--  
unicorns she had never seen  
much less tamed with the golden bridle.

"That damned unicorn," she said,

"I just about convince myself  
mythical beasts do not exist--  
then through early morning clouds  
the drum of golden hooves  
clatters outside my window."

"Always is not forever," she said,

and expounded on the point  
"Take lovers for instance  
(there's certainly a variety to choose from)  
I never could sustain reality  
the day-to-day refused to fit the dream  
pain-tinged memories remain  
long after the rest is dead."

The crazy woman

in the attic got loose again today  
said her say and strayed  
wild-haired back from where she came  
leaving me to ponder unicorns  
and the day-to-day.

--Annette Van Dusen  
Oklahoma City

## SARAH

She sings beside me, filling my ears  
with a low sweetness. I who have  
only heard sopranos am charmed  
and blessed by this hymn  
sung in a pitch of fire. No  
music necessary.

She is like a bird  
that sits on eggs.  
She gathers her eggs into her warmth  
and waits for them to develop.  
She accepts my eggs, too,  
fully aware that babies that hatch  
may be lizards.

Knowing this, I offer her my stories.  
I watch her arrange them and me,  
making patient comparisons.  
She knows all time is hers.  
I wonder what incantation  
this particular conjurer will make of my words.

--Jacoba Hood  
Weatherford

## JOANNE

We have been friends for years.

Yet when I think of you  
or hear your name mentioned,  
I see you as I saw you first--  
walking fast across the crest  
of a steep hillside school-yard.

What really stunned me was  
the cape you wore--dark blue,  
regal, blowing out behind you  
free as wing, as sail,  
as wind itself--

and your long, blonde hair  
lifting and blowing, too,  
at dance with light  
and devil-may-care  
like the splendid cape.

The same bright image flares  
again, again.  
It is like a promise  
or a truth revealed.

--Katharine Privett  
Pawnee

**BEFORE THIS LIFE WHAT WAS I TO YOU?**

Your dreams, my son,  
Antedate your current history.  
Who were you before you were mine?

Six, and already  
You own a repertoire of anecdotes,  
Delight your gallery with tales.

Delight me, too.  
And the déjà vu  
When you tell a tale from my recall.

--Sharon E. Martin  
Cushing

In my English classes  
I define a rough draft as Adam.  
I read it in a magazine--  
Sounded good to me.  
The girls usually have to explain it to the boys,  
proving the final copy is always clearer on the facts.

\*\*\*

God has to be a man.  
Were he a woman  
He would have cleaned up  
That first mess He made  
Once He perfected the model.

\*\*\*

Ear piercing  
Hair perming  
Gold chains and bracelets  
Sequined jackets  
Matching glove...  
  
Sons sure are getting expensive these days.

--Nancy Lavender  
Lawton

## THE ORDER

Get angry, you said,  
at what,  
too many commuters  
with big hands and fiery words,  
a bag of bones  
that will soon break on the snow  
storm of reality,  
the bathroom light  
at early morning  
and the alarm clock helicopter  
that jerks me  
like a mole from underground,  
I water my lawn in winter  
when there are no more  
songs to sing,  
when I distrust  
the small colonies  
of people at the grocery  
store who wear tired faces  
and chapped, pinched lips,  
when old friends  
start to line and gray  
and throw their children  
up into the air into a tree,  
anger has no future,  
I learned that  
back there with Soupy Sales  
dancing with the Mouseketeers,  
when Cinderella got the handsome prince  
after she'd worn her anger  
like that one glass slipper  
that I tried so hard to find.

--Linda Leebron  
Edmond

IN MEMORY OF ARTHUR

The chrysanthemum you sent looks like  
Rich yellow sherbet  
Poured from a glass  
Made out of silk  
Thru the heart of a wide buttercup  
Into a shiny mold of soft petals--  
And laced with sweetest kind thoughts.

Its mirrored folds lend a vast canvas to my mind,  
That lingers, dear one  
On the abundance of your nature,  
Where all precious nectars are gathered  
And so gallantly fused  
Into the sweet breath of you.

--Lou Aubrey  
Oklahoma City

## TANDEM

True love enters,  
a raging ocean tide.  
Lovers like blankets wrap,  
bodily boundaries gone:  
two  
in tandem ride.

The soul of passion  
lifts;  
The peak of action  
halts  
the solitary life.  
Find a buoy  
find an anchor  
find an ending  
to the strife.

Conceive the gentle family:  
the grasping silence  
of one who needs  
only one to hear.  
Bring the babies gently  
as the lovers sigh:  
Now side by side,  
loving, draw near.

--Julie Beth Lannigan  
Poteau

## BLISS

Turn over, George, you are keeping me awake,  
With that tossing and snoring and wheezing you make.  
Get out of the middle, would you please, Mother?  
And could I have just a bit of the cover?  
Get those feet off me, although you're so nice.  
Your feet are as cold as a chunk of ice.  
George, why do you always turn on the light  
Every time that you have to get up at night?  
Why are you cold? It's so hot in here.  
Could we turn down the heat just a bit, dear?  
The conflicts go on forever like this.  
It's commonly known, and called wedded bliss.

--Barbara Thrash  
Texhoma

## CUCKOLD

A passive man,  
a faithless wife.  
She has transferred  
her affection to cloth.  
Sheathed in new rose silk,  
she feels less lonely.  
And as though,  
dressed in warm challis,  
arms hold her close.  
Chiffon touches her breasts.  
Tenderly, linen folds  
around her thighs.  
Like fabric woven of flame,  
velvet desires her.  
Blood pulses red red satin.  
Love quickens under lamé.  
Brocade's weight,  
the press of fleece,  
the tease and itch of lace  
arouse her.  
Her husband is preoccupied.  
He seldom notices  
what she is wearing  
or cares about the cost.

--Katharine Privett  
Pawnee

## FRUIT, OFF SEASON

I have forgiven myself  
of everyone I loved before you  
hair that grows and grows on my  
armpits and legs  
my children's bad manners  
my bad back  
the dog's escape  
the dead battery when I left  
the lights on in the parking lot  
of the supermarket where I bought  
kiwi fruit off season at its highest price  
and the grapes I bought and hid  
in the egg compartment so I didn't  
have to share them, and all the times  
I shared and shouldn't have  
the shoulds and should nots  
of a lifetime  
the cave-in on my brother when  
it was my idea to dig to China  
icing I snitched off my father's  
birthday cake before it was cut  
of being 45 and not flossing  
my teeth every day.

--Kennette H. Wilkes  
Edmond

## NIGHTFALL

My love came like the desert breeze at dawn  
Slim cool fingers caressing me  
Leading me to unknown heights  
Spurring me on by golden dreams  
The joys of youth.

My love was with me through the morning hours  
The warmth and splendor of her  
Seemed a world apart  
And when the sun was high at noontime  
My love was hot with passion  
Too great for human heart,  
The heat oppressing me  
Blinding me, wilting ambition  
My heart writhed under the pain  
And I would be free from it.

My love clung with me through the evening hours  
Did she temper the heat of her affection  
Or did my soul rear beneath its glow  
As the sun sank?

As night comes down my love is near me,  
Warming my chilling soul,  
Soothing the bitterness,  
Wiping away poignant griefs,  
As the desert breeze at nightfall  
Blots out remembrance.

--Elizabeth A. Hollen  
Alva

## HOLLOW BONES

These days are the same size,  
small and dark,  
the quiet snow is falling  
on your faithless hands  
that know no bound'ries,  
with wind as sharp as finely honed steel,  
slivers of ice  
penetrate these eyes full of grief,  
you told me that you held  
no promises,  
that was just so many words.

You know, a woman is her mother,  
a wild haired wife,  
a dim movie that's been played before  
and watched by small faces  
pressed in dark windows  
learning that role,  
now there is no music  
and I am bleeding from my mouth  
for endless repetition of your name.

It is January  
and the days are ice  
and sticking to your calendar,  
I look at you through frozen eyelashes  
and know that my name, too,  
is listed with forsaken women  
on a bare stage  
each pounding a crucifix  
into the very center of her heart.

So, this is a burial song  
to the rhythm  
of flesh on flesh in time  
and the comfort of your warm throat  
and your hands.

--Linda Leebron  
Edmond

Wanting you was easy  
Losing you became a way of life.  
Each step forward has brought me closer  
To the empty pages of our love.  
My heart would have them written  
with passion and delight,  
But my soul sees now what I  
escaped.  
Faded and worn emotions imprinted  
on my mind  
Complete the final chapter of  
our love.

--Patricia Wade  
Owasso

## GRIEF

I have known Silence  
Deep and long:  
So deep the winds forgot to whisper  
And the song of the night was stilled.  
So completely the silence filled  
My heart, that when my small son spoke,  
Softly its taut strings quivered,  
And more softly broke.

--Elizabeth Anne Hollen  
Alva

(reprinted from WORLD OF POETRY)

## STARVING THE THIRD

The black and white photograph  
captures flies on matted hair,  
they lie in death's place  
like an untimely joke,  
these people  
with skin on the eyelids  
thin as transparent glass,  
with beautiful bones  
and swollen bellies  
eating fingernails for food.

Was it the rock and roll bureaucracy  
Godless and corrupt  
scattering bread to those  
with thirsty flesh  
for the salvation of their bones,  
we're told it never got there,  
never reached the starved bodies,  
the afflicted people,  
a pleading nation  
who reach with the voices of hands  
for the forgotten covenant  
with childlike grace.

We are freely evil  
and must look  
to our own shame  
and these issues  
of the tiny politics of home,  
we are a fallen generation  
of waste and blood  
where there is no more hope.

--Linda Leebron  
Edmond

## THE PEAR

I hold the chilled pear  
in my palm,  
feeling its ripeness  
pressed against my fingers.

Inserting the sharp edge  
of the knife,  
I carefully carve away  
the skin.

It falls--  
a golden spiral.  
I put the peeled pear  
on the plate.

Again I take the knife,  
and slice by slice,  
place the luscious fruit  
upon my tongue.

How sweet the taste.

--Mary Menges Myers  
Oklahoma City

## AN EARLY FALL IN '72

To eat authentic cabbage rolls requires having very old German neighbors. If they're Catholic so much the better, you can go eat the cabbage rolls for lunch on Sunday. The stout old lady will have discharged her sins the night before while you heard bells calling; no wrongs will have been kneaded into the dough tender as the flesh of Christ. Once after lunch the old lady spread out in her chair and while she slept I went outside to find Mr. Heffel in the flower bed. Wearing his yellow fishing hat, he'd thrust an electric prod deeply among the roots of iris that waved guileless colors in my face. Even his accent blushed because I'd caught him shocking worms on the Sabbath. Their mute moist bodies twisted at our feet, and I knew limbleness as I moved back inside the house to eat a now chilled cabbage roll.

--Jacoba Hood  
Weatherford

## FULFILLMENT

Last night I ran near  
mistral trees and melic brooks,  
while pend'lums clocked  
my mortal steps.

Then from a veil a vision rose  
around this fettered flesh,  
to offer from the mist a metamorphosis:

I became a tree last night  
as winds bewitched me back through time.

My roots sprang out beneath cool earth.  
My trunk flowed through with vital sparks.  
My leaves tantalized toward sunlight.

I was teeming power trilling through time.

As a young pine,  
I saw kaleidoscopes of centuries beside seas.

Then from the vision strength arose,  
and glowed my earthly ego.  
It lent my daily cycles vigor  
and eased the rigor from this pulsing flesh.

--Linda Knight Mayberry  
Norman

## MOON, NIGHT AND TIME

Last night the moon was full. I stood at the door,  
looking, watching, trying to feel the light.  
It should have been tangible; it was vivid, cool, bright,  
falling on trees, highlighting leaves, more  
concealing than revealing. Quiet, the night  
accepted the moon, calmly permitting shine  
to outline its shape and caress its face with fine  
attention to detail, sensuously filled with delight.

The moon and night are unconcerned with time.  
They are bound by its laws but appear to care not  
for its restrictions. That was what we sought,  
held by laws and limits, yours and mine;  
that natural unconcern, light within dark,  
reaching, holding, one another's heart.

--Karen A. Murphy  
Temple, Texas

## BLUE CREEK CANYON

You pitched your North Face tent on a gabbro exposure,  
weathered smooth by the action of water and wind,  
and later, as the campfire died into embers,  
you looked for Saturn and Jupiter in the sky  
as the moon washed your face  
as white as unstained quartz.

The night grew cold just before dawn,  
and though your sleeping bag  
had a goose-down filler, you felt  
a chill as if the sun had  
moved far from this planet.

When you awoke, the sun was shining  
but it was cooler somehow, and dim,  
as if it were as lost in time  
as the volcanoes that poured  
Carlton Rhyolite onto the earth  
millions of years ago.

You tried to re-start the fire,  
fix some coffee,  
but the wind was too gusty.  
Instead, you sat, buffeted for the first time  
by a solitude as cold as a distant sun

while you wondered  
if the sun would ever warm this earth again  
and if all igneous rocks and jagged hearts  
would eventually be worn as smooth  
by the action of solitude  
as the gabbro on which you made your bed.

--Susan L. Smith  
Norman

## A HOLIDAY IN JULY

On a hot July day  
work and passion intermingle  
then lie contentedly on an office floor,  
satiated for the moment.  
Much later  
heat changes to cool breezes  
and in dark taverns music begins.  
Whispered words quiet old fears, night wins.  
Warm bodies touch, responding to liquid and solid  
tranquilizers.  
As hours pass  
fellow travelers glide through space and time,  
adventurously sharing the joys of serendipity.  
Seemingly, forever caught in a lovely web  
on a large bed of sensual delight.  
The night dies  
but, then abruptly arising on the fourth  
a glaring sun and foreign multi-visual images bombard the  
eyes.  
Cognitively integrating another perspective  
of reality  
I see that Swiss men live here  
where I spent the night.

--Patricia Heck  
Miami

## WHEN WE CAME TO OKLAHOMA

We drove north 500 miles or so--  
late August, in the sun,  
the three of us, alone  
with our cat panting in the heat  
(he sat on the hot car floor,  
while the children fed him ice)--  
pulling a trailerful of our past  
to make ourselves a home.

I cried each night for nearly a month;  
sometimes I hid, ashamed of the flow  
of tears, afraid the children would see  
and share my pain; closed into my closet  
I clung to my coat,  
wrapped its arms around me for small comfort,  
and wept into the rough blue cloth.

It was a good move--I knew that;  
knew the foreign streets would take on names,  
faces grow familiar, wave to new-made friends,  
explore the snowfall (my delight,  
like a small child, who only saw it snow  
four times before)--played and laughed,  
at last, at peace with this new place.

So gradually, without my knowing how,  
the pace, environment, crept into me;  
indelibly--red dirt and wind,  
all mapped out in my mind; sung in my sleep  
a tune of happiness, content, part of the land:  
We drove 500 miles or so--my two, the cat and I--  
to make, and keep inside ourselves, a home.

--Kathryn Rojas  
Midwest City

## WE WALKED

In England we walked  
in a field like this. The new green  
sponge sank beneath my feet. I put out  
fine root hairs which grew strong, spread  
across the Salisbury Plain, sent up  
a circle of massive stones to greet the sun  
at summer solstice.

Yet this is not Stonehenge  
not even England, hard red clay  
land that favors yellow--daffodils, jonquils  
forsythia and sunflowers. Even the sunsets  
are red, with oil derricks silhouetted  
against the west. This place  
where the trail of tears ended, and reservation  
became another name for graveyard. Where one thing dies  
another grows. So with wet drops  
I will soften hard clay  
and fashion my own bowl  
to catch the rain.

--Kennette H. Wilkes  
Edmond

## A VISITOR'S NOTES

I'm sitting in a small Midwestern cafe  
Somewhere in the mid-December of the universe.

On the far wall  
a timepiece  
Chews up the minutes  
And spits them out again.  
Rolling them on his tongue,  
They have no taste.

My coffee cup is empty.  
The waitress ignores my motion  
And the whitewashed concrete walls  
Shift their stare my way.

All these little towns  
the same--  
Cold and hard  
And windows barred  
To keep out everything  
But dust and rust and time.

The dust has crowded out all thoughts  
From everybody's mind  
Except for hopes of future  
    and imaginary heavens.  
What I do here will not alter;  
Everything remains the same  
Except the hand that shows the hour.

--Sharon E. Martin  
Cushing

## BIRTHDAY

It snowed on my sixteenth birthday.  
Unusual for October 3rd.  
I in a red and white checked dress,  
watching the fat flakes float by the window.  
And you coming in out of the snow  
with a "new" second-hand Philco radio  
which was, of course, for the whole family.  
But you said, "It's for your birthday."  
And even with no cake and no candles  
it was a celebration.

--Mary Menges Myers  
Oklahoma City

## CLASS REUNION

My "Class of '76" tassel  
still hangs in my '74 Camaro  
swinging from the rearview mirror  
twirling in the sunlight into endless mirrors  
when I drive down roads  
miles distant from the red-carpeted room at the Holiday Inn  
where Doneta and Darryl and you, Josie,  
and I drank Lone Star beer and Jack Daniels  
until the moon rose yellow-green  
like an over-ripe Osage Apple  
and late that night,  
on motel sheets smelling vaguely of Clorox,  
the stars rained down like confetti  
as we bared ourselves to the future  
and to each other,  
defenses down,  
barbed wire tangle around our hearts gone for once,  
naked chest against naked chest,  
I liked you like that.

But the next morning,  
when the sun blistered up and  
knots twisted in our eyes,  
we fled the Holiday Inn  
and the fresh cold pool  
we had swum in the night before.  
I moved to the Oklahoma Panhandle  
to ranch and raise wheat around Black Mesa  
and you,  
someone told me that they saw you,  
thin-armed and big-hipped,  
in a Fort Worth Wal-Mart  
with two little ones and one on the way.  
I don't know about that.

All I know is that this morning  
when I opened the letter inviting me to our graduating  
class'  
ten-year reunion,  
I couldn't think, I just had to get outside,  
survey my ranch on Black Mesa,  
assess the damage the record-breaking drought  
did to my tender winter wheat  
and wonder what the weather would bring.  
Spring showers to settle the dust?  
A Blue Norther to spit a blizzard on the cold-cracked earth?  
Or just more of the same dry cold,  
and never a hope of a rainbow.

Yet the hope of holding you again rises  
like the buttes on Black Mesa,  
decapitated volcanoes,  
encrusted with rock armor that was molten lava once  
but now is riddled with brittle Apache Tears  
everywhere except the core  
that, still warm, has not yet hardened into volcanic glass.

Around the buttes,  
the prairie is brown from the hard winter,  
a wasteland of dead grasses.  
I watch the cold wind blowing waves  
in this cadaverous ocean of stunted wheat,  
near the place where Coronado camped overnight,  
searching for the seven cities of Cibola,  
and suddenly I must look for you,  
even if I find nothing but rumors and deserted campsites.

But first I'll fetch a can of gasoline  
to soak the prairie around Black Mesa, enough  
that with the help of a dry north wind,  
I can burn the dead winter wheat to the ground  
and allow the new growth of Spring to emerge.

--Susan L. Smith  
Norman

# Poetry for Younger Readers

## IN EXONERATION

One age, somewhere, lay a sylvan glen.  
A cave in it served as a dragon's den.  
And two friends sat at tea on the lawn,  
One was the dragon, the other was a swan.

Lulled by the food, they began to reminisce.  
The dragon told stories that made the swan hiss.  
Then, grabbing a chance to butt in, the swan  
told tales that made the dragon yawn.  
They bombarded each other with histories,  
each detailing virtues of her own species.

Then thinking to dramatize her stories,  
the swan offered to show her glories  
of flying. The dragon gave her consent  
and the swan commenced a wobbly ascent,  
which soon smoothed out to a graceful spiral  
that gave the dragon quite an eyeful.

It woke in her a compelling need  
to do the swan a dirty deed.  
So the dragon tactfully tried to hint  
to the swan that she should make her descent.  
For she felt it would be impolite to say  
that the swan made an excellent target that way.

But when swans get started, the urge to fly  
becomes a joy they dislike to deny.  
Every creature must be what it is,  
The swan was no exception to this.  
And since nothing can break the force  
of genes, the dragon had no recourse  
but to open her mouth and spit her fire  
on the fated swan who must soon expire.

Gad, but it was a horrible sight,  
that flaming swan in the pale moonlight.  
The bird then sang her fabled song;  
it sounded very pretty, though it wasn't very long.  
The dragon's face became quite wan.  
She felt ashamed of the thing she'd done,

So seeking to honor her friend, the dragon  
crept into her lair in search of the flagon  
of rarest wine she had saved for years,  
now to be diluted with reptile tears.  
The dragon sobbed, then drank a toast.

"Dearest little Swan, I must entrust  
you to the ages, since you have bit the dust."  
Then the dragon curled up to get a little sleep.  
Her snores were loud and her dreams were deep.

For every creature must be what it is  
and a dragon is no exception to this.

--Jacoba Hood  
Weatherford

## CATS

I should always want a cat  
To be curled on my fireside mat.  
A pussy cat, content and fat,  
Or an alley cat to chase a rat,  
They're my kind of creatures,  
And that is that.

Only a cat can purr so sweet,  
Only a cat will be so neat,  
Forever washing its velvet feet  
And everywhere else--what a feat!  
They're my kind of creatures,  
I now repeat.

A cat is icy and serene,  
Haughty as a king or queen.  
A cat will purr and primp and preen  
No other care will intervene.  
They're my kind of creatures,  
That's what I mean.

Velvet paws hide needle claws.  
Friendly first, till given cause  
To pounce and tear without a pause,  
Heeding only primeval laws.  
They're my kind of creatures.  
Because; because.

--Jean Stiles  
Owasso



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