

Featured Artist
Margaret Walther

My Throat is Parched

(Wine Bottles, La Morra, Linda Butler, Black & White Photograph)

how long have I been in this place—

I am the middle gourd, the squat
plump one poised in the center, two cohorts by
each side, bottles behind me
a camera eye is fidgeting, doing its job

once I heard daily—
Fabrizio, thin/ prune those vines
Fabrizio, weed
Fabrizio, construct a trellis

I had a job, too—
I carried water for Fabrizio

let me overflow—

placed into a wine museum, I thought
would be an honor, recompense for all my work
ended up in a forgotten corner
my only visitors, spiders

what do I care about photographs
go away—

remind Fabrizio I am here

The Motherlode

She hones in, looking for the honey.
The shoes loom.

Before she came, I washed dishes, scrubbed our apartment floors.
You picked up all your little trucks and cars.

But there they are--brown, cracked, full of life--manshoes,
peeking out beneath the couch.

Tensed, I stare at you. Your malemouth trembles, your tongue, a tiny oar,
lifts into the water.

I hauled them up from downstairs, you whisper.
From the babysitter's? Yes.

The woman slumps. She has lost her ore.
I am filled with relief. The welfare check will continue as usual.

You, the good son, enter your sterile room,
become a stone.

Trajectory of Flight

As we walked around the lake, several
geese took off. I marveled
at the trajectory

of their flight, as if sculpting a cliff above
our heads, air falling, split rock. I noted the delectable, raucous k
male, female
shakuhachi flute.

You looked up, *Don't drop a load on me.*

And I thought I was the practical one.

Rhodochrosite

a rose is a rose is a robe

these crystals emit rose chords—

a music so dolce against the black crags
of tetrahedrite

it must chorus/ coruscate from the heart—

the Incas believed the gems the blood

of former kings and queens, turned
to stone

quartz icicles line the sides—

rich counterpoint, sonata of snow, spinet
plucking

the soul into song
my rock, from Sweet Home Mine—
Alma Colorado, timberline portal
to musical harmonies
cerise/ surreal
red x of pizzicato
once cloistered in a crevice of earth, its sheen
brings me to my knees—
sixty-five, I don't know how to pray—
draw me into your sequined
chemise of cherry, teach me how
to sing through winter—

MARGARET WALTHER is a retired librarian from the Denver metro area and a past president of Columbine Poets, an organization to promote poetry in Colorado. She has been a guest editor for *Buffalo Bones*, and has published poems in many journals, including *Connecticut Review*, anderbo.com, *Ghoti* and *Quarterly West*, with work forthcoming in *Naugatuck River Review*, *Chickenpinata*, *Nimrod* and *Many Mountains Moving*, where she won the 2009 Poetry Contest.

Malaika King Albrecht
The Great Blue Heron Rookery

Mid-March the great blue herons return
to the cypress trees above Beaver Pond.
My dad takes her hand for their daily walk,
guides her along the dirt path. My daughters
and I trail behind them. Serena taps
her *snake stick* every few steps
despite Amani's warning that she's knocking
on their dirt doors, just asking for trouble.

We enter the clearing, into this noisy place
of heavy wings, clicking beaks, and squawking,
the endless fussing over the details of life.
Quietly he counts to her, *15. 16. There are 17
nests this year. 3 more than last year.*
She says, *Yes* though she cannot remember

last year and may not even remember
yesterday's walk. I want to ask,

How can you do this everyday?
With a harsh warning croak, one bird
startles from the marshy edge.
With wings nearly a 6 foot span, the bird
flies into the open window of the sky.
Her face tilted upward, my mom says
She's beautiful. He smiles watching her,
and gray-white feathers rise in the wind
around us like ashes after a great fire.

The Riddle Song

Grocery bags in my arms,
I hip the front door open
and hear my father singing
to my mother,
*I gave my love a cherry
that had no stone.*
He stretches out her right leg
and then slowly rotates it in circles.

She hasn't walked in three years
or gotten out of bed in two.
*I gave my love a baby
with no crying.*
Her legs resist, the muscles
tight as fists. He massages
the leg nearly straight, moves
to the next one still singing.
*A baby when it's sleeping
it's not crying.*
*The story of how I love you
it has no end.*

Of course I'm crying
in the kitchen doorway.
I can't see her eyes from here,
but I'm hoping that their open
that she's awake
looking directly into his eyes.
He moves to her left arm,

tucked beside her body
like a broken wing,
and gently spreads it out.

One Last Time

Mom and I know this is wrong,
the parking lot, the take-out paper bag
between us, and the car idling,
a/c blasting and her gulping down
Benadryl pills with unsweetened tea.

She reaches into the bag, retrieves
the lobster, red as a sunburn.
Shouldn't we have an epi-pen? I ask.
She points to the red ER sign,
We're right here.

In the near dark, she devours the lobster,
and then we walk quietly across the parking lot
into the hospital. Her face buttery
and already swelling, she smiles,
Perfect Mother's Day.

MALAIKA KING ALBRECHT's poems have been or are forthcoming in many literary magazines and anthologies, such as *Kakalak: an Anthology of Carolina Poets*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Boston Literary Review*, *New Orleans Review*, and *Letters to the World Anthology*. Her poems have recently won awards at Salem College and Press 53. She has taught creative writing to sexual abuse/assault survivors and to addicts and alcoholics in therapy groups and also is a volunteer poet in local schools. She is the founding editor of *Redheaded Stepchild*, <http://www.redheadedmag.com/poetry/>, an online magazine that only accepts poems that have been rejected elsewhere.

Margaret Adams Birth East-Southeast

She believed it was in Georgia—that spot
which lay far-distant, like a dot of mossy green
rhythmically slicing to and fro across the back
of her closed eye, like a platinum scimitar standing
guard over Taurus and Orion, like a sheet of glass
revealing every visible thing but revealing it
convexly shrunken in minute perfection.

Dusty thickets of cotton and rice genuflected to
the coastal breeze, received summer's humid
baptism and the holy kisses of mosquito and bee,
where the land met the Atlantic, and the blessings
of this place did not seem immediately clear.
The ocean glistened flatly, barren of autumn's swells,
and reflected life forms scraping the shallow line
between brackish water and salty sand.

But all she could do was lie
abed dreaming of towers of clouds and dancing bulls,
of golden insects and red-hot sunsets, and of all the details
belonging to that one spot she would have
wished to call her own,
even though a cardinal can recall where
last it built its nest, and the fields, and the pines
and the weeping willows that trace the saffron sunlight and
the puckish shadows, acting as a natural compass to there.

MARGARET ADAMS BIRTH grew up in North Carolina, the daughter of an NCSU English professor and a Wake County public school teacher, and has since lived in Virginia, California, the Caribbean island of Trinidad, and, for the last decade and-a-half, New York (New York City, to be specific). A freelance writer, proofreader, and copy editor, she has had numerous poems, short stories, essays, and even comic books published over the last twenty years. Her poetry credits include publications in such journals as *Black River Review*, *Poetalk*, *Perceptions* (her poem there a nominee for the Pushcart Prize in poetry in 1994), *Purple Patch* (England), *The New Voices* (Trinidad and Tobago), *Ship of Fools*, and *White Wall Review* (Canada).

db cox

have you seen bessie

---for Bessie Smith

have you seen bessie
leaning
on the bar
moaning low
notes darker
than a clarksdale
juke joint
ma rainey
approved
blue tones

painted
with smoke & whiskey

have you heard bessie
singing
songs shaped
in tragic grace
snapshots
of human hurt
framed in black
packaged & sold
like dirty photos
in plain-wrapped
envelopes of pain

have you seen bessie
racing
hell-bent
along mississippi
backroads
wheels humming
to the tune
of late-night radio--
indigo empress
rolling
toward a place
where the highway ends

good saint shane
---for Shane McGowan

holding tight
to a mic stand
lifeline--
cigarette smoke
rising
from a shaky
right hand
pushing perfect songs
past a death-rattle
diaphragm
good saint shane
stumbling
toward grace

pissing
in the face
of the "everyday"
half-burnt brain cells
still flaring
across that magic
black box
half-cocked laugh
crackling
like static
from a broken radio
rock & roll water walker
playing out
the implications
of his holy part--
peter pan poet
with a metronome heart
that keeps on beating
because it can

DB COX is a blues musician/writer from South Carolina. He can often be found in the early-morning hours bent over a Fender Stratocaster guitar in roadhouses, honky tonks, and juke joints throughout the south. His poems and short stories have been published extensively in the small press in the US and abroad. He has published five books of poetry. His first chapbook, entitled *Passing For Blue*, was published by Rank Stranger Press. Two other chapbooks, *Lowdown* and *Ordinary Sorrows*, were published by Pudding House Publications. Main Street Rag published his first full-length collection, entitled *Empty Frames*. Pudding House Publications has recently released a new chapbook called *Nightwatch*.

Curtis Dunlap
Bud Vernon's Arrest Story

I was arrested for driving drunk
back in '83.
My wife, Kate, and I had been to a party.
She'd had too much to drink,
tried to start our old pickup
with her roller skate key,
so I drove.
We'd almost made it out of the city limits
when, suddenly,
blue lights started blazing

like a K-Mart special.
A chubby runt of a policeman
eased up to the driver's side of my truck,
hand on the butt of his pistol,
shouted, "Step slowly out of the vehicle, sir!"
Well, I stepped so slow I stumbled,
bumped my nose on the door,
and I reckon that's why he had me take
what he called a sober-variety test.
I passed the test, touched the tip of my bloody nose
with my fingertips,
walked heel-to-toe, heel-to-toe
down a solid yellow line on the road,
not an easy feat in brand new boots...
Flashlight blinding my eyes,
he says, "Mr. Vernon, I'm going to have to take you into custody."
...which, naturally, irritated me.
I turned to Kate, still in the truck, and said,
"Honey, this fat son-of-a-bitch is taking me in."

....and wouldn't you know he handcuffed me
quicker than a cowboy tying the legs of a steer?
Fastest little fat s.o.b. I ever did see!
I apologized, told him that my remark
was just an expression,
that he *probably* had a fine upstanding mother.

I was the only one laughing...

...lost my license for a year,
spent ten weekends in the county jail,
started buying Johnny Cash records after that.

Maggie Sands: The Way I See It

I've seen how Abigail Beasley
looks at Bob Hathaway
when he's loading lumber
on the back of his truck,
the way she twist and fingers
the curls in her long blonde hair when he glances
in her direction.
I heard Abigail Beasley say that Bob Hathaway
looks like Yul Bryner now that he shaves his head.

She ain't fooling me.
Scuttlebutt is that Bob Hathaway
sits in his back yard at night
with a rust bucket of a radio
trying to tune-in to signals
from outer space.
I don't know about such things,
but there's one thing I do know:
Abigail Beasley's signals
are broadcasting loud and clear.

love poem

sometimes
I like to imagine
that she's
googled me;
she'll read
a few
of my poems
in an online
journal,
remember
the one
I penned for her
decades ago.
she'll rise from her chair,
retrieve an old shoe box
from a closet,
sit down
at the kitchen table
with a cup of coffee,
tenderly lift
and unfold
a yellowed scrap
of notebook paper,
read that love poem
aloud,
smile,
look wistfully
out the window
into
her rose garden
and say,

"I'm glad
I didn't marry
that poor bastard."

CURTIS DUNLAP lives near the confluence of the Mayo and Dan rivers in Mayodan, North Carolina. He has been published in a variety of journals including *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *Magnapoets*, *Modern Haiku*, and *Sketchbook*. He was awarded 3rd Prize in the 11th International Kusamakura Haiku Competition in 2006 and the Museum of Haiku Literature Award in 2008. His web site is located at tobaccoroadpoet.com. Curtis also blogs along Tobacco Road at tobaccoroadpoet.blogspot.com.

Robert Eastwood
Little Earl

Upended trunks, obscene, entrail-rooted—
not all could shoulder the waters.
Most stood because they had
no alternative
as captives to this place,
& joined the bedragglements
of raped grasses, silted elbows.

A hierarchy at each side—morning fog
embraced by deep-throated hills,
& sun, phosphorescent gold
on broken thatches,
filigreed into wisps—
caught to dazzle
in knots of branches.
Delicate lace across the ruin.

It's a willow land, a creek bed
on a dawn after the storm,
& as my boots grow heavy
in the coiled grasses,
gorged with wetness,
I remember, strangely,
my little cousin,

so many years ago,
born a blue baby,
& my uncle picking up
his little body,

his almost translucent skin,
stark against the pressed shirt
uncle wore for Easter.

How my uncle's gnarled,
carpenter's fingers
gently brushed
the thin wisps of hair
from Earl's pale forehead,
the blue eyes burning through.

ROBERT EASTWOOD retired from business, then taught high school and began writing short stories and poetry. Nominated twice for a Pushcart Award, he's appeared in *Blue Unicorn*, *Carquinez Review*, *Ekphrasis*, and many other journals, in print and online. His three chap books, *The Welkin Gate*, *Over Plainsong*, and *Night of the Moth*, are by Small Poetry Press.

Helen Losse
The bridge that was

built to transport us safely
was invisible in the distance—
in the late evening storm,
as were the patch of spring flowers
under our neighbor's birch,
their bright yellow becoming
more and more forgotten

with each falling flake. We sat
by a cozy fireplace in a house
on the river's southern shore,
gazing from time to time out
a thermal-pane picture window
into a night glowing with
beauty and wonder. We ate

ginger cookies and sipped hot
tea or cocoa, no one thinking
about the bridge that connected
parcel of land to parcel of land,
that moved people on one shore
toward people on the other. Yet
an event, simultaneous to coziness,

must be told for completeness of story, just as it had to be viewed on the nightly TV news. A man had drowned in the water near the bridge—near the yellow diamond-shaped sign with the four words of warning: "Bridge Ices Before Road."

HELEN LOSSE is the author of *Better With Friends* (Rank Stranger Press, 2009) and two chapbooks, *Gathering the Broken Pieces* and *Paper Snowflakes* and the Poetry Editor of *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*. Her recent poetry publications and acceptances include *Shape of a Box*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Hobble Creek Review*, and *Blue Fifth Review*. Educated at Missouri Southern State and Wake Forest Universities, she lives in Winston-Salem, NC.

David Treadway Manning
Aubade

She stood beyond the screen door
in near dark, then turned
and left. I followed her as she walked
into the new day pinking
the city's sleeping cranes and towers.

Lights were coming on in houses.
She kept just ahead of me
so I could not see her face. Daylight--
a flood of cream and azure--

lit the railyards and markets
and rose into the sky. The city
was coming alive with rushing cars,
with doves and trucks,

and papers slapping porches.
I knew I was awake because I could
not stop sounds by thinking. I longed
to see her, but she would not turn
toward me or speak as we tracked

the day westward. Miles passed
and arrows of geese crossed the faint
face of the moon. We paused where
goldenrod hoards the final light
before dusk is taken by the stars.

Then she spoke, saying:
My face that you seek
is a trick of light. It escapes,
like this day, into the sky.

Skin

Walls of touch, scrawled
with subliminal Braille. Lines

of property, vessels of our *are*.
Adrift in chaos, envelopes

of entropy's evasion, these
citadels of powerful design.

The interface of chance with mystery.
Sangreal of consciousness.

Sunset body of an apricot. My cat's pink
belly, shaved for ultrasound.

Safe-passage between caves. Backs
of an old rabbi's hands, gnarled

as Israel. On the highway, the torn
container of deer.

Night Wanderer

Huge and homeless, rags
flapping against the porch,
the shuddering stranger
has found our house
this January night. He shambles
 against the shutters,
rubs up against the walls,
anything for a little warmth.

 At the back door
he rattles to tell us
he has already pruned
the dead pansy bed, blown

the old geraniums away, is about
to take the dead oak down,
and will do more for us
if we will just let him in.

DAVID TREADWAY MANNING is a Pushcart nominee with poems in a number of journals and six chapbooks including *The Ice-Carver*, winner of the 2004 Longleaf Chapbook Competition. His more recent books are *Light Sweet Crude* (Pudding House, 2009), and the full-length *The Flower Sermon* (Main Street Rag, 2007). A chapbook of love poems, *Continents of Light*, is due from Finishing Line Press in early 2010.

Karla Linn Merrifield
Bowing to the Wild

In the holy land of magnificent
frigatebirds, heat blisters Earth's skin,

but lizards of rare ilk skitter
a fretwork of tracks in sand.

Out from under saltbushes they flit
with no fear of the white king

who rules the nacreous heavens
above an azure Sea of Cortez.

This is their desert sanctuary,
their adapted country, their *Mexico*.

Bare volcanic mountains of brown tuff
rise up; giant green *cardon* cacti

lift their arms to salute
sere Sonoran skies.

Deep waters steep in bold sun,
brewing a rich stew for cetaceans.

For those mighty, ancient gods
of this planet's oceans resurrected,

I have returned to the Baja,
its *Norte* winds, its blinding light.

For fin whales, grays and great blues,
humpbacks and the sperm, and

for commonplace common dolphins,
for the bottle-nosed one—

my love, my love *Tursiops truncatus*,
my *Espiritu Santo*, I come again

to pray.

Metamorphosis

December has stirred the poet's wings.
in a sustained hallucination of skuas,

she's flying off again to alien latitudes.
The migration of her feather-brained imagination

has begun: following a hollow-boned dream
to Antarctica where she welcomes seabirds plunge-diving

into her head amid bergy bits and brash ice crashing.
Not for the first time does she wing away,

but, this season, she flutters even farther south,
down where there are no limbs to alight on.

She soars not *above* treeline, but *beyond* it,
to the last great wilderness of her mind.

Remember last winter's equatorial obsession
with the blue-footed boobies of the Galapagos?

This year, specter-like—disguised as a snowy petrel—
she expects to converse with penguins at the colder pole.

She'll navigate phantasms of good-omening albatrosses;
she'll witness ravished shag eggs, gutted gray sheathbill chicks.

That's the reality when she goes to such glacial extremes
to be the White Continent's alembic of avian belief.

A four-time Pushcart Prize nominee and 2009 Everglades National Park Artist-in-Residence, KARLA LINN MERRIFIELD has had poetry appear in dozens of publications as well as in many anthologies. She has five books to her credit, including *Godwit: Poems of Canada*, which received the 2009 Andrew Eiseman Writers Award for Poetry. She is poetry editor of *Sea Stories* (www.seastories.org), book reviewer and assistant editor for *The Centrifugal Eye* (www.centrifugaleye.com), and moderator of the poetry blog, *Smothered Air* (<http://smotheredair.yuku.com/>). She teaches at Writers & Books, Rochester, NY.

Mike Lewis-Beck
Siena Sunday

With the eternal scaffolding coming down,
the Duomo's pink-white stone face shows fresh and deep.
Marble angels, about to lift themselves by brass wings,
pause to turn at my camera.

Bells of the noon mass ring out,
mingling with the beats of a neighborhood band.
The band remembers the horse race,
parading through the Campo.

Warm fall sun encourages our walk,
our amble toward Santa Maria dei Servi at the wall.
Old confessionals offer a hiding place for penitents.
What about the beggar on the bench?

Charcoal smoke billows from a long and weighty grill,
a herald of ritual steak fiorentina at Trattoria Papei .
Amadeau greets us in English.
Next week he goes to Napoli, he says, to see "mama."

We thank him for his Chianti recommendation,
and translate the word "kidding".
He likes tourists, especially American girls.
When to give him the Iowa t-shirt we brought?

MIKE LEWIS-BECK has published in *Albatross*, *Poet's Ink Review*, *Lyrical Iowa*, *Daily Palette*, and *Bun Fight Press*. In my poems, I aim to capture an emotional or visual moment.

John L. Stanizzi
Orient Point at Dawn

From the Connecticut shore
Orient Point hovers just inches
above the surface of the sound
as distance and light
recreate, erase, distort,
until what's left is a bar-code of gray silhouettes,
beveled patterns of inarticulate shadow
through which the first glints of sunlight
needle dreamy sleepers to stir.

Once I took the ferry
from New London to Orient Point
and Clem's knotty-pine bungalow,
cool beneath enormous conifers
and filled with ocean knickknacks;
the yard was softened by rusty needles
hewn by off-shore winds,
and the mourning doves
hung shiny round notes on the humid afternoon.

I cooked shrimp translucent pink,
and at dusk drove back to the landing
to guess which of the tiny silver figures on the sound
was the ferry carrying you to the point.
The water-soaked jetty leaned
this way and that against the tide
and into the half-light,
akimbo ties, heavy, never dry;
a gull at the shoreline
ran down tiny hermit crabs
tossed ashore by the thousands,
fielding them as they tumbled on the ebb,
swallowing them whole,
and then there was your ferry.

The clarity of this morning
begins to fill in the blanks on Orient Point
and what remains now
are flashes of color
from years ago in small places

which are way over there now,
across the water
and held in faintest shadow.

JOHN L. STANIZZI is the author of two collections of poetry, *Ecstasy among Ghosts* and *Sleepwalking*. New work appears in *The New York Quarterly*, *Rattle*, and *Tar River Poetry*, and *Gutter Eloquence*.

Connie Post
I Need to Make Something

A voice repeats
in my head all morning
as I wander the aisles
of the craft store

It's been three weeks since the funeral
I decide I should get out for at least a while

I pick up
masks that break when I touch them
construction paper that turns to dust
paint brushes that have no bristles

It can't be with yarn
or string
or things that untie

It has to be the same color as
the lipstick I used to steal
from your dresser
but there are no pastels
or oils in that shade

I find only rows of plastic flowers
pretending to have authentic stems
pretending they can root themselves
In the flower pot
beneath my kitchen window

I find a thousand colors
of origami paper I cannot fold

into the same story
It all comes back as loss

the cashier looks at me
like I'm crazy
as she counts back my change
and tries to understand
why I've purchased every false flower
in the store
as if they too – could pretend
we are perennial

CONNIE POST is the Poet Laureate Emerita of Livermore California . (May 2005 – June 2009). Some of my publication credits include; *Calyx, Kalliope, Comstock Review, Chiron Review, DMQ Review, Cold Mountain Review, Main Street Rag, Dogwood, Iodine Poetry Journal, RiverSedge, White Pelican Review, Monterey Poetry Review, Carquinez Poetry Review, Oberon, and The Toronto Quarterly Connie Post*

Andrea Potos
Two Sisters

In churning whitewater,
the older sister sloshes and hollers, holds
to branches bowed over.
Her toes gouge the silty floor;
the current under the current
slams into her.
Wordless, the other sister
kneels on the bank
beside lichen-strewn stones.
Willows drape her face, grasses scratch
their silence into her skin.
She remains, reeling in
every gleaming,
salvageable thing.

The Widow and Cable TV

Nights vacant now,
she switches on
the political televangelist.
He holds out his right and shining
pundit palms

while her insides bleed--
he offers to snatch
her Sorrow--

like a wizard--
he turns it to Rage.

ANDREA POTOS is the author of two poetry collections: *Yaya's Cloth* (Iris Press) which won an Outstanding Achievement Award in Poetry from the Wisconsin Library Association, and *The Perfect Day* (Parallel Press). Her poems appear widely in journals and anthologies. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin and can be reached at www.BookThatPoet.com.

Robert Nazarene
Hospice

Sometimes
they'll wait

to pass
until you're out of the room

ROBERT NAZARENE is founding editor of *Margie: The American Journal of Poetry* and Intuit House Poetry Series, publisher of the 2006 winner of the National Book Critics Circle award in poetry. His volume of poems is *Church*. New work appears in *AGNI*, *Green Mountains Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Literary Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and elsewhere.

Stephen Morris Roberts
Trade Wind

--for Angelika

Blown off balance,
I wavered
After we split.
Then April
Gusted you a new lover.
My fingers
Massage loamy

Soil, plant red begonia
And yellow lantana.
No proper bonsai tolerates
A downward
Pointed branch. Sudden breeze
Off slit-open
Waves lifts seed
Burdened lugustrum's
Musk-stiff scent
Onto my long, still acidic, tongue.

Caretaker

Under an oak's faithful shade,
I address the next pruner-friendly boxwood.
But young James complains
The overbearing oven of a sun
Is too wilting for him to shear the thorned
Privet. I, too, used to hasten
Sweat-drenched as I could,
Until I finally understood all the dead wood
Will be excused eventually,
And every boxwood will look
Beautiful. The sprig of green here and there
Nipped unintentionally, I admit
To losing my share of friends
In a similar manner, veins of perspiration
Run from his red forehead.

STEPHEN MORRIS ROBERTS is the author of *A Space inside a Space*, St. Andrews College Press, a full-length collection of poems, and *Every September . . .*, Tragically Hip Press, a chapbook of poems. His poems currently appear in *Aries*, *Nantahala*, *The New St. Andrews Review*, and *Pembroke*. Stephen was a presenter at the 2009, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) North Carolina Conference: *Creative Hearts, Healing Minds, the Art of Living with Mental Illness*. Stephen earned a MA from Hollins College and a BA from UNC-Chapel Hill. He is a native of Winston-Salem , North Carolina , and lives in Wilmington, North Carolina, working as a crew person and an actor in the film industry.

Richard Taylor
Playing Catch

Watch this kid. He throws the ball
across the plate, chases it to the backstop,
hurries back to the pitcher's mound,
throws the ball again and again, shouting
gentle encouragements.

A munchkin in a Yankees cap, she just stands there,
never swings the bat, shows no interest in hitting.
He keeps throwing the ball as if it's his job
to be the angel that refuses
to let her be unappreciated or unloved.

I try to remember what it was like
to be learning the fundamentals—
love, heartbreak, sacrifice.

This kid makes all his errors
on the giving side, and I root for him.

Landing

what is flight for
if not for this
closing of the arc
the quiet thrill
the flare near the end
when air is squeezed
between ground and wing
before gravity
takes its due
and the earth pushes back
with a gentle bounce
the important thing
not the where
but that we flew

RICHARD ALLEN TAYLOR is co-editor of *Kakalak Anthology of Carolina Poets* and the author of *Something to Read on the Plane* (Main Street Rag 2004). His poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *Ibbetson Street*, *South Carolina Review*, *ken*again*, *Wild Goose Poetry Review*, *The Powhatan Review*, and *The Main Street Rag*, among others.

Natasha Tyson-Wall
"Baby Sounds"

When my daughter holds her hand in mine
or presses her soft noggin' against my breast,
I wonder...is all this mine?

Then, she looks up.
Her eyes casting a liquid sheen
trying to see whose hand she's grabbing.

She poses her question--each coo a grunt.
Her spidery fingers nip at me leaving scratches on my skin
that I can't feel.

The other marks I felt left me branded.
Forever, I'll know that she was there and I was her host
supplying every nutrient through every cell of my body and hers.

Of course, she doesn't understand all of this.
Everything is new to her.
But...there's recognition in that stare.

She blinks and casually turns
her doughy, little walnut-colored face to the front --
head bobbing steadily on the syncopated rhythm of my heartbeat.

I, too, dance on the measure and am glad she heard my answer.

NATASHA TYSON-WALL is a middle school reading teacher in Stanly County. She is a board member of the Uwharrie Players theater group and a member of the Stanly County Chorale and the Kollection Band (a beach, blues band).