



COLUMBIA CENTER for the ARTS
presents

Silent Applause of Butterflies

Plein Air Anthology

2014



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Editor's Note

By Julie Hatfield

As we celebrate our tenth year, the Pacific Northwest Plein Air Event continues to gain momentum. The Writing Exhibition attracted a record number of writers this year, as twenty talented individuals visited five locations in the Columbia Gorge for creative inspiration. Poetry, fiction, essay – even a letter addressed to a blackberry thicket – grace this year's collection, with each piece clocking in at 500 words or less. I am delighted and deeply grateful for what our writers chose to share.

I also appreciate the support writers received from Hood River Coffee, Waucoma Books, Hood River Stationers, Doppio Café, Cicci Gelato, Stoked Coffee Roasters and Sweet Dee's Cider Spot. Event sponsors included Green Home Construction and Norendo Northern Oregon Endodontics. The Writing Exhibition would not be possible without the generous support of the Columbia Center for the Arts.

I hope you enjoy this imaginative anthology, and may you be encouraged to grab a pen and a notepad, step outside and see what happens.

Image credits

Cover: "Mid Afternoon in the Gorge" by **Anton Pavlenko**

Location photographs by **Julie Hatfield**



Downtown Hood River



Thanks, Petula!

By Pennie Burns

Inspired by Downtown Hood River

The first song on the playlist in my head this morning is “Downtown,” and I find myself humming along with Petula Clark as I sit down on a bench in the warming sun.

“When you’re alone and life is making you lonely... tadadada... downtown.” I’ve often done that, but I’m not here today for “shopping therapy,” or to just get out of the house, or even to do a specific errand.

This time it’s to take it all in and put down in a few perfect words that meaningfully describe what I perceive, and what I feel about it.

Oh, this is lovely! My beautiful small town hometown. The morning sun feels so delightful. The breeze carries wonderful scents of baking, coffee, leaves, freshness. No one around, really, so I focus on the sights. Interesting architecture, the faces of venerable buildings I’ve never even noticed before. The tops of ubiquitous fir trees showing above the decorative cornices on almost every one of the rooftops, and I begin to imagine...

But what is THAT? A huge diesel truck rolls up to the intersection! Why is a truck that size even here? When it rolls away I can hear it for blocks. Ahhh, quiet again... but not for long... cars without mufflers, more diesels, and all the freshness is gone from the air, and my reverie is over!

Oh, but here comes a young couple strolling hand-in-hand and gazing at one another as they walk toward me. How sweet! But before I can get misty over memories of my own young loves, my lost loves, I smell... cigarettes! Each of them is carrying a cigarette that wafts the awful smell of tobacco and God knows what else into my face!

The chugging, rattling trucks seem to come one after the other now. And the sun is getting way too hot! My reverie is over! So over!

As I retreat, not even noticing the oak leaves as I usually do, or the fascinating contents of the shop windows that usually catch my attention, I try to get the song back. What

were the rest of those lyrics? I need to shift my take on the whole experience. Or it's just a big waste of time.

Ah yes... "Just listen to the music of the traffic of the city. How can you lose?"

How can I lose?! I love music, and the lyrics tell me traffic is musical.

I can "forget all my troubles, forget all my cares" if I go downtown!

"Everything's waiting for me."

Thanks, Petula!

In 2008, **Pennie Burns** moved from San Diego to Hood River with her new husband Tom. She left behind family, friends and a teaching career of 35 years. Happily, new friends who seem like family, and six years of new experiences here, have made her feel the Gorge is her home.

Aimless

By Diane Cooper

Inspired by Downtown Hood River

The afternoon is indecisive, a lackluster pewter sky keyed with silver sun scratches. The sloped sidewalk herds people dressed for the weather lottery – sandals, sweaters, boots, shorts. Achingly polite vehicles stop and go, stop and stop and go again. Finally a horn blasts.

It's a crossroads. Southern accents and Australian accents. A young woman doing yoga on the corner. Walked dogs are interested in everything, heads down, shuffling gaits. A man argues with his wife about the name of a color. Periwinkle, she insists. Blue, he says. The label more important than the flower which will die tomorrow, its purpose to provoke an argument? The flower boxes are transient, withered beauty next to thriving herb. An elderly woman in a yellow sari, her thin hair dyed red, walks by. She is not happy with her companion, dressed in jeans, dark hair abundant on her shoulders.

Women stand outside a café, their parting words a rush of things they were afraid to say inside. Colonoscopies, a secret told.

The sky is begging to be photographed but is ignored. Blue handkerchiefs flutter in the brightening clouds, and the scratches of sun have broadened and gentled until all is soft and warm. The brown patches on the hills are cheeks offered to a cradling hand.

Nobody notices the MCMVII on the navy building's fresco, or the neighboring diamonds chasing it, pursued by windows shaped like dashes. The last building on the block ignores the parade and stands open, inviting someone to take a break from work and look down at the street. Tourists pause on a corner, pawing at a map, and finally sit on the curb, uncertain of where they are or where to go. Defeated, they look around. Maybe they will smell the sweet flower. Maybe they will decipher the Roman numeral.

There is a swift breeze fleeing up the hill, saving the bench by the police station for last. A siren has gone off, competing with the railroad horn, a motorcycle at the stop sign, and the shrieks of a little girl who Does Not Want Her Hand Held! The breeze carries them all away. There are horizontal stripes of blue all around, interrupted by bold brick and more red cars than grey cars, for a change. Stop and stop and go.

People trudge up a pair of steep steps to the brewpub and beyond. They move as reverently as a funeral procession. Nobody is going down the stairs. There is a dark grey flag flapping wildly between the Stars and Stripes and the blue Oregon flag. It defies understanding – perhaps it is a pirate flag. Something to beware, the City of Hood River. Watch out. The blinking red light warns like a buoy, vivid under dark rain clouds. A Gorey drawing springs up, drunks falling down the stairs to their deaths, the red light luring and warning, the pirate flag flapping, the unused directory bearing witness, and Hitchcock feeding the birds.

Diane Cooper loves the variety and expanse of her adopted state, Oregon, and plans to live here the rest of her life.

Jujube Lips

By Erin Keefe

Inspired by Skylight Theater

They look over the marquee in front of the theater and agree upon a movie. Nervously, they both try to pay. “Please, let me,” he says. She smiles. The curve of her lips just kills him. Always has, ever since high school.

“I insist on getting the popcorn and,” she says as she peeks over at the candy counter, “Jujubes!” They laugh as they both recall the same gummy candy from their youth.

The lights dim and she offers him some Jujubes from her outstretched hand.

He takes one.

She does, too.

“Remember the last time we ‘watched’ a movie together?” she asks.

“I mostly remember this,” he leans over and lightly kisses her Jujube lips.

He looks into her eyes as the story onscreen unfolds and theirs begins again.

Erin Keefe lives in Hood River with her partner, Doug, who is an immense support to her creative heart. She continues to work on her first novel and tries not to neglect her blog, novelideablog@blog.com.

Local Forgiveness

By Bruce Ludwig

Inspired by Downtown Hood River

They're gone! It's the annual Hood River refrain the day after Labor Day. It's the signal that it's safe to come back downtown. We locals naturally drift back to our favorite haunts like zombies foraging for food (or whatever zombies do). It's the time of year that local bistros, coffee houses, and pubs close for a day or two for needed repairs, remodels, or simply to give staff a brief respite. It's a time when businesses ask our forgiveness for ignoring us all summer long while they pandered to the tourists.

We always forgive. Sure, our forgiveness is given partly due to the resumption of locals' menus and locals' discounts. We also know that if not for the tourists, Hood River would not have all the wonderful restaurants, pubs, and businesses that help make this city thrive. These wonderful Hood River amenities are ours to savor during the coming cold, wet, and snowy season.

I love this time of year. Suddenly, after being ignored since April, they see me when I walk in and shout out *Norm!* Well... honestly... they shout out *Bruce!* It's the time of year that renews my faith in the good people of Hood River. Michael, at Doppio, waves at me through his storefront window even as a crew is working on a remodel project in his closed coffee house. April greets me by name from behind the bar at The Pint Shack, and is not surprised when I order a Double Mountain IRA – she remembers. Later, I'll go to the Hood River Taqueria where they will wonder if I'll order my usual take out. No. Not this time. Hanging with friends. Thank you.

I may actually *love* this town, but I'm not willing to commit. We have issues. No need to dredge them up right now. I will admit to *liking* Hood River. There are certainly people here that I love. Some I like. I'm unwilling to admit to hating anyone, but there are a couple of contenders. Oh. Yes. I said I wouldn't dredge up *those issues*. Let's just say I *like* Hood River, and that I'm happy here.

Hood River is a beautiful small city in a beautiful setting. It is full of wonderful people who care about me – and us locals. What more can I ask for? It's home, even if it does ignore me from April through August.

Bruce Ludwig is a retired Hood River police chief currently working part time as an Emergency Preparedness Coordinator for a local hospital. He has lived in Hood River since 2005, and he is active in local theatre. He writes, perhaps, to get attention.

Mike's, the Heart of Hood River

By Leah Stenson

Inspired by Downtown Hood River

Wandering around Hood River on the morning after Labor Day, I see three Plein Air painters working at their easels on the hill in back of the library. I assume they are painting the river and the Washington side in the distance, but when I wander over to inspect their canvases I see that they are all painting Mike's, the quaint little ice cream shop the size of a closet next to the Ruddy Duck clothing store on Oak Street. It makes perfect sense since Mike's, with its pastel green, beadboard door trimmed in violet, and window boxes burgeoning with purple flowers, is a visual delight. The sign, with alternating red, teal, pink and lavender letters on white trim below the low-hanging roof, is inviting; and pale green wooden Adirondack chairs and picnic tables in small, medium and large, a la Goldilocks and the Three Bears, make everyone of all sizes and shapes feel welcome.

It is 10:30 in the morning and the shop is closed. A young man is watering flowers in window boxes and pots and planters scattered around the patio punctuated with red canvas umbrellas. In summer, the shop opens at 11:00 am and closes at 11:00 pm. Tourists and locals flock to Mike's for fine ice cream – salted caramel, almond pistachio and coconut – among my favorites – but they also come here for camaraderie. Some shops in Hood River appeal mainly to sports enthusiasts and others mainly to well-heeled adults, but Mike's is a place for everyone – old, young, rich, poor, sportive and sedentary. Here, ice cream is the great equalizer.

Adults relax on the patio chatting with family and friends while children, exuberant from an ice cream high, run around on the patio, climb the two-tiered play structure and clamber over the stainless steel sculpture which doubles as a jungle gym.

Mike's is more than just an ice cream shop. It's a throwback in time to a simpler, kinder way of life, one that still prevails here in this charming town and its stunning natural surroundings.

The young employee, who is now bringing out more pieces of patio furniture, startles me out of a reverie when he asks if I'm doing crossword puzzles. He has never heard of the Plein Air event, but he is happy to hear Hood River is doing so much to support the

arts. He invites me to taste the ice cream and recommends pumpkin. How can I refuse? Rich and creamy, with a hint of cinnamon, allspice and nutmeg, these are definitely the flavors and colors of autumn.

Leah Stenson writes poetry, essay and memoir. She hosts the Studio Series: Poetry Reading and Open Mic in SW Portland, and serves on the board of Friends of William Stafford. Please visit her Web site at www.leahstenson.com.

Why We Need Art

By Nancy Woods

Inspired by Columbia Art Gallery

Intentional imperfections

Meant to be seen

Up close

Monochromatic landscape

Brings calm

Into the room

Paintings point out

Life's patterns

Offer perspective

Make sense of a meaningless world

Nancy Woods is a writer, editor and writing instructor. She is the author of *Hooked on Antifreeze: True Tales About Loving and Leaving Alaska* and the soon-to-be-released *Under the Influence of Tall Trees: Humorous Tales From a Pacific Northwest Writer*.

www.nancy-woods.com.



The Dalles Mountain Ranch



The Barn

By Linda Jo Hunter

Inspired by The Dalles Mountain Ranch

The barn squeaked, thumped, rattled and moaned, but the dead man was silent.

I was revolted. Then my tracking training kicked in. He was hanging with yacht braid wound several times around his neck. The loose end swung with his tennis shoes. His head was bent so far forward that there was no doubt he was dead, even from twenty feet below. How the heck did he get up there?

I looked around, squatting down so the light would show shadows in tracks on the black dusty floor. There were impressions of shoes freshly pressed in the dust. The most noticeable thing, however, were the tire tracks which ran over the human tracks. They came from a closed, double tall sliding door on the side of the barn. I peered around without moving. I didn't want to add tracks of my own. I tried to think what was *not* here, as the missing things sometimes tell more of the story.

Ah yes, there was nothing under the dead man. There were no drops of body fluids, no debris from the guano crusted timber he was tied to. He had to have been put there.

I moved back out of the barn and took a deep breath of the windy air. Then I called 911.

"Are you the RP?" The responding officer was gruff.

"Look," I said, "I did you a favor by waiting for almost an hour!"

"Harumph." He reached in his cruiser and grabbed a microphone.

Another squad car drove up. A funny looking deputy with Spock ears approached. "Who is dead?" He directed this to me with a grin.

"No one I know." I shrugged.

Grumpy turned to me. "Okay madam, I need your contact information." He shoved a notebook, with a pen balanced on top, in my direction.

I listened to them as I wrote.

“Looks like a suicide to me.” Grumpy was quick to weigh in.

“Yeah... well how did he get up there?” Spock asked.

“Maybe he used a tractor.” Grumpy nodded towards the farm equipment.

“I’m sure! Then he parked it back there after he was done and pocketed the keys.”

I moved in behind them and handed back the notebook.

“Not that tractor,” I nodded towards the one grumpy was focused on. “I think it was the front loader outside. See the tracks... they go from here right under that side door.”

They both turned to glare at me. Grumpy sized me up; an older lady with her hair in a bun. I watched his hands clench and his lips compress.

He hissed like a mad goose. “What the hell do you know?”

“Nothing. I am just a writer.”

Then I blinked. The barn came back to normal and I was alone. The wind continued its haunting symphony and the dead man was gone.

“Yeah,” I thought to myself, “Just a writer with an overactive imagination.”

Linda Jo Hunter is the author of *Lonesome for Bears, A Woman’s Journey in the Tracks of the Wilderness*, Lyons Press, 2008. She is a tracker, a writer, a painter who works in oil, and someone who is always looking for the next adventure.

Cobalt Blue Beads

By Connie Nice

Inspired by The Dalles Mountain Ranch

She closed her eyes and turned her face to the west wind. It hit her hard, then slid across her cheek like a lover's caress. Leaning back against the trunk of the oak tree, she sighed.

Almost time.

This was the old way. To come to the place of her beginning. To await the passing of her spirit from this world.

The old way. Her way.

The shrill cry of the eagle cut through the air, startling her. She looked up. Soaring high above her, the bright white of its head contrasted against the brilliant blue of the summer sky. Majestic. Powerful.

This was her spirit guide. Come to help her finish her journey.

She gazed across the golden yellow hills that rolled away towards the snow-covered mountain. Wy'east.

It had been a guiding beacon for her life; Mount Hood.

Closer. The mighty river, Columbia. Nch'i-Wa'na.

Windswept white caps played a game of tag as they raced east against the current. East, towards the morning sun.

She thought she saw the brown humped backs of Wahtonka. Buffalo. Silhouetted on the distant hills.

Have they come to see me off?

She rubbed her eyes and squinted to get a better look. No. It was only a clump of scrub-oak and rocks.

The buffalo were gone. Passed on. Long ago.

Mr. Coyote, “the trickster,” came to tease her with thoughts of sweet purple huckleberries and warm starchy camas root. She had no time left for tricks. She reached out her hand and gathered up a rock to toss at him. He was not there.

So many that have passed on before her.

Celilo Falls, named for the sound of the falling water. Just over that hill. There since the beginning of time.

Now gone. With it went the salmon.

She slowly reached into her leather belt pouch and pulled out a small strand of beautiful cobalt blue beads. She rolled the beads back and forth between her fingers, comforted by their smooth, cool, round shape.

A circle. Her life.

The beads had been a gift from her husband. Traded for the last of their beaver skins one winter.

He too was gone. Gone. Following his spirit guide, Salmon, down the river.

Now there would be no one left to bury her. No one except the Creator himself. She was the last “old one” to go.

The buffalo were coming closer.

The eagle called out her name.

It was time.

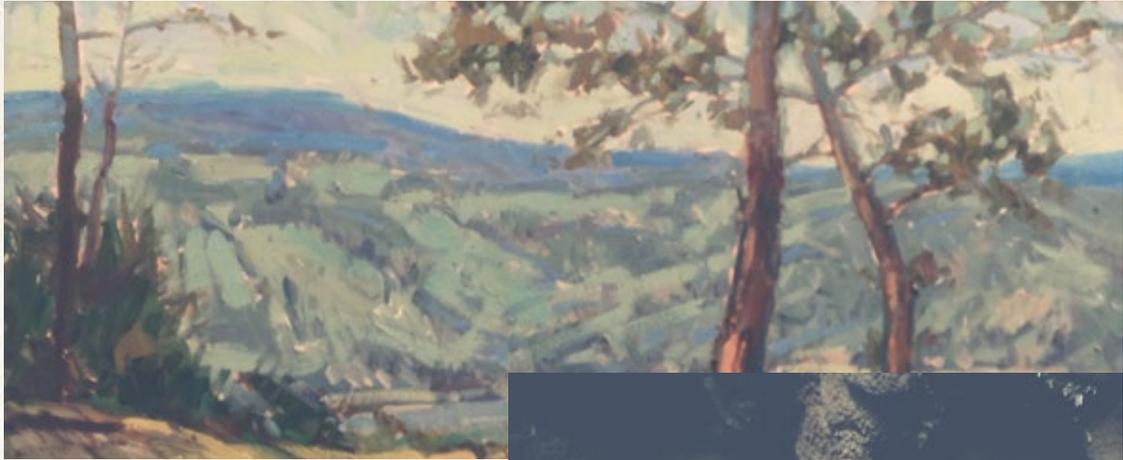
The wind blew. The sun was warm. Her body was cold. One last gaze at this land from where she had been born. The earth that she loved. The earth where she would now return.

One final breath.

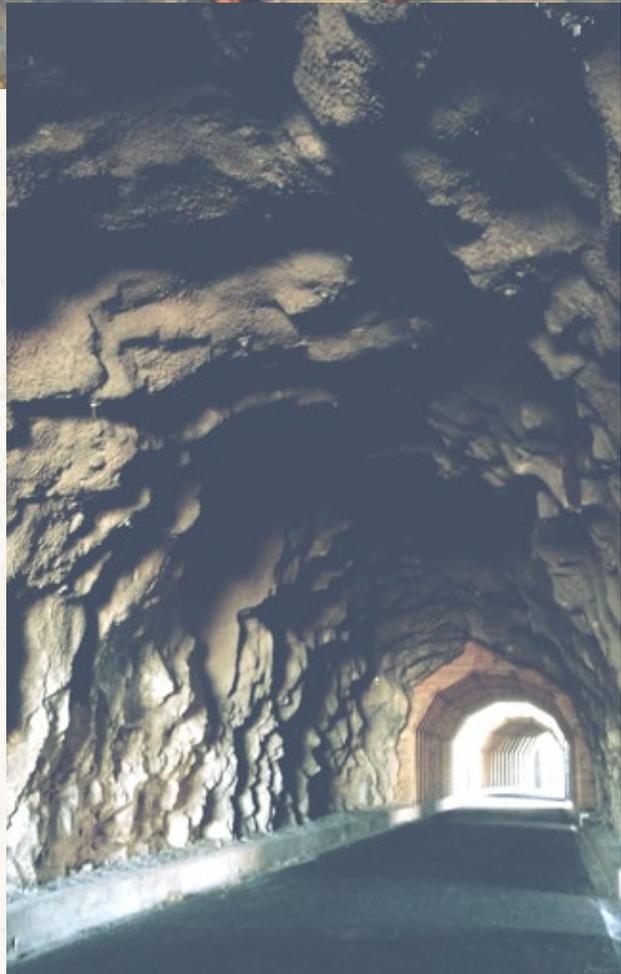
Her eyes closed.

Soaring high above the still body of an old woman, the eagle cried out, then pushed its mighty wings against the power of the wind. It flew towards the setting sun. In its talons dangled a single strand of cobalt blue beads.

Connie Nice is a wife, mother and grandmother, from White Salmon, Washington. Early retirement has now given her an opportunity to work full-time as a writer, speaker, and teacher. She loves sharing her passion for history, nature, travel, family, and faith through words. Find her blog at www.connienice.com.



Mosier Tunnels



Snowbound: Day 6, Imagined

By Amy Baskin

Inspired by The Mosier Tunnels

This historic message remains carved in the basalt of the east twin tunnel:

Snowbound

Nov. 19 – 27, 1921

Chas. J. Sadilik

E.B. Marvin

In the Great War,
men huddled together just like he and Marvin.
There's no shame in keeping heat.
Feet frozen, he tries to wiggle his toes all the same
in their wet leather boots.

They had toyed with the passing of the seasons
the muted threats of nature
a simple hunting excursion —
party of two.
Now Marvin sleeps a fretful sleep
staving off the terror of the pitch dark.
They wait for a change in fortune
a drip
a melt
a tendril of light to anoint their heads
bestow forgiveness upon them
for their presumption that they could master all they surveyed.

Charles closes his eyes and tries to picture the vee of ducks
the glint of the autumn sun
how it kissed the top of Mt. Hood's crown
an old friend bidding a fond farewell.

Before the snow closed in,
he had looked out the adit at the hills across the river.
Marveled at how engineers tamed the gorge —
so peaceful, yet the land's slant of layers betrayed a sense of underlying violence.

On the first day, his eyes would widen at the sound of any movement —
the jerk of his own knee
the groan of Marvin's stomach.
By the fifth day, he ceased to open his eyes at all.

Two weeks ago, Millie canned the last of the harvest.
Today, she should be setting their Thanksgiving table, if all were well
if he were safe and dry by the hearth.
Instead, he passes time with Marvin's head resting on his shoulder.
He tries to recall the scent of
the nape of Millie's neck the night before he left on the hunt.
She held him and told him how blessed they were.

Now, he shakes his head
recognizing that the absence of fresh apples in the cellar
was a sign
blithely disregarded —
as he cleaned his rifle on the porch
in the chill of dawn.
Now he feels a kinship with each slice of Anjou pear trapped in Millie's jars.
He laughs in spite of himself.
Hopes that in this tunnel
he and Marvin stay as well preserved
as that hardy French cultivar
that grows in the valley and persists despite frost and cold.

Amy Baskin reads to escape or help interpret reality. She writes for the same reasons. Her limited concept of home decorating involves precarious stacks of books and journals. Her work has appeared in various publications including *Stories for Children Magazine* and *Reading Local: Portland*.

Butterflies

By Jill Cooper

Inspired by the wind at The Mosier Tunnels

Butterflies gather together along river edges to sun their wings and lick the salty rocks.

~ Todd Murray, entomologist

I have never strapped myself to cords and cables and neon kites.
I have never leaned my neoprene-wrapped body backward on a board, tilting, a swaying
pressure, sending it, resistance into wind into
loft into sky like a boosting bird, like a curling wisp of smoke.

But I have dug my toes into hot sand and inhaled the evening air.
And I have observed the summer river – dancing with its hundreds of kites – a silent,
distant applause of butterflies.

I have etched out stories with symbols onto paper. I have played with the resistance and
elements and swells of language. And I have shown up for dawn patrol, with quiet words, to
unzip impermanence and let her fly.

I have been there to catch the sky cracking open its translucency onto yesterday's hot
memories. I have handle-passed
a honey gold sun, an apricot sun, even a fried-egg sun onto the flickering light of the
screen.

No I have never surfed on water, but I have schlogged through a paragraph luff, wondering,
What am I doing here? So I licked the salty rock, and I came back again the next day, for
those moments when I am riveted downwind on a white-capped phrase – a butterfly in the
power-zone, a moment, a blue eternity, an ephemera worth all the words.

Yes I have dug my toes into the hot sand and inhaled the sweet night air.
But most of all, I have found that back on shore, like the butterflies,
all I need depends on no more than a deep breath, and another sunrise.

Jill Cooper is a poet, writer and the founder of Exult Road publishing, home of *The Yes Book* (Fall, 2014). Her writing has appeared in Seattle literary magazines, *The Raven Chronicles*, *The Floating Bridge Review* and online magazines, *Rewire Me* and *Rebelle Society*. She hails from Underwood, Washington. Visit www.ExultRoad.com.

Passage

By Julie Hatfield

Inspired by The Mosier Tunnels

The tunnel doesn't look intimidating. I can see light at the end before I even enter. The arched front is plain and modern against the wild hillside, which is carpeted with dry grasses bending in the stiff breeze. Large timbers, smooth with age, line the walls just inside the opening. Thick iron brackets imply stability and security, and the dim passage promises a respite from the midday heat.

But after I've entered – after I'm committed – the timbers vanish and the tunnel's true essence is exposed. The rough basalt walls speak of dynamite blasts and other violent acts the hill endured, and a willingness to drop a boulder or two to even the score. Thick smears of concrete look like they would prevent this from happening, but obviously the concrete was added because it was needed. I touch the coarse walls, cool and dusty. Time does not pass here.

It is up to me to move forward. I'm glad I'm not claustrophobic. I'm glad I don't feel the ominous pressure of the dark walls and ceiling. I'm glad there is an archway coming up, a little side window of light. I give a short bark of a laugh – the side window overlooking the Gorge is blocked with steel bars, like a jail cell. A stunning view of the Columbia is below, but I am not allowed to enter that world. I must stay in the tunnel until I am through.

So I continue, walking towards the sunlit exit. The tunnel ends but a second tunnel instantly begins. I don't want another tunnel. I want to be finished with tunnels. Can't I at least have a longer break between these relentless tunnels?

I sigh and keep trudging, in daylight for a moment and then back in the dark. *Sometimes the tunnels come on their own timetable, not yours, I tell myself. Traveling through them is faster than walking all the way around, and safer than falling off a bluff. Keep going.*

I have to trust that eventually I will leave the tunnels behind. Someday I'll be free to travel the open road, with nothing separating my soul and the blue sky.

Julie Hatfield is a freelance writer and lives in Hood River. More essays and flash fiction are at her Web site, www.onlineprose.com.



The Answers That Swallows Know

By John Metta

Inspired by (east of) The Mosier Tunnels

You don't have to notice it so much from up here, but you still know it's there. It cuts this place like a blade, slicing through the hillscape. We live in a wound, our blood pouring out westward, our breath leaking away to the east.

The highway ripped us open here, but it was an old wound, much older than the knife road. We have bled from this wound for a long, long time.

Still, standing here, you can almost forget these things. The mane of the hillside cast in the shadow of the western clouds paints a pretty picture. Artists come with paint brushes to romanticize those hills for us. They help us ignore the shaft of railroad, fletched in the Wyoming coal fields and drawn from the bow of the eastern horizon. They help us ignore what our life is like down there.

Things seem so much simpler at this height. They don't see this, those driving fast on the knife edge. They don't come here to these places. These are our places. The beauty here is our beauty. There are answers here. They are our answers.

Down there, there is no beauty. Down there are only the troubles. Bills and no money, whiskey and no job. Down there, there is only dirt, and grime, and tears, and matted black hair, and blood, and vacant eyes staring back at you and still blaming you even now after all this damn – shut up! Just shut the fuck up or I'll – !

But up here, there is none of that. Here there is just... peace. Calm. The quiet rustling of the balsam root that when the wind is blowing just right, you can hear whispering your true name.

This is a place of simple answers, and few come here to listen to the magic of them. So few come to see the flowers, like spattered blood painting the cracked rocks. So few watch the scrub swallows diving into the face of the cliff to feed their children and then flying away to find more food. So few listen to the answers that the swallows know.

People say they want answers, but they really just want things. Shiny things, heavy

things. There are too few things here. Grass, some wild flowers, dragonflies, and this mangle of basalt. There are no shiny things here, only answers.

And there is the wind. The warm wind, rushing past your face and pouring into your mouth so hard that you can barely breathe.

And the lichen, splattered against the bare rocks. It's amazing how much detail you can see in their cracked and broken patterns, even though they are coming toward you so quickly.

John Metta grew up in an inner city housing project. Somehow, he's now lucky enough to live in Hood River, eating organic kale, and having a spice rack with eight different kinds of salt. He writes partially to reconcile his difficult past with his current incredibly lucky life.

Never

By Shannon Perry

Inspired by The Mosier Tunnels

I never hunt like an eagle,
swooping down to the river
to fish for my young,
but I gather moments
in my backpack
and feed on them later
in the quiet of my home.

I never follow the curve of the river
where it moves out of sight
but walk by the streambed
and turn over rocks,
searching for small creatures hiding.

I never see where the squirrel goes
after it hops from the fence
but imagine I could follow it
up the maple tree or into
burrows under the ground,
brown earth closing in.

I never roar like the wind
but trouble my beloved
with a tempest of sound,
a blustering babble,
until the air calms
and we hold each other
in peace.

A generic Oregonian, **Shannon Perry** has had the privilege of living in the Hood River Valley for 32 years. Its beauty inspires her every day, and she has written for as long as she can remember. She is a retired educator. One of her poems was selected for an anthology entitled *Yes*.

How Can I Explain?

By Peggy Thompson-Hudon

Inspired by The Mosier Tunnels

How can I explain to you the complex feel of the wind gently slipping over the right side of my face? I uncross my legs, put my feet under me and stand up from the hard asphalt ground. In the dusk of the evening, the light is fading away so much sooner than I had hoped. A faraway, high-pitched and enduring screech of an approaching train gives fair warning of what soon becomes the roar of metal rushing through wind. Within a few moments, the sound of the train moves away and plays in reverse its screeching. It continues towards its destination and I am left with my question to you.

How can I tell you of my exact experience? I bend my knees and my sweet dog walks to me and nudges against my chest with his wet nose. I see a smile in his eyes and his mouth and it warms me to my core as if he were my child.

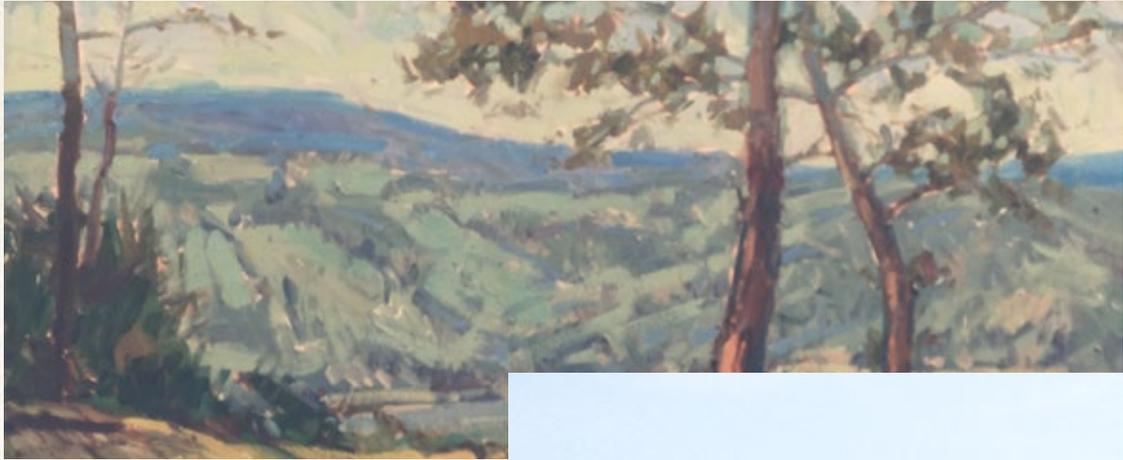
Is it possible that I could truly explain to you the things I am seeing? There is more to describing an experience than spitting out words on paper that reflect our literal vision.

Note to self: Learn one new adjective and adverb a day.

I slowly walk back down the darkening path to venture toward my warm home and look up along the rock outcropping to my left. The thin and spiky outline of grasses that move gently against the backdrop of white, orange and blue are merely shapes without dimension in their blackness. It is no longer daylight and heading quickly into nightfall. It is all fading fast, but I want you to see it. I want you to experience it.

Maybe this is why we, as humans, have the need to share our experiences. When you stand next me to appreciate what I see with you, there is no adjective or adverb needed. The silent camaraderie would assure me that I am understood.

Peggy Thompson-Hudon is a resident of Hood River and has the deepest desire to write. With a little help from her friends, it may become a regular thing!



Bingen Waterfront



Wind

By Alison Fitts

Inspired by The Bingen Waterfront

All words are wind
 except the written ones.
The pen can still deceive
 But, at least the deception remains
 longer than a breath.

Alison Fitts lives in Hood River.

Love Is...

By Rishell Graves

Inspired by The Bingen Waterfront

Love can be seen...

On a crowded street, when money is given to a homeless man,
In the gaze between two lovers,
When an elderly couple walk arm in arm,
No longer for romance, but out of necessity.

It can be heard...

In the lullaby a mother sings,
The laughter of friends,
And passions shared at night.

You can taste love...

When you bite into fresh baked bread,
Drink the tea brewed to comfort you,
Or kiss the lips that taste like home, no matter where you are.

Love can even be smelled...

On the skin of a newborn baby,
In flowers picked by the chubby hands of a toddler,
The scent that lingers on a piece of clothing,
Long after that person is gone.

Love is not stopped

By borders or skin color,
By logic or gender.
It can enter the darkest of days
And fill them with light.

Love is...

A word so small
It can float on a whisper,
And large enough
To carry the universe in its arms.

Rishell Graves is a musician who lives in White Salmon with her wonderful partner, who often accompanies her when she performs. She has raised two daughters, and now enjoys spending time with her four grandchildren. Inspired daily by the beauty of the Gorge, she lives each day in gratitude and love.

Have You Heard the One

By Mari Matthias

Inspired by The Bingen Waterfront

“Have you heard the one about the turkey vulture?”

Every night at the Bingen marina, the dead stand-up comedian stands on the gravel road, like a stage above the river, and tries out his jokes on the riverwater. Often competing with the wind, the specter loudly sharpens his wit, perfecting his material and his dead-ringer timing. The Columbia laughs and encourages and slips along downstream. Very satisfying. He constantly has a new audience.

One night, just at dusk, a dedicated Insitu employee is finally leaving work. Perhaps his long-houred fatigue has brought him to a consciousness that allows him to hear the ghostly comedian and, drawn in, he walks toward the river. The employee finds himself lingering, giggling, then laughing full-out at the splendid deftly-delivered humor. Such pointed sarcasm and hysterical innuendo! Jokes approaching perfection, dry but not dead. He laughs harder than he ever has. He howls his mirth, tears streaming down his face, until he literally splits his sides.

Now there are two specters haunting the Bingen riverside.

“Have you heard the one about the turkey vulture?” The dead Insitu ex-employee groans at his doom of hearing the same old jokes repeated, with minor tweaks and improvements, for eternity.

Mari Matthias lives in Underwood with her husband and two kids, where she is haunted by potential literary characters.



Panorama Point



The last, cold light of evening

By Faith Keolker

Inspired by Panorama Point

The last, cold light of evening varnishes the lowest branch of a Douglas fir.

The discourteous west wind picks up her feet to the dance of late summer – and soon her skittish swirls will command the stage in their turn.

Dark clouds congregate irreligiously, with no regard or reverence for the passing sun.

There is mischief in the air: the changing of the seasons is afoot.

A native of the UK, **Faith Keolker** has lived in the Hood River area since returning here with her Oregonian husband in 2007. Faith's work has a timeless quality, and she is currently working on a collection of poems in a traditional style.

Ponderosas of Panoramic Point

By John Lockman

Inspired by Panorama Point

O god of heaven there is nothing like nature.
There is nothing but nature!

A young Artist shows me her panoramic acrylic
Orange skies and washed out fields
On her canvas give way to overcast
Hues of darker greens with cooler tones,
Now before us foretelling
A Summer's descent into autumn
With shards of light cast down,
Breaking through the clouds,
Their heavenly spears on the airport
Off in the distance.
They draw my eyes from Mount Defiance
and remind me once again
Of civilization's entropic claw.
Patchwork quilts of clearcut beige swaths
Punctuate the east sloping hills descending into the valley
Where perfectly lined pear trees in orchard columns
Salute the frost windmills like
Tombstones in a military cemetery.

My eyes are drawn downward
By some strange gravitational pull
That tug on mortal muscles in my skull.
I see before me, beyond a hedge of junipers,
Two ponderosa pines still viable but with
Clusters of brown needles.
O how we all root for those
Wily knot infested sappy pines
Eyes float up again
(ascending to the heavens?)
Looking for more evidence
Now that my mind adjusts

and looks closer-listening
Past the romantic view.

I see them everywhere.
Green stands surrendering to
Brown snags of ponderosa pines;
The relentless march of time
Sparing nothing in the chaotic dance of nature
balancing
The only two forces governing the universe:
life and death.

The young artist with her portrait,
brushes, and globs of paint
From wrinkled tubes is now packing up
On the road home we see a lone ponderosa
Strangled by a ganglion mesh of poison oak vines,
The leaves beginning to show red
But the tree looks like it may survive.

I insist on stopping to get a photo.
Never seen Poison Oak so robust
And high on the bark of a pine.
Maybe pine beetles are smarter
Than us and stay away
As a man in a pickup warns us to also.
He is an orchardist
Inviting us instead
To celebrate a long awaited
Change in weather
He drives off confused by my
Infatuation with the toxic vines.

Another man, a brother, a father, a son
Just shot his head off
A few days ago down in Santa Barbara.
As the youngest he was the envy of his family
Spared of the abuse
Fed only the royal jelly
Things just don't add up his sister told me

Pieces of his eyes clung to the walls... staring out at infinity
And a few days before that a baby was born,
His niece with perfect head of hair, alert.

This is nature
This is Panoramic Point
These are the ponderosa pines of Panoramic Point.

John Lockman lives in White Salmon, Washington. He is a member of Windbags Toastmasters of Hood River and also has been in a few musicals at CAST.

A Letter to the Himalayan Blackberry

By Sarah Sullivan

Inspired by Panorama Point

Dear *Rubus armeniacus*,

I should tell you about the sounds here. Somewhere down the hill someone is playing the tuba. It's an odd instrument to play loudly on an otherwise quiet evening, and it's hard to describe to something without ears. So brassy. All bellow and brazen. Clearly amateur.

Meanwhile the wind picks up and I can see the heat lifting in the valley and the mountain adorning her evening attire. First she tries on her coral-colored scarf. Then the pink sweater. Then the purple shawl. With yellow shoes?

The metallic buzz of the highway roars below and someone is mowing the lawn. Is that a wood chipper? Have they no reverence? I hear a semi-trailer on a long chug in a low gear hauling up the hill.

Maybe you are considering how delightful it is to be deaf, now. Imagine this, though. In the brief moments between cars and tuba and the maniacal, chatty blue jays there is a breeze that moves across the valley like a wave of whispers and the leaves on the trees dance just so. A bee flies by with pollen boots, humming from flower to flower.

And if we could hear the moon in the shape of a perfect egg rising over the east hills it would be a clear, silver bell. A white beacon, rising.

I'm pretty sure the mountain is in cahoots with the tuba player now. It's a circus out there, every outlandish color and sound.

Now can we talk about the fires? In that blaze upriver I was the tree in flames. I burned to the core, sap hissing from every fiber of flammable wood. I can tell you about surrender. You went underground and stayed cool. How?

Tell us about how you make flower and fruit out of the most barren of earth. Tell us what it means to be a pioneer even in the ashes, far from your Himalayan home. What

is it like to live up in the lonely hills with the elk and the deep dark? And how does one strike a deal with the birds to fly? I want to be inside of something airborne, to be the food that becomes wing or beak or sinew or bone. You become something else, constant resurrection, spring leaf, grey dirt to berry, stain my hands, stain my teeth. I want to cover the earth, to hold the hillside, to feed the animals fruit. I want to be like you, persistent, steadfast, strong, the last bird song of the night.

I take back what I said about the tuba player being amateur. The musicians with the horns showed up, plus the drummer and now the tuba sounds just right. There should be a parade! The humans are making such joyful noise and the birds are gone, and the wind is still, listening.

Sarah Sullivan recently moved to Hood River from Portland to serve as the Executive Director of Gorge Grown Food Network. She belongs to a writing group in Portland called Savor.