

# Gnarled Oak

*an online literary journal*



Issue 12: Refuge  
Apr-May 2017



**Gnarled Oak**  
Issue 12: Refuge  
Apr-May 2017

*Gnarled Oak* is an online literary journal publishing poetry, prose, artwork, and videos four times per year. This issue was originally published online from Apr-May 2017 and is archived at [gnarledoak.org/category/issue-12/](http://gnarledoak.org/category/issue-12/)

Editor and publisher: James Brush

Cover art: "Trees" by Olivier Schopfer  
Title: from "Refuge" by Steve Klepetar

All copyrights are retained by the original authors and artists.

Website: [gnarledoak.org](http://gnarledoak.org)  
*(please visit the website for the current issue,  
submissions info, and past issues)*

Like on Facebook: [facebook.com/gnarledoak](https://facebook.com/gnarledoak)  
Follow on Twitter [@gnarled\\_oak](https://twitter.com/gnarled_oak)

## Contents

Lenting — Tiffany Grantom	1
i woke this morning — Neil Creighton	2
Avoidance — Mary McCarthy	3
Landmine in a Field of Flowers — Matt Mullins	4
snow angel — Tom Sacramona	5
The Island — Barbara Young	6
Look Both Ways — Jane Williams	7
The Two Ends — Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy	8
Song for Awe & Dread— Tommy Becker	9
long night moon — Deborah P. Kolodji	10
whiteout — Marianne Paul	11
Practice Makes Perfect — Elizabeth Vrenios	12
Enchant(ed) — Misha Penton	13
highway dusk — Malintha Perera	14
Sacred Stones — Lawrence Elliott	15
Trees — Olivier Schopfer	18
The Spoilt Season — Steve Klepetar	19
Ode to the Corner of the Drug House Down the Gravel Road Off the Two Lane Highway #51 — Darren C. Demaree	20
The Stars Are All Dead and Have Fallen — Barbara Young	21
heel cups — Elizabeth McMunn-Tetangco	22
usual questions — Christina Sng	23

crow moon — Debbie Strange	24
Listen — Ken Poyner	25
Anatomy — Marie Craven	26
Refuge — Steve Klepetar	27
Editor's Note	28
Contributor Bios	30

## **Lenting**

*Tiffany Grantom*

I have lented the 'shoulds' in years past. This year, I will lent what steals my breath. I will lent the cycling shrieks of war cries empty, and war cries full. This year I will lent the streaming compulsive—media and social media and the rites of the angry. This year I will lent the proclamations of imminence—every one. This year I will lent the proclamations of eminence—all but one.

This year I lent, so that prayers made quiet, and prayers made loud I can hear myself. I can hear the whisper call of power and holiness simmering, resonating, in the presence of the Throned. In the just-beyond-my-eyelids.

**i woke this morning**

*Neil Creighton*

to a neutral voice intoning  
bombs in marketplaces  
and refugees washed upon the shore

to music of breath and skin  
dark cascade of pillowed hair  
gossamer feather of touch

to dreams of justice  
from the vast sea's edge  
to beyond the distant shore

to a jacaranda blue day  
dancing through the curtain  
and kookaburras' liquid burst of song

## Avoidance

*Mary McCarthy*

Waiting for catastrophe  
I keep busy with things  
that don't matter,  
avoid starting what  
I might not finish,  
try not to mourn,  
or spend myself in rage,  
wasting energies  
I can't replace.  
Grief will come  
when I think I have  
outrun it.  
I already have too many  
sympathy cards  
and sleepless hours enough  
to find thousands  
of bad endings  
that become easier and easier  
to imagine.

## Landmine in a Field of Flowers

*Matt Mullins*



View Matt Mullins' video "Landmine in a Field of Flowers" at  
<http://gnarledoak.org/issue-12/landmine-in-a-field-of-flowers/>



**snow angel**

*Tom Sacramona*

snow angel

two sticks from the woodpile

and a butterfly

## The Island

*Barbara Young*

Kristin-who-cuts-my-hair describes her sweet  
honeymoon in the Bahamas. She \*Snip\*

says it was a telephone offer. Who  
in their right mind would? But they did.

In the mirror, behind blue Barbicide,  
she shapes thin sheets of hair as she talks.

But she's only a blur—her island grows,  
luxurious, through my reflection. Later, home,

and the Weather shows a swirling egg yolk,  
red as a dragon's eye, aimed at the Bahamas.

Someone told me once: Don't go to Paris,  
it's not there. And if you loved the book,

don't see the movie, ever. Untroubled by storms,  
Kristin's green lizards smile on from pink walls.

## Look Both Ways

*Jane Williams*



*Jane Williams*

## **The Two Ends**

*Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy*

I kept losing my pencils at school. At first, dad would cut each pencil in half. Then mom threatened to tie the half-pencil to my button.

autumn pile  
every leaf  
finds its place

## Song for Awe & Dread

*Tommy Becker*



View Tommy Becker's video "Song for Awe & Dread" at  
<http://gnarledoak.org/issue-12/song-for-awe-dread/>

**long night moon**

*Deborah P Kolodji*

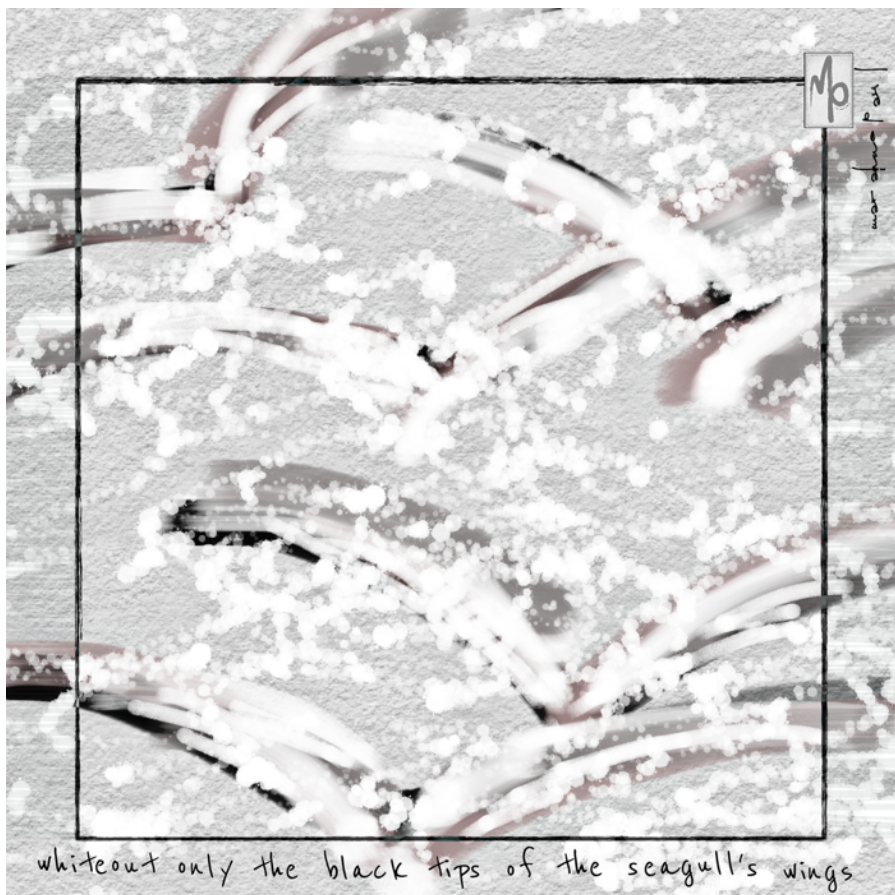
long night moon

the old clock

ticks louder

whiteout

Marianne Paul



## Practice Makes Perfect

*Elizabeth Vrenios*

mother intoned,  
thumping time on the side of the piano  
with her ruler  
while I struggled at the keys.  
So I practiced the art of magic  
(deception, we shall call it)  
like turning water to ice under a silk scarf,  
and coaxing my mad dogs under the table  
to silence their whimper.  
They, accustomed to spaces  
dark and deep, began to sleep.

Once in a dream  
I carried a dead child on my shoulders  
as I crept down the night hall  
to the stygian mirror, expecting to see  
a snarling beast with plundered eyes.  
But there was no image  
in the silvered shadows.  
The hair on the backs of the dogs  
began to rise.

But practice makes  
permanent,  
While I practiced the art of the silk scarf,  
and perfected the image of coolness,  
the mad dogs rose, growled  
and shook their chains.



## Enchant(ed)

Misha Penton



View Misha Penton's video "Enchant(ed)" at  
<http://gnarledoak.org/issue-12/enchanted/>

*Artist's statement: Enchant(ed): an experimental poetry / vocal film, created on a stunning Colorado backroad in the deep winter. The work is a meditation on discovering the unexpected and uncanny, and explores one word, "enchant/ed."*

highway dusk

*Malintha Perera*

highway dusk

all I wanted to know

in a moment

## Sacred Stones

*Lawrence Elliott*

In the breathless way that only five-year-olds have, she explains to me the importance of each of the rocks in her box of precious things, held inviolable in the secret spot in the top drawer under all the socks. Since I well recall the totemic power of sea-glass and flat, smooth river stones for warding off evil and standing as sigils of fate's approval of my existence, I listen to her recitation of each stone's biography in the absent-but-present way that loving uncles have about them.

Her words wash over me, tumbling from her in little bursts of enthusiasm, rife with wandering asides, non sequiturs, and sighs of frustration at her own inability to articulate the ocean of meaning inside her. To the casual listener, it sounds like a grocery-list of items being ticked off in a sing-song litany. It sounds like that to me, too, except that I love her. So I listen past the tuneless song of "...and then...and then...and then" until I don't hear it anymore, and I can actually listen instead.

She's too young to affect the rhythms of a story-teller, the body-language, cadence, and intonations. The rise-and-fall, tension-and-resolve musical qualities of a story well-told are beyond her, for now. But the need to convey, to be understood, for her truth to be recognized... these things are well within her grasp, and they animate the story of her stones until it becomes epic. But not if you saw it written down. A transcript of it would be boredom itself, filled with "...and then...and then...and then."

I've grown into the mantle of a storyteller in the midst of a clan of storytellers. To stand out from among the group of Bards and Bullshitters I hail from is a feat unto itself, believe

me. So I listen with a different kind of attention to the tale of her sacred stones, hearing the story beats like a drum out of time, implying the shape of truths buried in her. Witnessing her evolution from Sunday to Sunday is something to behold. Soon this little one, with her earnest "...and then...and then...and thens" will be gone, replaced by a big-time first-grader with a grasp of relevant conversational threads, and a developing instinct for the social cues to tell which story, and when. And then her tales will rise to take their place on the long arc of the living narrative made up of every story ever told.

But for now she stumbles forward, leading with intention and meaning in the absence of all the words, as we ever have, as we ever will, for they are the millennial predecessors of syntax and grammar. When our ancestors grunted and gestured with stone knives and bear-skins, their intention and meaning was still plain to each other, and so we arose. As we ever have, as we ever will.

I know well the frustration of words that fail, that cannot contain the life they describe. When my own stories lay flat on an imaginary page, lifeless as a recitation from any randomly chosen page in the phone book, their content as stilted as a grocery-list of unrelated events, strung together by mere grammar and syntax, "...and then...and then...and then." When all the editorial tricks are just tricks that cannot hope to animate the lifeless heap of characters we made up so we don't have to grunt anymore. And I stare at them until it seems hopeless, all these meaningless squiggles on an electronic page that doesn't actually exist outside the uncreated space of charged particles they inhabit. So it is that tens of thousands of words disappear into digital nullification, countless ones and zeroes recycled for better purposes. Delete.

But some days, when I'm lucky, the love comes in.

When it does —when everything seems to shine, and even the wrong words seem to rhyme— and I'm out on the street and the 3/4 time of my steps counterpoints the 7/8 time of my heart, and every dog's bark and shoddy muffler Dopplering away from me sings a song; the play of light and shadow is a game that the whole world is hoping I'll notice and join in. I'm like a drop of water having rejoined its vast ocean at last, yet still a drop. The breeze chases my heels along and I am subsumed by a love of every single thing, ever.

Every person on the street, every distant soul in far-away lands, my flesh and blood; my family and friends like a fire in my bones. Even those that have betrayed me, every person that has ever cheated me, every criminal that has ever stolen from me, are separated from me only by their own illusion of "otherness." And all the heartbreak in the world —even this I love, in the way that you love a willful child who must learn in their own way; regretful that they must, but content to walk alongside while they do.

Then everything unnecessary passes away, and the words that remain —that actually tell the story, that hold the essence of the life they describe— are animated by the love of what I've beheld. So the breath of life comes across the dry bones of mere words, anima whetting their marrow, such that they rise up to join the long arc of the living narrative, the one that God Himself is writing about each one of us, and literally everything else. A story of every attosecond of existence, every tear fallen, every dream dreamt; about the orbit of subatomic particles, and the beat of a butterfly's wing in China.

A brokenhearted story of love and sacred stones.

Trees  
*Olivier Schopfer*



## The Spoilt Season

*Steve Klepetar*

This is the spoilt season, the dying land.  
Here are weeds and crows and graves.

Trucks growl up our street all night  
and in the morning we pull our shades

against another day of rain and tears.  
Here are angry men wading icy streams.

Here is their music of broken drums.  
Here are drugs and beds with their sheets

torn up, and dust on the nightstand, dust  
on the walls and floor. Someone lived

here once, in wind and fading light,  
when the kitchen hummed, and the scent

of soup went everywhere. She lived  
in a body, painted her image on glass

where it shone in the dark, another star  
made of desire, kissing the brow of sky.

**Ode to the Corner of the Drug House Down the Gravel Road  
Off the Two Lane Highway #51**

*Darren C. Demaree*

While everyone slept  
I set up all of the mirrors  
to face against the walls

& I couldn't be sadder  
that nobody realized  
& nobody thought

that this was strange.  
Come to think of it,  
when was the last time

I saw what I look like?  
I have pictures of myself.  
I was a pretty man.



## **The Stars Are All Dead and Have Fallen**

*Barbara Young*

And with help we loaded the pickup  
with all the other things that no longer functioned.

Washing machine that shook itself to death.  
Ancient computer, dirty face like city ice.  
One stained mattress, upon which no children  
were conceived. And so forth. Drove

somewhere. Nothing grew there but hills  
someone had burned with cigarettes.

Thorns survived. And kudzu. There was a ditch  
where an old Chevrolet dammed the runoff  
and buried itself in red mud. There we did  
our unloading. Appliances rolled downhill

like snake eyes. Newspaper bundles and slick  
magazines fell like bad cards. Sliding down,  
the mattress ripped some kudzu cover away,  
exposed layers of garbage. Households like ours.

A daughter's bicycle with glossy mylar streamers  
looked to have been almost new, but vines  
threaded its spokes and frame,  
stitched it to the earth like Frida Kahlo.

We have returned our portion.

**heel cups**

*Elizabeth McMunn-Tetangco*

heel cups

scars from my grandfather's walker  
on the carpet

**usual questions**

*Christina Sng*

usual questions  
at reunion dinner  
taking the broccoli  
for another spin  
around the plate

crow moon

*Debbie Strange*



## Listen

*Ken Poyner*

I hear the voices of the water. Not mermaid voices. Not fish, nor cetacean, voices. A civilization of voices. The soft, careful voices of warriors plotting. The bruised, back of the hand voices of lovers who believe for stern seconds that passion is prized more if it is endless. The battleship-gray voices of mothers disowning their children. The boastful voices of those who have accomplished nothing. The red glowing barn voices of those scheming wealth out of poverty. The gossamer voices of suppression. One voice that believes there are no voices, shouting. A voice hidden in a far off lagoon, lingering in the shallows like a rifle shot. Brute voices and soft. A community of voices, a society of voices, a civilization of voices, all with mouths at my ear united in one common, tentacled plea: drown, drown.

**Anatomy**  
*Marie Craven*



View Marie Craven's video "Anatomy" at  
<http://gnarledoak.org/issue-12/anatomy/>

## Refuge

*Steve Klepetar*

If sky darkens on a day when you have roamed too far,  
if wind picks up, trembling leaves on familiar trees,

if lightning carves its fiery veins above your head,  
if thunder explodes, and a fury of rain drenches you,

if you stumble in this wet misery on a street  
that all but disappears, I offer you an open door,

and at my table, an honored place. If power lines  
lie sizzling and snaking on the wet ground, we will

find lanterns and candles, some crusty bread  
and plenty of wine. Together we can ride it out,

this storm that rose so suddenly. Others have already  
come, shaken and storm-cursed, but warm now, and dry

in this well-built house, where voices study the daunting  
language of hope, and new songs braid and rise, until fear

is sealed away, and a new, quiet courage spreads around  
us, a lake glimmering at sunset, or moonlight in the spring.

## Editor's Note

This week I took my son to the Bullock Museum of Texas History to check out the Stevie Ray Vaughn exhibit. They had his old Stratocaster under glass, beautiful and beaten to near ruin.

"Why does it look all messed up?" my son asked.

We turned and watched some footage of him performing "Pride and Joy" on Austin City Limits. "He could play like that," I said, "because he practiced so much that his guitar wound up looking like that," I said pointing back to the old Strat.

Maybe it's true, or maybe he bought it already beat up. Still, there's a good lesson there about practice, I think.

Later, I sat at the table to do a little reading and work out exactly what I would write here, cup of coffee topped with whipped cream on the table beside me. The fly that Simon the Cat has been too lazy to kill the past two days buzzed nearby and then I heard more intense buzzing, high pitched and fast. Desperate.

I glanced at my coffee cup just in time to see the fly disappear beneath the whipped cream to a hideous high-temperature doom, those buzzing notes still ringing in my ears.

Then after a moment of silence for the fly and a quick trip to the coffee pot for a fresh cup, I continued reading *Fear of Music* by Jonathan Lethem, an analysis of one of my favorite albums, *Fear of Music* by Talking Heads. That album, and their next one, *Remain in Light*, are the kinds of work that make me want to write until my computer and pen look like Stevie Ray's guitar.



I've a suspicion that pens and computers of many of *Gnarled Oak's* contributors must look pretty well-used too. How else does such fine work as appears here come about except through long practice and hard work. And coffee, too, perhaps.

\* \* \*

This issue ended three weeks ago, and so my apologies for the tardiness. But here we are at last.

I especially liked this issue for the number of videos I was able to include (thanks to Dave Bonta at [Moving Poems](#) for a well-timed shout-out to *Gnarled Oak* that resulted in substantially more video submissions than usually come my way).

And, as always, thank you to all who submit to and read *Gnarled Oak*.

With gratitude and thanks,

James Brush, editor  
Jun 2017

## Contributor Bios

**Tommy Becker** is a poet trapped in a camcorder. He's screened work at Zebra Poetry Film Festival and Visible Verse Film Festival among other national and international film festivals. He writes the poetry, records the video, writes the music and does all the editing to create short music video poems. It's a DIY process at [tommybecker.com](http://tommybecker.com).

**Marie Craven** (Queensland, Australia) assembles short videos from poetry, music, voice, stills and moving images by various artists around the world. Created via the internet, the pieces are collaborative in a way that belongs to the 21st century, with open licensing and social networking key to the process. In 2016 her video 'Dictionary Illustrations' was awarded best film at the Ó Bhéal Poetry-Film Competition in Ireland. To see more: [vimeo.com/mariocraven](http://vimeo.com/mariocraven)

**Neil Creighton** is an Australian poet whose work as a teacher of English and Drama brought him into close contact with thousands of young lives, most happy and triumphant but too many tragically filled with neglect. It made him intensely aware of how opportunity is so unequally proportioned and his work often reflects strong interest in social justice. His recent publications have been in *Poetry Quarterly*, *Autumn Sky Daily*, *Praxis mag online*, *Rats Ass* and *Verse Virtual*, where he is a Contributing Editor. He blogs at [windofflowers.blogspot.com.au](http://windofflowers.blogspot.com.au)

**Darren C. Demaree's** poems have appeared, or are scheduled to appear in numerous magazines/journals, including the *South Dakota Review*, *Meridian*, *New Letters*, *Diagram*, and the *Colorado Review*. He is the author of six poetry collections, most recently *Many Full Hands Applauding Inelegantly* (2016, 8th House Publishing) and is the managing

editor of the *Best of the Net Anthology* and *Ovenbird Poetry*. He currently lives and writes in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.

**Lawrence Elliott** is a retired Journeyman Carpenter of twenty years. He's enjoying a second act in life in the employ of the University of Oregon. He blogs about autobiographical oddities at [Scratched in the Sand](#)

**Tiffany Grantom** is a mother of five, doula, paralegal, wearer-of-many-hats-busy-monger who hopes for a season with time to write a book. Today, just scribbles and lists, and fly-by wording glories. Also found in working clothes at [insightdoula.com](#).

**Steve Klepetar** has received several nominations for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize, including four in 2016. Recent collections include *My Son Writes a Report on the Warsaw Ghetto* and *The Li Bo Poems* (both from Flutter Press). *Family Reunion* (Big Table) and *A Landscape in Hell* (Flutter Press) were released in January, 2017.

**Deborah P Kolodji** is the California Regional Coordinator for the Haiku Society of America, the moderator of the Southern California Haiku Study Group, and a member of the Board of Directors for Haiku North America. Having published over 900 haiku over the last 15 years, her first full-length collection, *highway of sleeping towns*, was recently published by Shabda Press.

**Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy** is a psychiatrist from Bengaluru India, living in England. A trained vocalist and a composer in Indian Classical Music, he writes in Kannada, Sankethi, Tamil and English languages. His haikai writings have been published in reputed journals and anthologies and won

prizes, worldwide. He is currently the Editor of the *Blithe Spirit*, journal of The British Haiku Society.

**Mary McCarthy** has always been a writer, but spent most of her working life as a Registered Nurse. Her work has appeared in many online and print journals, including *Earth's Daughters*, *Gnarled Oak*, *Third Wednesday* and *Three Elements Review*. Her chapbook *Things I Was Told Not To Think About* is available through Praxis magazine online as a free download. She is grateful for the wonderful online communities of writers and poets sharing their work and passion for writing, providing a rich world of inspiration, appreciation, and delight.

**Elizabeth McMunn-Tetangco's** chapbook, *Various Lies*, is available from Finishing Line Press. She co-edits *One Sentence Poems*.

**Matt Mullins** writes and makes videopoems, music, and digital/interactive literature. His work has screened at various festivals in the United States and throughout the world including Visible Verse, Zebra, Videobardo, Liberated Words, Rabbit Heart, and Co-Kisser. He has published poetry and fiction in numerous print and online journals, and is the author of the short story collection *Three Ways of the Saw* (Atticus Books). You can engage his interactive/digital literary interfaces at [lit-digital.com](http://lit-digital.com).

**Marianne Paul** is a Canadian novelist and poet who recently transitioned to short-form poetry, primarily haiku, senryu, haiga and haibun. She was the winner of the 2016 Jane Reichhold Memorial Haiga Competition, multi-media category. Read more of her writing on twitter [@mariannpaul](https://twitter.com/mariannpaul), and on her website [literarykayak.com](http://literarykayak.com).

**Misha Penton** is a new music vocal artist, performance creator, and writer. She composes experimental vocal pieces, sings new music and new opera, and invents and performs new solo and collaborative works. Her projects blossom in many forms: live performance, audio projects, video works, and site specific / installation performances.  
[mishapenton.com](http://mishapenton.com)

**Malintha Perera** writes haiku, tanka, micropoetry as well as longer poems. Her first published haiku book, *An Unswept Path* (2015) is a collection of monastery haiku. She resides in Sri Lanka with her family.

**Ken Poyner's** latest collection of short, wiry fiction, *Constant Animals*, and his latest collections of poetry—*Victims of a Failed Civics* and *The Book of Robot*—can be obtained from [Barking Moose Press](#), or [Sundial Books](#). He often serves as strange, bewildering eye-candy at his wife's power lifting affairs. His poetry of late has been sunning in *Analog*, *Asimov's*, and *Poet Lore*, and his fiction has yowled in *Spank the Carp*, *Café Irreal*, and *Bellows American Review*. Find him online at [kpoyner.com](http://kpoyner.com).

**Tom Sacramona** is a poet living in Plainville, Massachusetts. He is grateful to have haiku published in journals, such as *bottle rockets*, *Mayfly* and *Modern Haiku*. Sacramona is a member of the Boston Haiku Society and the Haiku Society of America. Learn more about haiku: Visit his blog at [tomsacramona.wordpress.com](http://tomsacramona.wordpress.com)

**Olivier Schopfer** lives in Geneva, Switzerland. He likes to capture the moment in haiku and photography. His work has appeared in *The Red Moon Anthology of English-Language Haiku 2014 & 2016*, as well as in numerous online and print journals. He also writes articles in French about etymology and everyday expressions at [Olivier Schopfer raconte les mots](#).

**Christina Sng** is a poet, writer, and artist. She is the author of two haiku collections, *A Constellation of Songs* (Origami Poems Project, 2016) and *Catku* (Allegra Press, 2016). In the moments in between, she finds joy in tending to her herb and bonsai garden. Visit her at [christinasng.com](http://christinasng.com).

**Debbie Strange** is a widely published Canadian short form poet, haiga artist and photographer. Her books include the full-length poetry collection, *Warp and Weft: Tanka Threads* (Keibooks 2015), and the haiku chapbook, *A Year Unfolding* (Folded Word 2017). She invites you to visit her archive at [debbiemstrange.blogspot.ca](http://debbiemstrange.blogspot.ca).

**Elizabeth Vrenios** has had poetry featured in such online poetry columns as: *Clementine*, *Kentucky Review*, *Form Quarterly*, *Scissors and Spackle* and in issues of *The Binnacle*, *Poeming Pidgeon Unsplendid* and *The Edison Review*. Her prize-winning chapbook, *Special Delivery* was published by Yellow Chair Press in the spring of 2016. She is a Professor Emerita from American University, and has spent most of her life performing as a singing artist across Europe and the United States.

**Jane Williams** is an Australian writer based in Tasmania.

**Barbara Young** hasn't been writing much this year. East Nashville got too popular, so she and Jim packed up the cats and moved out to White Bluff. A grocery, two hardware stores, and a bakery that only makes doughnuts. Change is interesting. Because writing prompts can be easier than poems, Barbara sometimes becomes "[Miz Quickly](#)."