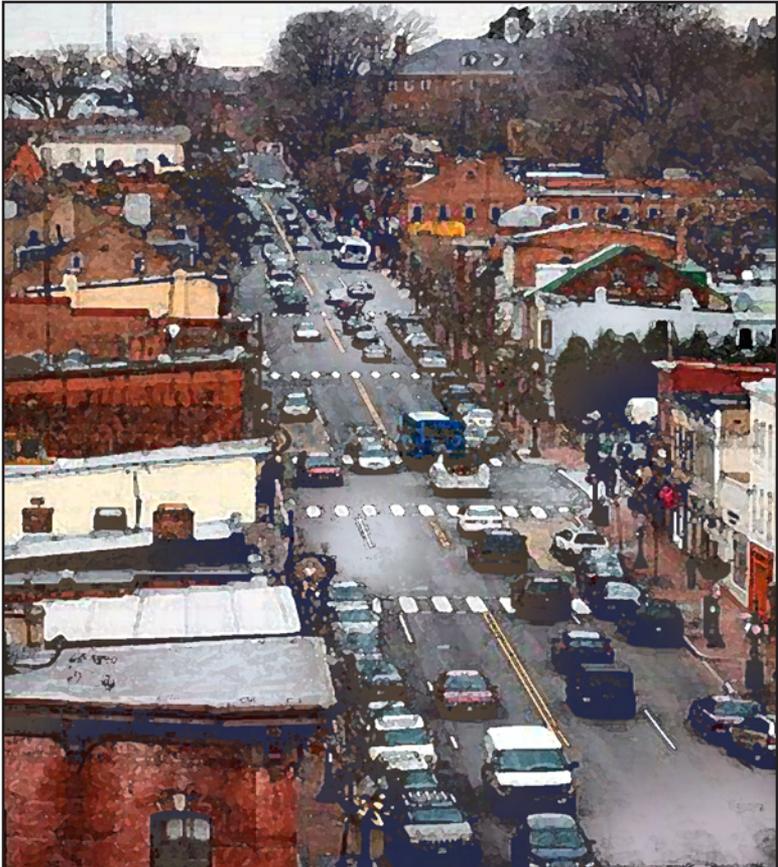


# The Federal Poet

Fall 2007



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THE FEDERAL POETS

9039 Sligo Creek Parkway #1409, Silver Spring MD 20901

<http://www.blehert.com/TheFederalPoets>

## Introduction

THE FEDERAL POETS is the oldest continuously active poetry group in the Washington D.C. area. First convened in 1944, it is a nonprofit organization open to all poets without regard to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or political affiliation.

Members of THE FEDERAL POETS meet at the West End Public Library in Washington, DC, on the third Saturday of every month to read, analyze and discuss their poetry. Visitors are always welcome. Members and visitors who are planning to attend should bring 20 copies of a recently written poem for distribution to those present. The poem will then be discussed with a view to enhancing its chances for publication.

The chief aims of this organization are to improve the members' poems by the exchange of constructive criticism and to increase their exposure through publication and readings.

*The Federal Poet*, containing the best poems written by members, is published semiannually. Local and corresponding members receive it and may submit poems to the editor for consideration and publication.

THE FEDERAL POETS is a chapter of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies and the Academy of American Poets and is also affiliated with the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines.

For membership information, write us or visit our website.

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## Before Sunrise

(reviewing two films)

Calculate the possibilities  
of Céline and Jesse, two seraphs in grunge,  
keeping their last-second promise to meet  
again at a Viennese railway station  
on Beethoven's birthday. Remember,  
they already vowed not to write each other  
or exchange addresses; correspondence,  
in their young experience, serves only to speed  
love's death. So what might happen?  
Neither returns; he comes, she doesn't;  
she comes, he doesn't; one is too late  
or too early; his plane crashes; her train wrecks;  
they reunite, and within minutes  
exhaust their previously inexhaustible  
conversation, or within hours  
open the wounds they failed to inflict  
before; or they elope,  
find jobs, have kids,  
and spend ever after at each other's throats.

This is the point: possibilities  
are not to calculate. The chances  
of their meeting at all; of their wandering  
those streets where rats in Homburgs  
exchanged conspiracies with sickly smiles,  
drove vans over each other, were run aground  
in sewers; of their ascending  
that Ferris wheel where Harry Lime  
offered Holly Martins a hypothetical  
twenty thousand pounds for each crushed rat--  
"Tax-free, old boy, absolutely tax-free"--  
and redeeming that evil with a simple kiss  
were just as infinitesimal  
as the black-and-white trees of the Prater  
regaining their green, the rubble  
being cleared away, the Schönbrunn and Staatsoper  
seeing illumination by night again.

*Miles David Moore*

## Girlfriends

When we first met, it seemed of no great moment.  
Soon, I looked for you to smile me into morning  
each school day. There was no question  
we'd find a way to forge a bit of freedom.  
We found a niche where we could smoke in secret,  
a coughing, smarting start to our long friendship.

Daily-ness developed into a friendship  
I treasure up to this very moment.  
At first, we giggled, shared what was so secret,  
phoned each other first thing in the morning.  
We dated twins, giving us some freedom  
to postpone the looming *what's next?* question.

Perhaps we feared the answer to that question  
would threaten the endurance of our friendship,  
knowing we'd no longer have the freedom  
to share the mood and madness of each moment.  
We pledged there'd never be a morning  
we were needed and held back - it was no secret.

There were of course some things we each kept secret.  
Our families, our careers, were without question  
what filled our thoughts on waking every morning;  
our daily chores, our lives full of new friendship.  
Still, at times, there'd be a sudden moment  
when memories were stirred with easy freedom.

Our bodies no longer have their youthful freedom  
to move with ease. Our pain, our aches, a secret  
we keep from those around us every moment  
to avoid their wearing worry and their questions.  
It's only in our lasting life-long friendship  
that we can share the daily-ness of mourning.

I phoned to hear your voice this very morning,  
to laugh together in that welcome freedom  
formed by years of deepened friendship.

I do not need to keep from you the secret  
that answers have all turned into questions;  
that we marvel, muddle, through our moment.

There is a moment early in the morning  
when questions, *dream? memory?* mix with freedom.  
Distinct and clear - no secret - is our friendship.

*Edna Small*

### No Use?

Yesterday I met a man  
who made his boss angry  
by telling him to shut up.

*"He can't tell me to shut up,"*  
his boss said to me  
as he walked away angrily.  
*"I'm his boss."*

And yet this man said he wanted  
everyone in the world  
to be happy. *"So do I,"* I said.  
*"I've wanted it since I was 3."*  
*"It's not possible,"* he said.  
*"I'm still trying"* I said.

*Pam Blehert*

### **In the Morning**

At home now in my kitchen,  
I watch the steam rise  
from the electric tea kettle spout.  
I drink the tea I brought with me to California,  
wonder why, no matter where I was or where I went,  
no one wanted it, when I offered.

In the morning, San Francisco is cool and gray.  
The sun waits.  
By afternoon, the fog burns off.

I wait for an answer to a life-long question.

*Nancy Allinson*

## I wish I were a Frenchman

I wish I were a Frenchman on my *bicyclette*  
I'd ride around *la Cité avec mon baguette*.  
I'd drink *un bon vin rouge* kept snug inside my *cave*,  
Effuse *panache, aplomb et "parlez-vous français."*

I'd wear a gamey *moustache*, turned up at its points  
And make a *sauce espagnole* for my beefy joints  
Pronounce my *langue* with *grande finesse* and Gallic *verve*.  
I'd ogle *femmes fatales* and paint their *jolie* curves.

When I become a Frenchman, I'll wear dark berets  
And for dessert I'll order chocolate parfaits.  
Take up *causes célébrées*, when I become French,  
*Mangerais mon Camembert*, which gives my nose a wrench.

Find a leggy girl friend who never, ever snores  
Though she may possess *un nez comme Louis Quatorze*.

*Tim Einstein*

## Bike at Seal Cove

Coming back the long way, over sharp slick rocks at the ebb,  
I passed the wedges of darkness where sea caves were eating  
the base of the headland. Then the curve of the fog-chilled beach,  
with its long beds of kelp, like whale-shapes cast up and waiting.  
I had lost track of our quarrel. There was only the last cliff and its  
steps.

Then I saw the bike tire, half of it, standing on edge  
like a slice of lemon, propped up in the dark tangled kelp.  
Why mess with a tire? you'd say. I was worn out, and carrying  
a side of wet cardboard. Let someone else find it, someone younger  
haul it sixty feet up to the trash cans on top of the steps.  
But the incoming tide could cover it, or drag it asunder,  
leave spikes in the sand where kids ran carelessly.

Not just a tire, but the top of a pedal, brand-new —  
in the hump of sand-heavy weed, the handlebars, new.  
(What if there were more, a message, a glove, a hand  
for the glove?) The frame slanted down, disappeared under fronds.  
The whole bike could be buried next tide, or dragged out and ruined.

The seat unscratched, kelp jammed in the springs underneath.  
A new mountain bike—*Explorer*, scrolled on the frame—  
no one to stop me, or help. I dug down to sprockets and chain,  
kept digging till the stuck frame shifted, then finally heaved free  
as the back wheel came up like a platter, shrouded in weed.

Hands cramped with the cold, no tools. I left the green slime  
round the gears, and wheeled her out slowly—I didn't dare ride.  
Sand caked on the tires, dead weight that wouldn't shake loose.  
There was still the sixty-foot cliff. One step at a time,  
lift the front wheel and follow, the best I could do.

Near the top a stranger, on his way down, could he help?  
About forty, black jacket, silver rings in his ear.  
He'd seen some kids throw a bike from the cliff last night—  
too far off to stop them, he caught up and asked them *What for?*  
They denied it of course—*We didn't do nothing. What bike?*  
Tires must've floated her, tires and a lucky high tide.  
Then he took the bike in both hands—the strength of men  
who can lift without even trying!—up the last dozen steps.

\*\*\*

You gave me your coffee and jacket, I told you the story.  
You helped the innkeeper load the bike in his car.

That night we talked of the bike, reclaimed by its owner.  
Of the police, who didn't have time to chase kids on the cliffs.  
Of the man who'd taken some risk—as we might not—  
who said he wasn't the type to go blabbing to cops.  
Of the kids running wild, looking for things to throw off.

I thought of my anger, wild when I set out that morning,  
not knowing what was worth saving, what to let go.

Then I saw, before sleep pulled like a tide and washed over,  
far out, the tires and the kelp, torn from their moorings,  
floating and turning together, moving slowly to shore.

*Judith McCombs*

### Our Little Chipmunk

There it sits,  
the tiny chipmunk,  
quietly  
in the corner  
of our patio  
waiting –

Waiting  
for what?

For  
the new morning  
to provide excitement —  
for being chased  
around patio,  
garden, every busy road  
by  
necessity, hunger, fear?

There it sits,  
the little chipmunk,  
on the lookout —

*Ingeborg Carsten-Miller*

## A Guilty Trespasser

A moth flies into my kitchen  
The yellow walls offer the moth a freeway  
to the fluorescent light fixture  
The moth would like to ride,  
Opening and closing itself for endless miles  
Until the crash – when I flip the switch to off  
The moth crouches on the floor  
A guilty trespasser  
Finds my foot

*Nancy Allinson*

## Talking

I talked to an old man  
who knew the truth many years ago  
and did nothing.  
I talked to a young man who  
didn't know there was any truth.  
I couldn't talk to a man who wouldn't listen.  
I couldn't listen to a man who wouldn't talk.  
But I keep trying.  
They are part of my world.

*Pam Blehert*

**We have little in common,**  
My love, but a great deal in  
Rare.

*Dean Blehert*

### Death of a Barber

The woman in the smock hacks at my hairy  
Scalp with her scissors as the daylight fades.  
"A heart attack--he went so fast. Poor Larry,"  
She says with all the warmth of her steel blades.  
A magazine from June 2002  
Lies dogeared in an empty chair. The shears  
Snap briskly to the swish of rinsed shampoo.  
My disembodied hair drifts down like years.

The strip mall's lights begin their nightly glow.  
Across the street, the Pilgrim Holiness  
Church's neon sign blares JESUS SAVES.  
The streams of peacock efflorescence flow  
In waves along an orphaned patch of grass--  
What Whitman called the uncut hair of graves.

*Miles David Moore*

### **When You're Told**

When you're told you are stupid the first time  
your eyes bug out

When you're told you are stupid the second time  
your heart almost pops out

The third time your brain Xeroxes the stab—

Stupidity gushes inside you  
Stains your feelings  
Chokes your freedom  
Rubs out your creativity  
Smothers your choices  
Hushes your mind  
Grills your intelligence

When you're told you are smart the fourth time  
your eyes go blank  
your heart beats slower

*Pamela Passaretta*

## Unexpected Bliss

What better gift  
than  
an unexpected gift  
totally out of the blue

— there —

You  
are never alone:

There is always somebody  
thinking of you!

*Ingeborg Carsten-Miller*

**Nausikaa (and Odysseus)**

he stepped from behind an olive tree  
a gleaming stranger  
naked from the sea

and all her maidens fled the game

like a flame  
before her wonder-opened eyes  
he appeared in her soul's first eternity

and his words gilt the air  
as he knelt  
to grace her with her very name

a virgin  
vision-wed to olive banks that edge the sea  
she dances alone  
or swims near the rocks  
where her wedding sheets were piled

the river breaks upon whitening ranks of foam  
and sinks into the sea

the day dims

and she  
a king's only child  
dances alone

*Charles Gerald DuBose, Jr.*

**Mother, Widowed**

Tear-drops of dawn dampen the grass  
*you hover in my sleep*  
mine brim behind still closed lids  
*I never heard you weep*

Alone with age, with vision dim  
*I see you silence fear*  
you heed the calling of each day  
*I weep your unshed tears.*

*Edna Small*

## The Loser

I knew how to lose girlfriends.  
In the mall they slid their arms free

and chained themselves to kiosks,  
calling for a real man to unlock

them with his teeth, while I pretended  
I didn't know the woman and the

resigned guys who took out key chains  
and decided to take them home.

At restaurants they pushed themselves  
through too-small windows, scraping

their knees on the way to their new  
boyfriends. Movie theaters built new

exits beneath the seats for them to  
escape, and my parents didn't bother

cooking meals for our visits, knowing  
I'd rather just eat pizza after the girls

refused to come in, holding my hands  
while revealing it was just a joke

gone wrong and now they were ready  
to reveal the punch line: goodbye.

Then when it all seemed to be going  
well, I proposed and they cried

for more than the appropriate amount  
of time. I had to force the rings

on their fingers, and they wiggled  
toward the other side of the couch.

On the wedding day I put on my  
suit, a uniform to wear just before  
charging over the trenches of hope.  
Outside the church a line of best men  
readied their cars, checking gas  
and breaks, waiting for my brides  
to run out the steps, rose petals flying  
out behind them, the veils drifting  
up for me to catch while I watched  
them drive away, the tin cans still  
behind my rented black limousine.  
I'd eat more than my share of cake.  
I'd lick the frosting off my fingers  
and pretend they were not my own.

*Donald Illich*

### **Flight and the Rosebud Tree**

Your face arrives in the rosebud tree.  
I recite the slant of days, the arching hymn  
of clouds budding purple in my sky view.  
Sun travels like a song, red as rhyme.

The silent white sky climaxes like a lie  
in heat, her hair crumpled,  
the circle afraid of notice, too tame  
to cheat God's help. A rabbit claimed sons,  
her hair caught fire aloft.

I repeat the arrival of brown roses,  
translate feelings cold, know the stray  
hair of lemon love. Blue eyes imagine music  
sleeping broken, bright. I wander  
through grief, rainy, your face gray  
and safe. A basin of regret laughs.

*Mary L. Westcott*

## The Spanish Seaman's Widow

she climbs the stone steps  
with her empty basket

up the winding stone steps  
to a flat roof  
where lines of white linen  
hang in the sun

as she steps upon the rooftop  
high above the street  
the winds billowing the sheets  
fill her eyes with the sails  
of her husband's ships

and she drops the basket  
and runs into their midst

standing erect  
among those windblown sails  
like the proud mast of one of his ships  
her black hair streaming like a pennant in the wind

finally she looks up  
to see the tower  
where he would stand  
gazing out to sea

and grips the hem of a sheet  
and turns round and round and round  
binding her body  
in layer upon layer of white linen

standing as in a shroud  
among the billowing sheets  
under the looming tower  
muffling her sobs

*Charles Gerald DuBose, Jr.*

**Can you know?**

Could I console the worm for its dark labors?  
Could I measure by my light the fragments of  
a rainbow's sigh, the crystalline beat of  
winter thunder, night over  
the ocean, the silent flight of  
the pelican? Could I be so watchful? And perhaps,  
if so, would they turn into sentient patterns,  
knowledge of what  
they are? O worm, o pelican, o joyous  
thunder, can you know me?

*Pam Blehert*

## Dialog With a Lyrical Poet

I write of rain and worms. You ask in reply  
if you could measure by your light “the fragments  
of a rainbow’s sigh, the crystalline beat  
of winter thunder...” -- damn! Give you a crack  
for your lyrical wedge, and you’ll squeeze in  
rainbows, crystals and flocks of grinning  
big-nosed, scrawny-necked birds who smell  
like dead fish (“the silent flight of the pelicans”).

It’s my fault, saying that rain and light  
don’t intend to become flowers.  
I should have said the shit doesn’t intend  
to fertilize the rutabaga or the flakes  
of scaly dry skin don’t intend to feed  
the carpet mites.

After all, this is the late 20th Century;  
can rain still make flowers and rainbows  
after the Holocaust?

But what’s done is done, and here we are  
in your lyrical universe...or were, just a  
second ago -- where’d it go?

Perhaps our poems, too, become more or less  
than they intend, these sentient patterns  
that keep turning into me before they have become  
knowledge of what they are. O poems, if you know us,  
do we then know ourselves?

*Dean Blehert*

**The Preemie Butterfly Girl**

*Short Diary of a Metamorphosis*

Her life began  
in an incubator—  
Years later  
she flew  
until she grew—  
Landed  
shedding her wings  
grasping the earth  
every day—  
Not in a far away  
hotel room  
but in her own apartment  
in the same city  
with her man  
working together—  
No hopping a ride by air  
to hostess an airplane  
pleasing people—  
Now reborn  
without the uniform  
to rule her world  
the steel fuselage  
is replaced  
by inner armor—  
Reinforcing  
her grounding  
transforming  
The Preemie Butterfly girl!

*Pamela Passaretta*

## Angel Wings

If faith could  
lift a life higher,  
hazy moon could  
flirt with sky,  
subdue thunder and snowy ice,  
fetch angels to earth.

Autumn blows  
in billowing waves.  
A thief pulls  
shades on days.  
Angels float to cloudy peaks,  
perch on heaven's side.

Clipping clouds  
like winged angels  
shadowing  
children, we  
fly through beds of down feathers  
for the Beloved.

Clouds of tears,  
tongues of grey land,  
bare mountains  
cast shadows  
on dowdy plains while angels  
slip on wings to fly.

*Mary L. Westcott*

**Waxman**

If you have ever over-reported your expenses  
Or underreported your income to the IRS  
Waxman will know  
If you have ever done anything unauthorized or illegal  
In any country in the world  
Or in any star in the sky  
Waxman will find out  
And call you before the Committee  
on Oversight and Reform.  
And depose you at great length  
In 2007 Congressman Waxman became  
chairman of this committee  
Even with his 434 overdrafts on the House bank

*Hunter Alexander*

## Inner Loop

inside the y

inside the loop

the duck

of your ear

and this subway car

full of ducks

*Lee Gieseke*

---

Note: The silhouette of the inner contour of your ear (in most cases) forms the shape of a duck's head.

## Received Wisdom

*Wednesday, September 27, 2006, William Grimes, writing for the New York Times on a new book about Prussia published by Harvard University Press, Iron Kingdom: "...Mr. Clark, who gently but insistently exposes the flaws in most of the received wisdom about his subject."*

Of all the wisdom that I've ever won  
And all the smart things that anyone's done  
The sort that's best, I do believe

For, what the hell could ever be said  
In favor of wisdom that's NOT in my head.  
If I never heard nor ever read it,  
How in the world would I ever get it?

When I go searching for answers I need,  
I depend on wisdom that I have received.  
I don't think that it would be very fair  
To ask me to use smarts that aren't really there

Harvard is very "received", you may say.  
More critical thinking should come into play  
When passing along some deep sagacity  
The very best part of which is its veracity.

How in the world would I ever come by it?  
It's long been known that you cannot buy it.  
Our sense is not very common, we know  
Considering the sense that we generally show.

Important decisions get made every day;  
Many a fork you'll find on your way.  
The road not taken can only be perceived  
By dint of wisdom that has been received.

*Tim Einstein*

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