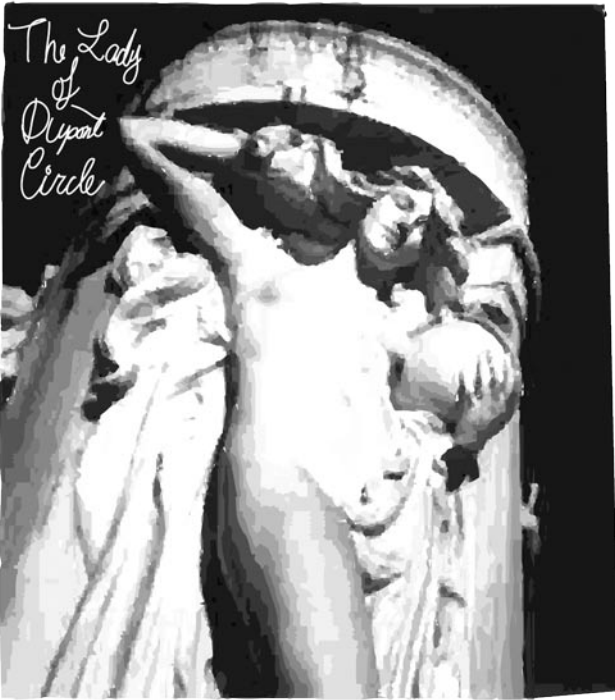


The Federal Poet



Fall 2003

The Federal Poet

Fall 2003

Vol. LX, No. 2

Introduction

THE FEDERAL POETS is the oldest continuously active poetry group on 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.

THE FEDERAL POETS
9039 Sligo Creek Parkway #1409, Silver Spring MD 20901

Copyright © 2003 by The Federal Poets. All rights revert to authors upon publication.

Subscription (U.S.) \$10.00
ISSN 1041-4886

President, Federal Poets, and Editor: Nancy Allinson
Publication design and typesetting: Words & Pictures East Coast
Cover Design: Pam Coulter Blehert
Published by **THE FEDERAL POETS**

Table of Contents

The Friendship Club	1
<i>Dean Blehert</i>	
Lunas	2
<i>Rosemary Winslow</i>	
Fairland Care: Voices, Doors	4
<i>Judith McCombs</i>	
The Way Things Ought to Be	6
<i>Ann Rayburn</i>	
Dali World	7
<i>Miles David Moore</i>	
Remembered Greatness	8
<i>Dean Blehert</i>	
A Folk Tale Set to Music or a Swan Named Gottfried	9
<i>Harlan M. Kelly</i>	
MUSIC	10
<i>Averille E. Jacobs</i>	
You Move Me	11
<i>Jessica Laguerre</i>	
Twelve Reasons Why I Know There is a God	12
<i>Dorcas Tabitha</i>	
Twelve Proofs that There is No God	13
<i>Lee Giesecke</i>	
Things Left Behind	14
<i>Ann Rayburn</i>	
Love Note	15
<i>Jean E. Leyman</i>	
Now You See It...	16
<i>Dean Blehert</i>	
Care For Me	17
<i>Jessica Laguerre</i>	
OOPS	18
<i>Averille E. Jacobs</i>	

Tears	18
<i>Ingeborg Carsten Miller</i>	
OBL	19
<i>H. Alexander</i>	
Triolet	19
<i>Jean E. Leyman</i>	
Leap	20
<i>H. Alexander</i>	
Headlands, from the Post-Concussion Journals	21
<i>Judith McCombs</i>	
He was so well loved	23
<i>Pam Blehert</i>	
You'll Have Known it All the Time	24
<i>Nancy Allinson</i>	

The Friendship Club

People are hard on each other. When I was 8, I wanted to start a friendship club. Everyone who joined would get to be a friend of all the others who joined, especially me. What we'd DO. . . I never got that far, thinking if I could just get a bunch of other kids to join a friendship club, the rest would take care of itself (but when I thought of it, all I thought of was me talking, explaining my ideas to friendly ears).

I persuaded just one kid, Tom Conner, a tall, smiley, slow-talking, geeky kid who agreed with everything I said (something I hadn't yet learned to distrust), so we were going to have a friendship club, but before we could find a third, he got busy playing with this weaselly kid who shared his interest in old cars and who liked to walk up to me and punch me in this face, until one day I walked into his punch and grabbed him and wrestled him to the ground (being bigger), after which he left me alone, but so did Tom. Would you like to be my friend?

Dean Blehert

Lunas

Months after it happened, someone said
a butterfly attending the hands
means someone you know's returned,

so was it you
or only the cabbage white
here for juice left on my finger

stayed five entire minutes
once at the beginning and once at the end
of that summer?

And now this morning—three lunas,
more than I've seen in my life,
and each one large as a hand,

each one as if two
pale green bodies
curved toward each other

or two ethereal ears
listening without sound.
Bright angels,

rapt all night by the porch light
I forgot to turn off,
you're pinned to the screen

with dozens
of your ordinary earth-toned cousins.
I don't know if you're alive.

Somewhere
a whole town may have died.
Somewhere a family.

That time I turned to you
when my relatives turned away—
you listened, I almost couldn't

believe it. You gathered me.
I said *thank you thank you*.
Then left.

One day you turned half-
paralyzed. I came back,
calmed your troubled head in my hands.

Now I take one rare moth down,
it tilts like an open book,
dead-weight, light in my palms.

Then put it back.

Next morning the whole tribe is gone.

Rosemary Winslow

Fairland Care: Voices, Doors

*Put the dirt where dirt belongs
You sweetie pie you hear my song
You didn't see me long and long
Go away where you belong!*

An old woman's voice—is she alone?—
coaxes and taunts; her singsong carries
from one of the many open rooms
to the corner of the home's long hall,
where I scan an oil-spill *Geographic*
and watch the door of one shut room.
Behind me, in the blue-green lounge
TV plays on, too loud, the lulling
boombox of the old, who are wheeled
to watch, or drowse, or dream. I wait
in the hall, so Esther won't be lost
when she leaves her sister's private room.

*You've loved each other seventy years,
I used to say as I held her hand
to guide her past the doors, the aides,
the visitors who look like friends.
Last week our comfort words broke down—
she didn't nod or smile, till I changed
to *all your lives*, then *a real long time*.*

One sister's smart, but left the world
for a voice that rules through her alone.
The other's sane, or used to be—
a therapist, in the years before
Alzheimer's moved into her head.
On good days they can patch a visit:
the smart one smiles and shares her food,
the sane one brings the other out
to meet her friends in the corridor.
On better days their visits last

till Esther wants to leave. On worse,
the imperious voice won't let her in—
or calls for Esther, then casts her out.
Worse or better, the present slips,
and Esther can't say where she's been—
just that we need to find Elaine.

In the hall the voice from a farther room
resumes its taunting schoolyard rhymes:
Go take the key go lock the door
You take the cake I can't take more
Put the hurt where hurt belongs
Go away where you belong!

Did I hear *dirt* or *hurt*? The door
I watch stays shut. Disasters, weather,
pleasures blare from the TV.
In the hall, as in a street, the helped
and helpers pass. I find a *Digest*,
thumb its comfort tales of heroes,
risks, and brave enduring love.

Judith McCombs

First published in: *Prairie Schooner* 76:1 (Spring 2002):136-37.

(Ed Note: "Heron in Shadowed Waters" was reprinted in the last Federal Poet from *Prairie Schooner* 76:1 (Spring 2002):135-36)

The Way Things Ought to Be

On good days, our mother was elegant
as a spray of tulips
in a silver bowl,
nodding slightly toward the sun.
Her monologues at dusk
glowed of cigarettes and scotch,
amber like her hair, reflected in the glass
that rolled across the linen table cloth

as if to join the smoky jars, the scent
of roses on her dressing table.
In good times, we loved the weekly ritual
of the changing of her purses,
shaken out above the bed,
coins, hankies, powder, combs.
Polished fingernails brushed tobacco flakes
from counterpane to floor.

We understood the goodness of sharp corners
on freshly sheeted beds, of notes
with monograms, pleats beneath hot irons,
herbs arranged by alphabet. In matching
pinafores and blouses, we set out
her shoes, lined them up
like soldiers on the floor, waiting
for their next command performance.

Ann Rayburn

Dali World

(for Grace Cavalieri)

Ants weep from the wall.
The crack of the eyelid widens
across the length of your room.
God help you if it opens.

You look at your reflection, forgetting
there's no such thing as a gentle mirror.
Tigers in full blood rage
leap from your pomegranate head,
revealing your soul as the bare soles
of Christ as He ascends to Heaven
still nailed to His cross.

Your watch melts on your wrist.
You feel it burn into your veins:
the poison of time, the folly
of trying to cage memory in gold.
You choose to leave your room,
to live madly in public,
to tell the bourgeoisie balancing
fur-cosseted teacups on their knees
that it's all just a circus,
that you control it utterly
with a flick of your whip mustache,
while ants weep from the closed eye
that grows in your wall and waits.

Miles David Moore

(First published in *Minimus*)

Remembered Greatness

A lady from a local paper interviewed me
(doing “something about poetry”).
Her last question was Who among current poets
will be remembered as great (ME! ME! ME! -
TEACHER, ME! ASK ME!),
and I said I didn’t know.

Pam, I could promise to remember you
if you’ll remember me - as a great. . .
a great you and me?
But I can’t imagine you ever reduced
to a memory merely. You will always stand
in the way of memory of you
just as I am always here to interfere
with my memory of myself -

and who remembers whoever
wrote the works called Shakespeare’s -
Who can see more than
the vaguest outline through all that
blinding light?

Dean Blehert

A Folk Tale Set to Music or a Swan Named Gottfried

In an opera Wagner wrote
a white swan small and tame
must pull a heavy boat.
Most don't recall its name.

In this opera Wagner wrote
a lady faces shame
when comes on stage afloat
some guy to save the dame.

This hero's come by boat
and has a massive frame
which any swan who'd tote
would win 'mongst swans great fame.

He's from some place remote.
This sets her heart aflame.
Soon both with love are smote
which they in song proclaim.

The guy takes off his coat.
She begs he give his name.
He won't. This gets her goat.
She weds him just the same.

Then some villains who would gloat
prod her to learn his name.
They're nasty types who dote
on evil, shame and blame.

To that march which Wagner wrote
to bed the wed pair came,
but love's not antidote.
The villains win their game.

So he who'd come by boat
tells name and whence he came.
He leaves on a high note.
The swan wins no acclaim.

Harlan M. Kelly

MUSIC

I'm pregnant with music.
I hope it'll be a philharmonic orchestra or a
jazz quartet complete with a cool girl singer.

Music is what I'm pregnant with.
The Doc told me, "Forget the orchestra.
Forget the jazzy quartet 'cause it's twin
Mahogany Stradivarius violins you're carryin."

Averille E. Jacobs

You Move Me

It's hard to resist the urge I have
To retaliate in kind.
Your attacks are swift, so cold, so neat
I nearly lose my mind.

And I don't like who I become
Whenever you're around.
Your misery infects and spreads.
It lingers and surrounds.

You move me with offensive ease.
Your hatred coats and stains,
'Til all that I can think or want
To do is cause you pain.

Jessica Laguerre

Twelve Reasons Why I Know There is a God

because Darwin could not explain organs of sight.
because stomachs do not digest themselves.
because gene mutations are hardly ever beneficial.
because of the Second Law of Thermodynamics.
because the sciences that contradict the Bible are the least
 scientific of the sciences.
because people only use 10% of their brains.
because there are Jews.
because Jews are a taunt, and a byword everywhere.
because Israel is a nation again.
because the Bible describes nuclear warfare.
because sinful man could have never invented a pure god.

Dorcas Tabitha

Twelve Proofs that There is No God

Because there is suffering.

Because it doesn't go on long enough—
life, that is, not the suffering

Because there is evil

And because parasites are really,
really disgusting

Because God's an excuse for hate

Because if God were God,
why would He ever make us?

Because men made gods in their own image,
and "God" is cut from the same stone

And because consciousness grasps the finite—
something the infinite cannot do

Because ethics is hard-wired, mostly,
so no God is needed

Because of Occam's razor—
no unneeded entities, please

Because is is
and always was

And because the beauty of the world
is profound

Lee Giesecke

Things Left Behind

Through the window, a landscape
after rain. The black and white cat drinks
from a puddle in the street, while I look up
from my book to wonder
if she tastes some essence of the bird,
who washed and preened there just an hour ago.
We stumble into these encounters daily.
Last week a scientist told us how,
according to his calculations, each of us

has inhaled molecules from Caesar's last breath,
the very ones released as he cried *Et tu, Brute?*,
which some might say explains our taste
for war and mayhem. Zen masters speak
of the shapes of things left behind, the outlines
of a world of illusions: the matted grass,
for instance, when the lion rises from his sleep.
Or your gloves, lying on the chair,
their remembered shapes of absent hands.

I find your comments in this book you left,
pencilled in the margins. My finger traces *Yes!*, or
This could never be, as if it were following
the curve of your smile, which lingers
in the corner of my vision
just as your thoughts do on the page.
Tonight you'll be back with your warm skin
tasting of spices. Meanwhile I am like the cat
circling the rain puddle, circling her yellow saucer,
waiting for the taste of fresh cream.

Ann Rayburn

Previously published in *Minimus* Vol. 10, 2002

Love Note

I formed and dressed a loving thought
In robes of shining radiance
And tied it with a lover's knot
Of silk embroideries.
Then with a final secret kiss
I tossed it to the breeze.

And up it went to the opal skies
On its joyous way to you.
You caught it with a practiced hand
And plucked it to the core.
"Is this all there is? You asked,
"Is there nothing more?"

Jean E. Leyman

Now You See It...

Milky mist boiling out over the bay
lifts and briefly unveils
the Golden Gate Bridge,
behind it a mosaic of sun-washed rose
and pearl houses crowding the hills,
then resettles, swallowing up the sun.

Lightning seizes a landscape in its flash
of daylight, etching every blade of grass
onto the retina, then loses it to starless night.

Love, in the play of glittering eyes,
reveals vast futures, instantly lost
in the next blink of doubt.

The suddenness estranges us,
not that we can't still see it—
we can't UNsee it—
but that we can't believe we ever saw
what still we see.

Dean Blehert

Care For Me

Doctor, will you see me now?
I'm in a lot of pain.
Please don't rush me, brush me off,
Assume my stress inane.

Look at me. Please see me here.
I'm saying something's wrong.
Tell me; test me. I don't want
To suffer overlong.

Doctor, please examine me.
My fear's at fever pitch.
Care for me as though I were
White and male and rich.

Jessica Laguerre

OOPS

once I met a man with a pacemaker
he said he couldn't get too excited
so we tried
blew out his battery
and he died

Averille E. Jacobs

Tears

Put
your
tears
on
paper
to
let
them
cry
out
their
woe.

Ingeborg Carsten Miller

OBL

Among the taller wood with ivy hung
bin Laden plays and dances round his young
He sniffs and barks if any passes by
And swings his gun and turns prepared to fly
The horseman hurries by, he bolts to see
The Captain sees them and Turk goes by
And gets a knife and prods the hole to try
They all get still and lie in safety sure
Come out again when everything's secure
And start and snap at choppers overhead
Who've come to render Osama bin Laden dead.

H. Alexander

Triolet

The squirrel is an acrobat
On the ground or in the air.
Amazing to the little cat
The squirrel is an acrobat
Whatever can one think of that
Who can only sit and stare?
The squirrel is an acrobat
On the ground or in the air.

Jean E. Leyman

Leap

Cyberbanking, cybertrading and cyberspeculation
Can be scary
If you play
puts and calls against the box
Contemplating hedging and
Now is the August of our being absent without leave
When the London Interbank Offered Rate
is holding steady
and the gold fixing is cancelled
because of lack of interest.

H. Alexander

Headlands, from the Post-Concussion Journals

Inside the head
a landscape shirts, goes under.
In a Netherlands a great sea floods
across the waking dike, where tourists drive,
floods past the inland sleeping dike,
where farms lie safe, and past
the inmost dreaming dike, all bulwarks
broken through and flooded deep.
Stubs of earthworks, pathways gone.
A North Sea cresting, curling, an endless
glittering reach of muddied salt
where tides wash through the cared-for fields,
the small tree-shadowed homes.

A ladder floating, pale wooden
rungs, no hands, no cries.

I wake at two or three or four
each night, stars, moon, blackness
sealing grey. Inside the head
the tilting neuron paths, the reptile
brain set free. In easier times
I seem to stand aside and watch
from some safe place while giant seas
spill through, the deep obliterating
waters claim their own, the crests
of foam play out. A curious pleasure
as the flood breaks through this life
I've built, as join and tie give way,
it's gone, I'm carried, free.

*** **

On the long drive home from Stratford, when my head
could not process or screen out the lights and sounds
and vibrations of travel, my daughter took the back
roads mostly, so she could find green, quiet places for

us to stop and walk, safe from jolting changes, until I could go on for another hour or so. She was the able one, the comforter. Once, just inside the New York state line, I saw a sign for a something dam, and had her turn onto a wooded hillside road along a creek. Paradise Road, the sign said, just before the asphalt ended. The gravel Paradise wound up past scrubby trees, the unseen creek on our left, small chained-off tracks to unseen hillside cabins on our right. No cars or trucks came by. As the way got narrower she wanted to turn back. We've come this far, I said, can we give it another five minutes? Then a curve, a long slow rise, and at last across the valley a huge earth wall, the dam. A dam that held, with a glittering lake beyond. At the side a small white building, almost windowless, no one in sight, Keep Out.

The top of the dam was a gravel road, Keep Out, chain fence with barbed wire strands. My daughter pulled over and got out, waiting in the shadow of the car at the side of the road, while I walked sideways down the slope, across the bulldozed flats of clay and scattered stones, where small brown weeds could hardly grow. In the dry spillway beyond, low shrubs took hold, no trees. In the levelled valley where I walked for a long, long time, dry clay and red-brown split-off stones were everywhere, a host of shards flung here and there. At last I looked for a stone to take, to remember this still safe place, but each shard I picked had in its shallow curving underside a spider's nest. White threads, small life. I put each back, carefully. The huge wall held. The waters safe behind, the valley safe below. My daughter, keeping watch. The ordinary blue-grey sky above. Another chance.

Judith McCombs

He was so well loved

It used to be enough
to steal a loaf of bread
to have your head
claimed by the better man.

We go on killing in the auspices
of the food god.

You might say of the fleet
antelope
that he was so well loved
by the lion
that the lion
(being the fleeter)
just went ahead
and made the antelope
a part of him.
Ergo,
he ate him up
malgré tout ses efforts.
If you find yourself half-eaten,
look for the lion,
the vulture, the hyena
lurking in the tall grass
loving you.

Pam Blehert

You'll Have Known it All the Time

(Italicized lines are from Grace Cavalieri's poem, How to Obtain)

It'll happen when you least expect it
Suddenly you will understand
the inner and outer loops of the beltway
as your car veers into the rain-glazed night of a
Saturday alone
you'll be headed finally in the right direction
without hesitation, with truth.

When you're telling a friend what you think,
the police officer who gave you a ticket on a Friday night,
who accused you of making an improper right hand
turn on yellow
will knock on you door and give you back
the point you lost.

When you're playing crazy eights,
your high school guidance counselor will interrupt
your game
waving your IQ in her hand
and you'll grab it from her
before it comes an impostor
tattooed on your arm in blue.

You will notice it
the wave in your hair that asserts itself
no matter how long you roll it out.

You always knew it.
Your voice and its language
will play a duet on the stage
where lights are friends, applause is heard first
inside the brain.

You will start seeing it
in the same way you see the fall colors drape your window:
you'll open your heart to the crimson mansion,
you'll open your arms to the chartreuse stairway
you'll hold onto the bannister of rain soaked tree trunks
that go deep into the earth and push into the clouds
 all at once,
And of loving *you will say*
"Is this all there is to it"
You'll have known it all the time.

Nancy Allinson

Index

A

H. Alexander 19,20

Nancy Allinson 25

A Folk Tale Set to Music or a Swan Named Gottfried 9

B

Dean Blehert 1,8,16

Pam Blehert 23

C

Care For Me 17

Ingeborg Carsten Miller 18

Grace Cavalieri 24

Grace Cavalieri 7

D

Dali World 7

F

Fairland Care: Voices, Doors 4

Frantic Egg 6

Friendship Club, The 1

G

Lee Giesecke 13

H

Headlands, from the Post-Concussion Journals 21

He was so well loved 23

J

Averille E. Jacobs 10,18

K

Harlan M. Kelly 10

L

Jessica Laguerre 11,17

The Federal Poets

Leap 20
Jean E. Leyman 15,19
Love Note 15
Lunas 2

M

Judith McCombs 5,22
Minimus 7,14
Miles David Moore 7

N

Now You See It... 16

O

OBL 19
OOPS 18

P

Prairie Schooner 5

R

Ann Rayburn 6,14
Red Cedar Review 22
Remembered Greatness 8

T

Dorcas Tabitha 12
Tears 18
Things Left Behind 14
Triolet 19
Twelve Proofs that There is No God 13
Twelve Reasons Why I Know There is a God 12

W

The Way Things Ought to Be 6
Rosemary Winslow 3

Y

You'll Have Known it All the Time 24
You Move Me 11

Notes:

