

# ESCOM Journal

May/June 2023



Emeritus Students  
College of Marin

*Lifelong Learning*

*Lifelong Doing*

*Lifelong Friendship*

***ESCOM is as bountiful as the season***

*Photo: Marilyn Bagshaw*

Hello ESCOM Members:

Spring is bursting out all over, and so is ESCOM. Our monthly *Spotlight Presents* programs are going strong with new author programs and meaningful talks. We have a membership coffee planned for June at the IVC campus. Our clubs are continuing to thrive with renewed energy. We are also starting to train folks on computer skills with Marin County and Senior Planet.

Covid taught us that Zoom is a useful medium to keep us growing. While not all of us like the computer as our connection, everyone can agree it has kept us working together. We have taken to it just as a kid learns to ride a bike; it gets us places we need to go.

And speaking of places to go, ESCOM is now 50 years old. There will be a celebration of our birthday on Saturday,

October 14 at the beautiful Jonas Center on the Indian Valley Campus from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. AgeWave CEO Ken Dychtwald will inspire us as the Keynote Speaker, Monologist Josh Kornbluth will entertain us with his wit and wisdom, and singer Desiree Goyette will thrill us with a cabaret of new songs. There will be food, friends and fun for all. Mark your calendars.

In case you haven't heard, College of Marin President, David Wain Coon, will retire this coming December, after 12 years at the helm. He has been ESCOM's mentor and partner throughout the last decade, and has kept us all afloat in some rocky harbors. Multiply the ESCOM problems by 1,000 and we get some idea of his challenges to keep the college alive. Thank you, Dr. Coon, for your amazing service to all our communities.

Enjoy the longer days with warmth this spring. Please let us know what you might want ESCOM to include this year and how we can combine our energy and continue to grow together. Contact us at [escom@marin.edu](mailto:escom@marin.edu) with your ideas.

Gary Gonser. ESCOM President

## **Mark Your Calendar**

**October 14, 2023  
ESCOM 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday  
Bash**

**1 to 4 pm  
Jonas Center  
Indian Valley Campus  
Novato**



Elaine Thornton



Laura Harrison

## In Memoriam

### Ralph Mead



I'm writing to thank all the ESCOM members, current and past, and especially the book, film and opera clubs whose work gave voice to my father's passion for the arts.

Ralph Mead, passed away unexpectedly on April 11, 2023. He was a longtime Marin resident and ESCOM member with deep New York City roots who put as much passion into giving a talk at ESCOM as he did his classes at Yale or Harvard.

He especially liked the ESCOM Opera Club that met on the IVC Indian Valley campus. He was a *real world* person so he would go down to the club regularly to share his deep knowledge of opera. He showed the group an Italian Film made by Franco Zeffirelli of *La Traviata*, composed by his favorite Opera composer Giuseppe Verdi. He took meticulous notes to share because he cared so much that people really understood both the opera and film's nuance.

My father wrote avidly and was a student of song writing. He contributed a piece in the spring issue of the early days of the ESCOM newsletter, which I encourage you to revisit.

The pandemic marked the end of my father's engagement with the club and perhaps the end of that era. Print had given way to digital and in person to Zoom, but my father didn't much like computers and he was always a person who preferred to experience life in person. I hope those who remember my father will play a piece of classical music of the highest caliber in his honor.

Please join us in memorial Sunday, May 21, 2023 For details email [sarahbmead1@gmail.com](mailto:sarahbmead1@gmail.com). Email if you would like to come earlier to remember him.

Sarah Mead  
415.871.6780



## New Beginnings

Here she comes,  
like a train with no brakes  
without even a *pardon me*.

But Storm God  
steps on the tracks,  
blows lady Spring  
purposely back.  
With him comes Rain and Snow  
to persuade her New Beginnings  
to first grow strong  
and then grow slow.

Mother earth has weathered  
Snow and Rain  
Fire and Flood,  
Extremes of hot and cold.  
Stay awhile, lady Spring,  
give her some time  
to adjust her makeup.  
She's already made grass greener,  
buds on the trees more plump,  
and birds more fit to cope this year.  
Move ahead, slowly, with purpose,  
and nurture her New Beginnings.  
and challenged to make a new life.

Carol Allen



Laura Milholland

## A Baker's Dozen

thirteen of us gathered  
to celebrate one of our own  
not long ago we were  
a square of four  
but since blowing out eighty-three  
or four candles on our cakes  
two have left and one was sick

friends for eight decades  
some for nine  
laughing crying singing  
looking good 100 per  
from head to feet\*  
friends forever

Barbara McDonald

*\*line from our high school song*

## No Backup

Working Field Services at San Francisco's animal shelter, we split The City into four sectors. We'd handle aggressive animals, sick and injured, cruelty cases, strays, and rescues. One day I was assigned to the south end of San Francisco, which included Potrero Hill, Butchertown, Double Rock, Bayview-Hunter's Point. Not the most affluent end of town you might think. But if you showed people respect they would treat you the same.

I was near S.F. General Hospital, when I got a radio call. *Meet SFPD up the hill in front of the housing projects at Connecticut and Wisconsin.* The call was for abandoned pit bulls tied up to a fence. My employer forbade us to enter the projects without police so it worked out well that SFPD asked for *us*.

The officer was alone, waiting in a patrol car at a corner entrance to "housing." He said there were three aggressive dogs tied up a block away near Dakota Street, so I asked him if it would be easier to drive over there. "Nah" he said. "We'll walk over." I'd been told by police officers about other projects where microwaves were thrown from the second floor onto cops, so I figured it a lucky break these were single story units.

The cop looked to me like a short Richard Roundtree in the film *Shaft*. Had a black semi-auto pistol on his belt and wore a starched uniform. No sergeant's stripes, a line officer, but I didn't peg him as a rookie. He walked like he was born there, owned the place. I followed and, feeding off his self-assurance, started to relax.

We walked about a city block through those rundown barracks built for shipyard workers during WWII. Junk lay around -- old bicycles, beer cans and all the grass was dead and brown. The cop stopped to chat warmly with senior citizens.

We eventually came on three dogs chained to a concrete retaining wall. It was popular to breed pit bulls with Rottweilers then, and these were typical: barking, territorial, showing teeth. Lucky they were chained. I had only one rabies pole with me, so the officer decided he'd stay with the dogs so they wouldn't disappear and I would walk back and get my van so we could load all the dogs.

I walked back alone for a block, in a uniform and badge with no gun, my radio on a different channel than his. No way to call for help if something went wrong. Glancing out the corners of my eyes the whole way.

I drove back around the complex and parked at the curb about fifty feet from the action. The cop was talking to two guys, but by the time I'd walked those 50 feet, three or four more guys had gathered around the cop. They wanted to take the dogs, but the officer wasn't having it without proof of ownership. Their tone was friendly, but they were probing, seeing if they could intimidate him. They were smiling but there was an edge behind the smiles.

I had underestimated how aggressive the situation had become. I had never seen an officer draw his gun up till that time. And he was waving it around, pointing it casually, almost friendly, at different guys in the group. "Why you do me like that, Brother?" one asked, smiling, showing a gold tooth. The cop wasn't smiling. Some of the group began quietly moving around toward the cop's back. It was tense, intimidating. Smiling but hard-eyed. The guys began to surround us. My mouth went dry. All I could do was turn and stand back-to-back with the officer, holding the rabies pole level like a fighting staff, ready to lash out. It was either that or get jumped from behind. They closed in on us. And then they stopped.

As it turned out, no one drew a gun on the cop; maybe he just convinced them he was crazier than them. In ones and twos they dispersed and I was able to load the dogs into my truck. I offered him a ride back to his car on the other side but he calmly said he'd walk. We shook hands.

We'd been alone the whole time with no backup, as if he could police the whole neighborhood by himself day or night. He was agreeable, downright cordial to the neighbors, but when it came to trouble he was solid as oak.

Mike Holland



## Fooled by a Fake

They arrive so suddenly, those moments. They always catch you off guard. There you are, somewhat absent-mindedly, doing this or that. Looking out your window, perhaps, or thinking about a boy you once dated in high school. It's a quiet time, no need to rush, nothing pressing to do, so you settle into the invisible cocoon of warmth that is slowly surrounding you.

In my case, it was a day in early spring, embroidered with the delicate light green foliage of new growth. You could smell the warmth, feel it elbowing the chill away. Bye bye winter! Hope to see you never! In a nod to the flowers I knew would soon appear, I had on my brightest sunhat, an impossibly vivid purple and yellow number. I wanted to welcome them. See, there's a great big flower already here! Come and join me!

In the meantime, I had work to do. Those weeds! (Who did they think they were?) So obstinate, so unwilling to yield to the superior power of my spade. How could I tell them this was an uneven fight, they had no chance, because I and my spade would never give up?

Enjoying a rare moment of preening about my imminent success, I dug deeper and meaner. It feels great to be a winner, no matter how small the spoils, it just feels great. Head down, laser focus deployed, I at last felt a slight release under the soil. Gotcha! One weed down, 984 to go.

And then it happened. One minute there was me gloating, the next, a terrifying assault of ear-splitting noise an inch away from my ears! The thrum of a huge engine — but, but how? Had a fighter jet slammed into my garden? OMG, I'm gonna' die right-here- in-my-front-yard-right-now. But first I'm going to go deaf because the noise, the volume...

At least it'll be a quick death, I thought. And curiosity being what it is, I had to at least get a glimpse of the monster before my last breath. Peering out from under my hat, I came face to face with the source of my terror. Shimmering and sparkling in the sun, a tiny hummingbird hovered an inch or so from my face. Hovered loudly. Very loudly. Loud enough to be mistaken for a jet engine. He looked serious and thoughtful, investigating, seeking information, trying to determine, I guessed, whether or not I — and my hat — were a real flower or a fake. He lingered; I tried to look at him with what I hoped was kindness; I felt incredibly blessed to have him in my presence. And I empathized with the dear creature, as I alone knew that no matter how smart you think you are, anyone can easily be fooled by a fake.



*Laura Milholland*



*Laura Milholland*



### Interstellar

Whispering moon, so silent,  
as you flirt among the clouds,  
upstaging distant stars.

You pluck the limelight so  
coquettishly in scope and range,  
with timeless seniority.

I beckon, hear my call:

Don't close the curtain yet,  
there is a mind-in-play.

deidre silverman

Photos, Laura Miholland



### Mamas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow up to Be Oilmen

(A Parody)

Oilmen ain't easy to love, and harder to hold.  
They'd rather sell you some stock or pump that black gold.  
Lone Star suspenders and old 3-piece dress suits,  
Each morning begins a new day.  
If you don't understand him, and he don't die young,  
Then, maybe he'll just drive away (in his Porsche).

Oilmen like smoky old boardrooms and hot dusty prairie.  
Warm swimming pools, hot tubs, and plenty of girls of the night.  
Them that don't know him won't like him,  
And, them that do sometimes won't trust him.  
He is wrong and he's just different, but greed won't let him,  
Stop sellin' that oil to the planet, that's right !

Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be oilmen.  
Don't let 'em be tycoons and make shady deals,  
Let'em be cowboys or drive 18 wheels.  
Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be oilmen.  
Well, they've got these big loans, and they're always alone,  
Even with someone they love.

Jeff Lemontt



## My Dreams

I dream of priests, doctors, police listening  
to our stories of suffering, conflicts, injuries,  
with empathy, compassion; and perhaps,  
even insights for mitigations and resolutions.

I dream of whales, salmon, and porpoises  
cresting in blue oceans filled with anchovies,  
with rounds and rounds of feeding frenzy.  
Joyful breaching as they surround their prey,

I dream of children and mothers thriving in safety.  
No gunpowder odors, sounds of rockets, cackling bullets.  
They dance and sing instead in yellow mustard fields,  
spring fragrances of wild red roses and purple rosemary.

I wake to find reality shocking, barren, and unmoored.  
Confounded by daily news and internet screaming.  
Let my eyes stay closed for a few minutes more,  
let my dreams swim downstream.

Ray Fey



Nancy Outenreath



Laura Milholland

## The Blessing

Yesterday, I wept when she left us.  
I wanted to keep her  
for an hour, even a moment longer.

Today, I felt her hands  
cupped around mine  
as I drank my coffee,

saw the color of her hair  
in the frost that etched itself  
on the window,

heard her voice  
when I sang the songs  
that she loved,

breathed her essence  
from the handkerchief  
in my drawer,

knew her calm  
when I held her rosary  
to my heart.

And so it was today  
and will be tomorrow  
and the next day  
and the next.

Katherine Bonenti





Tami Tsark

## For Special

Autumn sunlight slanted across the waxed pine floor of my mother's bedroom illuminating the faded writing on the box. *Chiara Fiori, Box 18, Tres Piedras, New Mexico, U.S.A.* I knew that another box lay within this box with its Italian stamps and strange flourishing script. This box, resting in the very bottom of her small cedar chest, was the last item to remove. It had fallen to me, her oldest child and namesake, to go through her things. Dreading the task, I'd put it off, but all my siblings were arriving to spend Thanksgiving in the old house, expecting to find mother's belongings sorted so we could choose which items held some special memory or value for us.

Tracing our name in that elegant foreign script I imagined her excitement upon its arrival, God, it would have been 70 years ago, a gift for her trousseau from my father's mother in Florence. I can see her eagerly opening this outside box and discovering inside that jewel of a box fashioned in hand combed-paper of a soft buttery yellow covered with brilliant ruby, emerald and sapphire floral curlicues, each outlined with real gold.

The chest was where mama kept her treasures; the scarlet Chinese silk jacket lined with the skin of unborn lamb, a cinnabar box holding a string of amber beads, this box with its jewel of an inner box. Whenever the chest was opened the scent of cedar wafted through the room and I was allowed to stroke

the fine lambs' wool and carefully unfold the contents of that jewel of a box.

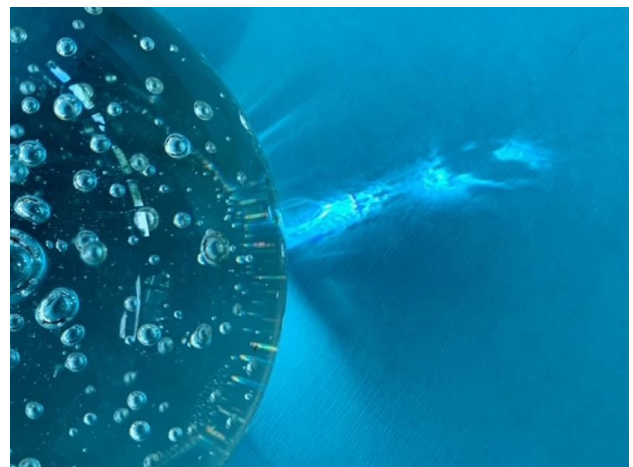
Inside was a nightgown the color of an apricot, except it glistened, an apricot lightly sugared, embroidered here and there with flowers and leaves in stitches so fine they appeared to be woven into the silk. To go with the gown was a robe, one shade lighter, the silk weightier, woven in small lined checks that caught the light and shimmered.

They'd never been worn, not on the honeymoon, not in this bedroom and not on any of my father and mother's infrequent vacations. But she would get them out and, fingering the soft, frosty fabric, tell me how she was saving them for the right occasion, the deserving place, the special time.

Five years ago I visited my mother and we lifted things, one by one from her chest. When we came to the box she said, "I haven't looked at these since before your father's and my divorce." I said, "Mama, that's got to be 20 years. Open the box."

She carefully slid the top off and folded back the tissue, exposing the gown. It still glistened as if spun from spider webs, but as she lifted the nightgown from its nest it shredded in her hands. She put it back into the box, covering the robe beneath with silk dust.

Susan Connelly



Tom Cannon

## The Light in the Dark

Who would not wish for such Shangri-La  
that place in the hushed woods where the filtered light -  
from the sun only touches your smooth skin of appreciation?

That rapid, rushing stream where the thrush  
thrives to become your glorious wings -  
is it the Elysian Fields of your own creation?

Whose eyes can see what no other eye can see and  
what poetry comes from the greenest tree when it falls -  
for you and no one else? Is that the sound of elation?

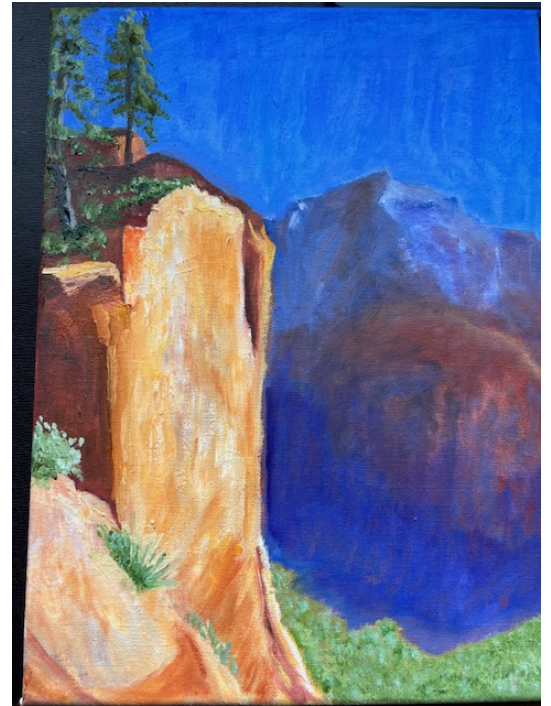
In the warm daffodil summer the blossoms spring  
serenely into your waiting arms just for you. -  
Is it all within your contemplation?

When you tread on the ocean beach, hear the southwest wind  
and sense the salty sand beneath your tired feet –  
the world is yours – or is it imagination?

When you were born and carried into the new light by the dark  
pursuing  
universe, you were welcomed at the junction of existence –  
and challenged to make a new life

So in your slice of being, be the light and damn the eternal  
darkness  
cold on the other side of the time that we cannot measure. -  
While you are here everything is gold, and your life is the brightness.

Julio Burroughs



*Jeff Ross, oil on canvas*

## Robins Now

The air is filled with robins

Now, though frost still tops the roof.

This morning's proof that love

Abides; love turns the tides toward  
spring.

The white round moon slides softly  
down

The brightening day-lit sky,

And everywhere I turn my eye

Invites my heart to sing.

A.T. Lynne





*Laura Milholland*

### **Katherine**

In the shadows of your fulfilled life  
there are guidelines.

Plenty of opportunities to make a difference  
somewhere in the world.

You ever so gentle and saved  
gave time and patience  
to those hungry shoeless children.

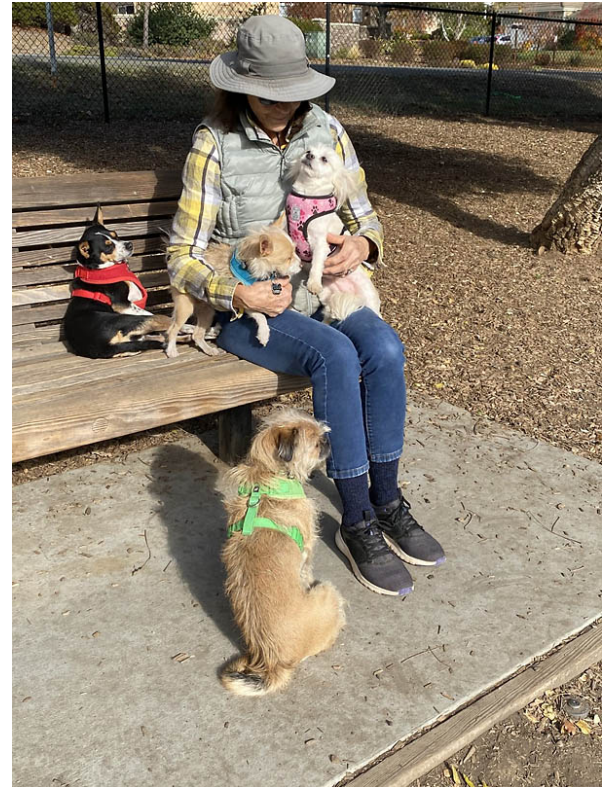
Offerings of scriptures and schooling,  
bread and shelter....

it just seemed so effortless ,

the way a river hugs its banks  
nourishing its villages  
with baptism and fish.

Always open to give and give,  
no thoughts of personal redemption....

yet the one child who took your reflection  
left scars inside your buried soul....  
for she resisted the fires



*Nancy Pappas*

trying first to have her own wisdom,  
not those incessant demons  
that haunt the darkened hours.

Still, she told me how much she misses you,  
how much she loved you,  
she said her life is more aware  
because of you.

Sharing with her children  
your insight and eternal passions.

She wanted you to know these things  
as we walked through winter  
taking in the world surrounding us.

*Margie Heckelman*





Marilyn Bagshaw

### Untitled

A fool for rhyme i was, so rare  
a path I chose - t'was in the air  
and I for one knew I was headed  
down a road to which I was wedded

It's not that Ars Poetica died  
it's that my love for rhyme hasn't lied  
in fact the dance remains unchanged  
between myself and rhyme arranged

But life is rough, times are hard  
so I seek out my inner bard  
to sooth my soul with rhyme as one  
with poetry's elixir - bar none

Louise Potter Yost



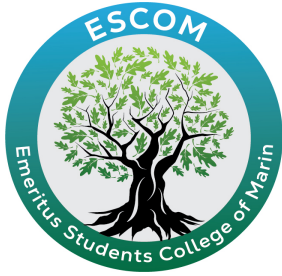
Marilyn Bagshaw

### Elegantly Pain Free

As cute as the wind blows  
The chances of meeting are taken by storm,  
The migraine throbs, touched and shattered  
As the worship and greed bang for answers to questions, which are unjust belonging to the hurricane's eye.

So our naughty swinger goes up and down on the power strings of the ins and outs.  
Her feeling of pain departs to the love of health waters,  
Soothing and keeping her royal aches from crowning with misery.  
At last she wears the crown of water, no thought of feelings of pain.  
Waters' justification has soothed those aches, which turn to smiles and sing of victory,  
Anyway the horn blows even the wind lauds.

Karen Arnold  
(The author is a Certified Nursing Assistant)



# ESCOM

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College of Marin

## ESCOM Journal

Editor, Denize Springer

Web Content Manager, Richard Jensen

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## ESCOM Council

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## WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE JOURNAL?

**NEXT DEADLINE IS JUNE 15**

Please send your final draft to  
[denizespringer@gmail.com](mailto:denizespringer@gmail.com)

## PLEASE ADHERE TO THESE SPECIFICATIONS

Submit only one piece of final, proofed work. Changes, unless absolutely necessary, will not be accepted after submission.

Include your name in the file name and on the page of your document. **You must be an ESCOM member. Membership is free but is no longer automatic with class registration. To join, go to: <http://escom.marin.edu/join-escom>**

**WRITTEN WORK (750 words MAX):** must be single spaced, left margin oriented, and ATTACHED as a Word doc. Do not submit PDFs of written work (as these cannot be properly transferred or edited). **Please submit only one piece per issue.**

**ART and PHOTOGRAPHY:** Borderless images only in file size no larger than 300 kb and attached to the email in the .pdf or jpeg format (not imbedded in email message). **Images larger than 300 kb or saved as a tif file cannot be considered.**

**POEMS: (50 lines MAX including the spaces between stanzas)** If your poem must be centered, please note this.

Misspellings, grammatical errors and erroneous line breaks could be mistaken as the author's intent and not corrected. Proof your copy before sending it in.

Information for "In Memoriam" must be verified with an obituary that appears in an official resource such as a newspaper.

***Emeritus Students College of Marin (ESCOM) is a student organization of active adults affiliated with the Community Education Department of College of Marin. Founded in 1973, ESCOM provides opportunities for lifelong learning, lifelong doing, and lifelong friendships.***