

# ESCOM Journal

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*The creative arts publication of Emeritus Students College of Marin*

*November/December 2023*



*Laura Milbolland*

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*ESCOM celebrated 50 years of service and lifelong learning on October 14 at the Bill and Adele Jonas Center on the Indian Valley Campus. The celebration drew more than 200 guests who enjoyed delicious food and wine, stimulating talks and great entertainment. Pictured: top left, current ESCOM President Gary Gonser; top middle, singers Desiree Goyette, LaMont Ridgell, Alexis Lane Jensen; top right College of Marin President David Wain Coon; bottom left, Keynote Speaker Ken Dychtwald, bottom right, speaker/entertainer Josh Kornbluth. Photos: Laura Milholland*



**FICTION**

**Christmas in Costco**

I was in Costco a couple of days ago. Actually, it was September 6, which I know for sure because that's my birthday. And I was in Costco because my sister, Claire, who is the youngest of the five of us, took me to Costco to buy me some towels for my birthday, which she said are the best towels she ever saw in her life.

Claire likes to make me happy. That's because I raised her, and my other sister and brothers. I was 14 when Claire was born. My mother had already been in her room, mostly, for years and my father was still drinking all the time. I don't know how they got together...you know...to make a baby, but they did that five times. They either loved each other or hated each other. Who knows? But I'd been the head of the house forever before Claire came along. There wasn't anybody else, that's for sure.

Anyway, here we are in Costco on September 6, and I scan the store – I always do that – and practically the first thing I see is the top of this giant Christmas tree, which, first of all, I know is fake, and second of all – what the hell is a Christmas tree doing in Costco, or anywhere else, on September 6? In the old days, September 6 would be the first day of school! We wouldn't even be thinking about Halloween! But here in Costco, God forbid somebody shouldn't get ready for Christmas in time. And what do they want you to buy but this HUGE, HUGE fake tree with built in lights, so all you have to do is lug the thing home, hope it doesn't bend in two when it hits the ceiling, and dump ornaments all over it. Ornaments that you probably bought at Costco last year and the year before that...and you get what I'm talking about.

Not only is it September, but it's hotter than hell. How is anybody supposed to get in the Christmas spirit when it's 98 degrees and you're sweating like a pig? But that doesn't stop Claire. That girl loves any kind of party or special event or holiday. So, she says.

"Come on! Let's go look at the Christmas stuff!"

"Honey, I have to take a stand here," I said, "I don't want to look at Christmas stuff. It's September 6. It's like six months or something to Christmas. It's not even Halloween. Not Thanksgiving. Let's just get the towels and a hot dog and get out of here."

And then Claire does this thing that she does. She gives me a big hug and says, "Okay, whatever makes you happy." She says that all the time. See, I used to say that to her when she'd get super upset. She wanted the doll with the black hair. I said, "Whatever makes you happy." Also, when she had to get braces. She was wailing, and I said, "You want your teeth to look like a horse's? Hey that's ok with me. Whatever makes you happy!" So, naturally, she gets the braces. Then a lot later, when it was time for her to go to college, I wanted her to go to the local two-year place, and then go to the four-year place. But she wanted to go to the four-year place right away. So, I said "okay, whatever makes you happy." So, it wasn't easy, but to tell you the truth, it never was easy. Whatever. She's the baby, and I knew she would be the last one. My brothers and sisters are all doing all right, that's for sure. I saw to that. And after she graduated, it was Easy Street!

Anyway, we looked at all the towels...and I don't say nothing...but they looked just the same to me as the towels in other stores...but whatever...and then we did the samples, you know what I mean, even the pretend meat, which wasn't bad. And we're laughing and talking, and I start thinking about when she was little, and how I wasn't really ready to be a mom, but how much I loved her and how much fun I had with her. And then we're getting ready to leave and I look at Claire, and I say, "You know, honey, it might be fun to look at all the Christmas stuff after all. Do we have time?"

Susan Little

## Gingerbread

On a dry Nevada winter day, the air smelling faintly sulfurous, my family arrived to spend Christmas on my grandparents ranch.

In a corral near the house were two palomino horses; Cheetah, a fine-boned, high spirited mare, and Dusty, a giant, mellow gelding. They shared the corral with Adonis, a huge bull. He was bellowing and even across the yard I could see his breath rise, ghostlike, above his heavy head. Climbing the back steps with my family we pushed through a door into a glassed back porch as icy cold as the outside. Heavy jackets, cowboy hats and caps with earflaps hung from pegs on the wall. A line of boots stood ready by the door. Two wicker chairs were pulled back from a solid but scarred table laden with gloves, wire cutters and a wooden toolbox, its handle ready to grab, its red paint faded and flaked.

My grandmother opened the door and swept us into the dining room which was filled with the scent of just baked gingerbread. The aroma of the spices mingled in the air and made me instantly feel warm, cozy and starving. It was grandma's tradition to welcome us with warm gingerbread. My mother brought applesauce she'd made with apples allowed to hang on the trees until after the first frost, which turned their flesh winey and sweet. We all fell on the gingerbread like a pack of wolves eating it with the applesauce or spreading it on top of the bread with sweet, golden homemade butter.

My favorite cousins, the horses and grandma's gingerbread were the three things that most delighted me about spending Christmas on the ranch.

In M. F. K. Fisher's book, Long Ago in France, she talks of her life in Dijon when she was young, just married, in love with her husband and enthralled with life in the Burgundian town. She recalls the smells. Dijon mustard of course, and in the fall, "cassis, the scent of gingerbread, pain d'epice, wafted through town and permeated even the most stout of walls all the yearlong. It was a smell as thick as a flannel curtain. I now have my own favorite recipe for gingerbread which I infuse with Calvados in honor of pain d'epice."

## Gingerbread Recipe

unsweetened cocoa powder for dusting pan  
 1 cup chopped pitted prunes, dried apricots are also good  
 1/2 cup Calvados  
 1 Tablespoon minced fresh ginger root  
 3 cups all-purpose flour  
 2 teaspoons baking soda  
 2 teaspoons cinnamon  
 1 teaspoon ground ginger  
 1 teaspoon ground cloves  
 1/8 teaspoon cayenne  
 3/4 teaspoon salt  
 1 cup vegetable shortening  
 1 1/2 cups packed light brown sugar  
 1 cup unsulphured molasses  
 1/2 cup strong brewed coffee  
 4 large eggs , beaten lightly  
 1 teaspoon vanilla  
 1/2 cup chopped crystallized ginger

Preheat oven to 350 F. Butter a 10-inch springform pan and dust with cocoa powder, knocking out excess. In a skillet cook prunes, Calvados and minced ginger over moderately high heat, stirring until almost all liquid is evaporated. Remove pan from heat.

In a bowl whisk together flour, baking soda, spices and salt. In another bowl cream the shortening with an electric mixer. Add sugar beating until light and fluffy. Add molasses in a stream, beating until combined well. Beat in coffee, flour mixture, eggs and vanilla until batter is just combined. Reserve one Tablespoon crystalized ginger and stir remainder into batter with prune mixture. Turn batter into prepared pan and sprinkle top with reserved ginger.

Bake gingerbread 1 hour 5 minutes, or until a tester comes out clean and cool on rack 1 hour. The gingerbread will fall slightly in center. Bon appetit!

Susan Connolly



*Susan Connolly*

### Four Seasons Will Rain Again

The winter rain will drop again

For survival and celebration.

The Autumn rain will be amongst us

Bring forth the harvest.

The summer rain shall return

Keep the houses from wild burn.

And in the spring the rain returns to become

Creative, vital and plentiful as we begun.

Karen Arnold

### The Theft

Tracy, the tiny, tufted titmouse

sits on a telephone line

whistling an imaginative tune.

Her fluid black eyes and brushy

grey crest alert. She's waiting

for my hairy dog, Harry, to settle.

An abandoned cavity awaits,

chiseled out by a crafty woodpecker,

and she hopes to make it her nest.

Once Harry's asleep she flits

on and off his shaggy black back

stealing many beak-fulls of fur.

Harry seems quite obliging as if

someone is scratching an itch.

Then back and forth to the oak tree

she flies carrying her pilfered fur

mindfully lining her nest.

What a delight to witness

these partners in crime

as I sit on my garden bench.

Carol Allen

## Buffalo in Golden Gate Park

*(After a painting by Joan Brown)*

indolent    mocking

gazing at the viewer

he munches on a twig

hoofed    humped    horned

he stands under the tree

on a red carpet

overlaid with pine needles

the evening sky pinks

into lavender

blue

deep purple

don't be fooled by

his teddy bear look

languid eyes

he knows who he is

no wooden nickel

he's the real deal

Barbara McDonald



*Bison Winter, Laura Milholland*

## Old Banyan

Gusting winds consume Lahaina with orange red flames  
of a dragon's hurricane breath.

Ancient banyan with radiant green foliage burns.

Intense heat vaporizes canopy of sheltering leaves.

Sixteen charred and blackened branches stretch up  
to the smokey sky, begging for mercy.

She weeps and watches children and toddler  
treading water in shark infested sea to escape  
hell's fire, flying rooftops and trees, clinging to doors,  
sharp lava rocks, and telephone poles.

Banyan's roots must search and travel deep  
into the native volcanic earth to find ground water  
to survive.

ray fay



## ***Lifelong Learning***



### **Creativity Takes Courage**

Once upon a times there was a famous French artist, Henri Matisse. Matisse had a quote “Creativity takes courage.” That quote is very applicable today if we learn about the Quilting Teacher, Patricia Bruvry, who teaches are College of Marin Community Education.

Patricia was born in San Francisco and grew up in Marin. She attended Redwood High, then went off to San Francisco State for a B.A. in Art and Textiles and John F. Kennedy University for a Masters in Fiber and Mixed Media. In the mid 70’s, Patricia moved to Colorado where she became a weaver and fiber sculptor. She taught at San Francisco City College for many years and taught weaving, sewing, art to wear, textile design and quilting. She taught Art at Mark Day School for 14 years. Now retired, she is teaching a Sampler Quilt class at College of Marin and she is on the board of the Textile Arts Council of the de Young Museum in San Francisco. Patricia traveled to France in 2019 to learn Indigo dyeing from Michelle Garcia, a master dye specialist.

Currently, Patricia is exhibiting her “Astronaut” quilt at the Houston Quilt Festival. Patricia contacted a former Commander of the Space Shuttle; he sent her a photo that the Space Shuttle Commander had taken. She was so inspired by the photo that she designed and completed an “Astronaut.”

As Patricia continues teaching, she allows each of her students to express his/her own creativity in their quilting. Watch for further news about this courageous artist.

Maria Gregoriev

## **Shine On**

Strayed and far from home  
a lost cicada waif  
siphons light beams  
off the harvest moon  
piloting her underground  
where she belongs

as a pair of lovers spooning  
on a bench in Griffith Park  
look up to see a narrow sliver  
shading for a moment in time  
the glow of an outsized moon  
in this mid-October sky.

lynn arias bornstein



*Harvey Abernathey*

## Threshold

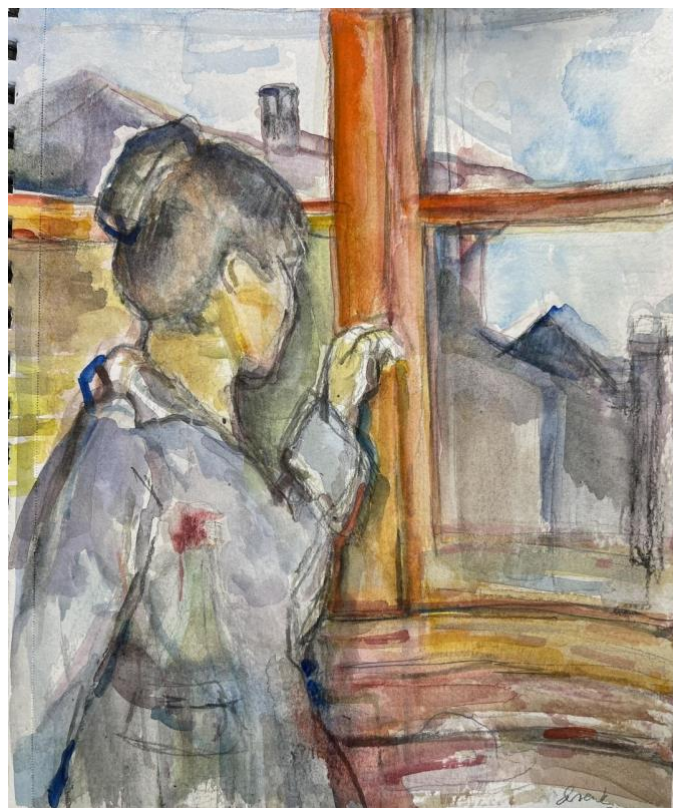
Liminal space is luminous  
then a shadow comes  
fleeting but there  
a brief reminder of the darkness  
of the unknown.

So much now is in the in-between  
of what is no more and what is to be  
not able to straddle both  
I am caught in the threshold  
waiting.

I am in the liminal space  
not a comfortable place  
not a place to stay  
if I stand very still and squint  
I catch a glimpse of the future  
as I step away from the past.

I don't look back but ahead  
counting my breath and listening  
for the clarion call or whisper  
that time for emergence has come  
time to step into the light  
time to walk into the future.

Anne Mulvaney



Tami Tsark



## In Celebration of the Winter Solstice

Why be afraid of the darkness?

Dark is the rich fertile earth

that cradles the seed, nourishing growth.

Dark is the soft night that cradles us to rest.

Only in darkness

can stars shine across the vastness of space.

Only in darkness

is the moon's dance so clear.

There is mystery woven in the dark, quiet hours,

There is magic in the darkness.

Do not be afraid.

We are born of this magic.

It fills our dreams

that root, unravel and reweave themselves

in the shelter of the deep, dark night.

The dark has its own hue,

its own resonance, its own breath.

not with despair, but with promise.

Dark is the gestation of our deep and knowing self.

Dark is the cave where we rest and renew our soul.

We are born of the darkness,



Nancy Pappas

and each night we return

to the deep moist womb of our beginnings.

Do not be afraid of the darkness,

for in the depth of that very darkness

comes a first glimpse of our own light,

the pure inner light of love and knowing.

As it glows and grows, the darkness recedes.

As we shed our light, we shed our fear

and revel in the wonder of all that is revealed.

So, do not rush the coming of the sun.

Do not crave the lengthening of the day.

Celebrate the darkness.

Here and now. A time of richness. A time of joy.

Stephanie Noble

*From "Invitation to Insight, Meditative Poems"*

*Enjoy an animated version of this poem on YouTube at:*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTvVG\\_9oVUg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTvVG_9oVUg)

## A Call in Sleepy Hollow

Our office receives a call to remove a dead deer from someone's backyard. I write down the address and go out to the back compound where all the trucks are kept. I'm assigned to Truck One, otherwise known as the "dead truck." It's a dark blue 4wd pickup with a camper shell, very plain. Start it up, and first thing, make sure to turn on the Motorola dispatch radio. Not many things more embarrassing than driving around the county wondering why there are no calls, then realizing the radio is off.

I motor out of the Animal Shelter and zip onto 101 heading for San Anselmo. The call is just off Butterfield Drive and I get there in less than 20 minutes. I pull up to the address and grab my rabies pole out of the back. It's a four-foot aluminum pole with a clever adjustable loop on one end. It's meant to keep distance between the Animal Services worker and a rabid animal. It's good for other things as well, often used to control aggressive dogs. Today I'll use it to drag a dead deer from the yard, out to the truck.

The resident answers the door and she's a cheerful woman with two preschoolers. "Thanks for coming so quickly, the poor deer is out in the backyard, up on the retaining wall. I don't want the kids to see this, so we'll stay inside."

Out in the backyard I see the deer about eight or ten feet up on top of the wall. I can smell it, but I'm used to it. The type of smell can tell you what stage of decomposition it's in, but that day I just wasn't thinking.

Luckily the thing, (In this job, once something dies, it's not really an animal anymore, it's a thing), died with its head hanging over the edge, so it's easy to put the loop around the dead neck and tighten it up. I tug and it doesn't move. Try a little harder and nothing. Finally, I plant my feet wide and pull on the come-along.



*Laura Harrison*

The body breaks free of whatever it was caught on and flies over my head, showering me with a cascade of maggots. I'm talking maybe a hundred here, all over my shirt, my bare arms and in my hair. In the years of doing this job I've had the odd few maggots on a hand, but never had the sensation of having them freely crawl all over me. I had to resort to the secret mantra that all us guys have: "I'm a man, I'm a man, I can handle this."

I go back to the truck for a king size plastic bag; get the bag around the carcass, carry it out and swing it up into the truck bed. I ring the doorbell and let mom know that it's done, but the animal was decomposing, and the yard will smell for a day or two. All good. She's occupied with the kids and never saw what happened in her back yard.

Soon I'm ready to leave, kind of brushing myself off, doing that thing where you fluff your hair back and forth, trying to fling but not crush (and so retain), any maggots left up there. Up in the cab I drive away and get on the radio. "30L19 back in service with one impound."

Driving down Sir Francis Drake, I think I feel something crawling inside my right ear, and finally it becomes too much to take. In the utter quiet of the dead truck I let out something between a roar and a scream.

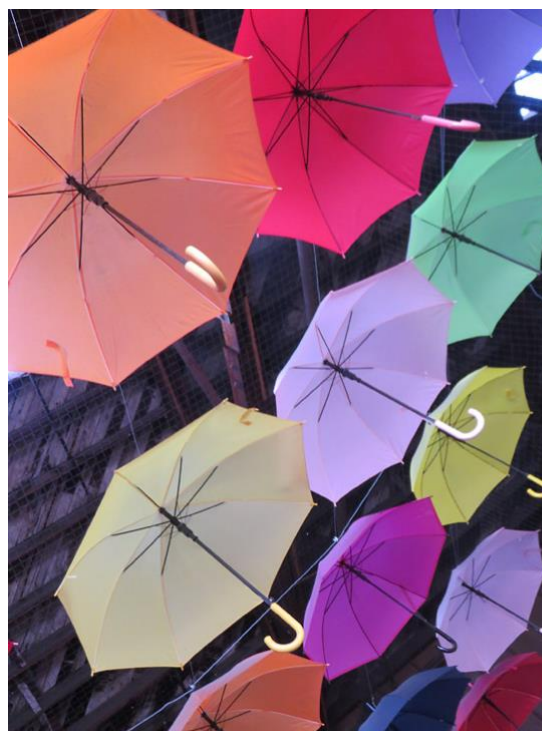
*Mike Holland*





*Yosemite Snow, Marilyn Bagshaw*

*Nancy Outenreath*



*Laura Harrison*

*Nancy Pappas*







**ESCOM**

Emeritus Students  
College of Marin

## ESCOM Journal

Editor, Denize Springer; Web Content Manager, Richard Jensen

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**Indian Valley campus:** 1800 Ignacio Blvd., Bldg. 10 Rm. 40, Novato, CA 94949 415/457-8811, x 8322

**Kentfield Campus:** 835 College Ave., Kentfield, CA 94904 (ESCOM office is temporarily occupying the Deedy Lounge in the Student Services bldg.) 415/485-9652 or [escom@marin.edu](mailto:escom@marin.edu)

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## WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE JOURNAL?

**NEXT DEADLINE IS DECEMBER 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.