

# ESCOM Journal

July/August 2023



Emeritus Students  
College of Marin

*Lifetime Learning*

*Lifelong Doing*

*Lifelong Friendship*



**HAPPY SUMMER EVERYONE!**

Cover photography: (top of page) Harvey Abernathey,  
(lower left) Laura Milholland, (upper right) Laura  
Milholland, (lower right) Elaine Thornton



## The Ultraviolet Catastrophe\*

Max Planck solved it with a math trick  
Maybe if I'd known that, I might have  
Been more interested in mathematics

Quantum physics & mechanics  
Light is a stream of particles they say  
And we are drawn like bowing tulips

The nature of reality itself  
A battleground in the 1920's  
Brought grown men to tears

The electron is everywhere at once  
Then entanglement, oh no  
Is that how I fell in love with the cowboy?

We smell by vibrations the guy says on TV  
So that's how Chanel's *Allure* works, I think

Quantum tunneling  
The reason the sun & stars shine  
How a tadpole turns into a frog

Is this how a beast becomes human?

Metamorphosis, random jiggling  
And endless circles, circling  
Supposed evolution & mutations  
So, how *will* a transhuman become a god?

The Hindus knew this  
Thousands of years ago

A fly will eventually find a trap

*The Horse eventually becomes the grass*  
Said Dragameer, the Maître D at Vanessi's, one night

Marcia Taylor Smith

*\*The prediction of classical electromagnetism that the intensity of the radiation emitted by an ideal black body at thermal equilibrium goes to infinity as wavelength decreases.*



Marilyn Bagshaw

## Night Swimming

Soul-weary  
I plunge  
into the waves  
surrendering

to their flow letting go  
through the gully of a break  
untangling  
streams of consciousness

releasing  
self-imposed restraints  
of earthbound caution  
the old holding back.

Easy swimming through  
salty ocean swells  
cleaved by river currents  
bearing silvery sounds

songs of the ancient river goddess  
Melusina, mother of seers and queens,  
singing her wisdom  
into the shell of my ear:

*freedom lies not in my domain, daughter,  
rather within your own element  
move free on shore  
embrace the earth—claim yourself*

Body clad in phosphorescence  
I sprint to shore embracing  
dawn-warmed sand between my toes.

I am home.

lynn arias bornstein





Harvey Abernathey

## Independence Day

"Mom we can't go away this week. It's the Fourth of July," my three children shouted in unison. Not a holiday to be tampered with, Independence Day was the most sacrosanct of holidays in the McDonald household. So, rising earlier than usual on a summer day, off we trekked to the annual Larkspur Firemen's Pancake Breakfast. Maple syrup and bacon sweetened the air. After breakfast we lined up outside Rainbow Market for perfect viewing. The best was the off-kilter Las Gallinas Non-Marching Band: backwards, sideways, and every which way! Other entries outdid themselves in red, white, and blue. Mayors and honored citizens tossed tokens from floats and convertibles. As the last entry passed, the younger family members joined. A festival of fun beckoned at Corte Madera Park. I headed home. Time to finish cooking beans and potato salad for a potluck celebration with friends. Later we gathered on Meadowood Green for three legged races, egg tossing, and lots of laughter. A scrumptious banquet followed. Burgers, hot dogs, beans, salads galore, to-die-for pies, and hand-churned ice cream! Fireworks echoed in the distance. Eventually, the children grew up and moved away. Yes, the Fourth of July was my favorite holiday too.

Barbara McDonald



Above top: "Seeing Things in a New Light," Tami Tsark

Bottom: Nancy Pappas

## Heaven

The dishes had all been cleared from late-afternoon supper on my grandparents' Illinois farm. Their kids, all adults, and their kids, we grandchildren, spilled out of the house one by one into the humid heat of the still-bright summer sun, seeking out the shady spots under the sheltering oaks and elms that would bring the cool relief for which we longed, while four score and more of meadow birds circled around, each singing its own species' song.

The women gathered to talk up the latest Sears Roebuck catalog fashions and to chase after, and occasionally cuff, any one of the kids too rambunctious, errant or rough. Alongside the smokehouse Uncle Kenny taught me the of intricacies of throwing an underhand softball curve while Uncle Glen sat in the tool shed's shadow cracking open a case of cold brews to serve. The bottles of Budweiser soon flowed into song, Uncle Bus playing his hand-me-down guitar for everyone to sing along to standards by Hank, Loretta, Jimmie and the peerless Patsy Cline.

Some voices were in (but most were out) of tune and synch and time.

Grandpa shortly jumped up and did what he always did, break into a tipsy, gypsy semblance of a jig he said he'd learned from an old Irish neighbor last century as a kid, prompting Grandma to do what she always did, shake her head in feigned disgust while putting the ice she'd already crushed, fresh-picked orchard peaches and cream-laden milk from Bess, our Guernsey cow, into the vintage ice cream churn, telling each of us kids to stop what we were doing and take our cranking turn.



Laura Harrison

In time, our shadows grew longer, darkness at first faint, grew stronger. Songs of the people and birds of the day gave way to softer sounds of the night, gentle wind rattling the leaves of the trees, owls hooting, gliding out for the hunt, bats in their blind zig-zag flight, solemn refrains of frogs from a nearby pond in ever louder progression and sonorous clicks of crickets from nearly every direction.

I stood apart taking in the scene, petting the family hound. A lone firefly caught the wind, rose slowly from the ground, danced lazily upward, its lantern body blinking in the mind's eye

of a child not yet quite seven,

climbing higher, ever higher in its flight up to what I imagined must be heaven.

Larry C. Tolbert



## Seneca, 1977

It is an old gold-mining settlement, just a dot on the Triple A map. Although located only a few miles north Highway 70 that shares the canyon with the North Fork of the Feather River, it has taken nearly an hour for us to negotiate the rough, dirt road that snakes its way through the Plumas National Forest in Northern California. A fly fishing friend told Linda and me of its existence. "It's a hoot," he said and didn't elaborate.

Mid-afternoon, we arrive at a small cluster of weathered buildings nestled under towering trees. Painted large on the side of one is faded lettering that simply says, "Bar." I think of the movie *Deliverance* and have misgivings. This is not a place one wanders into casually; it's a scratch-where-it-itches, beer and shots joint in the middle of nowhere. But it's been a long, dusty drive, so we look at each other and agree we'll venture in. Just one drink. Leave immediately, if we don't like the feel of the place.

The interior is small—a short bar and adjacent room with a handful of tables—in only slightly better condition than the outside. The few people who are there turn and survey us.

A tiny, woman, someplace between middle age and old, is behind the bar, dark red lipstick, penciled eyebrows. If she is surprised to see us, she doesn't show it.

"What'll ya have?" she demands.

This is not my first saloon. I read neon, know how to adjust. I point to a sign and ask for a Corona. But, Linda, my New England schoolteacher, is oblivious and cheerfully asks for a cognac, water on the side.

"Eh?" the bartender asks, as if she has heard correctly.

"A Cognac." Then, Linda remembers where we are and adds "Or any brandy would be okay," as if that would make her appear less genteel.

"*Tres bien*, I got cognac!" says the woman. It is as if the request has made her day. "Courvoisier."

Linda hears the woman's accent. "*Canadienne?*" she asks.

Marilyn Bagshaw



The woman's face erupts into a broad smile, "*Oui, Quebecquois!*"

"I thought so!" Linda says happily. My family is French Canadian, *Fontaine*, from Leominster, Massachusetts.

Her French is halting, but she manages just enough to delight the bartender, Marie Saben, who flourishes a bottle of Courvoisier VSOP and fills a shot glass for Linda and one for herself. I am handed a cold bottle of beer; no glass is offered.

No charge," Marie announces.

Judging from the expressions of those listening, free drinks are a rarity. Tension, real or imagined, evaporates.

I buy the second round, standing treat for the handful of people in the place who have joined our conversation. After a while, more locals wander in, kids in tow. The men, from a small gold mining operation nearby are loud and friendly. A woman nurses her baby. A girl, about fifteen, more hippie than backwoods, sits at a battered upright piano; I expect country western, but she plays Dubussy, "*Clair de Lune*." When she finishes, everyone applauds. They've heard her before.

Hours later, after dark, we leave. People walk us out to our car, shake my hand, hug Linda, and tell us: "Come back."

Erik Cederblom

## Labels

Fragrance of flowers

oceans roar, birds pass in flight

nature's labels bring pleasure and love to our senses

Life's labels maybe confusing and stressful: immigrant, busboy  
student, intern, resident, physician, philanthropist, volunteer  
never ending challenges

How will this journey end?

Are labels my legacy? Need to peel them away  
and cleanse my soul

Must cleave from the past, live in the present:

*Be ocean's roar*

*Be flowers bloom each season*

*Be birds just soar*

Each day a new being, seeing, and breathing  
no fear, no expectations, open boundaries  
free

*write a poem and not be a poet*

*play piano and not be a pianist*

*sing a song and not be a composer*

Let it go; joy, love, satisfaction will flow and stay

one mindful step each day

be one, be you, that is good enough for all days

ray fay



Nancy Outenreath



Lisa Swanson





Harvey Abernathey

### Summer Darkness

I hate black--the color of evil, death, and clinical depression. Since moving to California, I have not owned a single item of black clothing--not even underwear.

But this job requires black, so I picked up a few cheap things at target: tights, a long-sleeve tee-shirt, gloves, and men's socks, size large. I'll wear those over my shoes. No need to spend money on black shoes I'll wear once.

I found a ski mask at Sports Authority for \$6.99. Bought weed killer at Walmart in two trips. Paid cash for everything. You can't be too careful.

That rotten man knew he was going to ditch me at the altar. He told me we'd get married after the house was renovated and the gardens were established. That was 18 years ago. I poured my heart and soul into that place. I worked my backside off so he could have his organic vegetable garden---

Orange Dress, Patty Young, watercolor pencil



non-toxic weed controllers; poison-free gopher traps; everything done his way--the hard way.

How I slaved in that garden--sometimes twenty hours a week, especially in the summer. Stoop labor in the hot sun. Sweaty and unpleasant, but I was in love--or thought I was.

The garden starts 27 paces from the street. I must count steps because I'll be working in the dark. Two gallons of undiluted Roundup ought to do the job. I'll be in and out in seven minutes.

Twenty-seven paces in, turn left five paces, uncap the Roundup. One, two, three, four...

Crap! I feel the earth shift and sink, and I am down. Waves of pain crash against my instep. Willing myself not to scream I reach for my ankle and feel sticky wetness and jagged bone. I forgot about the gopher holes.

Dark beady eyes in a face of fur float above me as my world fades to black.

Dianne Hendricks

## The Jewish Home

Back in the 1990s, when I worked for Animal Control, I, a second generation San Franciscan, was married to Claudia, another second generation San Franciscan. My Grandparents were from Ireland, hers were from Russia and Austria. I was a lapsed Catholic, she, a Jew. She wasn't an Observant Jew, had been to Temple only a few times. She was more a "yeah, I'm Jewish; what's it TO ya?" kind of gal. I learned a lot about mitzvah, Hadassah, and caring about social issues from her.

I came to feel that if I were ever reincarnated, I might like to come back Jewish. God knows, they have no idea of what guilt is compared to us Irish *catlicks*. They're at home with the rituals surrounding procreation. They also don't entertain fistfights at family gatherings. They can speak sharply, but it's somehow understood things will never come to blows. They can handle their liquor. They dress better.

Riding around the City one day at work, taking radio calls about stray dogs, trapped skunks, rats in toilets, a call came out on the radio for an injured seagull at The Jewish Home For the Aged out on Silver Avenue and Mission. I had never been on the grounds. It was always locked, fenced and inviolate, in a windy, gritty part of San Francisco called the Excelsior.

Buzzed through the gate, I saw blooming flowers around the buildings. The place was clean and safe for the folks who lived here. The staff were smiling and cordial. You could feel the kindness in the air. They showed me through a residence hall and to a courtyard. The gull had a fish hook through its lower beak, with the rest of the line tangled on one of its legs, meaning it couldn't take those few quick steps forward a bird needs in order to get lift and fly. This was good news. The leg didn't look swollen or red. The bird was otherwise healthy and alert, doing its best to chomp one of my fingers. I had a pair of wire cutters in my van to cut the barb off the hook and remove it. I dropped a bath towel over the gull and put him in a cat carrier.



*Marilyn Bagshaw*

On the way out the folks in the residence smiled at me and asked questions. I stopped to answer and a small crowd formed.

They asked what I could do for the gull and were delighted when I told them he would be flying in a few minutes. One sweet old woman asked my name. I told her it was Mike but they could call me the pet name my wife always calls me.

"What's that, Mike?" "Well, she calls me Sucha." "Sucha?" she said. "Yeah, she always says 'you're such a Goy'!"

We laughed like hell together.

Mike Holland



## Estate Sale

I was curious  
when I saw the sign  
it was a large house  
almost at the top of the hilly street  
where the sun shines all day  
overlooking the valley below  
that fell into shade  
much earlier.

When I walked in  
I was surprised to see  
that it seemed everything  
the people who lived there  
owned was being sold  
every room was filled  
there were chairs and lamps  
cups and saucers, silverware  
all the trappings of daily life.

In the bedrooms clothing was laid out on the beds  
as if someone was preparing to get dressed  
for a night out  
photos were displayed faces  
gazing out of the frames at potential buyers  
I wondered who would buy pictures  
of a family of strangers  
and why no one in those photographs



Jeff Ross

wanted these reminders  
of lives lived and times celebrated  
a moment in time captured  
a history of time spent.  
A sadness come over me  
and I left before the agent could approach  
to ask if I had any questions  
walking down the hill  
I thought about what we leave behind  
when our time here is finished  
will it be kept or sold at an  
Estate Sale?

Anne Mulvaney



Marilyn Bagshaw

*"Summer Hats, Mary Buttero*



## Airwaves

There's an emptiness that comes  
in the middle of a hot summer night,

when you lie awake, struggling against  
thoughts that won't leave you alone.

You listen for something  
to take you outside of yourself:

the occasional passing of a car,  
the distant barking of a dog,

the radio beside your bed.  
You scan the stations for

that remote signal intended for you,  
the one that can reach the emptiness inside.

You strain to hear it as it drifts in and out,  
teasing your already wired senses,

that smoldering, sweet rendition  
by John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman,

the one that plays  
again and again in your head.

You stay with it until the end,  
even when you can't hear the words,

even when there's nothing but static.  
And when it's over, you want to say,

"Don't go yet. Stay with me a while.  
Sing to me again."

But it drifts back over the airwaves,  
back to that remote place, just out of reach.

And you put your face against the  
cool smoothness of the pillow next to you,

The one soothing spot  
in the middle of a hot summer night.

Katherine Bonenti



## Clancy

My dad and I really liked to go see baseball games, and they were some of the best times that I ever had with him. But it changed one summer, and I still think about it so many years later.

We were going to a late afternoon game – a few months before starting junior high, and we passed a cemetery I hadn't noticed before, where all the tombstones were the same size and all white. It was amazing how they were all lined up perfectly and I asked my dad why they were all the same size, and why the graves were lined up. I had been to cemeteries before, and I knew about burials - the tombstones I saw were mostly different from each other.

At first he didn't answer, pretending that he was paying a lot of attention to the traffic. So I asked him again, and this time he answered. He told me that those were the graves of men and women who had died in World War II. In school last week, someone from the state health office had talked to our student class about diseases like measles, mumps and whooping cough. So I asked my dad "How did they die?" He repeated that they died in World War II. I said I had heard him when he said World War II, but I wanted to know what they died from. Did they die from the flu or tuberculosis? The man from the state said measles was making a comeback.

My dad didn't seem to be too happy with my question. He always liked me to ask questions, and was always telling people what a curious boy his Clancy was, like it was something good and important. But now he didn't look like he was interested in answering me. We drove on for a while, neither of us saying anything. Then he said: "World War II was a big war in which most of the world was fighting each other. There were two sides, and there were many battles -- people killed each other so that they could win more battles and then win the war. Our side won the war, and that graveyard is full of dead soldiers from our side who were killed in the battles in that war. They were killed with bombs and bullets that came from the other side."



*Elaine Thornton*

At first I didn't believe him, but my father never lied to me. It was so quiet in the car even though we were in heavy traffic. It felt like something in my head was heavy and I could tell that I had trouble breathing. My eyes were watering in the quiet, and my Dad looked over at me and I could tell that he thought maybe he shouldn't have said what he said. I wanted to tell him, to let him know that it was all right, but I couldn't make the words come out, and he knew that I was sadder than I had ever been in my whole life. He turned the car around, and we went back home, and I went to my room and sat in the dark until I fell asleep in my chair.

Julio Burroughs



# ESCOM

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College of Marin

## ESCOM Journal

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**NEXT DEADLINE IS AUGUST 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.*