

# ESCOM Journal

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*The Literary and Visual Arts Publication of Emeritus Students College of Marin*

*March/April 2025*



*Marilyn Bagshaw*

*INSIDE: Spring Preening, Mitzvahs, Pond Sprouts,  
and Stove Top Chickens*

MEET

U.S. Poet Laureate at College of Marin March 13



Ada Limon  
Thursday, March 13, 2025  
5 pm to 8 pm  
James Dunn Theater  
College of Marin  
835 College Avenue  
Kentfield

Limon is a native of Northern California who currently lives in Kentucky. Don't miss this opportunity to hear from one of the greatest poets of her generation.



*Pussy Willow, Harvey Abernathey*



*Apple Blossoms Yosemite, Susan Connelly*



*Lake Tenaya, Chas Richardson*



*Laura Zahradnik*



Steller’s Jays

If the acorn that conked Henny Penny on her noggin fell from our oak trees, glancing up she’d have seen cerulean pieces of sky falling through the tree branches. If she hadn’t rushed off repeatably squawking, “The sky is falling!” warning her friends of impending doom, she would have seen her pieces of sky spreading broad wings. They would have gracefully landed, cocked their crested heads and collected their spoils, the acorns they’d dislodged from the branches above and sent raining down, including Henny Penny’s culprit.

I throw bird seed and peanuts in their shells under the oaks on the bank outside my kitchen windows. Steller’s Jays, watching, swoop down through the branches. Their feathers feature microscopic air pockets that scatter and reflect blue light so when the sky is a brilliant azure so are they. Landing, they cock their heads eyeing the peanuts before hopping down the hill, picking up and dropping peanut after peanut. Retracing their hops they take the heaviest of the peanuts and fly off. Scrub Jays also weigh the peanuts before choosing one. Both members of the *Corvidae* family want the most bang for their bucks! If I’m late with their breakfast they give their harsh scolding call often followed by a series of rapid-fire loud chirps.

My favorite of their calls I named the music box song. It is a string of quiet melodic warbles, liquid gurgles and murmurs. I’ve watched them, crest flattened, throat vibrating, singing this song to their chicks, to their mate and sometimes just to themselves. They also make a strange call that sounds like a mixture of clicking and buzzing combined.

Steller’s Jay’s mimicry of many bird species, plus other animal and non-animal sounds, is another feather in their cap. I listened while one, perched in a tree in front of me, gave a pitch perfect rendition of the Belted Kingfisher’s ratcheting call. They use the Red-tailed Hawks’ call as a warning of danger causing other birds to seek cover as well as in a non-altruistic way to clear the competition from where they’re feeding. Squirrels take notice and hide also.

It is almost time for their spring courtship. Mated for life, the males remain gallant and solicitous to their mates throughout their lifetimes. Watching a pair through my window making their way down the bank, I saw him retrieve a perfect acorn, still firm and glossy, that he’d hidden last fall and present it to his mate. She graciously received his gift, and in bird posture curtsied before they continued down the hill. Courtship and mating bring on nesting. Steller’s are often criticized, along with other bird species, of robbing nests of eggs. A friend who worked for the Audubon Society said this behavior is often driven by



Laura Milholland

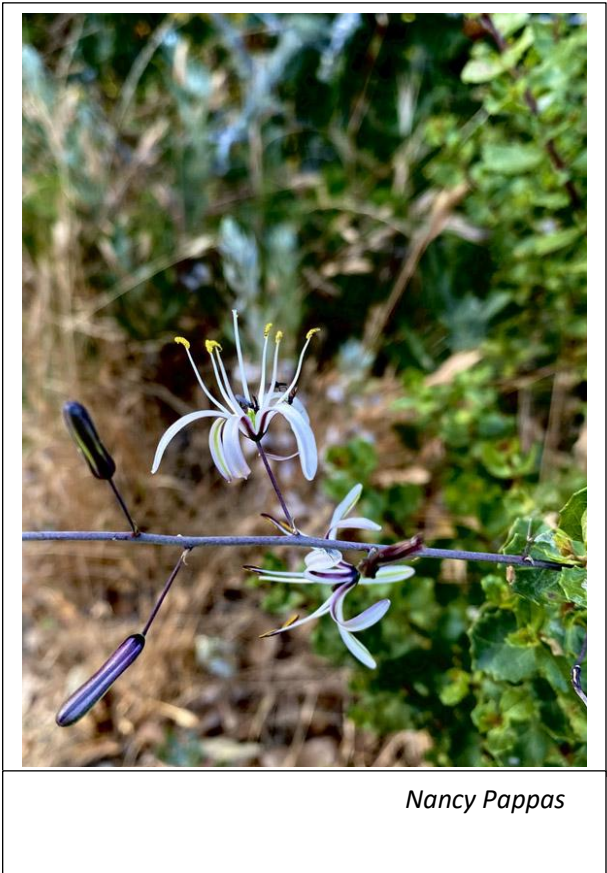
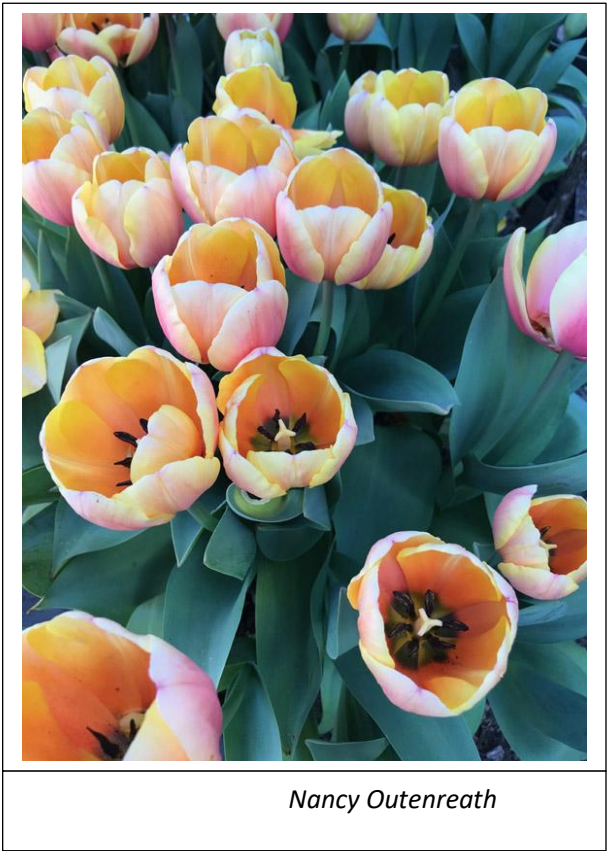
lack of calcium in their diets. She suggested throwing out crushed eggshells for all the birds.

Who would guess that Steller’s Jays are talented ceramicists? Under an old fir tree, I discovered a Steller’s nest still attached to a fallen branch. The inside of the nest was a smooth, rounded earthen bowl. The outside was artfully constructed of neighborhood materials; sticks of varying sizes, lichen, leaves, and stems, all held together by the mud bowl. I’m guessing the Jays, like Robins, carry the mud in their beaks, making hundreds of trips to construct their nests.

Last year I observed one of the chicks fledge too early. It glided a short distance from the nest then couldn’t rise from the ground. The parents quietly escorted and placed it in the center of a dense, brambly shrub. About five minutes later they returned and chaperoned it to an equally protective bush below their nesting tree. The other chicks successfully fledged two days later. With the parent’s encouragement the grounded chick flew into the lower branches of a tree. Perched on trees on either side of the chick’s tree the parents took turns calling to it. The chick flew back and forth between them gaining confidence

Bestowing exquisite gifts is another charming side of Steller’s. On our deck at the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite, a bird landed and dropped something on the umbrella I was sitting under. It pushed a delicate forked Alder branch with tiny cones attached off the umbrella. It landed at my feet. Next a Steller flew down, landed and looked at me as if to say, “okay, what do you have for me?” He loved the Marcona almonds I gifted him.

Susan Connelly



Signs of Spring

winter birds are passing through  
jamming on their palmated pedals  
Canada geese skid along the creek  
coots and mallards forage the shallows  
capriciously red-necked stilts dart  
back and forth across the slate grey water  
chirping flitting flirting blue birds  
played tag in a leafless tree  
all signs that spring is on her way  
longer days when magnolias explode  
tulips unfold swallows fashion nests  
titmouse fledglings negotiate flight  
crows collect branches  
daffodils dance jonquils kiss the air  
in the outer world chaos is rampant  
Nature remains faithful

Barbara McDonald



**For Sam**  
(1943-2017)

Sam Shepard moved to higher ground today  
or lower as he might say  
he was just 73  
I remember telling him he didn't know how to end a play  
in that shiny red booth at Tosca's one night  
I was maybe 23  
he looked up with those steel blue eyes  
having seen too much already—  
that sexy crooked front tooth  
a tall drink of water  
with a little salt on the rim—  
and the edge, where he liked to live

*Yes, I'm struggling with that,  
when does it ever end?  
Utah, is that where you're from?  
Yes, I'm still struggling with that  
But there's good trout fishing in the Uinta's*

I can't remember what we drank  
but Hank Williams was playing on the juke  
under the darkened smoke-stained murals  
haunted by thousands of trysts  
and endless dead-end conversations  
traveling along the curling lines of smoke  
like the Beckett plays he loved

my girlfriends stayed away  
standing at the bar staring at us  
the room buzzed with wild  
and was ripe with new

that last Kentucky sunset  
of an embrace in a movie  
I forget the name  
under a sycamore with Jessica  
that won't let go—  
what will you take with you now?

*Buried Child*

*Fool for Love*

or just the memory of  
that last shot of whiskey  
before you went home?

Marcia Taylor Smith



Nancy Pappas

**Sense of Spring**

Silently, the surge of Spring  
sweeps its earthly impulse over  
land and sky.  
An urge to herald all forms of life  
and sense that silent impulse:  
with an undeniable zest  
within planet Earth to herald  
growth and new beginnings.  
Its welcome essence bestows  
a genuine zest for life  
to embrace and thrive within the urge  
to seek, expand, rejuvenate and celebrate the  
expansive forms of existence above, beyond  
and deep within our very souls.  
Spring has sprung!

deidre silverman

Jonquils

There are jonquils on the hill  
now lushly green with grass  
they stand jauntily in groups of three or four  
scattered over the landscape by some random sower.  
  
I hope they survive these cold mornings  
the sun does not stay long there  
this time of year and I want them to last  
a reminder that days will get warmer and longer.

Even though winter is still with us  
and we wait for more rain to come  
we can look at the blooming hill  
and remember it will be Spring again.

Anne Mulvaney



Marilyn Bagshaw



Laura Milholland

Sitting in the Glider

Keeping watch as the sun collapses behind the mountain, morphing it incandescent—like a paper mache prop in a second-grade play. In the middle-distance Corte Madera creek, dusk-dyed ashes of roses, rides low tide out to the bay.

Silky, the next-door yellow lab, delivers her five-fifteen bark, announcing she exists in the world as the old alpha crow, surveying his range from the top branch of our grey pine, caws dominance over the valley.

The March evening cools. I snuggle down into myself, swinging back and forth, back and forth, breathing deep the evening air, faintly scented of red cedar, the planks Don used to build this glider so many springs ago. Back and forth, back and forth I sway, laying to rest all the years I persevered, pledging to keep at bay this end of the day—his last on earth.

-- Lynn Quist



White Wolf, Laura Milholland

Disguised Trash

From early man we learn to eat  
Trick or treat.  
From the south known from tree to breeze  
The title of a plant, locoweed.  
Those of us who decide the celebration of such is to say, “No,”  
Feel no reason at all to decorate the weed as healthy and  
packaged to go.  
I gave up trying to delight  
With lyrics I like  
The monotony of guitar plus guitar  
And search instead for celebrating end of war.  
Bride of misdeed that clutches her skirt  
Treats her ‘friends’, husband and society as dirt,  
Like a really big shoe  
Wrong size for me and you.  
The better ways come after good  
Avoiding the tree of good and evil as we should.  
So you may read from my words I see nothing to touch, to feel  
Go where your home is, our meal is real.  
Song of Songs, of the last king of his line:  
Silly, asking for too much to represent a valuable, permanent  
mark in time.

Karen Arnold

La Lupa

I am a senescent she-wolf,  
  
my whelping season long past.  
  
I roam with a northwest wind,  
  
on frozen tundra, cold and alone.  
  
I thirst, I hunger, I howl long and loud  
  
to locate my pack, define my space.  
  
Wolf moon has waxed full,  
  
seas are drained almost dry.  
  
Time to look inward and trust  
  
our instinct to survive. Reconnect  
  
with Earth’s natural stride, and howl  
  
our intentions on the incoming tide.

Carol Allen



Harvey Abernathey





Sharon Fusco



“Spring Preening,” Marilyn Bagshaw

Mitzvah

This morning, I left my poet’s circle with joy,  
to drive a friend, her mind clouded by time  
from her assisted care home to a doctor’s appointment.

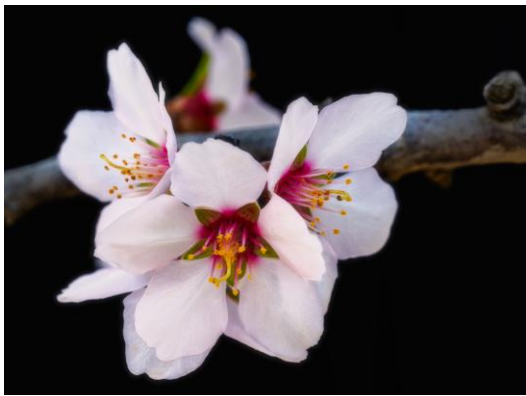
We begin an hour early—ten blocks, an easy stretch.  
I know the streets well, thirty years working there.  
But parking is a test of will.

The doctor’s name is not in the directory. Voicemail answers  
our calls. Google shows him at the new hospital—twenty blocks away.  
Parking is no better.

“No, this doctor isn’t here,” they said. “Try the new clinic  
across the street.” “Your doctor is a resident-trainee,  
He is in room 516, back at the clinic where you began.”

Five hours spent chasing healthcare, My patience has worn thin  
but she needs a physician. Perseverance wins this day,  
but her nightmares in search of compassionate care have just begun.

~ray fay, m.d.



Early Almond Blossom, Harvey Abernathey



Susan Connelly



Contrary Wind

Rough Rock Bilingual School, Navajo Reservation, 1979

My boss looked at me and then at an empty seat, six o'clock in the circle: the bottom. Then it began: my introduction and initiation into the traditional mysticism of the Navajo. My rite of passage reflected across the circle in dark eyes holding millennia of ancient wisdom. Johnson Astazi, Principal, Rough Rock Bi-Lingual School, was the first to speak. No introductions. "We have no volunteers at our school for activities after classes. You do many good things for our boys. They are happy."

He turned slowly around the circle and translated to the dozen, seated statues. I was beginning to feel warm and fuzzy.

"But you do not know our ways. Other teachers are complaining."

I said nothing and waited.

"Each day now more boys bother them to join your program. Field trips, big problem. Teachers lose respect. But fun is not learning."

A few grunts supported his presentation. All this began to sound very human, very political but I postponed judgment, took a breath and focused on the cultural learning opportunity. My boss held an M.A. from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. Yet as our meeting continued his English reduced and simplified, suggesting an old black and white Western where negotiations were underway to discuss the fate of their pale face captive.

Around the circle, a rainbow of turquoise, silver, vibrant velvet and silk shirts, multicolored headbands, blue jeans and boots stitched from the skins of previous visiting teachers painted a festive landscape for inquisition. I waited. This was 1978; people back home would miss me.

The one with white hair, sitting at eleven o'clock stood. A respectful tension filled the dome. He walked slowly to the middle of the room and faced me. "Boys go in brown water and play, yes?"

I nodded, "They are safe. I planned everything. No problem."

His right arm swept in a flat arc in front of him in the direction of Many Farms Lake then fell to his side, his fist closed.

"You, Billiganna\*. You listen. Many Dine drown in water since long time." He was the teacher now and I was the child. "No one make medicine-way for Dine water dead. Spirits there, lonely. They drag boys down, die, to stay with them." He turned around and walked back to his seat. No one looked at me.

There it was. I had crossed the boundary into a world invisible to those - not of The Dine. Others stood and spoke. Canyon de Chey,



Tom Gannon

Black Mountain, every outing, picnic and campfire violated a sacred timing, boundary or ritual.

My accomplishments and self-esteem felt stripped away like epaulets at a court-marshal. I stood naked in front of a thousand years of tradition. For a moment, I saw the happy faces of the boys and their transformation from bored zombies in the classroom to engaged and motivated students. We had a trip planned for the big trading post at Ganado so they could practice bargaining skills and math – in English.

I had no rebuttal, no appeal, no defense. The land and all the mysteries it contained belonged to the Dine.

When I opened the office early Monday, a note from Principal Astazi lay on my desk. My termination? A bill for the cultural training session? I sat down and read,

"You have a good heart. Advice. You walk in the canyon north of your hogan in the dark and play your flute. This will call a Skin Walker. When he comes and stands before you, do not look in his eyes or you will be frozen. Look down at his feet. Spit on his left foot and he will stay there long enough to get away."

Johnson called a meeting in the gym for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade boys after school that same day. As the expendable outsider it was my task to announce the end of the after-school program I had given, and then for no apparent reason, taken away. Back to kick ball in the dust and dirt. Back to raggedy billiards, two boys at a time.

The look on their faces is carved deep into my soul. Boys robbed again of trust, joy, and self-esteem: stripped away this time by me, another Billiganna.

I stood on that small stage and betrayed our own small tribe. Captured, rounded up, they again began the journey back along that dark trail to some desolate and isolated reservation, domiciled within their young hearts.

Brenton MacKinnon

\*Navajo for *Contrary Wind* (White Person)

Clothes Rack

Culling through vertebrae, a whole dinosaur of clothes hangers

How apt

Fingers lag lovingly across fabrics

Not luxurious

Cherished for texture

Color

    The way the silk moved across my body the time I danced with

    Him

Now, standing poised on one foot, off-balance the way we find ourselves

Between love affairs or

Putting on a skirt

A shoe

Unwilling to believe I'll never again wear these age-softened

Beloved artifacts from the Pleistocene Era,

    I wonder how long memories last

    In moth balls.

Amy Carpenter



Tami Tsark



Tom Gannon



I AM in the Park

Monday Spring morning Tai Chi Chih in the park  
*Rocking Motion* movement starts the energy flow in  
our dedicated circle of teacher and students in the  
shadow of great trees in a small public grove.

We in silence *Around the Platter* move, toddlers  
and preschoolers in the playground nearby  
their laughter and cries join with the raucous  
*Bass Drum* caws of crows on limbs above our  
heads, in the wind, *Passing Clouds* float by.

I hold middle distance gaze and move to *Daughter*  
*in the Valley* as a young girl comes close to chase the  
geese feeding on the grass and cries with *Daughter*  
*on the Mountain Top* delight when she draws close  
enough to force, one by one, each goose to jump-fly  
just the right distance to escape her spirited grasp.

I *Push Pull* the Chi and consider the words  
the founder of this Tai Chi form humbly said,  
“I am not the creator, rather the originator, for  
it came not from but through me.”

And so it is for me in offerings of the poetry I  
practice as I gratefully grasp *Pulling in the*  
*Energy* in this grove that I’m no longer



Pat Soberanis

doing Tai Chi Chih, rather IT is doing me.

So, too, in like moments, pen to paper, heart  
full in *Perpetual Motion* I’m gratefully aware,  
surprising words pour forth, tumbling full  
formed onto the page of my poem in *Bird*  
*Flaps Its Wings* symmetry and boldness.

I am then as I am now in this grove,  
the I AM That I AM (in the words of  
ancient Hebrew) flowing unfettered

and free  
in downward doggerel  
rhyme clear for all

to see  
my verse comes  
not from, merely

through me.

Larry C. Tolbert



# ESCOM

Emeritus Students  
College of Marin

## ESCOM Journal

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**NEXT DEADLINE IS APRIL 15**

Please send your **FINAL** draft to

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Submit only one piece of final, proofed work. Changes, unless 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.**

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